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**Angela Carter's scarred texts.**

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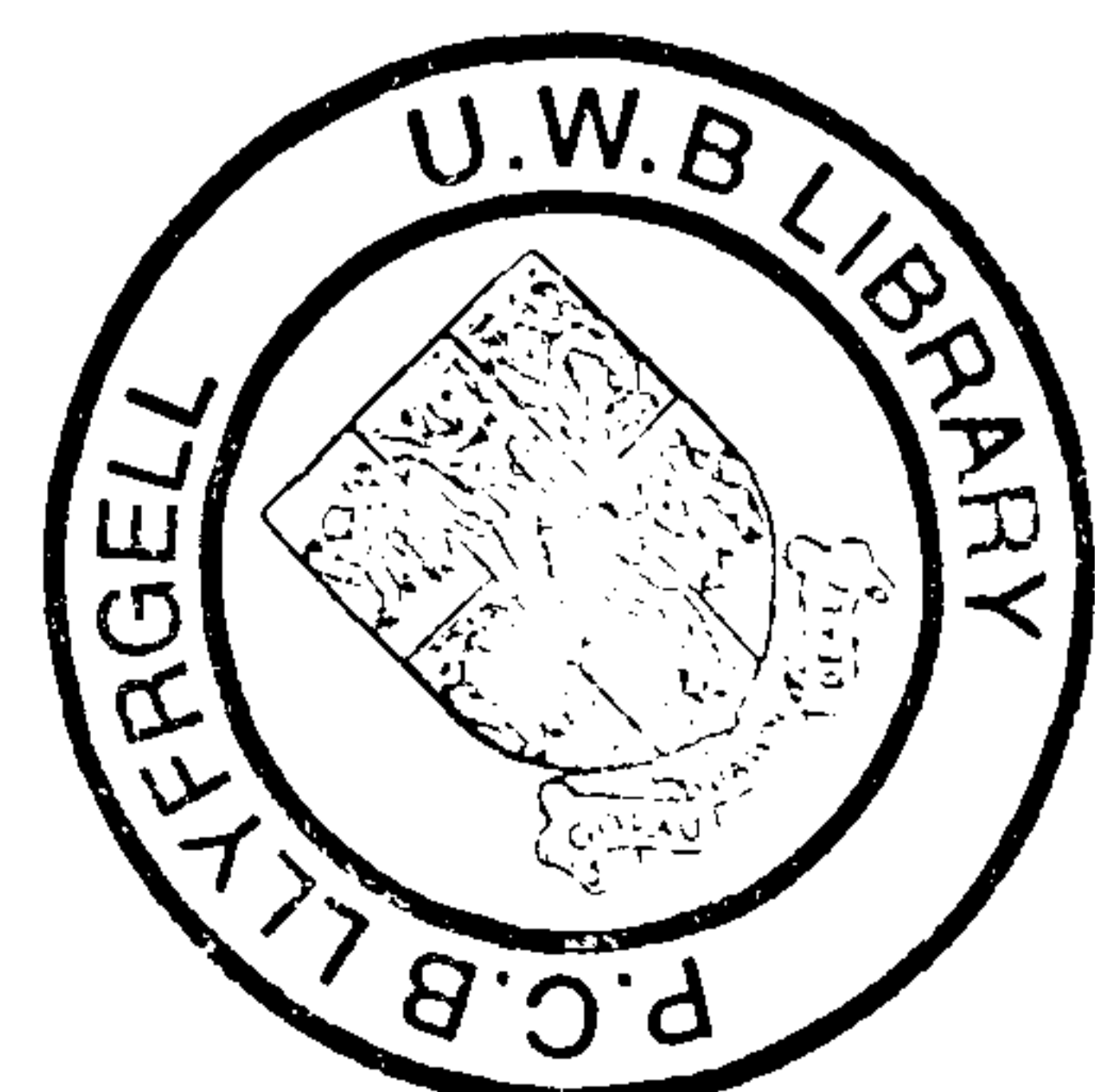
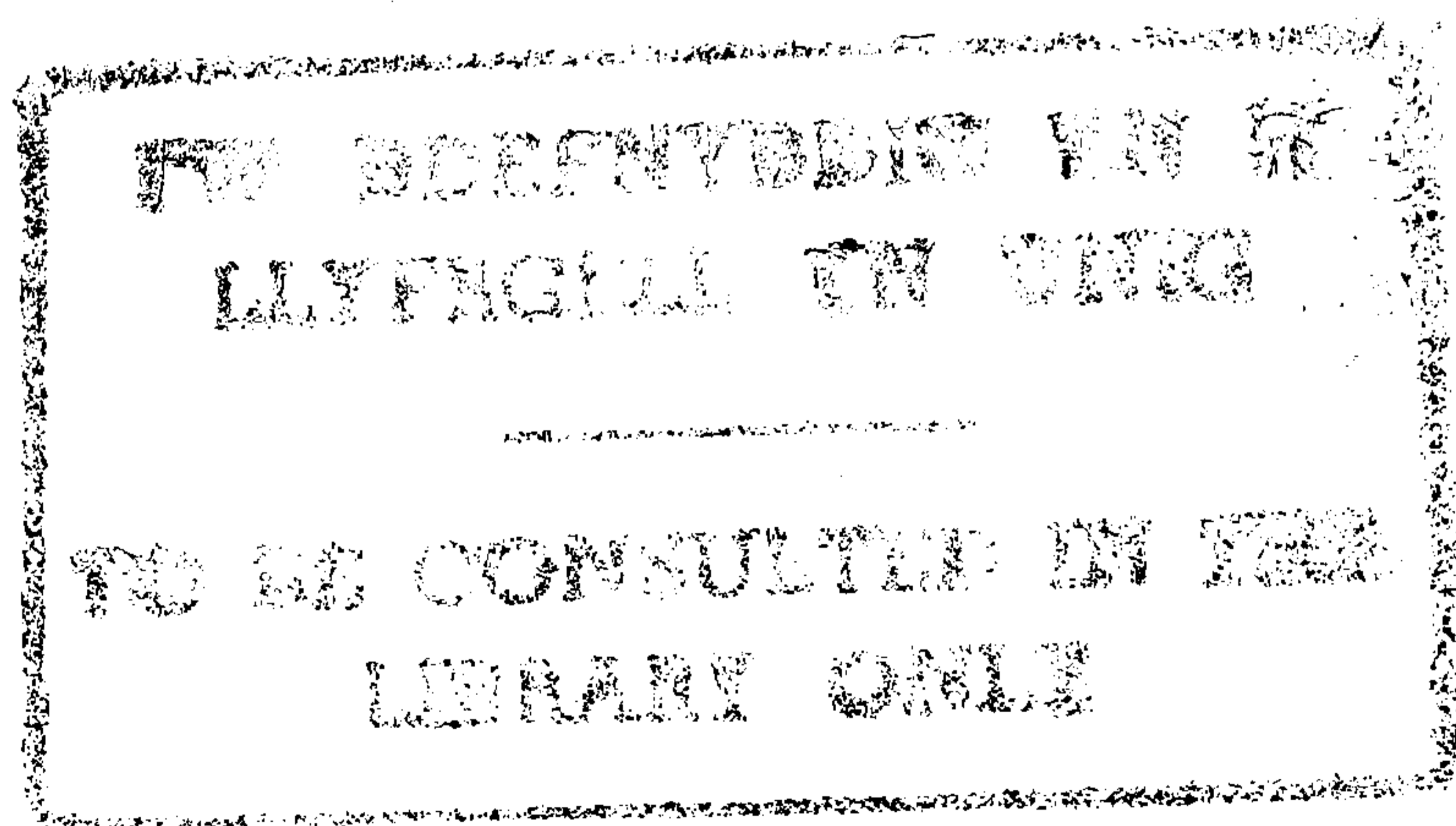
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**ANGELA CARTER'S  
SCARRED TEXTS  
by Tessa Claire Kelly**

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Thesis submitted for the  
examination of PhD. in February  
1999.



## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to describe a poetics of Angela Carter's fiction. It examines the way in which Carter's novels and some of her short stories mobilise the reader into speculation about possible ontologies, provoking them to think beyond the binary oppositions which sustain Western metaphysical thought. The thesis focuses upon Carter's "originary" symbol, the first motif in her first novel, which is a scar. In Chapter One, I argue that the scar is a re-presentation of the mythical wound of female castration which actually works to challenge patriarchal discourses on femininity and female sexuality, introducing feminist theories in order to fully explain the gaps in such discourses. Each of the five chapters which construct the thesis traces the way in which the scar/womb/wound image opens up different but related issues surrounding sexuality representation, signification and transgression. *Shadow Dance*, *The Magic Toyshop*, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, *The Passion of New Eve*, *The Bloody Chamber*, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* are all considered as interrogatory texts in dialogue with one another and with other literature and theories, effecting a breakdown between disciplines and generic categories, yet simultaneously creating a dynamic "new" form of textuality which can be viewed as potentially transformative.

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## List Of Abbreviations

SD Shadow Dance

DH The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman

PNE The Passion of New Eve

MT The Magic Toyshop

HV Heroes and Villains

BC The Bloody Chamber

NC Nights at the Circus

WC Wise Children

VFT 1 The Virago Book of Fairy Tales

VFT 2 The Second Book of Virago Fairy Tales

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved nieces, Bethany Alice  
Dutson and Rosie Laura Dutson.

## INTRODUCTION

### TOWARDS A POETICS OF ANGELA CARTER'S FICTION

Elaine Jordan has recently spoken of the dominance of Carter's politics in discussions of her work, and of the relative neglect of her poetics.<sup>1</sup> This thesis is offered in the hope of redressing that balance somewhat. The approach I have employed in the thesis is best explained with reference to the methodology outlined by Gerardine Meaney in her fascinating book *(Un)like Subjects*. Meaney places novels by Doris Lessing, Muriel Spark and Angela Carter alongside the theories of Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray in order to tease out similarities and differences.<sup>2</sup> In the introduction to this book, Meaney states that she resists simply applying theory to docile novels, using them to highlight aspects of one another instead: it is this aim which I hope to achieve in *Angela Carter's Scarred Texts*.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, as the editors of the "Interrogating Texts" series put it, my readings of Carter's fictions attempt to "question the suitability of certain aspects of...theory *vis-à-vis* certain texts, and ultimately to interrogate the theory itself: to reveal its own inadequacies, limitations and blindspots".<sup>4</sup>

Carter's fascination with the cinema and film iconography is well documented and it is perhaps no surprise that her earlier work foreshadows not only theories of gender performance and cybernetics, but a great deal of the major developments in

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Jordan, "Afterword," *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter*, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London and New York: Longman, 1997) 216-219: 218.

<sup>2</sup> Gerardine Meaney, *(Un)like Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction* (Routledge, New York: 1993).

<sup>3</sup> See Meaney 12.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Waugh and Lynne Pearce, "General Editors Preface" to the "Interrogating Texts" series (New York and London: Edward Arnold).



film studies, especially feminist film theory. The first chapter of this thesis focuses on Carter's novel, Shadow Dance.<sup>5</sup> Like a horror film, with its frequently hideous close-ups, the novel (via the eyes of the protagonist, Morris) repeatedly cuts to the horrific scar on a young girl's face and, in turn, the scar questions sexual identity. Paul Magrs tells us that "The apocalyptic thresholds in personal interrelations that feature so strongly in D.H. Lawrence's work have, in Carter's writing, become invitations to deconstruction and reinvention".<sup>6</sup> The scar in Shadow Dance is an apocalyptic threshold. Whilst the novel features the personal triangle of relations between three people, that is to say, Morris, his friend Honeybuzzard, and the scarred girl, the personal is made political as the scarred girl is shown to form the pivot of the relationship between the men, as well as its vanishing point. She comes to highlight the instability of vision-as-representation, destabilising the men's alliance and the world they attempt to create in their own image. In this way, the scarred girl challenges the supposed omnipotence of patriarchy and the theory of the "male gaze" which dominated feminist work on film in the early nineteen-seventies.

Shadow Dance, an eclectic hybrid which draws (self- reflexively) upon canonical artworks and popular forms such as horror films, uncannily prefigures the work of Carol Creed and Barbara Clover.<sup>7</sup> Both of these women have written on the horror film as a means of interrogating the bias towards classic Hollywood movies that earlier feminist work on filmic representation and narratives display, and,

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<sup>5</sup> Angela Carter, Shadow Dance (London: Virago, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Magrs, "Boys Keep Swinging: Angela Carter and the Subject of Men," The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London and New York: Longman, 1997) 184-196: 189.

furthermore, the gender binaries these analyses tend to (re)produce. I want to examine the work of Creed and Clover in relation to the work of Laura Mulvey on visual representation in order to demonstrate the fruitfulness of feminism's abiding strength, that is to say, its ability to reexamine itself, to interrogate and reformulate its own premises. Which leads us on to Clover's work.

In the introduction to a chapter entitled "Opening Up", Clover points out:

It is no wonder, given the developments of the last twenty years, that horror should worry the nature of the masculine: what it is, what it should and should not be.... On the face of it, the occult film is the most 'female' of horror genres, telling as it regularly does, tales of women in the grip of the supernatural. But behind the female 'cover' is always the story of a man in crisis, and that crisis is what the occult film and this chapter are about.<sup>8</sup>

Clover establishes that masochism is inherent in the desire for watching horror movies amongst men and women alike and is more important than any sadistic motivation on the part of the spectator of these kinds of films. Clover is by no means the first feminist film critic to study masochism in regard to spectatorship, but it seems particularly relevant to a discussion of Shadow Dance as it is a novel very much concerned with the horrified male gaze, with the break down of the "masculine" psyche which is linked, more generally, with the breakdown of patriarchal systems sustained by dichotomies. Those dichotomies, as Hélène Cixous has so brilliantly demonstrated, are never gender neutral.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Carol J. Clover, Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film (London: BFI, 1992) and Barbara Creed, The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Clover 65.

<sup>9</sup> See Hélène Cixous, extract from "Sorties," in New French Feminisms, eds. Isabelle de Courtivron and Elaine Marks ( Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980) 90-98.

To explore the breakdown of the masculine psyche is to implicitly express doubt about masculinity as an essential category with clear, definable parameters. Clover's study of occult film builds on this theme as she believes it is an area of horror which displays elements of male masochism whilst simultaneously allowing the male viewer to mask them. It is precisely this masochistic identification on the part of the male spectator that Carter explores through the figure of Morris and, in so doing, she sets into motion a disintegration of the categories masculine and feminine as they are popularly conceptualised.

Creed's book, The Monstrous Feminine, provides insights into Shadow Dance as well as other Carter fictions because images (phantasies) of monstrous women proliferate in the novel, as they do in horror films. Creed's study follows closely on from Clover's in its insistence on the perverse pleasures of the horror genre. Like Clover, she believes that representations of women in the horror film play a much more important role in structuring these narratives than in other kinds of film, and in this sense they challenge the premises of film scholars such as Mulvey. Mulvey concedes narrative control to male figures and defines the role of woman in film as that of spectacle only, the one who is usually controlled and possessed within the diegesis. Shadow Dance plays with themes that Clover and Creed explore in relation to the horror movie genre, such as the uncanniness of woman (the unassimilable Other who is simultaneously desired and feared), something I shall look at in more detail in the first chapter. Creed is useful to a discussion of Shadow Dance, as well as other Carter fictions, because she draws on Kristeva's theory of abjection in order to explain the function of monstrous imagery in cinema and the monstrous woman in particular.

Like Clover, Creed sees the horror film as a genre which plays mainly to the masochistic aspect of the psyche, thus fulfilling the perverse desire for the pleasure of unpleasure. She believes that the representations of women in horror films destabilise the male viewer, who watches them in abject fascination, unable to exert dominance and control in the act of looking. The studies of both Creed and Clover undermine Mulvey's influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema",<sup>10</sup> which encodes male dominance and sadism into the very structure of looking as if the objectifying gaze were an essential component of masculinity. Mulvey speaks of films as narratives which construct viewing subjects and is thoroughly self-conscious in her application of psychoanalysis to a study of the function of film. When she advocates a more thorough incorporation of psychoanalysis within her discipline, she sounds a feminist battle cry, appropriating psychoanalysis as a political "weapon" or "tool" which can be turned against itself in order to reveal its logocentrism and to dismantle its mythical premises. She calls for a deconstructive approach to the study of mainstream cinema, which has since been taken up by many feminists, yet there has not been a consensus in the reception of her work, which is pioneering, but in many ways contentious.

Issues surrounding spectatorship become more prominent in British feminist film criticism after the publication of Mulvey's essay which describes the ways in which cinematic texts work to position viewers. She focuses on the language of representation in an attempt to expose the bourgeois ideology of the realist aesthetic that informs classic Hollywood cinema. At the time of writing, Mulvey, a filmmaker herself, believed that the deconstructive approach to film analysis (which draws upon

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<sup>10</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Issues in Feminist Film Criticism, ed.

semiotics, psychoanalysis and theories of ideology), would open up a new filmmaking practice, eschewing realist illusionism in favour of a more formalist approach. Pleasure, according to Mulvey, should be removed through a more radical avant-garde cinematic practice. However, she was keen to stress that this avant-garde cinema would act as a counterpoint to mainstream cinema and would not replace it. What Mulvey says here about a feminist aesthetics regarding film in particular might also be applied to the fictional practice of a writer such as Carter, whose texts enact complex deconstructions of bourgeois realist aesthetics which hinge on the debasing objectification of women.

According to Patricia Erens, Mulvey's essay marked a shift away from the study of the changing image of women in Hollywood (to the content of films rather than the cinematic process) which had hitherto been the main focus of feminist film criticism in America and Britain.<sup>11</sup> The new methodology and practices which evolved within feminist film criticism in Britain were not taken up in the United States until much later in the decade, and it was only in the nineteen-eighties that the differences in film analysis became less pronounced.<sup>12</sup> Drawing on Lacan's premise that language is structured like the unconscious, Mulvey asserts that film, too, is a language of sorts: a signifying system similarly structured by the "unconscious of patriarchal society".<sup>13</sup> The cinema, particularly classic Hollywood cinema, is yet

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Patricia Erens (Indiana: Indiana UP, 1990) 28-40.

<sup>11</sup> Patricia Erens, ed., Issues in Feminist Film Criticism (Indiana, Indiana UP, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> This split in approach (between American and British feminists) was by no means confined to film studies as Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore note in their introduction to The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism, eds. Jane Moore and Catherine Belsey (London: Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> Mulvey 28.

another phallogocentric controlling mechanism which works to reinforce "pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have molded him".<sup>14</sup> The use of the masculine pronoun here is important in the context of Mulvey's argument, as is the word "fascination". This is because Mulvey draws on Freud's discussion of scopophilic desire in his "Three Essays on Sexuality" in order to explain cinema's exploitation of voyeuristic fantasies. According to Freud, scopophilic drives exist independently from erotogenic ones, yet they play a major part in human sexuality. In "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" he was to develop his ideas on scopophilia in relation to a pre-genital autoeroticism, but at this stage he associated it with taking other people as objects: "and subjecting them to a curious and controlling gaze". Mulvey goes on to note that Freud's major examples of scopophilia centre around the fascination children have with the bodies of others. Children often desire to see what is forbidden or taboo, and their voyeuristic activities are thus fuelled by "curiosity about other people's genital and bodily functions, about the presence or absence of the penis and, retrospectively, about the primal scene". This pleasure in looking (which Freud came to view as primordial) is, however, later linked to the perceiving subject's idea of himself in relation to others, and is dynamic in the constitution and maintenance of his ego boundaries. The cinema indulges the primordial pleasure in looking. It creates the illusion of distance necessary for the activation of the erotic gaze, whilst simultaneously satisfying the narcissism of the subject, by providing images with which the subject may identify:

The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form. Scale, space, stories are all anthropomorphic. Here, curiosity and the

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<sup>14</sup> Mulvey 28.

wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world.<sup>15</sup>

Mulvey invokes Lacan's mirror stage as an analogy for film watching, a process which is similarly predicated on a process of recognition and misrecognition. The mirror stage describes the time when a child looks in the mirror and joyously recognises himself, perceiving his body as an entity in itself: finished, whole, perfect. This implies that the child previously experiences a lack of self-awareness. Preceding the mirror stage, the child is a mass of unharnessed drives. Lacan creates the word "homelette" (little man) to describe existence in the Imaginary, a pun which combines the words homme (man), and omelette (broken eggs). The broken eggs implies being as fragmentariness and at this point the child perceives no distinction between him/herself and others. He exists in a space without boundaries and is one with his mother. In the Imaginary realm, as Toril Moi notes, there is no difference and absence, only identity and presence (the child identifies with the mother).<sup>16</sup> Desire for the mother is necessarily repressed as the child learns to speak and differentiate himself from others. The articulation of "I" marks the accession to the Symbolic Order of language and culture. This primary repression of the mother opens up the unconscious which had not existed prior to this and desire enters the child's existence in the form of lack, which is inherently linked to the experience of the loss of unity with the mother: "The speaking subject that says 'I am,' is in fact

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<sup>15</sup> Mulvey 30, 30 and 34 respectively.

<sup>16</sup> Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Routledge, 1985) 99.

saying, 'I am he (she) who has lost something'-and the loss suffered is the loss of the imaginary identity with the mother and the world".<sup>17</sup>

Lacan's model of psychosexual development is a rewriting of Freud's Oedipal stage. For Lacan, it is not the biological father who breaks up the mother-child dyad but the sign of the father, the phallus, which he maintains is the ordering principle of the Symbolic Order: "To enter into the Symbolic Order means to accept the phallus as the representation of the Law of the Father. All human culture and all life in society is dominated by the Symbolic Order, and thus by the phallus as sign of lack", and those who cannot take up their place in the Symbolic and remain within the Imaginary are, for Lacan, psychotic. The various objects in which we subsequently invest our desire can never fully satisfy us because, "for Lacan, desire 'behaves' in precisely the same way as language: it moves ceaselessly on from object to object or from signifier to signifier, and will never find full and present satisfaction just as meaning can never be seized as full presence".<sup>18</sup>

According to Lacan, it is the mirror stage which is the vital intermediary stage that allows for dual relationships. It constitutes the moment of self-recognition, which is a prerequisite for taking up a position within the Symbolic Order. The process of recognition for the child, however, always involves a misrecognition: "the image recognised is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego, the alienated subject, which, reintrojected as an ego ideal, gives rise to the future generation of identification with

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<sup>17</sup> Moi 99.

<sup>18</sup> Moi 99. This is Moi's reading of Lacan.



others".<sup>19</sup> Mulvey explains that visual pleasure and the act of gazing is always a bid for transcendence accompanied by a fear of the loss of ego boundaries, and in this sense cinema-going is a re-living of the mirror stage. Crucial to the development of her argument is an examination of the intersection of gender and scopophilia; this is why she uses the male pronoun when speaking of the cinema spectator. In a phallogentric culture, according to Mulvey, the active look is always masculine and the female is the passive recipient of his desiring gaze, an erotic spectacle: the desired object which fascinates and frightens him. The male characters in classic movies play a different role to the women. Whereas a woman will often arrest the narrative, her visual presence freezing the flow of action and breaking the "Renaissance space", as she becomes an object of erotic contemplation for both the characters within the screen story and the spectator within the auditorium, the male characters command three-dimensional space and this three-dimensional space corresponds to that of the mirror recognition: "in which the alienated subject internalized his own representation of this imaginary existence. He is a figure in a landscape... The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action".<sup>20</sup>

Mulvey goes on to examine the function of the female figure in the classic film in psychoanalytic terms. She believes that as a signifier of sexual difference (her body signifies lack, an absence of the male organ) she poses the threat of castration and therefore always implies a certain amount of unpleasure. In classic cinema, this anxiety is usually circumvented in one of two ways: the guilty object, the woman, is

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<sup>19</sup> Mulvey 31.

<sup>20</sup> Mulvey 34.

demystified and thus punished (sometimes punished and saved), or else she is substituted by a fetish object, or turned herself into a fetish object, so that she becomes reassuring rather than threatening. The first method, which is voyeuristic, she associates with sadism, and this fits in better with film narrative than fetishistic scopophilia:

Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of the will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end. Fetishistic scopophilia, on the other hand, can exist outside linear time as the erotic instinct is focused on the look alone.<sup>21</sup>

Implicit in Mulvey's description of the voyeuristic/ sadistic narrative is the idea that the woman is mystifying (she has to be demystified or, colloquially speaking, brought down to earth", through sadistic punishment). Doesn't this suggest that the figure of the woman represents something more worrying (something other) than, the lack of the penis, which Mulvey unquestioningly takes to be the signifier of sexual difference? Does desire have to be equated with lack which, in Mulvey's descriptions, is always linked to the female body?

Luce Irigaray, who is frequently referred to in this thesis, challenges the misogynistic representation of the female body as lacking in Freudian and Lacanian discourses; she is, perhaps, the most astute feminist critic of Freud's notion of sexual difference. In This Sex Which Is Not One, Irigaray draws attention to Freud's "Three Essays on Sexuality" where he asserts the hypothesis of a single identical genital apparatus, the penis, as fundamental in accounting for the sexual origin of both sexes. This enabled Freud to posit the notion that the libido is always masculine. Irigaray shows in The Speculum of the Other Woman that, in this

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<sup>21</sup> Mulvey 35.

respect, Freud is no different from other Western philosophers and that Western thought from Plato was based on the law of the one.

In Freud's writings on the origins of sexual difference, Freud takes the penis as the signifier of sexual difference and regards the vagina as a negation of this. It is construed as a lack (of the penis), rather than something positively different. His belief that the girl suffers from a sort of inverse of the castration complex, whereby she is driven out of her attachment to her mother through the influence of her envy for the penis, is viewed by Irigaray as another means of asserting the inferiority of woman. Irigaray criticises Freud and psychoanalysis for its ahistorical approach to sexuality and its normalising of socio-cultural effects which succeed in silencing women once more, denying them the right of sexual pleasure. What Irigaray objects to is the privileging of seeing, and the championing of presence, in Western metaphysics, something she observes to be continued in Lacan's redeployment of Freud, where, in his attempts to denaturalise Freud's theory of the subject in his insistence on language as origin, he raises the penis to the status of privileged signifier, the phallus.<sup>22</sup> As Diane Fuss explains, the phallus may point to the penis as the most visible mark of sexual difference, but nevertheless, it cannot be reduced to it. However, the metaphor derives its power from the very object it symbolises because it is metonymically close to the penis and, "it is precisely because a woman

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<sup>22</sup> Like Carter, Irigaray continuously challenges the primacy of sight as the organising sense of Western metaphysics although, as Linda Ruth Williams points out, Carter loves visuality and plays with vision rather than relinquishing it as a protest. See Linda Ruth Williams, Critical Desire: Psychoanalysis and the Literary Subject (London: Edward Arnold, 1995) 100.

does not have a penis that her relation to the phallus, the signifying order, the order of the language and the law, is so complicated and fraught with difficulties".<sup>23</sup>

In both Lacan's rereading of Freud and Mulvey's incorporation of Lacan's theory of sexual difference within her cinematic theory, the discovery of sexual difference as a specular one repeats Freud's emphasis on the primacy of the phallus. However, as Mary Jacobus comments, the sight here (of the penis) "might be suspected of serving as a screen for a 'site' of a different kind; that is, the site of sexual difference which is unrepresentable because undecidable".<sup>24</sup> Since the publication of Mulvey's notion of the fetishistic representations of women on screen, it has been argued that such projections are inhabited and undermined by the very ambiguity/undecidability they attempt to deny.

Clover points out that the main story of psychoanalysis, the drama of castration, which is entirely organized around the male body, is actually superseded in certain forms of popular culture, which forward tales of male identifications with females qua females: identifications which remain peripheral in Freudian psychoanalytic discourse and which are not mentioned by Mulvey. Clover's feminist project is to exemplify the ways in which these films reveal patriarchy's reliance on the Other for its self-definition, rather than simply projecting and defining the Other, and her examination thus undercuts major Lacanian premises which locates power with the

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<sup>23</sup> See Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on Sexuality," The Standard Edition of the Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1905) and Diane Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference (New York: Routledge, 1989) 7.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Jacobus, Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism (London: Methuen, 1987) 112.

phallus. She sees the theories of Mulvey as clearly mistaken in her diagnosis of the structuring look of the camera as sadistic and masculine, suggesting that occult films show an alternative and more complex male subject, whose reaction to others is not so easily defined as the aforementioned imply (thereby inferring a disagreement with the Lacanian bipartite model of psychosexual development).

Clover's analysis of the occult film in particular refutes Mulvey's theory of mainstream cinematic practice, especially her definition of the woman in film as representative of lack. "Opening Up" demonstrates that this is not true of all mainstream cinema. Clover believes that the popular cultural form most willing to elaborate fantasies of femaleness is:

the possession or occult film. It is not just the centrality of a female body and the interest in its passages and interiors and its capacity to accommodate alien intrusion, that mark the possession film as somehow 'feminine', but the fact that the male psyche/body is understood in like terms, and its story told with reference to the 'internal space' of a woman. For all its confusion, the occult film does have a language for the female body, a set of tropes and images that refer not to lack or absence but rather to the presence of things hidden behind closed doors.<sup>25</sup>

The occult film presents us with hysterical women whose bodies are more open to the entrance of the devil (this following on from the Edenic myth which links Eve with Satan before the Fall and implies, therefore, that woman was, and remains, corruptible). These films play on men's fears of the unknowability of women's bodies and thus reinforce particular stereotypes which link the female form with monstrous excess, yet they are important because they display a fascination with women's interiors as sites from which creation issues and do not represent them simply as external sites of lack. Such films play on the figure of the woman as a

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<sup>25</sup> Clover 111-112.

surface which belies depth and are like psychic journeys, probing the difference of the woman's inner space in search of new answers and masculine identities.

Carter's texts follow a similar dynamic to that outlined by Creed in the occult film and this is perhaps what makes her initially so shocking to many readers, feminists included. I once visited a teacher friend's sixth-form group who bombarded me with their responses to The Bloody Chamber. Why were some aspects of the stories so horrible, many of them wanted to know? The question is a difficult one to begin answering, not only in relation to The Bloody Chamber, but to Carter's oeuvre generally. Indeed, I started out on this project with a fascinated enthusiasm and became angry with Carter, as I struggled for a long time with the (sometimes) monstrous excessiveness of the fictions, and with the monstrous women figures in particular. In time, I realised that I was being confronted, not with femininity as monstrous *per se*, but with the monstrous fear of femininity which affects women's perceptions of themselves. On a psychic and spiritual level, women seem to be deeply affected by myths of femininity which they internalise and which become an integral part of their self-conception. As mentioned in relation to the occult film, the subtext of the creation myth is fear of woman, her sexuality and her creative power which must be labelled evil and taken under control. Seeing as Carter returns time and time again to this story of origins within her work, it will be worth examining it greater detail in this introduction. Another feminist critic, Patricia Parker, has studied the logic of women's secondariness constructed through the second Genesis story, and her work is helpful to an understanding of the issues that Carter (along with many other women writers) is confronting in the myth of the Fall from Paradise.

In Literary Fat Ladies,<sup>26</sup> Patricia Parker examines myths of masculine origins, whereby the woman comes second (is born second in time) and her threatening creative potential is overcome as she is labelled secondary to man and destined to follow him. Parker views such creation narratives as constructing a logic of woman's secondariness. We find one of these myths of origins in Paradise Lost, a poem which has frustrated so many women writers who have attempted to reverse the sexual hierarchy it imposes in order to reveal and to combat the misogyny which informs it.<sup>27</sup> As Parker points out, the creation story in which Eve is fashioned from Adam's rib (Genesis 2) is far more influential in the work of the exegetists than the first Genesis story which tells of the simultaneous creation of man and woman. In the first creation story Lilith, the first woman, is created from dust rather than from Adam's rib and both man and woman are said to be made in the image of God. This story is not as well known as the second version but Parker says it has long been used to defend the equality of women.

Parker describes the way in which Biblical commentators such as Augustine and Aquinas attempt to join the two separate Genesis stories in a unified reading by drawing on the passage from 1 Corinthians 11:7 in their interpretation of Genesis 1. This passage asserts that man is "the image and glory of God" whilst woman is the "glory of man" and they follow this up with the sentence from Genesis 2, "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man". Parker explains that:

What they emerge with is the explanation that "Woman is made in the image of God in so far as image is understood to mean "an intelligent nature"; but insofar as man and not woman is, like God, the beginning

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<sup>26</sup> Patricia Parker, Literary Fat Ladies and the Generation of The Text (London: Methuen, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> John Milton, Paradise Lost 1697.

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and end (of woman), woman is not in God's image, but in man's image," having been created *ex viro propter virum*, out of man and for man.<sup>28</sup>

These exegetists' misogynous interpretations have obviously been instrumental in Christian teachings which insist on a woman's subordinate position to the male. Parker also points out that it was not just the second Genesis story which posited the woman as coming second, for Aristotle also wrote an account of male and female which was influential right up until the seventeenth century. In the Metaphysics Aristotle drew up a table of binary oppositions which included the opposition of male and female. The woman's contribution to conception is as passive material and Aristotle ignores other theories of his time in which the woman is attributed a more active part in conception.

In the Metaphysics the mother is described as the "body" to the father's "soul" and, as Parker points out, these polarities had corollaries in other areas; in the association of the male with rationality and hence with ruling and public speech and the female with irrationality and thus with the virtue of obedience, with the home and silence.<sup>29</sup> These private/public ramifications I interrogate in chapter three in relation to The Magic Toyshop, which forms the main focus of that particular section of the thesis which deals in Melanie's entrapment in a network of discourses and myths of femininity.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, much of Carter's fiction displays the difficulties that even the

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<sup>28</sup> Parker 181.

<sup>29</sup> These Aristotelian ideas on sexual difference, as explained by Parker, held sway throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. They were linked with the account of the secondary female from Genesis 2 long before Milton combined aspects of the second creation story with Aristotle's account of the defective male in Paradise Lost.

<sup>30</sup> Angela Carter, The Magic Toyshop (London: Virago, 1993).



"toughest" women have in dealing with the cultural construction of femininity, and the mental and physical constrictions it places upon them.

The decline of Annabel in Love shows what happens to a woman who simply hasn't the ability to cope with her cultural positioning,<sup>31</sup> suggesting that because of their marginal status within language and culture, women live a sort of schizophrenic existence which can be extremely painful at times. As one critic has noted, in a society in which women are perceived as culturally inferior: "Relationality as the basis of identity has often reinforced their desire to please, to serve others and seek definition through them, internalising any anger about this as a failure of (essential) femininity".<sup>32</sup> I read this as comparable to what happens to Annabel in Love. Her actions at the end of the book, whereby she dresses up like a mannequin before gassing herself, testify to her desire to conform to some notion of essential femininity she believes she has never possessed. Annabel retreats from any of the roles that culture (the Symbolic Order) offers to women but she becomes trapped instead in the Imaginary realm. Unable to negotiate between the two realms, she begins a descent into madness which finally leads to suicide. The Thanatic impulse overwhelms Annabel's will to live. Despite Carter's admission of an initial authorial disdain for Annabel, the depiction of the "mad" girl appears (to this reader) to articulate a critique of relational modes of identity as they function within patriarchy, and of Annabel's entrapment as object of desire within a masculine specular economy.

Love exposes problems of female subjectivity, ironically confounded, Carter suggests, by the historical circumstances which create the backdrop of the novel; a

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<sup>31</sup>Angela Carter, Love (London: Picador, 1988).

<sup>32</sup> Patricia Waugh, Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern (London: Routledge, 1989)

period in which sexual liberation became a rallying cry for a generation of writers and philosophers (expounded in the works of Reich and Marcuse and others). The novel infers that ideas of sexual liberation in this period did not take sufficient account of the social and psychic differences between men and women, and between people generally, suggesting that such liberation was also confounded in practice by the historical sedimentations of guilt concerning women and their sexuality, and of the restricted means of expression for their specific desires.

Reading and writing about Carter, especially her earlier work, can be a painful experience but it works to erode those aforementioned sedimentations of guilt and desire. The scar on Ghislaine's face in Shadow Dance is the means through which I began to explore the concept of Carter's textual dynamics outlined above and it is the motif which continues to shape my thesis. In chapter one I introduce the scar, or what I elsewhere conceive as the wound/womb, as Carter's originary symbol (the symbol out of which all further Carter fictions will develop) as well as the symbol of (wo)man's original sin and the fall from Paradise. Like other feminist artists, such as the sculptress Kathy de Monchaux, for instance, Carter's work reflects woman as scarred, and her scar as her sex is a slash; it is impaired. But her work serves a double purpose, as it also views the female sex in detail from the inside out, as it is when viewed through a speculum. It asks the question of what it is to be a woman from a woman's point of view. It looks at things from the other side.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> I am indebted to Rachel Tooke for introducing me to the work of Cathy de Monchaux who, along with Yayoi Kusama, the Japanese female fetishist, forms the basis for a discussion of feminist visual art in her dissertation entitled "A Look from the Other Side". Tooke says of de Monchaux's "Scarring the Wound" that it is an attempt to turn things around, to look from the inside-out and as such it goes some way towards the creation of a new visual language which surpasses/exceeds masculinity. See Rachel Tooke, BA Hons. diss., "A Look From the Other Side," Norwich School of Art and Design, 1997. 42. See also Cathy de Monchaux, "Scarring the Wound" 1993.

The journey into the scarred space of a Carter text is destabilising, disorientating, sometimes painful, like femininity itself, but it can be exhilarating and creative too. This reading process is reflected in the “plot” of The Passion of New Eve which I discuss in conjunction with its “twin” text The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman in the second chapter, “Metamorphic Strangers and Strange Transformations”.<sup>34</sup> Here I regard The Passion of New Eve primarily as a novel about a man’s apprenticeship in femininity, of which he had once been ignorant. Evelyn becomes a stranger to himself after he is castrated in an operation in a womb-like space beneath the earth, a place which is a reworking and a parody of William Blake’s Beulah. At the end of the novel, Evelyn turned New Eve sets sail on that most feminine of symbols, the sea, pregnant with the child of her transexual lover, Tristessa, anticipating the birth of a “new” subject. In this chapter, Beulah is regarded in relation to the myth of the Medusa and the vagina dentata, which I discuss in chapter one, and as a site which interrogates the myth of the womb as a lost paradise. I also examine New Eve’s creation as a parody of woman as lacking (as a “defective male”) in Freud and Lacan’s theories of sexual difference, which repeat the misogyny and the logic of woman’s secondariness at the heart of the second Genesis creation myth.

The Passion of New Eve and Hoffman play with the idea of the post-Freudian subject fragmented by desire, the subject who is other to him/herself. As Jordan says: “through her speculative fictions Carter comes round to mocking modern

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<sup>34</sup> Angela Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), henceforth Hoffman, and The Passion of New Eve (London: Virago, 1982).

Romantic fantasies of the restoration of the wholeness in the fulfilment of desire".<sup>35</sup>

I examine the subversion of the masculine I/eye in both Hoffman and The Passion of New Eve with recourse to Cixous's critique of Freud's essay "The 'Uncanny'".<sup>36</sup>

However, The Passion of New Eve and Hoffman do not wholeheartedly celebrate fragmentation and the Surrealist transgressive theories that they allude to. As Waugh tells us, closely allied to the celebratory deconstruction of the subject in many male-authored postmodernist texts is a yearning for the ideal, unified subject. And for all their radicalism, the Surrealists liked to project fragmentation on to the bodies of women. Indeed, as Waugh has demonstrated, the myth of woman's unassimilable otherness remains unexplored in many modern and postmodern novels by men in which images of woman as monstrous in her absence, lack and insatiability appear time and time again: "The women characters of writers like Barth, Bellow, Kesey, Pynchon, Mailer or even Fitzgerald, for example, are in large measure projections of primitive masculine fears and desires, very often close to myth." According to Waugh, women writers have tended to occupy a very different position in relation to what she terms "covert postmodern nostalgia".<sup>37</sup> This is perhaps because, as Waugh points out, and as Carter's texts illustrate, women have been historically excluded from this mourned-for model of subjectivity, which is a masculine one. In order to establish the "universal" subject most philosophical discourses exclude that which it labels as "femininity" and projects onto women this otherness. Woman becomes the

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<sup>35</sup> Elaine Jordan, "The Dangerous Edge," Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994) 189-215: 199.

<sup>36</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" The Penguin Freud Library: Art and Literature Vol. 14, ed. Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 339-376, Hélène Cixous, "Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche*," New Literary History Vol. 7:3 (1976): 525-48.

<sup>37</sup> Waugh 65.

outside, the excluded, remaining on the margins, outside of the Symbolic Order through which the absolute subject is constituted. This feminine otherness is usually defined as that which is non-rational--the body, the emotions or the pre-Symbolic. All of these categories projected onto women as a group have been endlessly reinforced through socially dominant discourses and fictions.

The second chapter goes on to look at the way Carter's trip to Japan in the early seventies, a journey which led her into a comparison of different systems of desire, feeds into Hoffman and The Passion of New Eve. Drawing on an essay by Susan Suleiman and the work of Linda Williams,<sup>38</sup> this chapter aims to show how women remain the site of interrogation/object of enquiry in both systems, and the way in which Dr. Hoffman's world of the unconscious mirrors the obsession with woman as other to the male absolute. Although the level of irony operating in these novels is at times hard to ascertain, I argue that in Hoffman the peepshow may be taken as a parody of pornographic representation and the search for truth via the female body. The Passion of New Eve goes much further in its jujitsu of representation. It plays with the idea of the defective, infecting and infected female body in the representation of the city (a reworking of the wound theme) which is discussed in conjunction with the depiction of Leilah. Both Leilah and the city might be read, not only as parodies of male representations of femininity and the body, but as introducing feminine alterity which emerges from within the Symbolic Order, forming a powerfully disruptive force. In The Passion of New Eve, the first Genesis story is encoded in the text through the figure of Leilah. Leilah, the black prostitute

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<sup>38</sup> Susan Suleiman, "The Fate of the Surrealist Imagination," in Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994) and Linda Williams, Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible (London: Pandora, 1992).

whom Evelyn describes as an object of desire at the beginning of the book, later turns out to be a female guerilla fighter named Lilith, thus completely reversing the construction of her secondary status. Via a comparison with “O” in The Story of O,<sup>39</sup> I examine Leilah’s dichotomous position early in the novel where she oscillates between fixed, fetishistic object position on one hand and empowered masquerading subjectivity on the other, in order to show her as a subject-in-process/on trial who ultimately escapes an objectified victim position.

The third chapter of the thesis moves back to two of Carter’s earlier fictions, Heroes and Villains<sup>40</sup> and The Magic Toyshop, which present the marginal status of the female protagonists as a constant obstacle to be overcome; a painful struggle as second-class citizens which foreshadows Evelyn’s fate in The Passion of New Eve. Marianne and Melanie have to come to terms with their secondary status suddenly, but like latter day Eves they struggle against the mould they are expected to fill. The Magic Toyshop uses the motif of the mirror as a means of exploring female narcissism, which is linked to loss at the heart of feminine identity. This is examined in some detail with reference to an intertext of the novel, John Milton’s Paradise Lost (and its interpretation of the creation myth) and the work of Jenijoy La Belle, John Berger, Mary Russo and Irigaray.<sup>41</sup>

Melanie's desire to dress up in her mother's wedding dress highlights a closeness/identification with the mother and with the feminine role Melanie sees her

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<sup>39</sup> Pauline Réage, Story of O vol.1 (London: Corgi Books, 1995).

<sup>40</sup> Carter, Heroes and Villains (London: Virago, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin, 1972), Jenijoy La Belle, Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1988), Mary Russo, The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity (London: Routledge, 1994), and Luce Irigaray, various texts.

mother as representing, bringing to attention the ambiguity of Melanie's "romantic" desire for marriage and motherhood in the sense that although she fantasises about a bridegroom, marriage and children, she increasingly wants something else/other besides these "endings". Melanie's disturbances and disorientation are, I argue, inherently linked to the stifling claustrophobia which the family unit generates, paradoxically in Melanie's case, even when that unit appears to have been irrevocably sundered. Irigaray's critical reading of Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of the exchange of women provides a means of analysing the women's position in the Flower household.<sup>42</sup> The Romantic theme of incest, here brother/sister incest between Uncle Philip and Melanie's mother is not explored as transgressive eroticism or a radically liberating motif but, instead, as a horrifyingly real power relation. Melanie, who displaces her mother literally and symbolically, becomes trapped as victim in this incestuous relationship and this chapter looks into the machinations of masculine power for it is this which mainly determines and regulates Melanie's sexuality and which shapes her self-conception. She *is* victimised because there appears to be so little room in which to manoeuvre and escape male tyranny and the marking out of her body as male property. In many ways she conforms to the Gothic *femme fatale* whose agency is denied or negated. Exiled from her home, Melanie finds herself travelling and arriving in a different place where the same laws operate. For Melanie the accession to "womanhood" is a journey into a strange place which is a confrontation with her (m)other self. It is a fantastic journey marked by loss and absence of the mother whom she appears to have murdered /displaced but to whom she paradoxically returns. This issue forms the basis of the latter half of the third

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<sup>42</sup> In Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Elementary Structures of Kinship, tran. James Harley Bell, Rodney

chapter in which I discuss femininity and mother-daughter relationships in conjunction with Claire Kahane's work on Gothic fiction, Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of "Snow White", Irigaray's discussion of the difficulties of female origins, Freud's essay "The 'Uncanny'" and Cixous's reappraisal of his essay in "Fictions and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche*".<sup>43</sup>

The fragmentation and the disintegration of the self which Melanie experiences is most emphatically not celebrated in The Magic Toyshop in the way that the loss of what Patricia Waugh terms the liberal subject, that is to say, the rational, coherent subject, is celebrated in postmodern novels by men. Carter's fictions frequently imply that fragmentation and loss are (and always have been) inherent in feminine identity and that there is no escaping this state of dividedness. It is only later on that the divided feminine self really becomes the source of creative power and fragmentation becomes a plurality of selves, or possible selves.<sup>44</sup> However, Melanie's desire for a position other than someone's puppet remains a potentially disruptive force throughout the novel and her drive for something better, beyond what is on offer to her, is characteristic of most of Carter's female protagonists.

A discussion of the toyshop as womb/ wound-like space with fearful and difficult associations, leads on to an analysis of the poetics of The Bloody Chamber in chapter four where, I argue, the transformative possibilities hinted at in the toyshop/womb/wound are developed more fully.<sup>45</sup> I look at Carter's attraction to the

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Needham and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston: Beacon P, 1965).

<sup>43</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic (Mass.: Harvard UP, 1979), Claire Kahane, "Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity," Centennial Review vol.24 (1980): 43-64.

<sup>44</sup> Carter, Nights at the Circus (London: Vintage, 1994) and Wise Children (London: Vintage, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Carter, The Bloody Chamber (London: Vintage, 1995).



oral tradition as the means by and through which she was able to begin forging an alternative means of expression, outside of the constraints of patriarchal literary genealogies. In the oral tradition, Carter discovers an open-ended “feminine” form of dialogue with the past which enables her to open up the voices of the fairy-tale foremothers that had been gradually silenced in monologic literary versions since Charles Perrault. In this chapter I draw quite extensively upon Jack Zipes’s and Marina Warner’s socio-cultural histories of the fairy tale.<sup>46</sup> Zipes’s analysis of the “civilising process” is helpful to an understanding of the way in which the rich diversity, dynamism and subversiveness of the oral tradition was quashed, as fairy tales were subsumed into the educational literature of the nursery, becoming didactic parables instructing children how to behave according to bourgeois codes. So too, Marina Warner’s study provides a fascinating insight into the history of the tellers and telling of tales and of the transformation of the powerful feminine presence of the oral tradition into a false, nostalgic reminder of the fairy tale’s “universality”. The contribution of Bruno Bettelheim towards the “universalisation” of the fairy tale, which works to perpetuate stifling gender categories, is also considered and critiqued here.

Warner and Zipes’s studies are not only helpful or useful explanations of fairy tales, they are, like Carter’s own tales, compelling and mobilising. They reveal the power of enchantment propelling the fairy tale, motivating the reader: inviting the reader to think subversively. Although I am aware of the deathly, Gothic aspects in

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<sup>46</sup> Jack Zipes, Fairy Tales: The Art of Subversion (London: Routledge, 1991), and The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in a Socio-Cultural Context (London: Heineman, 1983). Marina Warner, From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers (London: Vintage, 1995).

some of the more “vampiric” tales, I prefer to focus upon the final trio of “wolf” tales. These are read as “ultimately” embodying the erotic rather than the Thanatic principle, compelling the reader to look and think beyond the binaries of western metaphysics. The wolf is an open-ended symbol, a metonym rather than a metaphor, whose accumulation of meanings works to expose and undo the history of women’s oppression and suppression. Earlier in this introduction, Annabel’s position in Love was used to explain/describe the total entrapment of a woman in a specular economy, the overwhelming power of Thanatos issuing from a fragmented female mind reflective of the sedimentations of guilt and fear in the female Imaginary at large. Carter spoke later of the novel as “Annabel’s coffin”, thus implicitly connecting the death drive with fictional practice and women’s writing in particular<sup>47</sup> and in this chapter, I invoke Irigaray’s theories of the female Imaginary (which contains its own possibilities of transformation) in order to demonstrate the way in which this deathliness is overcome. The wolf trilogy works towards the expression of a “real” state of love. This is a love that can acknowledge the death drives and thus accept the other without the damaging degree of violence that characterises the Symbolic Order at the moment. The abject female body discussed in chapter one turns into something else in some of the tales of The Bloody Chamber. The boundary-defying fluidity reflected in the body of this hopeful text provokes speculative thought about states of being. The frank reference to the lower bodily stratum, to female excrement and corporeal unruliness, I argue, makes this a grotesque female text which articulates a radically transgressive femininity, whilst it simultaneously reintroduces

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<sup>47</sup> Angela Carter, Love (London: Picador, 1988) Afterword.

he spirit of the bawdy, garrulous and enterprising women who have helped to shape its history.

The use of the concept of the grotesque body and the inherent heterogeneity of language, and thus of textual form comes, of course, from Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work is particularly interesting in relation to Carter for both are great liminal thinkers who reposition the (grotesque) body at the centre stage of cultural meaning-making and both are dedicated materialists. Similarly, Bakhtin's theory of language and the subversive, transformative potential of medieval carnival links in well to a discussion of the history of the fairy tale's "monologisation" at the hands of the bourgeois, and of the suppression of their subversive potential. Perhaps more could have been made of this connection, although chapter five of the thesis does look at the dialogic nature of Carter's final two fictions as a means of opening up monologic patriarchal structures, narratives and representations through feminist dialogue.<sup>48</sup> Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist point out that: "Bakhtin speaks of alterity as friendly to man, rather than alienating, which is the same structural situation, but has been perceived from Marx to Sartre as hostile"<sup>49</sup> and I read The Bloody Chamber as looking towards developing a way of perceiving the structures we inhabit differently, embracing alterity; perhaps even moving towards an ethics of alterity.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), and Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, intro. Wayne Booth (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984).

<sup>49</sup> Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin 70.

<sup>50</sup> I realise that the use of the word "man" in Holquist and Clark's reference to Bakhtin's theories is quite loaded for, as outlined earlier, the concept of alterity has not always been friendly to women, but used to marginalise them. Like many of the other male philosophers and theorists mentioned in this thesis, Bakhtin's blind spot was woman.

The fifth chapter of this thesis looks at Carter's last two books, Nights at the Circus and Wise Children, which have frequently been interpreted as "celebratory" feminist, carnivalesque works that utilise postmodern techniques. In this way these novels have been viewed as departures from the more critical and "pessimistic" earlier Carter texts. Yet recently, such enthusiastic readings have come under close scrutiny in the collection which I mentioned in the opening to this introduction. The title of this collection, The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter, clearly emphasises the problems of Carter's writing and the desires it embodies, and a couple of the essays on Nights at the Circus and Wise Children form rather more sceptical readings than my own initial studies of the novels. This fifth chapter is perhaps the most disjointed, because, in the light of this recent criticism I have attempted to revise my initial, rather naive "celebratory" readings (via a marriage of Bakhtinian and gender performance theory). Despite the doubts which have only just crept in to the chapter, I still stand by my earlier desire to read Fevvers and Nora and Dora as exuberant, subversive iconoclasts making grotesque spectacles of themselves and dethroning the phallus in their carnivalesque masquerades. In order to explain this process, I look at Mary Ann Doane's theories of female masquerade, which seeks out the subversive power of Joan Riviere's essay on masquerade, and at Stephen Heath's essay on femininity and masquerade.<sup>51</sup>

As Kristevan subjects-in-process, Fevvers, Dora and Nora open up possibilities to the reader; their triumphs over the loss and death send out a message of hope. These novels also reflect the woman writer's transformation of patriarchal structures and

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<sup>51</sup> Mary Ann Doane, "Masquerade Reconsidered," in Femmes Fatales: Women, Film and Psychoanalysis (London: Routledge, 1995), and Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as Masquerade," Stephen Heath, "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade," both in Formations of Fantasy, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986).

representations, for in their powerful and moving utilisation of pain, complexity and contradiction, Carter's scarred texts create a revolutionary feminist art form. As Elaine Jordan says, "Whether reading Carter stimulates delight or revulsion (as it must sometimes do), it is always an intellectual activity",<sup>52</sup> and Carter touched on the dynamics of her work in an essay about feminism and writing, where she declared that she wanted to, "decolonise our language and our basic habits of thought...transforming actual fictional forms to both reflect and to precipitate changes in the way people feel about themselves".<sup>53</sup> The movement of Carter's fictions and the interactions they provoke is a process I hope I go some way towards describing in this thesis without detracting from the exuberant multiplicity of the particular works I have chosen to focus upon.

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<sup>52</sup> Jordan, "Afterword," 217.

<sup>53</sup> Angela Carter, "Notes from the Frontline," On Gender and Writing, ed. Micheline Wandor (London: Pandora 1989) 69-77.

# CHAPTER ONE

## A SCARRED TEXT: SHADOW DANCE

### AND THE DISSOLUTION OF BINARY OPPOSITES

#### **Cinematography and the Projective Illusion**

In her thesis From Myth to Memory Sally Keenan examines novels by Toni Morrison, Angela Carter and Maxine Hong Kingston in order to demonstrate the different ways in which each of these novelists appropriates prior myths and fictions. It is especially those myths and fictions surrounding gender and race which each turns to her own, particular textual purposes. In a chapter "Angela Carter's Spectacular Fictions: Decoding Myths of Femininity," she notes that Carter's narratives persist in scrutinising the most powerful figurations of woman in Western cultural production; that is to say:

Woman as muse or object of unattainable desire; woman as object of exchange within a masculine economy (in both its libidinal and market sense)... Carter's work foregrounds the figure of woman as a crucial site of contradiction centred on the relation between seeing and knowing, between the visible and the parameters of knowledge in western discourse.<sup>1</sup>

This foregrounding of the figure of woman as a site of contradiction is perhaps why reading Carter's fiction is such a frustrating but exhilarating experience: woman is repeatedly presented as a question mark within her texts, rather than an accessible, knowable reality. She is slippery and evasive and difficult to pin down, challenging the readers' desires for "centred" novelistic subjects with whom they might identify. Carter is

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Keenan, "From Myth to Memory: The Revisionary Writing of Angela Carter, Maxine Hong Kingston and Toni Morrison," diss. U. of Essex, 1992, 17.

constantly, teasingly, asking: "Where is woman?", a question which actually forms the dynamic of the picaresque plots of The Passion of New Eve and The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, in which the male protagonists, Evelyn and Desiderio, set off on traditional male quests in search of themselves or of the father, yet frequently find themselves face to face, instead, with mothers and daughters. The sardonic, egotistical anti-heroes of these novels are repeatedly contained and confronted in and by the elusive "feminine" spaces that have up until now constituted the unconscious, Other or unthought, of culture. Within these gaps and lacunae in the fabric of (Father) Time reside the shadowy living-dead and the hybridic, monstrous female figures of patriarchal mythology (the representations described by Keenan), who haunt, taunt and tease, and in the case of Mother in The Passion of New Eve, wreak revenge on the male protagonists.

The first of Carter's fantastic women, more a trope of femininity than a "realistic" character (that is to say, a mimetic portrait of someone we might know and recognise), who occupies and represents these strange "feminine" spaces, is Ghislaine in Shadow Dance--Carter's debut novel. Ghislaine is a hybrid mixture of femme-fatale, vampire, cannibal, siren and harpy; a shadowy figure who flickers in and out of the pages of Shadow Dance, the very title of which describes her and her movements, as well as the movements of those involved with her. What is important in this novel is the centrality of the shadow, the presence-in-absence that shapes the text's erratic form.

In my analysis of Shadow Dance, I shall be drawing on Carol Clover's discussion of the modern horror film particularly that of the eighties occult film, as well as Barbara Creed's work on the monstrous feminine. Despite the twenty year gap between the publication of Shadow Dance and the emergence of these films, Clover's study of the horror film, and the occult

film in particular, as a medium in which the remapping of gender becomes a central issue, seems relevant to Carter's portrait of a man possessed and obsessed by the uncanny woman in/of this text. The application of film theory might seem more relevant to a study of Carter's later fictions, such as The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman and The Passion of New Eve, in which references to cinematography are explicit rather than implicit. However, there are obvious links between the title, Shadow Dance, the ontological status of woman in patriarchal discourses and the processes of cinematic production and consumption. If one thinks of a film as shadows dancing across a screen, then the relevance of film studies to Shadow Dance might become clearer.

The shadowshow that is a film is perhaps one of the most intriguing technological illusions in which the play of light upon a surface creates the image of the three dimensional world reflective of the world that the spectators inhabit. The darkened auditorium in which the audience sit might be taken as a contemporary version of Plato's cave and the film they watch to the shadows that flicker upon the back wall of the cave. These shadows, according to Plato are cast by ideal, perfected objects but the people watching them mistake them for the "real" thing, that is to say, Plato's eternal forms, whilst they are, in fact, illusions. Strangely enough, Jean-Louis Baudry links the cinema screen to the scene of representation in Plato's cave, and describes cinema as a contemporary realisation of the empiricist metaphor of knowledge as vision, explaining that this is because cinema ideologically positions the viewer.<sup>2</sup> The viewer assimilates his/her vision to the eye of the camera eye in a way which seems unmediated, and this spectator, believing what she/he sees, is confirmed in the illusory sense of mastery and self-coherence. In the act of experiencing the impression of

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," trans. Alan Williams Film Quarterly 27:2 (Winter 1974-1975): 39-47.



reality, the spectator does so in the manner of the subject of a transcendentalist or idealist philosophy. Constance Penley explains that:

In Baudry's Freudian terms, the [cinematic] apparatus induces (as a result of the immobility of the spectator, the darkened auditorium, the darkness of the theater, and the projections of the image from a place behind the spectator's head) a total regression to an earlier developmental stage in which the subject hallucinates satisfaction....<sup>3</sup>

One can see how this idea of film as a projective illusion connects with feminist critiques of woman as a projection of the patriarchal unconscious, critiques such as Luce Irigaray's in Speculum of the Other Woman.

Feminist film critics' considerations of film challenge the teleological and ahistorical aspects of Baudry's psyche-machine-cinema model and question the idea of film spectatorship as pleasurable wish-fulfilment, focusing on differences between films, rather than assuming, as Baudry does, that all films perform the same function.

Feminist film criticism also examines the projection of illusion on to women's bodies, something that Carter is fascinated by. As Laura Mulvey says: "It is hard to think of any more succinct summing up of the cinema and its projections of illusion and fantasy on to the female body than the opening of The Passion of New Eve".<sup>4</sup> I want to go on to look at Mulvey's theory on the classical Hollywood film's tendency to masculinize the spectator, which draws out the gender issues implicated in a theory such as Baudry's, and then to go on to look at theories which emphasise the spectator's oscillations across a range of identificatory positions and at destabilising representations of women on screen. So too, I shall examine Ghislaine of Shadow Dance, not simply as a projective illusion issuing

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<sup>3</sup> Constance Penley, The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1989) 61.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Cinema Magic and the Old Monsters," Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter (London: Virago, 1994) 216-230: 232.

from a male imaginary, but as a site where sexual difference (re-emerges), undermining the masculine "I"/eye.

### **Morris and the Exploration of Male Masochism**

Morris displays masochistic desires in Shadow Dance and, although it is written in the third person, the narrative voice often sounds as if it is conveying his thoughts. The novel opens with the return of a young woman with whom Morris had once been involved. The story thus begins in *medias res*, quite fitting for a text, which as we shall see, is concerned with in-between. Ghislaine, has a large "open" red scar on her face which simultaneously fascinates and repels Morris who is repeatedly drawn to looking at it. In Shadow Dance the sadistic story that Mulvey speaks of in relation to classic cinema lies outside the actual text itself. Like The Passion of New Eve (with which it has definite affinities), this is a novel in which binary distinctions such as sadism and masochism, masculinity and femininity, break down within the text, or are at least shown to interrelate in the more complex ways that feminist film critics, like Linda Williams, have illustrated in their discussions of identificatory processes within film spectatorship.

In her work on pornography, Williams draws attention to Gaylyn Studlar's work which highlights the repressed term in Mulvey's original statement of the perversity of narrative cinema, that is to say, masochism. Studlar argues that cinematic visual pleasure is not so much sadistic as masochistic, for it partakes of pre-Oedipal pleasures of merger and fusion, rather than the Oedipal issues of pain and separation discussed by Mulvey. Williams insists that it is important not to view sadistic and masochistic pleasures as completely separate from one another but to perhaps understand how they interrelate. Interestingly she states that: "masochism

is a perversion whose absolute passivity has been overestimated".<sup>5</sup>

Williams points out that men and women can enjoy the power and pleasure in identifying with a masochist's abandon as well as with a sadist's control, although the reasons for this will be different, according to their different identifications and object choices. There is power in the masochistic position for, as Williams stresses, there is no pleasure in "pure" victimisation: "without a modicum of power, without some leeway for play within assigned sexual roles, and without the possibility of some intersubjective give-and-take, there can be no pleasure for either the victim or the totally identified viewer".<sup>6</sup> For Williams, it is preferable to employ the description "sadomasochistic" to the fantasies informing films and for feminists to overcome their aversion to the idea of masochism, which has become as unacceptable to feminism as it is to patriarchy.

Carter is always interested in the relationship between pleasure and pain, and, unlike many feminists, she has refused to separate the two. Her sixties novels do perhaps deal more insistently with the theme of pain or at least it seems to have more of a hold over the characters she is drawing in this period. She doesn't just deal with women's pain and entrapment, but men's also, and the entrapment of both sexes is linked to the inherited notions of male and female behaviour we all hold as true. Like Clover's study of the occult film, Creed's analysis of the abject nature of the horror film and Williams's examination of pornographic films, Shadow Dance opens up the issue of masochism as a structuring principle of the Western psyche in general and not something that can be attributed solely to women

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<sup>5</sup> Linda Williams, Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible (London: Pandora Press, 1990) 216. See also Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasure of the Cinema," Movies and Methods Vol.2, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California UP, 1985) 602-621.

<sup>6</sup> Williams 227.

or split off and labelled as feminine.<sup>7</sup> Even so, masochism in Shadow Dance is inherently linked to the image of the wounded/mutilated female body to which the text keeps returning.

For Clover, horror is the filmic genre which expose the flaws of Mulvey's belief that voyeurism is essentially sadistic and (therefore) masculine. The real investment of horror movies, she argues, is in the reactive or introjective position which is figured as both painful and feminine. The horror movie builds on a desire of the viewer to be hurt as well as to hurt. This is the complex sado-masochistic desire that is staged in Morris's varying fantasies. According to Clover, the viewer is invaded at the same time s/he appear to be invasive and this holds true for men as well as women:

Much of the art of horror lies in catching the spectatorial eye unawares--penetrating it before it has a chance to close its lid. Only when the house curtain drops can our own 'curtains' relax and, indeed, horror cinema repeatedly equates the film screen and the dream screen guarded by the eye, as sites for invasion.

She goes on to explain the connection between this and horror films' recounting of the same stories time and time again. As she sees it, the compulsion to repeat, which underlies the watching and making of these films, is rooted in a deeper, historical suffering that needs living out: "The very repetitiousness of fear-inducing scenarios in horror cinema is *prima facie* evidence of horror's central investment in pain". Much of Carter's fictions, like horror films, stage this repetitious, masochistic desire which may perhaps be the moment of realisation of internal division, the otherness within the self which must be tortured and flagellated and insistently reduced to nothing as soon as it is glimpsed. In the Symbolic

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<sup>7</sup> Carol J. Clover, Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film (London: BFI, 1992) 65 and Barbara Creed, The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Order it is usually women who are forced to assume the position of the other and the stranger. The existence of troubling desire, internal division and ontological uncertainty--which Carter implies is the human condition--is projected on to women who are objectified and mutilated in the process. Historically women have been used as scapegoats and sacrifices in the pursuit of masculine unity, the means by and through which patriarchy carves out its precarious boundaries and identities. Carter's texts often seem horrifying and alienating because they are designed not to comfort and assimilate their readers but to familiarise them with the strangeness of/within themselves, a process which, like the watching of a horror film, necessarily involves a masochistic, introspective kind of painfulness.

That other academics have chosen to ignore the element of masochism in horror cinema, where it appears to be so obvious, worries Clover. The silence or gap in film theory on this score cries out for attention, as "something crucial to the system of cultural representation is at stake here".<sup>8</sup> According to Clover, male masochism and homosexuality are too unsettling as far as our ideas on male and female sexuality are concerned, whereby masochism is figured as a natural "feminine" quality, and thus as a perversion in the male, who must always appear as woman's opposite. Clover invokes Freud's essay, "A Child Is Being Beaten",<sup>9</sup> in order to highlight this observation. Most cases of masochism discussed in this essay involve male patients, but Freud pathologises their desire as "feminine", which can only be a failure of their masculinity. Fear of otherness within, of split and conflicting responses, is once more projected

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<sup>8</sup> Clover 203, 213 and 227, respectively.

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, "A Child is Being Beaten (A contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions)," (1919) The Penguin Freud Library Vol. 10 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).

onto the Other without: women.<sup>10</sup> Although Clover takes horror cinema to be a space in which the masochistic desires of both sexes can be played out, she believes that it also enables men to:

have their psychosexual cake and eat it too; experience the pleasure/pain of (say) a rape fantasy by identifying with the victim, and then disavow their personal status on grounds that the visible victim was, after all, a woman, and that they as spectators are 'naturally' represented by the visible and male figures: male saviours or sadistic rapists, but manly men however you cut it.<sup>11</sup>

In *Shadow Dance*, Mulvey's "guilty" object/woman (Ghislaine, a beautiful, blonde girl) has been knifed by Morris's closest friend, Honeybuzzard before the tale begins. Morris, who once slept with Ghislaine, requests that Honeybuzzard should "punish" her, and he slashes her face. Thus, the sadist of the story, Honeybuzzard, has already done his punishing and gone away. He returns in the second chapter with another blonde girl, Emily, who appears to be the opposite to Ghislaine. Emily is more of a character than a trope of femininity. Where Ghislaine is shadowy, metamorphic, Emily is solid, dependable, grounded, but even her stability is upset before the "end" of the novel. Ghislaine's return to the town where she once commanded a lot of male attention appears to precipitate a series of catastrophic events. In the first chapter we learn that Honeybuzzard took nude pictures of Ghislaine and himself, but it is made clear that Ghislaine is the object of a controlling kind of gaze here, in a scenario in which Honeybuzzard creates the action:

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<sup>10</sup> Clover's identification of the masochistic impulse within the horror genre, and her insistence that masochism must be acknowledged as a structuring principle in female and male subjectivity, is a necessary revision of the position of theorists such as Christian Metz and Mulvey.

<sup>11</sup> Clover 228.

Tirelessly, Ghislaine contorted herself, spread herself wide, arrayed herself in a bizarre variety of accessories. Honey would disappear at intervals to the shop and return with his arms full of new toys. Military boots and a brocaded hat, rhino whips; clanking spurs, a stag's head; a dappled, gilded, flaking fairground Dobbin from some dismounted roundabout on which they both rode, her giggle, her springtime giggle coming in spurts. (SD, 17)

In his essay on fetishism Freud explains that it is a reaction to looking at the mother's genitals which are always conceptualised in his writings as lacking. The child sets up a fetish object which stands in for the missing penis of the mother. Here Ghislaine is constituted (set-up) as the phallic woman (her springtime giggle "coming in spurts" [SD,17] is a typically Carteresque joke in this context), the fetishized woman whose image is designed to deny the existence of the figure of woman as castrated. On the night of Ghislaine's return in which he views her scarred face for the first time, Morris studies these photographs, planning to blot out her face in each pose, "as they do in newspaper photographs of men in prison. He thought that would duly extinguish her" (SD,17) and then, as if in a trance, he stripes each picture from eyebrow to navel and feels obscenely guilty on completion of this act. Morris had wanted to be rid of Ghislaine and it is implied that by transforming her into her scar (the stripe from eyebrow to navel) this aim remains unachieved and the photographs, like Morris's painting of a grotesque woman later on, mirror the grotesquely scarred body of the text--issues to which I shall return.

On one level, Morris could be seen to be reenacting the knifing carried out by his friend and thus as empowering himself sadistically in repeating such brutality. Later, when he drifts into a light dream, he again stages a scene of mutilation: "He dreamed he was cutting her face with a shard of broken glass and blood was running on her breasts not only from her but from himself, from his cut head...." (SD,18). Only this scene is complicated by the image of his own blood mingling with hers. Later,

Morris dreams once more of mutilating a female body, but again, his wife's blood mingles with his own as he imbibes it: "then it was Edna he saw that he was slicing open and there was blood everywhere, on her and on his hands and in his eyes and mouth" (SD,18). This dream recalls an earlier passage when, in the pub, Morris feels that in drinking his pint of beer he is consuming Ghislaine: "He was drinking her down sacramentally" (SD, 5). Elsewhere Carter has commented on the barbarity of the ritual scapegoating of Christ, and in this description the sacrament of drinking Christ's blood is invoked, but with a twist, as it is a woman who is being consumed here.<sup>12</sup> Like Julia Kristeva, Carter has always been concerned to expose the process through which Western Culture defines itself, its signifying processes and the sacrificial rituals which attend it. These women's texts constantly address the historical scapegoating of women which has seemed fundamental to the way in which Judaeo-Christianity functions.<sup>13</sup> We can see that in the excerpt above Carter plays with the idea of the sacrifice of woman as the basis of patriarchy.

So too, Irigaray criticises the concealment of the sacrifice of women as mothers, drawing attention to the fact that the whole of western culture is built on the murder of the mother. As she explains: "The substratum is the woman who reproduces the social order, who is made this order's infrastructure....".<sup>14</sup> In an interview Irigaray is posed with the hypothesis

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<sup>12</sup> See "Angela Carter," Novelists in Interview, ed. John Haffenden (London: Methuen, 1985) 76-97, where she tells Haffenden that only an unpleasant mind could have made up the idea of the crucifixion.

<sup>13</sup> As discussed in Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1992) and Revolution in Poetic Language, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1994). For an interesting and comprehensive discussion of the notion of sacrifice examined in these two texts, see Elisabeth Bronfen, Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992) 194-5.

<sup>14</sup> Luce Irigaray, "Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order," The Irigaray Reader (Oxford Blackwell, 1994) 47-53: 47.



that one of the most important ideas posited in Speculum is the impossibility of comparing men and women within a symmetrical frame, i.e. within the male imaginary that denies sexual specificity and reduces everything to the law of the one (the phallus). She replies:

In any case it is not simply a comparison which is the basis of psychoanalytic discourse--nor in the whole history of philosophy--since the feminine is in fact defined in it as nothing other than the complement, the other side, or the negative side of the masculine; thus, the female sex is described as a lack or a 'hole'. Freud, and psycho-analysts following him maintain that the only desire on the part of the woman, when she discovers she has 'no sex', is to have a penis, i.e. *the only sexual organ which is recognised and valued*.<sup>15</sup>

According to Irigaray this constitutes a complete misunderstanding of the specificity of the female, and a refusal, or rather an inability to recognise her existence and autonomy.

Like Irigaray's creative theoretical writings, Carter's texts play incessantly with representations of the feminine within phallogentric system and mythical and monstrous images of women flood into her texts as she insistently "opens up" the cultural unconscious. As Irigaray points out, by normalising socio-cultural effects on women and proclaiming their "frigidity" and passivity as connected with a "natural" inferiority, psychoanalysis admits that female sexuality poses a problem for the dominant values. In a characteristically affirmative deconstructive passage she writes:

Psychoanalytic discourse on female sexuality is the discourse of truth. A discourse that tells the truth about the logic of truth: namely, that the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects. Which implies that there are not really two sexes, but only one. A single

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<sup>15</sup> "Women's Exile," (1977), trans. Couze Venn. Interview in Ideology and Consciousness no.1 62-76: 62.

practice and representation of the sexual. With its history, its requirements, reverses, lacks, negative(s).... of which the female sex is the mainstay.<sup>16</sup>

Carter implicitly critiques the Freudian myth of female castration and inferiority in her fictions whilst her exploration of what Irigaray terms the male imaginary simultaneously reveals the "truth" ("the truth about the logic of truth") of women's status as a "frigid" masculine construct: as a ghost, a living doll, a hole, a bloody wound/womb. Her fiction's dynamics frequently derive their power from the tenuous connection between containment within such negatively confining and deathly images of femininity and the excessive overspilling and rupturing of these. The "mainstay" of the representation of the sexual (the female sex) is not so stable as Irigaray's statement would have us believe.

Like Kristeva, Carter is often viewed as postmodernist writer and practitioner of a certain deconstructive writing practice which takes its cue from poststructuralist thought but, although both can be read in postmodern terms, I would argue that psychoanalysis is more central to the work of these women. Both writers are interested in the boundaries of the psyche and self and its precarious existence within the Symbolic Order, with liminal states of being (in Carter's case using liminal creatures such as the vampire and the werewolf), and with the transgressive potential of artistic practice.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 86.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Jacobus has drawn attention to Kristeva's comment in an interview that the theorist and especially the psychoanalytical theorist is posited on the site of a scar, and she links observation with pain (opening up/seeing wounds?): "we are holding a knowing discourse, a discourse which pretends to some objectivity, and at the same time we elaborate this discourse through what is often painful involvement in the observation. We have to exhibit this contradiction, this pain." Kristeva in conversation with Rosalind Coward, ICA documents, as quoted in Jacobus *Reading* 167.

### **The Scar as a Destabilising Site/Sight**

Shadow Dance is about a man who is pushed to the limits of his being, to a liminal position at the edge of his identity as a "man" and his breakdown involves an encounter with the body of woman / (m)other imaged, in this text, most often as a scar. The very title of Clover's chapter on the occult film, "Opening Up" (mentioned earlier), and what she has to say about the representation of women's bodies as destabilising sites, rather than punishable or fetishistic sights, is important in relation to the scar image in Shadow Dance, an image which is literally open *and* an opening up. In his essay on the uncanny Freud notes how "neurotic men" find the female genital organs uncanny because they remind him of his former home, the womb: "whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself... 'this place is familiar to me. I have been here before' we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body".<sup>18</sup> We might think of this statement in relation to what Clover says about the female body in the occult film: that it is an inner space (invaded through its bodily orifices), which fascinates because of its goings on inside:

It is the possession film--stories that hinge on psychic breaking and entering--that plunges us repeatedly into a world of menstruation, pregnancy, fetuses, abortion, amniotic fluid, childbirth, breastfeeding.

The female side of this dual focus narrative, then, is a body story with a vengeance. Film after film interrogates the "physical presence" of a woman; forces it to externalise its inner workings, to speak its secrets, to give a material account of itself--in short, to give literal and visible *evidence*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Freud, "'The Uncanny,'" The Penguin Freud Library vol.14: Art and Literature, ed. Albert Dickinson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 339-376: 368.

<sup>19</sup> Clover 82.

As Clover shows, the body of the woman and the suffering of the female "character" is always linked more widely to the male, whose rationality breaks down in the face of the woman's supernatural possession. In the occult film, the anatomical opening of the woman is closely allied to the strictly psychological opening of the male character. Later in this thesis, I shall be looking at the body of the mother as an originary site in relation to the female psyche and psychic journeying, but Clover's examination of the possession film as a genre which uses the female body as a means for a reassessment of masculinity, is more pertinent regarding events in Shadow Dance. As she says: "In the world of Satanic or spirit films, the horror of being too open is matched only by the horror of being too closed".<sup>20</sup> Thus the opening up of the female body prompts an opening up of the male psyche. This opening up of the male psyche in turn enables the man in crisis to become more aware of others around him and to get closer to them. Clover believes it is a rare occult film that does not present a man forced by circumstances to question the universal claims of White Science<sup>21</sup> and to entertain thoughts about another world, one of religious, spiritual and magical feelings, and through his spiritual crisis to come to a closer understanding of those around him.

Shadow Dance also shows the mind of a man opening up through his encounter with the world of the other--via the female body--but the fears prompted by his encounter do not enable him to get closer to others, rather, he moves further away from people he knows and becomes increasingly alienated. Shadow Dance parodies the notion of the woman as a negative

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<sup>20</sup> Clover 98.

<sup>21</sup> Clover 98. Clover explains that White Science is inherently linked with Western rationalism and that its representatives are almost without exception white males, typically doctors, whose "tools are surgery, drugs and other forms of hegemonic science" (66). Black Magic is associated with ex-centrics; ethnic groups, children, priests, but mainly women. It refers "to satanism, voodoo and folk variants of Roman Catholicism" (66).

within masculine libidinal economy by introducing her ontological absence (her status as ghost/monster/holy image/wound) as a haunting and disturbing presence that threatens to upset the order of things, in much the same way that the occult film shows the female body as a troubling site in which life and death are indistinct and in which the safe binaries of the Symbolic dissolve.

The scar image that recurs repeatedly in Shadow Dance is a visible boundary between inside and outside, like other orifices, such as the mouth and vagina. It signifies interiority and corporeality. As Clover says of the body in the occult film, the scar prompts the spectator to think of things going on beneath/inside, and connotes presence rather than absence. It is at once a symbol of female mutilation and a place which mystifies. The difference embodied in/by the female form in both the occult film and in Shadow Dance (via Ghislaine's scar) is figured as active and heterogeneous, in sharp contrast to the static hole that is the symbol of female castration--a two-dimensional mark. This heterogeneity signifies a far more powerful, disruptive "femininity" than that implied by Mulvey, whose castrated woman's lack is akin to the "no-thing to be seen" described by Irigaray. Unlike the male characters in occult films who are reborn through their encounters with the female body, no consolatory psychological regeneration is precipitated through Morris's encounter with Ghislaine because, Carter implies, the woman's body can (and will) no longer offer itself as a utopian space or "homecoming". It can only be a place in/through which identities are recast.

Before her knifing, Morris could only view Ghislaine as a dazzling surface, someone who did not excrete. But in her monstrous aspect she/the scar threatens to ooze and leak:

She is a burning child, a fiery bud,' said Honeybuzzard, before he knifed her. All the clichés fitted her; candle flame for moths, a fire that burned those around her but was not itself consumed. And now her face was all sideways and might suddenly at too large a mouthful of drink or a smile too unwisely wide or a face-splitting request for 'bread and cheeeeeese' leak gallons of blood and drown them all, and herself too. (SD, 3)

He dreams incessantly of her blood and of the blood of his wife, Edna: "Why did she slave to keep the flat pretty? When the room was running with her imaginary blood? And also with his own; and with Ghislaine's. He wondered if he would drown in it" (SD, 21). What does this mingling of blood suggest?

Earlier, I mentioned the work of Williams and discussed her ideas on the sado-masochistic fantasies that inform films. Williams also refers to the work of film critics like Tania Modleski and Teresa de Lauretis, who have argued for a more fluid movement on the part of both female and male spectators, shifting to a model of bisexuality in order to explain alternating responses in film viewers. In an article, "Hitchcock, Feminism and the Patriarchal Unconscious",<sup>22</sup> Modleski challenges Mulvey's theory of the essentially sadistic male gaze. Modleski sets out to show that Hitchcock's films present femininity as a much more ambiguous concept than Mulvey's Lacanian perspective allows for. Drawing on Freud's notion of a pre-Oedipal bisexuality, which is repressed in order for male and female children to take up their "proper" identities in society, she forwards an alternative hypothesis.

Rather than representing the lack which structures the Symbolic Order, the woman's body serves rather to remind man of his own inherent but denied bisexuality, and it is this which draws him to her image. This idea is close to Clover's notion that the horror film displays a fascination with

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<sup>22</sup> Modleski, Tania, "Hitchcock, Feminism and The Patriarchal Unconscious," Issues In Feminist Film Criticism, ed. Patricia Erens (Indiana: Indiana UP, 1985) 58-74.

the female body and with "femininity" in general, rather than, as Mulvey would have it, a fetishistic substitute that simply deflects fear of woman's lack. It is also closer to Studlar's belief that cinematic visual pleasure has more to do with pre-Oedipal pleasures than with Oedipal issues, and is important where Morris is concerned. He does sometimes imagine himself in relation to Ghislaine, as in the excerpt above, and in one instance he actually takes Ghislaine's place in his fantasies. On leaving the pub after encountering her scarred face for the first time, Morris watches a car full of young people pass him by on the road. One boy throws a bottle on the ground. It smashes, but then, in a strange, uncanny moment which allies him with Ghislaine, he begins to hallucinate that it has hit and cut him:

He felt the bottle shattering against his face and, raising his hand, was bemusedly surprised to find no traces of blood from a gashed forehead on his fingertips. Why not? In a metaphysical hinterland between intention and execution, someone had thrown a bottle in his face, a casual piece of violence; there was a dimension, surely, in the outer nebulae, maybe, where intentions were always executed, where even now he stumbled, bleeding, blinded... He walked on in a trance, scarred like her. (SD,11)

Modleski is interested in Hitchcock because, rather than reaffirming masculinity and femininity as distinct categories, as Mulvey would have it, the ambiguous images of sexuality in his films work instead to destabilise the gender identity of protagonists and viewers. She cites critics such as D.N. Rodowick, Studlar and Janet Bergstrom who have challenged what they take to be restrictive orthodoxies in Mulvey's work, which applies Lacan's ideas on psychosexual development uncritically to the cinema repeating his view that sexual difference is organized according to rigid binary oppositions. Modleski believes that Mulvey's essay led to a picture of the cinema as so monolithically masculine that: "she made it seem

invincible and so, from a political point of view, feminists were stymied".<sup>23</sup> However it obviously didn't take long for feminists to reply to Mulvey.

Modleski cites the discussion of female bisexuality in New German Critique in 1978, which aimed to counteract Mulvey's formulations by stressing the need to explore women's homoerotic feelings towards females on film. Books and articles such as D.N. Rodowick's The Difficulty of Difference,<sup>24</sup> Studlar's "Masochism and The Perverse Pleasure of The Cinema"<sup>25</sup> and Janet Bergstrom's "Sexuality at A Loss"<sup>26</sup> develop these ideas, continuing to stress the bisexuality of human beings. The emphasis on bisexuality is important because it introduces the possibility of change and resistance within the cinema. These critics attempt to show sexual identity as more fluid and changeable than Lacanian feminists like Mulvey can accept, and form a theory of a more ambiguous cinema spectator who may take up a variety of different positions and forms of identification with screen images.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Modleski 66.

<sup>24</sup> D.N Rodowick, The Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference and Film Theory (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasure of the Cinema," Movies And Methods, Vol.2, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California UP, 1985) 602-621.

<sup>26</sup> Janet Bergstrom, "Sexuality at a Loss: The Films of F.W Murnau," Poetics Today 6, nos.1-2 (1985): 193.

<sup>27</sup> Implicit but undeveloped in Modleski's suggestion, and indeed in all the feminist critiques of Mulvey's essay which stress the need for a recognition of human bisexuality, rather than a reinforcement of existing rigid gender divides, is the idea that the cinema is a site in which conflicting desires are played out and thus not necessarily a medium which reinforces universal truths about human sexuality and behaviour. In her discussion of the way in which cinema works, Elizabeth Cowie invokes the work of Laplanche and Pontalis, who define phantasy as the setting or *mise-en-scene* of desire as opposed to the products of an already limited unconscious which is subject to the Law of the Father. Cowie believes that phantasy as the setting of desire can be found not only in daydreams of individuals but in public forms of fantasy such as novels and films. If this is the case, then it would seem that there can be a much more fluid form of spectator identification than Mulvey's analysis of the cinema, as producing and perpetuating phallogentrism, deems possible. See Elizabeth Cowie, "Fantasia," m/f 9: 71-105.



The work of these critics focuses specifically on female spectatorship but, as Modleski notes, increasing attention has been paid to the male spectator, and to the male gaze, which Mulvey figures as active and sadistic. Again, attention is drawn to the bisexuality of both males and females, which is repressed to different extents through a process of socialisation. In her discussion of the male spectator, Modleski draws on Christian Metz's hypothesis in The Imaginary Signifier<sup>28</sup>, where he posits the belief that the cinema is situated in the realm of the Imaginary of the pre-Oedipal (a state of undifferentiation where identity does not yet exist). But the male spectator has passed through the Symbolic and separated from the mother and repressed his femininity which he has since held in contempt, and thus Modleski believes that the male subject is extremely threatened by bisexuality, which contrasts with Mulvey's belief that the male spectator is threatened by the fear of castration represented by the image of woman. He is simultaneously fascinated by the repressed "feminine" aspect of himself: it is this ambivalence regarding male sexuality that women pay for in film, often with their lives.

In some senses it would seem that Modleski is not moving too far away from Mulvey's formulations, for she is still working with the idea that looking involves a dialectic of desire and dread. In stressing a process of identification and denial she is still close to Mulvey. It is in relation to what is being denied that her argument diverges. For Modleski, it is that which is excessive and uncontainable that threatens the male spectator. This is a part of himself which he must constantly forget in order to sustain his masculinity and which is reawakened by images of women on screen. These images disturb because they threaten to overwhelm the tenuous boundaries with an unknown pleasure so terrifying that it must be halted or

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<sup>28</sup> Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," Screen 16.2 (Summer 1975) 14-76.

twisted into something monstrous. This complex play between desire and fear for/of the excessive female body forms the narrative drive of Shadow Dance for we may read the oscillations in Morris's behaviour as due to a combination of fascination towards the repressed "feminine" aspect of himself, represented by Ghislaine, and the simultaneous fear of realising his bisexuality (the contradiction and difference within himself) through identifying with her, which drives him to fantasise her punishment.

As we have seen, it appears that Morris yearns for the sort of sadistic control that someone like Honeybuzzard maintains over others. Despite this, the fantasies and dreams in which this sadistic desire is staged, such as the "drinking down" of Ghislaine, or the shedding of her blood, all seem to be linked in some way to a masochistic identification with the victim and a fascination with the other that Creed has identified in the male spectator of the horror film. In Shadow Dance there is a similar exploration of gender cross-identification as that explored by those critics who argue against Mulvey's formulation of the gaze as essentially sadistic and controlling. It is not only Ghislaine who, in the first chapter, is aligned with Christ. Morris is viewed by Ghislaine as an "El Greco Christ" and both Ghislaine and Morris appear to take a perverse sort of pleasure from the spectacle of others' suffering, which is introjected masochistically.

Morris's fantasies of bloodletting strike him with paralysis as they are staged and played out repeatedly in his mind, like a recurring horror film, and his fears reveal the patriarchal unconscious's "grounding" in femininity. At the same time, the "ground", that which is deemed as femininity and positioned on the threshold between nature and culture, is revealed, not as passive/stable, but as something that can actively threaten the frail boundaries of (sexual) identity.

Mandy Merck has also picked up on the the fascination inherent in the 'horrified response' in her critique of Andrea Dworkin's book, Men

Possessing Women. Referring to Dworkin's unending outrage and disgust towards all kinds of pornography along with her detailed accounts of pictures from hardcore magazines and films, Merck writes: "It is worth remembering that such strategies can call up the infantile fantasies that Freud described--fantasies based on the powerlessness, on purely vicarious experience, on the voyeur's fascinated gaze at the horrifying scene".<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the repetitiousness of Dworkin's project recalls Clover's belief that horror's compulsion to repeat is linked with its central investment in pain.

Like Clover, Merck draws on studies of the response of horror audiences. She recalls James Twitchell's report of a young audience who shout warnings to the female protagonists in danger,<sup>30</sup> and makes an interesting point about the aspect of safety involved in the watching of these films, something Clover overlooks: "But the characters never hear those warnings, and in the difference between our knowledge and their ignorance lie both the pathos of the narrative and the security of the audience--frustrated, frightened, but fundamentally safe from the events portrayed".<sup>31</sup> Morris displays many of the self-destructive impulses discussed by Clover, but he lacks the safety afforded by the cinematic set-up (the kind of safety Merck talks about). He has lost sight of certain boundaries and is unable to negotiate the world around him any longer.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Mandy Merck, Perversions: Deviant Readings (London: Virago, 1993) 215, referring to Andrea Dworkin, Pornography: Men Possessing Women (London: The Women's Press, 1990).

<sup>30</sup> James Twitchell, Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror (Oxford UP, 1985) 70.

<sup>31</sup> Merck 215.

<sup>32</sup> David Punter has spoken of the loss of control as a central feature of contemporary Gothic literature. In relation to Heroes and Villains, he claims that the Gothic vision Carter portrays is in fact an accurate portrait of life, of the ways we project our fantasies onto the world and then stand back in horror when we see them come to life. David Punter, The Literature of Terror (New York: Longman, 1980) 398.

Stranded like a horrified bystander, he watches his life as if it were a film produced by someone else.

### **Ghislaine and Honeybuzzard: Mutilating Doubles**

Further complicating the picture in Shadow Dance is the fact that Honeybuzzard is not the type of "manly man"<sup>33</sup> Clover sees the male spectator of a horror film as being able to identify with. The sadistic mutilator is a dandy and, as I noted earlier, is often aligned with his prey, that is Ghislaine, in her monstrous aspect. His name is interesting in this regard. Honey might be taken to refer to vaginal secretion, and buzzard to the bird of prey. Honeybuzzard is indeed a man who preys upon females and inflicts fleshly mutilation and, at times, he appears to Morris as sinister, excessive and vampiric.

Marc O'Day has contrasted Honeybuzzard with Morris in his essay "Mutability is Having a Field Day".<sup>34</sup> O'Day believes that Morris's interest in junk is "sentimental and nostalgic, but above all genuinely motivated",<sup>35</sup> speaking of him as someone who "fits the conventional image of beatnik (and later hippy) 'authenticity'".<sup>36</sup> Honeybuzzard, in contrast to this serious, introspective man, is a performer; a cool joker who "externalises and lives out his fantasy life in an extrovert and exhibitionist manner".<sup>37</sup> According to O'Day, Honeybuzzard assumes that it is not psychological authenticity which is important but stylistic artifice, and in this sense he is

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<sup>33</sup> Clover 227.

<sup>34</sup> Marc O'Day, "Mutability Is Having A Field Day: The Sixties Aura of Angela Carter's Bristol Trilogy," Flesh and The Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago Press, 1994) 24-60: 24.

<sup>35</sup> O'Day 35.

<sup>36</sup> O'Day 36.

<sup>37</sup> O'Day 36.

a sort of modernist dandy-esque figure. After contrasting Morris and Honeybuzzard he notes the many similarities between the two men: "Both are bohemian, romantic, expressive individualists; both are narcissists, both are misogynists. They're perhaps the serious and frivolous sides of the same coin".<sup>38</sup> I would agree with O'Day's general synopsis, as far as it goes, but would like to extend the comparison between Morris and Honeybuzzard further by exploring the idea that they are a sado-masochistic pair. Honeybuzzard is a sadistic man and Morris a masochistic type.

However, as mentioned previously, the sadist is not always a voyeur. In this novel the gaze is always Morris's and is usually masochistic and introjective, signalling a constant failure of the controlling gaze discussed by Mulvey. The narrative voice which most often conveys Morris's thoughts consistently describes the metamorphoses of Ghislaine and Honeybuzzard as they become nightmarishly Other to him. The novel abounds with projections and introjections so that the characters are always mutating, the boundaries between them dissolving. O'Day speaks of the mutability that characterises the novel as referring to the material world the characters inhabit but he fails to extend this discussion to Morris's mutable state of mind and to the precarious, changeable states of mind of all the characters in the book and issues of identity that the novel raises.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of Shadow Dance is the way in which Honeybuzzard and Ghislaine appear to take on aspects of what Creed terms the monstrous feminine. Morris sees Ghislaine and Honeybuzzard as similarly deceptive. The descriptions of both betray an uneasiness about something hidden beneath their beautiful surface and in many ways they are mirrors of /to one another. It is a passive, seemingly

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<sup>38</sup> O'Day 37.

innocent Ghislaine who once tempted Morris. Ghislaine is described as having seemed like a very young girl whom he could not believe to have bodily functions (in this sense her body is denied--she is a mere surface, an arrangement of skin and bone): "She used to look like the sort of girl one cannot imagine sitting on the lavatory or shaving her armpits or picking her nose. She had such a little face, all pale; and soft, baby cheeks and a half-open mouth as if she was expecting somebody, anybody, everybody she met to pop a sweetie in it....And she was so light and fragile and her skin was almost translucent" (SD, 2). Later, Carter describes the skin of Marilyn Monroe in much the same way: "their dazzling, fair skins are of such a delicate texture they look as if they will bruise at a touch, carrying the exciting stigma of sexual violence, and that is why gentlemen prefer blondes".<sup>39</sup> Ghislaine's helpless mouth at this stage contrasts with the devouring, vampiric mouth/vagina that is represented by her scar on her return.

The colour of her hair is mentioned numerous times in the first chapter, along with Morris's perception of this hair, and what it represents keeps changing. At this point it seems to be the hair of a fairy-tale character. Marina Warner, in her book From The Beast To The Blonde,<sup>40</sup> has spoken of the proliferation of blonde female protagonists in fairy tales and muses on the significance of this colour (which she sees as akin to gold), and its mythopoeic qualities:

gold does not tarnish, it can be beaten and hammered,  
annealed and spun and still will not diminish or fade; its  
brightness survives time, burial, and the forces of decay, as  
does hair, more than any other part or residue of the flesh.

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<sup>39</sup> Angela Carter, The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History (London: Virago, 1983) 63.

<sup>40</sup> Marina Warner, From The Beast to the Blonde: On Fairytales and Their Tellers (London: Vintage, 1995).

It is hair's imperviousness as a natural substance that yields the deeper symbolic meanings and warrants the high place that hair plays in the motif repertory of fairytales and other legends. For although it is one of the most sensitive registers of temperature, and a single human strand is used in museum hygrometers in order to measure humidity for the purposes of conservation, hair does not register pain except at the roots.<sup>41</sup>

Although Ghislaine's face has been changed out of all recognition, her hair stays the same as ever and it is this golden hair Morris keeps returning too as if it represents something extraordinary. Its vividness, which does not diminish after her horrific ordeal, is in direct contrast to his wife's hair which is described as "a lifeless brown" (SD,7). Ghislaine's hair continues to give the appearance of an innocent, harmless, virginal girl and, although she speaks of the pain that her knifing caused her, it is Morris who seems to suffer the psychological effects of this traumatic happening. Warner's description of fairy-tale bloneness implies the "infinite resilience" of the masochist that Carter mentions in The Sadeian Woman (SW,78).

Honeybuzzard's hair, in contrast to Morris' "El Greco" dark locks, is also golden and gives him a deceptively angelic look which invites intimacy but acts as a refractive device: "Honeybuzzard slipped like a slim, blond porpoise through potential nets of obligation and affection. His cool, bland shining self darted swiftly through the world on its premeditated, obscure course and he was golden and peachy and he bubbled with simple schoolboy fun and he was incommunicado" (SD, 34).

Both Ghislaine and Honeybuzzard's hair mask the extent of their perversity and inherently destructive behaviour, and Morris imagines both of them at times as Medusa. In this sense Ghislaine and Honeybuzzard are mirrors of one another: doubles. This, for instance, is how Honeybuzzard appears on the night of the second "break-in": "In the flickering blue light,

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<sup>41</sup> Warner 372 .

Honey's long, pale hair and high-held androgynous face was hard and fine and inhuman; Medusa, marble, terrible." (SD, 136). Ghislaine's large, gobbling brown eyes put the reader in mind, perhaps, of the "Little Red Riding Hood" story in the sense that the wolf has huge, rapacious eyes and Red Riding Hood is consumed by him in the most familiar written versions of the tale. They are also compared to those of another fairy-tale creature: "They were as big as the eyes of the dog with eyes as big as cartwheels in the fairy story" (SD, 2).

It appears then, even at this early stage, with her first novel, that Carter's writing was influenced by the latent sexual content of fairy tales and their metamorphic potential. As well as the fairy-tale characters referred to in the text, the changing faces of Ghislaine and Honeybuzzard, who appear by turns angelic and demonic, call to mind one of the most prevalent *fin-de-siècle* representations of woman, the *femme fatale*, whose two faces Camille Paglia describes in her book Sex And Violence Or Nature And Art:

The *femme fatale* can appear as a Medusan mother or a frigid nymph.... Her cool unreachability beckons, fascinates, and destroys. She is not a neurotic, but, if anything, a psychopath. That is, she has an amoral affectlessness, a serene indifference to the suffering of others, which she invites and dispassionately observes as tests of her power. The mystique of the *femme fatale* cannot be perfectly translated into male terms. I will speak at length of the beautiful boy, one of the West's most stunning sexual personae.

Paglia goes on to contrast the evasiveness that characterises the "*homme fatal*" who always threatens to leave for other lands: "He is a rambler, a cowboy and a sailor," with the placid staying power of the *femme fatale* whom she refers to as a daemonic burden: "She is a thorny symbol of the



perversity of sex. She will stick".<sup>42</sup> In this sense, Morris's dislike of the name "Ghislaine" is important; it is its foreignness and its difficulty (he has difficulty pronouncing it) that makes him resentful and scornful. The name is intrusive and Ghislaine's foreign, intrusive nature as a whole is a major theme of the novel. In Shadow Dance the nymph mentioned by Paglia is replaced increasingly by the image of the Medusa and other consuming, engulfing figures in Morris's mind: the passive Justine type gives way to a rapacious monster.

At beginning of chapter three, Ghislaine is compared to a vampire woman, and Morris is terrified of being annihilated by her and thus avoids her: "the moment he saw her she would snatch him up and absorb him, threshing, into the chasm in her face. But he could not hide from the thought that she might never go away" (SD, 39). Later in the junk shop Morris sees a box of horror magazines: "'Peril of the Fiend Woman' announced red letters on one cover. He left the box alone" (SD, 79). These fictional women seem to have a reality now, for they all serve to remind him of Ghislaine, and Carter illustrates the way in which fearful images of women in popular culture actually lie close to the surface of the male imagination, symbolising very real fears of men in relation to female sexuality and power. Increasingly certain that she will find him, his fear gradually turns into a disturbing, haunting paranoia:

When the morning was gone, the fear that she, the real one, might come knocking at his door overcame him and he would at last jerk out of bed, no longer able to convince himself that he slept. Edna kept her physically away in the evenings, but he dared not stay alone in the house. (SD, 40)

Of course the idea of the "real" woman (and reality) are being called into question in this passage and in the novel generally, in which all the

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<sup>42</sup> Camille Paglia, Sex, Violence and the Nature of Art (London: Penguin 60's, 1996) 21-2.

"characters" are veritable collages/shifting kaleidoscopes of other literary and mythological figures.

Morris's fantasies and daydreams about Ghislaine as avenging harpy and Medusa begin to proliferate and take over his mind. There are frequent passages in which Ghislaine is described as characters from Gothic literature and horror movies: "the bride of Frankenstein looped her hand through Morris's arm to lead him to the bar" (SD, 4). She is a "witch-woman" (SD, 6) and figure from the horror movies and as she chatters, Morris believes her to be possessed: "she used to speak with the electronic, irresistible sing-song of a ravishing automaton; now her voice gave the final, unnerving resemblance to a horror movie woman to her" (SD, 4). Often referred to simply by a pronoun, the title of a famous *fin de siècle* novel by Rider Haggard becomes another reference point: "She. She would have turned to find him gone" (SD,12).<sup>43</sup> And when he thinks of their sexual liason, he remembers her hair as alive, like that of Medusa's: " And he remembered bitterly, the one time, just the once, and hardly worth the emotional price he had paid for the temporary possession of the white body and all this long, yellow hair writhing over the pillow like crazy snakes" (SD, 7). As soon as this recollection takes place, he glances at her now-still hair falling down her back and she is conceptualised as the other side of this: the goddess, "her back, shining with her tumbled hair, seemed to be plated to the waist in gold, like a holy image" (SD,7). However, the narrator's reference to Gothic/horror images of grotesque women necessitates the reader's journey beyond the representations of these monstrous (intertextual) women lined up, one after the other, as if to counter the containment of excess (within the image of excessiveness) with excess.

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<sup>43</sup> Rider Haggard, She: A History of Adventure orig.1886 (London: Macdonald, 1948).

Honeybuzzard has the adventurist characteristics referred to by Paglia in relation to the persona of the beautiful boy, but also has some of the staying power of the femme fatale and, as is the case with Ghislaine, Morris fears he may never be free of him. A hybrid of angel, and animal: "Honeybuzzard had the soft, squashy-nosed, full-lipped face one associates with angels blowing glad delirious trumpets in early Florentine pictures of the nativity" (SD, 56) and is desired by Morris in much the same way as he is by Ghislaine for the desire is close to repellant and disgust.

Honeybuzzard, too, is like the wolf in "Little Red Riding Hood":

It was impossible to look at the full, rich lines of his dark red mouth without thinking, 'This man eats meat.' It was an inexpressively carnivorous mouth: a mouth that suggested snapping, tearing, biting, a mouth that was always half-smiling in a pretty feline curve; and showing in the smile, hints of feline, tearing teeth, small, brilliantly white, sharp, like wounding little chips of milk glass. How beautiful he was, and how indefinably sinister. (SD, 56)

This is another contrast between Morris and Honeybuzzard: Morris has rotting, carious teeth which cause him much pain whilst Honeybuzzard has sharp, carnivorous ones which threaten to cause others harm (indeed later in the novel he wounds Morris with them).<sup>44</sup> The description of

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<sup>44</sup> The constant references to Morris's carious teeth bring to mind T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" and Lil's carious teeth (line 56), as well as the "Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit" (line 339). The aridity of the summer (literal and spiritual) in the novel corresponds with that of the desert of "The Waste Land". Indeed there are other allusions to Eliot's poetry throughout the novel. For instance, the publican's "Time" in *Shadow Dance* (SD, 10), echoes the "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME" of "The Waste Land" (lines 141, 153, 168-9), and the hallucinatory vividness of images of urban decay and death-in-life, along with the alienating relationships that abound in the novel are reminiscent of the descriptions of city life in poems such as "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," "Preludes," and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". When in chapter three the narrator tells us that "At the best of times, spring hurts depressives", there are echoes of the first section of "The Waste Land" entitled "The Burial of the Dead", which opens with, "April is the cruellest month, / breeding Lilacs out of the dead land, / mixing Memory and desire" (lines 1-3). Lilac, dead and withered "reeking of halitosis" (SD, 38) is referred to at three points in the novel which, like Eliot's poems, is obsessed with death and decay.

Honeybuzzard's wolfish mouth, (mirroring Ghislaine's wolfish eyes) to which Morris /the narrator is drawn in fascination, as he is drawn to Ghislaine's scar, is also reminiscent of the vagina dentata--the toothed vagina that threatens uncanny revenge, and there is a link here between the image of the devouring female organ and the comparison of Ghislaine and Honeybuzzard to Medusa.

### **The Wound in the Face**

Earlier, in the bar, immediately after Morris has recalled Ghislaine's former obsessions with her bodily functions and her gynaecological musings, there is this description of the scar: " The scar was like a big, red crack across ice and might suddenly open up and swallow her into herself, screaming, herself into herself" (SD,10). As mentioned earlier, it would seem that in the first chapter of Shadow Dance there is an analogy drawn between Ghislaine's facial wound and the wound of castration—her 'scar' is like the bloody wound below.<sup>45</sup> Morris remembers the graphic details Ghislaine

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poems, haunted as it is by the repetition of the dead and teeming with images of a "Hammer Horror" like nature: "A plague of echoes, writing is the source of the abjection of 'The Waste Land', its inability to close its boundaries or void itself of other texts" (190). Ellman explains that the text stages the ritual of its own destruction and that despite the critics' search for, "the totality it might have been," it only works to: "reinscribe the horrors it is trying to repress" (178 ). The fear of urban waste, "the filth without insinuates defilement within"(180), and the eroding parameters of life that the poem reveals are those things feared by Morris, this junk collector, who, like Eliot/"The Waste Land", is compelled to reinscribe the waste that he/it is trying to cast away. See T.S Eliot "The Waste Land," T.S Eliot: Selected Poems (London: Faber and Faber, 1990) 51-64, and Maud Ellman, "Eliot's Abjection," Abjection, Melancholia and Love, eds. John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1990) 178-200.

<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, this sentence plays with the idea of inner and outer selves whose precarious boundaries are signalled by the scar. Might the scar mirror the tenuous boundary of/between the inside and outside of this novel, and other texts which encourage the reader to intervene and interact with the fantastic? This idea has materialised as a result of reading Lucie Armitt's work in which she describes the fantastic as a process in which uncertainty is perpetuated: "Thus, precisely because the fantastic comes to the fore at the point of interaction between two conflicting worlds/zones/modes, the resulting narrative is always to a greater or lesser extent on the edge between the two". Elaine Jordan has written an essay on Carter entitled "The Dangerous Edge", a title which encapsulates Armitt's idea of the fantastic narrative as "on the edge" and which connects with my idea of the scar as a sort of anti-image, which reflects the instability of Shadow Dance. See Lucie Armitt, Theorising the Fantastic (Edward Arnold: London, 1996) 32

was once wont to impart about her bodily functions, of how she talked of menstrual pains and, at one point, the way in which she recounted in detail a course of treatment for a vaginal discharge. This is not long after we have heard about the blood that flowed from her wound initially: "I couldn't keep from peeling my bandages to look at it and they kept hiding the mirrors from me, wasn't that cruel, Morris? And at first it would not even heal but kept running, all blood and yellow pus" (SD, 8). Like Regan in The Exorcist (one of the occult films discussed by Clover), Ghislaine "speaks incessantly and crudely of sexual matters".<sup>46</sup> The narrator explains: "She had always been a very embarrassing girl ... She would say: 'I lost my virginity when I was thirteen,' conversationally, as she lit a cigarette, or she would complain of the performance of her last partner...." (SD, 9).

What happens to her wound and what Morris remembers her talking about seem connected, as if Ghislaine's talk of her experience in hospital prompts this memory. The scar and her specifically female health problems are loosely associated in his mind--there is a subconscious connection between them. This constant attention to, and fixation with Ghislaine's scar and the description of this scar as an unhealed wound with the potential to erupt at any second, rather than a fading facial mark: "the scar was all red and raw, as if, at the slightest exertion, it might open and bleed", reminds one of the wound Carter parodies in The Passion of New Eve: the wound of castration, the mark of the female sex. In an essay on

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Jordan has written an essay on Carter entitled "The Dangerous Edge", a title which encapsulates Armit's idea of the fantastic narrative as "on the edge" and which connects with my idea of the scar as a sort of anti-image, which reflects the instability of Shadow Dance. See Lucie Armit, Theorising the Fantastic (Edward Arnold: London, 1996) 32 and Elaine Jordan, "The Dangerous Edge," Flesh and the Mirror, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994) 189-216.

<sup>46</sup> Clover 88.

this to say about the return of red lipstick and the demise of the punk vogue for painting the eyes red:

Women are allowed--indeed, encouraged--to exhibit the sign of their symbolic castration, but only in the socially sanctioned place. To transpose it upwards is to allow its significance to become apparent. We went too far, that time. Scrub it all off and start again.... Now the mouth is back as a bloody gash, a visible wound. This mouth bleeds over everything, cups, icecream, table napkins, towels. Mary Quant has a shade called (of course) 'Bloody Mary', to ram the point home. We will leave our bloody spoor behind us, to show we have been there.<sup>48</sup>

She writes about the myth of female castration again in The Sadeian Woman ,

The whippings, the gougings, the stabbings of erotic violence reawaken the memory of the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration, which is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, to which it is related in the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture.<sup>49</sup>

Carter's description of female castration as a psychic fiction highlights the inherent misogyny behind the myth which fosters the idea of the suffering, masochistic woman. But, unlike Mulvey, Carter does not take female castration for granted. In Shadow Dance she takes every opportunity to parody it. The bloody, gaping scar that is the obsessive textual focus of the first chapter is forced on Ghislaine by Honeybuzzard, just as the myth of female castration is forced onto women via masculine discourses of the feminine.

As I explained earlier, Morris's attempt to blot out Ghislaine's face in the pornographic photos fails when he finds himself striping/scarring her

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<sup>48</sup> Carter, "The Wound in the Face," 99.

<sup>49</sup> Angela Carter, The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise In Cultural History (London: Virago, 1992) 23.

image. The scar makes her, if anything, far less easy to forget about. On the one hand, the destruction of Ghislaine's beauty that results from being knifed in the face by Honeybuzzard is a kind of death, for, if a woman's sole value in patriarchal culture resides in her appearance (as Carter often suggests is the case), then the ruining of this appearance can only mean she is reduced to nothing. She becomes a naught, like the figure "O".

Intertextual echoes of "The Story of O"<sup>50</sup> abound in Shadow Dance. "O" too is reduced to nothing through her subjection at the hands of sadistic men. Her name, "O", signifies her reduction to the sign of her sex (as Ghislaine is reduced to the sign of hers--in Morris's mind she is her scar). As Irigaray has explained, the O has always been conceptualised in Western philosophy as that which privileges sight above all other senses.

However, the scar--the displaced vagina/mouth--also threatens to "bite back" (like the rose in Carter's story "The Snow Child"<sup>51</sup>). Lorna Sage has drawn attention to Ghislaine's status as a member of the undead, a liminal in-between being. She believes her to stand for the Past, a "vengeful emissary from the realm of shadows Morris and Honey regularly raid".<sup>52</sup> In this sense Ghislaine is still alive and active, she is what Sage terms "the victim as predator".<sup>53</sup> Although she is frail and seemingly masochistic she also threatens sadistic punishment (and it may be that Morris projects fear of his own death onto her in the way Irigaray describes). In this sense the metonymic slippage between this girl and her scar draws attention to the female organs not simply as a negation, an "O", but, on the contrary as an

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<sup>50</sup> Pauline Réage, The Story of O Part One (London: Corgi Books, 1985),

<sup>51</sup> Angela Carter, "The Snow Child," The Bloody Chamber (London: Virago, 1995 ) 91-92.

<sup>52</sup> Lorna Sage, Angela Carter (Plymouth: Norcote House Publishers Ltd., 1994) 11 .

<sup>53</sup> Sage 10.

area of the body which threatens uncanny revenge. This brings us back to the figure of Medusa.

Freud links the head of Medusa who, if looked upon will turn men to stone, with the toothed vagina. According to Freud, the (decapitated) head of Medusa is an upward displacement of this mythical site, the snaky hair is reminiscent of pubic hair and Medusa's mouth stands for the vagina dentata. Elaine Showalter explains that: "For men to unveil the Medusa is to confront the dread of looking at the female organs: 'To decapitate: to castrate.' The terror of Medusa is linked to the sight of something."<sup>54</sup>

Barbara Creed has drawn attention to Freud's explanations of Medusa's terrifying power, which stress the incorporative rather than the castrating aspect of this figure. His first explanation, of the Medusa as incorporative, links her to the oral sadistic mother, the mother who feeds the child and gives it pleasure but who threatens to feed on the child in turn. The second explanation for the fear of the Medusa is that she may represent the dyadic mother, that is to say, the all-encompassing mother of the pre-Oedipal period who poses not physical but psychological incorporation. It is Creed's belief that horror films such as Psycho and Carrie and Alien all play on the fear of being swallowed up, of annihilation through incorporation.<sup>55</sup> Other horror films, such as Sisters, I Spit on Your Grave and Basic Instinct reveal another aspect of the Medusa which Freud ignores in his essay; this is the castrating woman.<sup>56</sup> Creed feels it is possible that alongside a fear of the castrated woman exists the figure of the castrator, which is repressed in Freud's explanation:

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<sup>54</sup> Elaine Showalter, Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture in the Fin de Siècle (London: Bloomsbury, 1991) 145.

<sup>55</sup> Alien dir. Ridley Scott, 1979, Psycho dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1960 and Carrie dir., Brian de Palma, 1976.

<sup>56</sup> Sisters dir., Brian de Palma, 1973, I Spit on your Grave dir., Meir Zarchi, 1978, Basic Instinct dir Paul Verhoeven, 1992.



The phantasy of the woman is as terrifying--if not more terrifying than--that of the castrated woman. It can also be used to explain why the male might desire to create a fetish, to want to continue to believe that woman is like himself, that she has a phallus rather than a vagina. In this context, the fetish stands in for the vagina dentata--the castrating female organ that the male wishes to disavow.<sup>57</sup>

Creed explains that the image of woman as castrator and as castrated are prevalent in the mythologies of all patriarchal cultures. The castrated woman, as Carter insinuates in The Sadeian Woman, is the tamed, domesticated, passive woman whilst the castrator, as Creed shows, corresponds to the image of the savage, destructive aggressive woman. On her return, Ghislaine is no longer a fetishised object of beauty that Mulvey associates with the male gaze but the fearful sign of castration; that which Mulvey views as being circumvented in classic cinema. However, according to Creed she may not be feared simply because she is lacking the phallus, but because she threatens to remove Morris's, or, more in keeping with Freud's reading of the Medusa myth, because she represents possible physical and/or psychic incorporation, annihilation or disturbance.<sup>58</sup>

Earlier I described the conflation of the words "honey" (vaginal secretion) and "buzzard" (bird of prey) in Honeybuzzard's name as connected with the "masculine" sadism described by Mulvey, for Honeybuzzard likes to mutilate women. In the context of his connection with the Medusa image within Shadow Dance, however, his name takes on an ironic cast, for the Medusa is, as we have seen, one of the most famous mutilating women in world mythology.

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<sup>57</sup> Creed 116.

<sup>58</sup> Creed 109.

## The Excessive Body of the Woman-Text: Shadow Dance and Abjection

The abyss that Morris appears to teeter on throughout the novel, and which the scar appears to represent, also brings to mind Kristeva's idea of the abject, which she describes as the edge of non-existence and hallucination. Whether it is blood that gushes from the scar and engulfs, or a force beneath it that sucks one in, the scar belies something below the surface of the face which is severely threatening in its ambiguity and invisibility. In Powers of Horror: An Essay About Abjection, Kristeva analyses the ways in which, through a process of exclusion and expulsion, a human being accedes to subjectivity.<sup>59</sup> A clean and "proper" body is necessary in order to be constituted as a speaking subject. The "abject" is the name Kristeva gives to the time and space marking the threshold of language, and the process through which the subject excludes those elements threatening life is that of abjection.

Paradoxically, those things that threaten life also help define it. Kristeva insists the abject must be tolerated, for, as Elizabeth Grosz explains, "what is excluded can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the borders of our existence, threatening the apparently settled unity of the subject with disruption and possible dissolution. It is impossible to exclude these psychically and socially threatening elements with any finality".<sup>60</sup> In this sense, the subject is never really free of abjection which is ever-present and especially felt in those moments of instability when meaning appears to be breaking down. Abjection is an abyss constantly beckoning the subject, attesting to the impossibility of clear lines of demarcation between what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable in culture

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<sup>59</sup> Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, Sexual Subversions (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1985) 71.

and what is deemed waste and non-waste, order and disorder, identity and non-identity.

Taboos build up around those things that the subject must eject and distinguish him/herself from and name impure. These fall roughly into three categories, that is, abjection in relation to food, waste and sexual difference. The subject experiences rejection towards these things in a direct way by choking, gagging, retching and vomiting, the bodily reactions that we take to be signs of disgust but, as Grosz explains, " Each subject is implicated in waste, for it is not external to the subject: it *is* the subject. It *cannot* be completely externalised".<sup>61</sup> Our notions of the abject and horrific are closely connected to the maternal body of the pre-Oedipal period, when there is a fusion between the mother and child and bodily wastes are not yet viewed as shameful. There is a distinct division between this realm and the one we inhabit as subjects, the Symbolic Order, governed by the Law of the Father.

The horror film, *Creed* suggests, is a modern defilement rite which attempts to sort out the impure from the pure and to separate all that threatens the Symbolic Order. The desire of the male viewer in relation to these images is interesting for the horror film, unlike other films, often plays out male fears and desire for the realm of the maternal body constructed as non-Symbolic by the signifying practices of patriarchal ideology, and we might see Shadow Dance too as playing out these dynamics. Kristeva's theory of abjection regarding sexual difference interests *Creed* in relation to horror films, which figure female monsters and waste associated with the female body.

*Creed* believes that watching a horror movie is a process of abjection in itself--a moment of rupturing of the paternal law, and the horror film,

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<sup>61</sup> Grosz 75.

which fills the spectator with fear and loathing, points back to the period in which the baby/child is still one with the mother, a period of maternal authority when the child was as yet undifferentiated from the rest of the world. This view of the horror film, as a site in which the spectator's identity is endangered for a while, connects with Cowie's view of the cinema as phantastical setting of desire. Like Kristeva, Laplanche and Pontalis (whose ideas Cowie uses and develops in her work on public forms of phantasy) she views identification as the operation itself whereby the human subject is constituted.<sup>62</sup>

The spectator of the horror film is attracted to images of a revolting nature (in the way that the subject is attracted to the threshold of signification, the abject) which fills him/her up, and of which s/he subsequently has to rid themselves. Once the spectator has experienced this perverse pleasure there is a corresponding desire to, "throw up, throw out, eject the abject (from the safety of the spectator's seat)".<sup>63</sup> This abject dynamic links up with what we have been saying about the identificatory processes in horror film-watching which combine the masochistic desire for the pleasure of unpleasure with the sadistic desire to overcome these, and also with Morris's encounter with the scar. Couldn't the reader of Shadow Dance, likewise, be entering into an abject process with the scarred body of this text, mirrored in/ by the scarred body of the woman?

Like the abject which is always in process/unfinished, the scar is always threatening to overflow, to run over. At the beginning of this chapter I drew attention to the prevalence of blood in Morris's fantasies and dreams and if we think of the scar's connection with female genitalia

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<sup>62</sup> See Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror, and Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," in Formations of Fantasy, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, (London: Routledge, 1989) 5-43.

<sup>63</sup> Creed 10.

(the bloody wound), then it is a possibility that the blood Morris keeps imagining/dreaming about could perhaps be menstrual blood.

Interestingly, feminist critics have been examining the significance of menstrual blood and abjection in horror films. Menstrual blood is described by Creed as a semantic crossroads, "the propitious place for abjection, where death and femininity, murder and procreation, cessation of life and vitality all come together".<sup>64</sup> Grosz's example of an abject category is faeces, an excremental pollution that threatens identity from without. Menstrual blood falls into a different category, that of objects which threaten identity from within: "Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and through internalisation, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference".<sup>65</sup> Inside the body menstrual blood, like other bodily fluids, which become abject once they are expelled, signifies the body's materiality and heterogeneity /life: "Inside the body it is the condition of the body's ability to regenerate itself".<sup>66</sup>

Elizabeth Grosz explains that menstrual blood is abject and tabooed when outside of the body because it represents the expelled border between one existence and another (between the body of the mother and of the foetus), a border which implies sameness and difference simultaneously: "In psychoanalytic theory this is perhaps too easily explained by women's castration rather than being seen as a threatening boundary or threshold between life and non-life, between male and female".<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Creed 62.

<sup>65</sup> Kristeva 71.

<sup>66</sup> Grosz 76.

<sup>67</sup> Grosz 76.

Clover speaks of menstruation as one of horror film's "abiding verities," for a menstruating woman is an open woman, and the open (body of) woman is necessary for the psychological opening of the male in the occult plot, and for gender transgression that results: "...if all women are by nature open, some women are more open than others. 'Plug it up! Plug it up!' Carrie's schoolmates call as they toss tampons in a film that is from beginning to end permeated with menstrual references and imagery".<sup>68</sup> We might refer to Ghislaine as one of these open women. Clover refers to Creed's reading of the menstrual theme in Carrie and The Exorcist, in which she links the horror film's obsession with blood and the bleeding body of woman, which is transformed into a gaping wound, to castration anxiety, especially in the slasher film. Clover, whose reading of the presence of menstrual blood in films is that it works *against* the idea of female castration and loss, has this to say about Creed's interpretation:

The slide from possession to slasher effaces the huge difference between the two sensibilities as far as the female body is concerned. The female body in the possession film is indeed a site of abjection (in Kristeva's sense), but as Creed herself notes in another context (p.63) it is not so absolutely the site of castration, and even the terms of its abjection are not absolute.<sup>69</sup>

She quotes a British gynecologist who believes that menstrual blood signals, to the contrary, that something is going on inside the body of the woman and concludes thus: " In the world of occult horror, in any case, menstrual blood would seem to have little to do with castration and loss and much to do with powerful things going on behind closed doors".<sup>70</sup> Jane Gallop mentions Irigaray's observations on the Sadeian libertine's inability to tolerate menstrual blood because it represents the disorderly

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<sup>68</sup> Clover 77

<sup>69</sup> Clover 78. Citing Creed, The Monstrous Feminine 63.

<sup>70</sup> Clover 78

body that the drive for order underlying our society finds difficult to subordinate to its categories: "Menstrual blood cannot immediately be absorbed into the category of female sexuality as phallic turn-on, phallic receptacle, or the category of maternity as carrier of phallic receptacle".<sup>71</sup>

Kristeva herself explains that the experience of abjection is linked with uncanny sensation, where what may have once seemed familiar (the body of the mother, the blood shared between mother and foetus) becomes fearsome and loathsome and radically separate, giving rise to a feeling of strangeness or estrangement.<sup>72</sup> It signals a time when the ego was not fully developed, when it had not divided itself from other people and the external world, and brings an anxiety of indeterminateness to the fore, as the subject hovers on the brink of castration and death, fearing a return to the maternal chora--a place of non-differation.

Morris finds it increasingly difficult to distinguish and separate himself from the external world and others as his eye/I is destabilised through his contact with the fearsome threshold/scar and his hallucinations/dreams of what was once hidden ("behind closed doors"): the blood of woman. Abjection as experienced by the male subject highlights female castration as a mythical construct, for it is *his own* castration and loss that are experienced in this moment of liminal disorientation as he hovers on the border of the Symbolic, a loss which is projected on to women in the Symbolic Order. This act is mirrored in Shadow Dance by Morris's striping of Ghislaine's photograph and Honeybuzzard's slashing of her face.

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<sup>71</sup>Jane Gallop, Thinking Through the Body (Columbia: Columbia UP, 1988) 54.

<sup>72</sup> See Kristeva, Powers of Horror.

## Medusa and Transformative Configurations of Femininity

Feminist writers and theorists alike have looked at the myth of Medusa, not only to use her to explain fears of women or the construction of the feminine as monstrous, but as a rebellious female persona who may exceed her representation in a culture which attempts to contain women in images of lack or excess. Hélène Cixous has claimed her as a heroine who has the power to break up the existing order.<sup>73</sup> In this essay, she cries out against that which Carter draws attention to in "The Wound in the Face". The myth of the castrated, masochistic woman can barely contain its fear of the power of women's desire, a desire which the Symbolic can only conceptualise in negative terms: "They riveted us between two horrifying myths; between the Medusa and the abyss. That would be enough to set half the world laughing, except that it's still going on. For the phallogocentric sublation is with us, and it's militant, regenerating the old patterns, anchored in the dogma of castration".<sup>74</sup> At the beginning of her essay, Cixous states the need for a positive conceptualisation of woman's desire, and one which does not always equate it with lack:

Woman of course has a desire for a 'loving' desire and not a jealous one. But not because she is gelded; not because she's deprived and needs to be filled out, like some wounded person who wants to console herself or seek vengeance. I don't want a penis to decorate my body with. But I do desire the other for the other, whole and entire, male or female; because living means wanting everything that is, and wanting it alive. Castration? Let others toy with it. What's a desire originating from a lack? A pretty meagre desire.<sup>75</sup>

Here Cixous highlights the repression of women's sexuality and silencing of female desire that the myth of castration, which posits the

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<sup>73</sup> Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *New French Feminisms*, eds. Isabelle de Courtivron and Elaine Marks (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981) 245-265.

<sup>74</sup> Cixous 255.

<sup>75</sup> Cixous 262.



woman as an inferior or botched male, has propagated. She believes that women have been kept in the "dark" (here she refers to Freud's description of women's desire as the dark continent): "that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute".<sup>76</sup> She rails against the way in which women have been violently driven away from their bodies and so, up until recently, have been unable to express their desire in language. The opening of the essay exhorts Woman to: "put herself into the text--as into the world and into history--by her own movement".<sup>77</sup> Cixous speaks of women's return from "without", from the place where they have been banished that which she terms: "the heath where witches are kept alive: from below, from beyond culture; from their childhood which men have been desperately trying to make them forget".<sup>78</sup> Exiled from their desire, women have been turned into silent, friid bodies yet Cixous writes that underneath they are seething with creative energy: "Women's imaginary is inexhaustible," she declares, "like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible".<sup>79</sup>

Medusa, who in patriarchal mythology has embodied men's deepest fears of women, is re-presented in Cixous's essay as a liberating/liberated figure, brimming with *jouissance*. She insists that phallogocentrism needs the myth of castration to ward off the fear of woman's desire and power and that: "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And

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<sup>76</sup> Cixous 247. Here she refers to Freud's famous comment in his essay "The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person," (1926) The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud: Vol.20, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth P, 1953) 212. Freud says, "We know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distnction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a 'dark continent' for psychology. But we have learnt that girls deeply feel their lack of a sexual organ that is equal in value to the male one...".

<sup>77</sup> Cixous 245.

<sup>78</sup> Cixous 247.

<sup>79</sup> Cixous 246.

she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing".<sup>80</sup> This laughing Medusa we might imagine with her head thrown back, her mouth open or, at the very least, grinning widely so that her face is split in the same way that the scar splits Ghislaine's face. But, whereas Ghislaine's face makes her mainly monstrous, Cixous's Medusa is her own person, a utopian image of the return of the repressed: "When the repressed of their culture and their society returns, it's an explosive, utterly destructive, staggering return, with a force never yet unleashed and equal to the most forbidding of suppressions".<sup>81</sup>

Throughout the essay Cixous refers to the burgeoning creativity within women that is always on the verge of bursting forth, and she links this to the body and to sexual desire, so that writing becomes a sort of orgasmic release: "Text: my body--shot through with streams of song; I don't mean the overbearing, clutchy 'mother' but rather what touches you, the equivoice that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force; the rhythm that laughs you".<sup>82</sup> This burgeoning woman is reminiscent of Ghislaine, but where Ghislaine, with her scar that threatens to overflow with blood, is linked in Morris's mind to images such as the "traditional Medusa" (which are in turn linked to the fear of the mother/mother's body), Cixous's Medusa is joyous and celebrates the moment of becoming. Her laughter reminds one perhaps of Bakhtin's carnival laughter which is revitalising rather than annihilating, signalling new possibilities as it undoes past restraints.

Cixous states, in relation to this "new" Medusa, that the mother in women is not the overbearing, clutchy and deadly mother of patriarchal

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<sup>80</sup> Cixous 255.

<sup>81</sup> Cixous 256.

<sup>82</sup> Cixous 252 .

mythology, but the mother who nourishes and stands up against separation. This sounds dangerously close to a reinscription of the other side of the patriarchal fiction of monstrous (Medusan) motherhood, that is to say, the passive, nurturing woman, whose body is no more than a receptacle. However, in linking the female bodily fluids to pursuits other than child-rearing, which is only one of a woman's capacities, Cixous begins to do what she exhorts others to do, to begin the work of dismantling crippling notions of womanhood and writing their desire, inscribing their bodies in language. In her work female bodily fluids are presented as linked to creativity, and not just creativity in the sense of the reproduction of the species, but in the creation of new expressions of desire.

Gerardine Meaney examines Cixous's reappraisal and reworking of the Medusa myth in a chapter called "Between the Mother and the Medusa".<sup>83</sup> Meaney believes that the myth of Medusa articulates male fears about the gaze of woman, the Other, which threatens his power to represent:

To look upon the woman is dangerous. The Medusa's own gaze is deadly. It is 'the gaze of the other which is necessarily threatening because of its different viewpoint.'... The story of Medusa becomes the story of Perseus. Woman is denied the power of observation. It is she, rather than Oedipus, who is truly blinded: her different view will become no view at all. The moves in this blindfolding game are very similar to the stages of sexual maturation observed by Freud which turn the woman into a castrated man.<sup>84</sup>

This is the castration myth that Cixous and Carter attack. Meaney continues to explain the way in which Medusa's gaze is deflected in Perseus's shield and the power of her gaze is defused. With his shield

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<sup>83</sup> Meaney 15-49. Meaney compares it with Doris Lessing's novel Landlocked and, more generally, to the Children of Violence series, in which the figure of Medusa is linked more traditionally to petrification and/or annihilation.

<sup>84</sup> Meaney 32.

Perseus makes her the object of the gaze rather than the gazing subject: "She loses the power of the gaze: Perseus seizes the power of representation".<sup>85</sup> Along with Morris's association of Ghislaine with Medusa come fantasies of decapitation which indicate fear of Ghislaine's power over him and a desire to appropriate this power for himself:

He was tormented by a recurrent dream, a mutation of the nightmare of the first night. He dreamed he was cutting Ghislaine's face with a kitchen knife. The knife was blunt and kept slipping. Her head came off in his hands, after a while, and he cut her into a turnip lantern, put a candle inside and lit it through her freshly carved mouth. She burned away with a greenish light. That was all. But the inconsequence of the dream was peculiarly horrifying.  
(SD, 39-40)

Meaney sees Medusa as implicitly representing the dangers of the maternal, language and feminine madness. She invokes Laing's The Divided Self in her discussion of fear of petrification by the mother (and by extension the mothering function in general).<sup>86</sup> In his case study of a young schizophrenic man, David, Laing mentions the Medusa myth and it is his utilisation of this myth that Meaney believes to provide an interesting link between Cixous and Lessing:

Laing considers schizophrenia to be rooted in ontological insecurity and a fear of petrification and engulfment. Early versions of the story of Medusa provide us with a figure who cannot be easily assimilated to the fiction of the 'mother goddess' or of the mother as 'womb and tomb of the world' (Campbell 1974:25).<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Meaney 32. In a revolting scene in Brett Easton Ellis's American Psycho (New York: Vintage, 1991), the psychotic yuppie, Patrick, does actually decapitate a prostitute and make her head into a Halloween lantern in the same way Morris dreams of Ghislaine. Patrick is clearly terrified of women and fuelled by desire and disgust. All of his murders involve torture and complete sexual humiliation of the women he victimises.

<sup>86</sup> R.D. Laing, The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness (London: Penguin, 1965).

<sup>87</sup> Meaney 17.

Meaney refers to the Medusa as the "other Medusa" whom she views as a figure exceeding representation and re-presenting woman in the texts of Lessing and Cixous. Morris, as discussed previously, suffers from ontological insecurity and the fear of petrification and engulfment by others, suggested by Laing as signifying schizophrenia. At least one other critic has seen Shadow Dance as being about schizophrenia; writing about Love Sue Roe speaks of it as following on from, "her [Carter's] studies of schizophrenia, silence and desire".<sup>88</sup>

And it is interesting that Morris should envisage Ghislaine so often as Medusa, for Meaney sees that in Laing's case study of David, it is petrification by the mother that is feared and Medusa has long been associated with the fear of the female. Meaney believes that Laing does not want to dwell too long on the specific fear of the mother in relation to the Medusa myth. He has to generalise about the fear of petrification because otherwise he would have to acknowledge sexual difference as the root of David's identity crisis. To admit to the specificity of David's fear (that is, of David's fear of feminine difference), is to admit to female power:

Laing moves from a discussion of a particular patient's fear of engulfment by his mother to the adoption of the term as a fear experienced in general by the schizophrenic. He then links this term to the myth without ever mentioning the identification of the Medusa with the terror of the female and of the mother in particular in scholarly works on classical mythology and in the work of Freud.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Sue Roe, "The Disorder of Love," Flesh and The Mirror; Essays On The Art Of Angela Carter, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994) 60-98.

<sup>89</sup> Meaney 30.

Later Meaney, in Irigarayan fashion, explains that a therapist such as Laing always finds in madness a reflection of himself rather than acknowledging sexual difference which would be braver:

The permutations of the Medusa myth mark the different modes in which the other (the woman, madness) has been restructured as a mirror which functions to reflect sameness. The myth also indicates the extent to which the woman, the maniac, who recognizes and identifies the subject as hero, is no more than a reflection of his own fears and desires. The therapist finds in madness his own reflection. What else could Perseus have seen in Athene's shield? The other is always elsewhere. It is impossible to 'begin from the concept of a unitary whole' (Laing 1960:16-18). There is always something else. That is why modern commentators have imitated Perseus's approach to the Medusa . For fear of catching a glimpse of the real Medusa they have pursued her reflection in the shield they have established against their own perception of difference. Having appropriated the power of the gaze they must be careful not to look straight into the light. They must persuade themselves that there is 'nothing' there anyway.<sup>90</sup>

Like the therapist and the modern commentators on the myth of Medusa mentioned by Meaney, Morris displays a great fear of the power of woman's desire and difference, but he also displays a perverse desire to gaze on that which he fears, as does the masochistic viewer of the horror film, which perhaps illustrates a step towards acknowledgement of the Other. His consistent inability to appropriate the power of the gaze again testifies to the overwhelming power of feminine difference which, as Cixous so inspiringly convinces, does not have to remain connected with monstrosity and fear of petrification or annihilation but may be re-presented as dynamic and life-affirming.

It is through reading and writing that Cixous believes women may begin to unleash some of their hitherto repressed, creative powers and undo the

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<sup>90</sup> Meaney 49.

negative images which men have projected onto them, returning to the body, "which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display--the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions".<sup>91</sup> She insists that the time is ripe to be rid of this "shadow woman", servant of the male. Ghislaine in Shadow Dance is a "shadow woman," the male fantasy figure Carter describes in The Sadeian Woman: " In herself this lovely ghost, this zombie, or woman who has never been completely born as woman, only a debased cultural idea of a woman, is appreciated only for her decorative value" (SW, 65).

In chapter two Morris speaks of Ghislaine as a second-hand woman and imagines displaying her in the window with a sign "Hardly Used" taped to her navel. He imagines that no one will look at her, only, perhaps an incurious dog and himself, "eyeing his own shop window anxiously, to see if she had moved" (SD, 19). This fear of her moving is interesting in relation to what Cixous says about the woman as "uncanny stranger on display". She is one whose difference is outlawed and thus she is exiled from herself, yet she always threatens to move from her consigned place and to upset the order of things. She was once a shadow of the male, content to receive her identity from him, but she returns to remind him of the strangeness and difference that he projected upon her. The power and the difference of woman's desire (a desire which, in Kristevan terms, is connected with heterogeneity), will always come back to haunt those who have attempted to repress it and perhaps work to undermine and undo imprisoning phallogentric structures from within:

If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for

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<sup>91</sup> Cixous 250.

her to dislocate this 'within', to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. And you'll see with what ease she will spring forth from that 'within'--the 'within' where once she so drowsily crouched--to overflow at the lips she will cover the foam.<sup>92</sup>

### Questions of Transgression

Carter is more sceptical about the ease with which feminine liberation might be achieved and about the notion of the complete destruction of patriarchal systems of representation than Cixous. However, as Morag Shiach notes, Cixous has more recently begun to examine the transgressive potential of painting due of her frustration at language's tendency towards the reproduction of the status quo.<sup>93</sup> The return of the repressed woman figure, Ghislaine, in Shadow Dance haunts and teases those who made her into a wounded "doll", opening up questions of ontology and, although in some senses Ghislaine represents a subversive figure who threatens "mythical vengeance" (to coin a phrase of Carter's from The Passion of New Eve) on those who created her, she is still very much a figure of the masculine imagination.

The undoing of repressions is perhaps more difficult than Cixous's essay would have us believe. Carter, more in keeping with Kristeva, tends to view transgression as an ongoing, material process and not as one single rupturing transforming moment in which existing systems of oppression are instantly shattered.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, in her discussion of the way repression

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<sup>92</sup> Cixous, "Laugh" 257.

<sup>93</sup> Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing (London, New York: Routledge, 1991) 34.

<sup>94</sup> David Punter says of Carter's fictions, "there are certainly moments of a joyous sense of the possible replacement of these attitudes by something more positive, more liberating, more equal. Yet these moments tend to be evanescent...". David Punter, "Angela Carter and Russell Hoban: Essential Imaginings," The British and Irish Novel Since 1960, ed. James Acheson (New York: St. Martin's 1992) 148.



operates, Judith Butler (invoking Foucault) says that: "repression may be understood to produce the object it comes to deny 'for repression is at once prohibitive *and* generative'". Carter's novels and short stories frequently pose this problem, thus reflecting the complexities of liberation, especially women's liberation. As Butler continues: "The female body that is freed from the shackles of the paternal law, may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law posing as subversive, but operating in the service of that law's self-amplification and proliferation".<sup>95</sup> Ghislaine could be viewed as simply another incarnation of the law: the meeting place of scores of masculine discourses and texts that trope the feminine as monstrously active or ethereally passive.

Irigaray speaks of the female sex as an interstice in her essay "The Politics of Difference". In this complicated speculative-theoretical piece, which seeks out a new ethics of sexual difference, she conceptualises the possibility of new forms of communication between men and women, utilising complex metaphors, such as that of the angel, who bridges the divide between sexuality and spirituality, in order to go beyond current representations of the (mono) sexual. So, angels:

... destroy the monstrous elements that might prohibit the possibility of a new age, and herald a new birth, a new dawn.... They speak as messengers, but gesture seems to be their nature. Movement, posture, the coming-and-going between the two. They move--or disturb--the paralysis or apatheia of the body, or soul, or world. They set trances or convulsions to music, and lend them harmony.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York and London: Routledge, 1993) 177.

<sup>96</sup> Luce Irigaray, "The Politics of Difference," French Feminist Thought: A Reader, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

For the masculine and feminine to be re-united, Irigaray believes that a link has to be forged between the divine and the mortal, in which sexual encounter would become a moment of celebration or wonder, "and not a disguised or polemic form of the master-slave relationship. In this way it would no longer be a meeting within the shadow or orbit of a God the father who alone lays down the law, or the immutable mouthpiece of a single sex".<sup>97</sup> This leads her on to the "other sex", to the vagina and, more specifically, to the labia that make up the threshold of the woman's body, which she re-presents as existing beyond the law of the same. In the same way that angels move between supposedly distinct categories, being neither spirit nor flesh, but something that moves inbetween, the vulval lips of the female sex constitute a place where immanence and transcendence are (being) recast. It is worth examining Irigaray's "utopian" passage in order to compare it with the scar of Shadow Dance:

Beyond the classic opposites of love and hate, liquid and ice lies this perpetually half-open threshold, consisting of lips that are strangers to dichotomy . Pressed against one another, but without any possibility of suture, at least of any real kind, they do not absorb the world either into themselves, provided they are not abused and reduced to a mere consummating or consuming structure. Instead their shape welcomes without assimilating or reducing or devouring. A sort of door onto voluptuousness then? Not that, either: their useful function is to designate a place: the very place of uselessness, at least on a habitual plane. Strictly speaking, they serve neither conception nor jouissance.<sup>98</sup>

The scar/vagina of Carter's Shadow Dance is also a perpetually half-open threshold but it is less a "utopian" image or space inscribing fresh notions of spirituality and new ways of thinking about libidinal economies

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<sup>97</sup> Irigaray, "Politics" 126.

<sup>98</sup> Irigaray, "Politics" 128.

than one which will not allow the reader to escape the monstrous inscriptions of pain and lack, mythical and real, in/upon the woman's body.

As Keenan rightly observes:

It would be misleading... to simply map French feminist theoretical writing on to Carter's work, in particular Irigaray's construction of a discourse for a potential and specifically female desire outside the order of patriarchy. Since Carter's meditations are always made from the specific position of a heterosexual woman, her response, 'strategic' and 'combative' is to play with the modes of the prevailing system of representation, to attempt its subversion from within.<sup>99</sup>

Carter implies that the power relations which govern and regulate bodies are omnipotent and perhaps as inescapable as the history of oppression which is the history of the West. She insists that we must face up to and rethink our relation to pain as well as pleasure in order to move towards a more loving, or, at least, a different state of affairs.

The return to the body and the bodily as the site or location of pleasure in postmodern theory and writing is approached sceptically by Carter, whose interrogations of the (M)other space warn against the (re)enclosure of the "Woman Question" which may result from the increasing male paranoia that characterises the "apocalyptic" era we are living through. One of Carter's favourite tactics is to illustrate the real effects of the processes of the Symbolic Order. The fictional becomes horrifyingly literalised or made "real" before the readers' eyes, so that the sacrificial moment of representation is lived out in the act of reading.

In The Passion of New Eve this very process is mirrored in the text itself, as a catalogue of the mutilations forced upon women by men is read to Evelyn, who in a hideous role-reversal is made into a woman, the first step of which necessitates his castration. Much of the ghastliness of

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<sup>99</sup> Keenan 22.

Evelyn's castration for the woman reader derives from the realisation that one actually feels quite horrified at the thought of such a "barbaric" operation, and, by extension, of the feminine condition--that is to say, the violence of becoming and then being fixed as an object or image.<sup>100</sup> Subsequently, the mutilation of a male body can, ironically, only be made sense of through recourse to the pain inflicted on female bodies:

She would read me accounts of barbarous customs such as female circumcision (had I known how prevalent a custom it was and how it was achieved by the excision of the clitoris?) and remind me of how fortunate I was that Mother, by a positive miracle of surgery, had been able to provide. She told me how the Ancient Chinese had crippled their women's feet; the Jews had chained the ankles of their their women together; and the Indians ordered widows to immolate themselves on the pyres of their husbands and so on and so forth, hour after hour was devoted to the relation of the horrors my old sex had perpetrated on my new one until I would moan, in a voice that grew softer, and against my will, more musical with each day that passed.... (PNE,73)

At the end of The Passion of New Eve, when Tristessa is discovered to be a (biological) man who has taped his penis to his anus in order to disguise the signifier of his manhood, Evelyn describes his genitals as forming a parody of the sign of female castration : "Abandoned on this great continent like a star stuck in space, an atomised, fragmentised existence, his cock stuck in his asshole so that he himself formed the uroborus, the perfect circle, the vicious circle, the dead end" (PNE, 173).

The fragmentation and isolation as well as the fixity ("stuck in space") that Tristessa is described as experiencing is very much a description of woman's alienation and objectification within patriarchy. However, the

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<sup>100</sup> Susan Suleiman says that one does not know whether to guffaw and shrink in awe at Mother's (castrating) power. Susan Suleiman, "(Re)writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism," The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives, ed. Susan Suleiman (Camb., Mass.: Harvard UP, 1986) 26.

description perhaps also points to the demise of Man at the end of the twentieth century and to a crisis of masculinity, which might be seen as the crisis in representation and in legitimation which undermines the very foundations of philosophy in the West. The vicious circle formed by Tristessa's genitalia might equally refer to the vicious circle of (masculine) intellectual imperialism, of liberal and humanist ideologies.

### **Revis(it)ing Feminine Spaces**

As Alice Jardine points out, it is tempting to see the exploration of boundaries and spaces as the very essence of philosophy, and dichotomies are the means through which these are mapped out. In Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity she attempts to describe the condition of modernity which has come about through the collapse of the binary structures which held the androcentric systems of the Western world together for centuries. She tentatively traces out the epistemological crisis of the late nineteenth-century as one linked to a crisis in figuration or representation, that is to say a breakdown in the means of knowing grounded in resemblance, of the correspondence between words and things, that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century: "according to Foucault, the threshold from classicism to modernity was crossed when, 'words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things'".<sup>101</sup>

This confusion surrounding figuration necessarily entailed a collapse of the dichotomies which hitherto anchored what Lyotard terms the grand narratives of the West, those absolutes such as Truth, History, Reason and God, and thus of the breakdown of the imperial speaking subject, the

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<sup>101</sup> Alice Jardine, Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985) 85. She refers here to Michel Foucault's The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York: Random House, 1970) 34.

white, heterosexual male, who relied upon these narratives in order to sustain his identity and centrality in the world. What interests Jardine, within the context of this dissolution of the founding concepts of metaphysics, is the resultant obsession of theorists of modernity with the reconceptualisation of the gaps or spaces of the unknown, the unthought, the Other. These spaces, as she explains, have always carried feminine connotations which go back, to the very least, to Plato's chora. They are connotations, it would seem, that cannot be left behind:

...when the structures based in these dichotomies began to vacillate, there also began, necessarily, an intensive exploration of those terms not attributable to man: the spaces of the en-soi, other, without history--the feminine. Most important, through those explorations, the male philosophers found that those spaces have a certain force that might be useful to man if they were to be given a new language. Here we are at the heart of gynesis. To give a new language to these other spaces is a project filled with both promise and fear, however, for these spaces have hitherto remained unknown, terrifying, monstrous: they are mad, unconscious, improper, unclean, non-sensical, oriental, profane. If philosophy is truly to question those spaces, it must move away from all that has defined them, held them in place: Man, the Subject, History, Meaning. It must offer itself over to them, embrace them. But this is also a dangerous and frightening task...<sup>102</sup>

This description of a process in which the re-vision of space within western discourses, and thus of the feminine with which it is so inherently linked, takes precedence over time, becoming or history, which is linked with masculinity, helps to explain many of the issues that Shadow Dance appears to be playing with in the wake of the breakdown of the master discourses.

The world Shadow Dance describes is one that is distinctly modern; out of joint, a world of shadows. At one point Morris fantasises escape,

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<sup>102</sup> Jardine 73.

“he would become a citizen of the real world, a world where there was black and there was white but no shadows” (SD,122), but this world seems past, inaccessible, and Morris's occupation as a struggling (and not very successful) abstract painter perhaps explains his "schizophrenic" inability to make sense of his environment through language. He lives an abstract existence and, unlike the literary heroes of times past, he no longer corresponds with the world in which he finds himself (adrift), so he must seek out a new means of expression. Paradoxically, at the one and only point in the novel he is described as actively painting, he attempts to create something abstract, beyond representation, yet, against his will, it turns into a woman:

So finally he forced himself to paint a picture. He took blacks, browns and a bitter blue and intended it to be abstract but it became figurative under his figures; a decaying female form, dead, in a brown desert, under a cruel blue sky. Though he disliked it intensely, he could not stop it growing under his fingers. “I am becoming psychotic.” But perhaps it was better to try and work it out on hardboard. (SD,122)

It is as if, like the male theorists mentioned by Jardine, Morris is unconsciously trying to find a new language for the Other that has invaded his consciousness (his-story), repeating the age-old masculine process of giving matter a form. The violence of this process is highlighted a little later on: "The woman-shaped lump wanted to be textury, feely, to jut, hunchbacked, swollen from the surface. He alternately coaxed and battered at the paint" (SD,122). The only shape the painted woman will take is a deadly monstrous one, like Ghislaine. This incident perhaps bears out the point that Armit makes in an essay on The Passion of New Eve: "It is not only that the female body remains the locus for fantastic

reconstructions of monstrosity and the grotesque, but that there seem to be very few alternatives on offer".<sup>103</sup>

As a writer's originary symbol in two senses--it is Carter's first major symbol in her first book and it is also, mythologically speaking, the mark of female difference--the scar is unforgettable. There is a textual obsession with the mutilated flesh as the narrator constantly returns to it, focussing the reader's gaze (along with Morris's), upon this corporeal conundrum. One might go so far as to say that the scar frames the text, but the image at times threatens to cave in on itself, swallowing the text into itself, in the same way in which it looks as if it might swallow Ghislaine into herself. In this sense Shadow Dance might be read as an inherently pessimistic novel, inferring that there is no escape from myths of the feminine and its attendant representations of femininity, angelic and monstrous, which can bury us alive. As long as we go on linking the so-called "feminine" spaces discussed by Jardine with the bodies of real women, we might expect violence towards women to continue and increase.

But the scar's prominence (as threshold of the "other" place) within Shadow Dance also suggests that the feminine spaces bequeathed to us cannot be ignored. The limits of the historical context (modernity) in which these spaces have reemerged as prominent and urgent sites of questioning must be realised, as I have just explained, but, so too, its promises cannot be ignored. I realise that, throughout this chapter, I have been pushing towards a more positive reading of the figure of Ghislaine (in the spirit of Cixous's Medusa essay), via the image of her scar/bloody wound. I am seeking to re-present the symbol of female castration within a feminist context, not as a gaping hole signifying lack and loss and related female suffering, or as the terrible devouring mouth that such a fiction barely hides, but, rather, as an interstice--a border between outside and

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<sup>103</sup> Armitt 179.



inside that calls into question the binaries upon which phallogentrism depends.

To use the word positive, however, is to fall into the trap of the Hegelian dialectic, which relies on binaries such as positive and negative, and simply reverses them so that the feminine becomes the positive half of the binary pair. This is a drive towards closure, an attempt on my part to make sense of a novel which is often fragmented, non-sensical and contradictory. I must leave this chapter gaping then, like the scar, which is a space that remains uncertain, dangerous even, and, like Carter's fictions, refuses to close up. To attempt to suture the wound of Shadow Dance, a scarred text which opens up so many ideas and questions and leaves them undone/unanswered, would bring it back into the discourse of the whole, as opposed to the hole, which is the locus of non-representation--monstrous in its intangible, unrepresentable state. The broken or failed dialectic that is the scar/feminine space is far more haunting and powerful than any temporary resolution of textual difficulties I might employ to tie up this chapter.

Shadow Dance cuts off abruptly (it does not "end" in the conventional sense of the word, which means that the issues it raises remain open) with Morris's "final" incorporation within the shadowy space he has been fleeing all along, "Morris vanished into the shadows" (SD,182). Thus, although in the denouement Ghislaine is murdered ritually and laid out like Honey's plaster Christ (in a horrific literalising of the sacrificial scapegoating that is a necessary and integral part of the process of Symbolisation), the dead substance, the (m)other matter that Honey kills in order to make it signify--to make sense of it--draws the protagonist back within her shadowy realm.

There is no escape for Morris from the space of the other, from the problems which the repressed feminine (which will just not go away)

raises. The threat of textual implosion or collapse into an unknowable, "feminine" space that Carter dramatises in and through Shadow Dance, the collapse of the "real" which her text describes and enacts, gestures, perhaps, towards the possibility of new configurations of woman and sexual identities, whatever those might be. As Kristeva tells us, it is only through our confrontations with the strangeness and irrevocable difference in ourselves and others that we might discover new ways of being, as we learn to live with identity as fluid and subject to change. Such strange confrontations are the essence of Carter's fictions which form a series of journeys into the uncertain terrains of the other and the dark, unacknowledged spaces within ourselves. The only thing that remains certain in Carter's fictional worlds is the uncertainty of the world we inhabit and the precariousness of the identities we construct in order to try and make sense of it.

In The Passion of New Eve, which I discuss in the next chapter, the boundaries of sexual identity are again presented as extraordinarily fragile, as fragile as the "central" image of Tristessa's glass palace which symbolically shatters into thousands of pieces of glass, anticipating the equally puzzling tiger-striped shards of glass in Nights at the Circus. So too, in this novel, as with Shadow Dance, the brittle binaries of Western metaphysics spin and smash, leaving the reader to pick up the pieces for herself.

## CHAPTER TWO

### STRANGE TRANSFORMATIONS AND METAMORPHIC STRANGERS IN THE INFERNAL DESIRE MACHINES OF DOCTOR HOFFMAN AND THE PASSION OF NEW EVE

#### The Unaccommodating Womb in *The Passion of New Eve*

As I have been arguing, the myth of female castration and lack and the bloody wound and womb as cultural signs of female inferiority, along with the associated fictions of suffering women, are consistently attacked in Carter's oeuvre. But the prevalence of the symbol of female castration and the linking of the maternal/female body with loss and death within her work perhaps indicates how insistent and insidious it really is.

The Passion of New Eve is very much concerned with the notion of being a stranger to oneself, and of the condition of the marginal other which has been women's position historically within phallogentrism. As Armitt writes: "Intrinsic to Carter's journey is an exploration of cultural identity through the discourse of the self as irrecoverably foreign, at the same time as she refuses to trace a path which would completely negate the past".<sup>1</sup>

In her theoretical text Strangers to Ourselves,<sup>2</sup> Kristeva speaks of how the internal division which is constitutive of all subjects must be lived with if the shape of human relations is to change, so in this sense women have a head start. But Kristeva suggests that for an ethical revolution to be achieved difference must be acknowledged without its subjection to totalisation, destruction or reconciliation. The subject should accept the existence of the otherness within herself so she may sympathise with others without, for, as Kelly Oliver puts it: "Kristeva argues that when we flee or combat strangers or foreigners, we are

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<sup>1</sup> Lucie Armitt, "Dystopian Landscapes and Dehumanized Forms," Theorising the Fantastic (London: Edward Arnold, 1996) 175.

<sup>2</sup> Julia Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

struggling with our own unconscious. The stranger or foreigner is within us".<sup>3</sup> As I hope to have made clear, Carter is an extraordinarily sceptical writer whose work problematises any celebration of marginality as she repeatedly reminds us of the suffering that the endless mythologisation of the space of the Other has caused, and much of her earlier fiction implicitly damns the fact of women's exclusion from history. On the other hand, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Carter's work/thinking has a lot in common with Kristeva's.

Like Kristeva, Carter exemplifies the way in which all women are voyagers in perpetual motion over lands in which they can never really feel at home. This is the explicit subject of The Magic Toyshop which I shall examine in the next chapter, and it can also be said of The Passion of New Eve where the experience of foreignness is shown to be feminising where femininity is strange, heterogeneous, fluid, excessive, connected with loss of some kind; in a word, contradictory.

Indeed Carter and Kristeva are both interested in the return of the repressed, with ex-centrics, alterity (the differences within the self and within the other), and with uncanny dislocation--those moments when the abyss of non-being opens up and identity is threatened, although Carter appears to be more explicitly concerned with women and feminine sexuality than Kristeva. As Carter's work progresses she displays greater optimism about the possibilities on offer to those who have been excluded from history and whose voices have been silenced, ignored or subsumed, and increasingly draws on their energy/alterity in order to rupture monological systems from within as she starts telling (our) stories differently. Lorna Sage says that Carter is suspicious of any strategy that valorises women as outsiders: "It's central to Carter's argument that this lack of a place in the world is not women's genuine condition but a piece of mystification, a myth a nonsense--

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<sup>3</sup> Kelly Oliver, "Introduction: Julia Kristeva's Outlaw Ethics," Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing, ed. Kelly Oliver (London: Routledge, 1993) 1.

and a nonsense that is compounded by the sanctification of motherhood",<sup>4</sup> but Kristeva insists that women's "special" access to outsidership and foreignness because of their position within the sociosymbolic order (rather than because of their "nature") can be viewed positively: "I am very attached to this idea of the woman as irrecuperable foreigner but I know that certain American feminists do not think well of such an idea because they want a positive notion of woman. But one can be positive by starting with this permanent marginality which is the motor of change"<sup>5</sup> and this increasingly becomes Carter's method. This is not so much to valorise than to utilise a position of marginality.

Although John Sears argues that in The Passion of New Eve Carter continues to insist that "femininity is always, ultimately, a construct of male desire",<sup>6</sup> I will argue differently, attempting to show the way in which Carter sometimes plays on the instability and alterity that representations of the feminine and Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalytic discussions of femininity attempt to mask or deny, showing how femininity inhabits masculinity as otherness, as its own disruption and the way in which sexual difference can emerge as radical otherness. Carter consistently exposes masculinity as a state that is precarious and which has constantly been under threat from that which is outlawed and named feminine and irrational and which therefore, unsurprisingly, comes to be increasingly haunted by it. This is what I hoped to highlight in my examination of Shadow Dance which deals with the woman as uncanny or the uncanny feminine: the gap that asserts itself in an apparently unified system. At the same time, the blackly humorous The Passion of New Eve again repeatedly reminds us of the physical and psychical pain inflicted upon women as they are positioned objects of desire who must reflect and support the (male) subject and the masculine realm.

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<sup>4</sup> Lorna Sage, Introduction to Flesh and the Mirror, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994) 1-23: 13.

<sup>5</sup> Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves 10.

<sup>6</sup> John Sears, Angela Carter's Monstrous Women (Sheffield: Pavic Publicator, 1992) 23.

In The Passion of New Eve a man is not psychically opened but *physically* opened up as he is fitted with his very own "feminine space"--womb/wound--and has to learn to live with the necessarily painful, foreign condition of femininity of which he had once been so ignorant. Irigaray calls women's status within a phallogentric order one of *déréliction*, and this being lost-to-oneself is what Evelyn experiences after his anatomical metamorphosis: "'Well Eve', she said comfortably, 'How do you find yourself?' 'I don't find myself at all I replied disconsolately' ." <sup>7</sup> Just as Mother enters the room Eve stands "naked and a stranger to myself" (PNE,74).

Although this novel, perhaps more than any other of Carter's fictions, draws attention to the female genitals explicitly as a wound, this "emblem" of femininity must be read in the context of her parodic, postmodern style. <sup>8</sup> What Carter appears to do is to frequently utilise/rewrite the symbol of the womb/wound as a deconstructive site, to maintain the womb/wound's contradictory status and to highlight its uncomfortable uncanny otherness repeatedly throughout her work. In this sense, the womb/wound becomes a displacing area or a series of displacing zones within her fictions. The foregrounding of this space as dynamic, unfixed and unfixing might be viewed as forming a sort of feminist textual strategy which foregrounds the female body and feminine desire as transformative and powerfully unruly in its ineradicable difference.

The rewriting of the female body and the playing with the traditional bloody symbol of femininity as *mise-en-abyme* (a point of eternal regression and

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<sup>7</sup> Carter, The Passion of New Eve (London: Virago, 1977) 75. All further page references appear in the text.

<sup>8</sup> Suleiman draws on Brian McHale's definition of postmodern fiction in her discussion of The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman. McHale writes of postmodernist fiction as preoccupied with ontology--the nature of being. It asks persistent questions about about what happens when different worlds come into confrontation with one another and their boundaries are violated. Suleiman sees Hoffman as the paradigmatic postmodern novel in this sense, as it is about a conflict between worlds and its protagonist travels through a plurality of worlds. She mentions postmodern fiction's "formal self-consciousness". Susan Rubin Suleiman, "The Fate of the Surrealist Imagination in the Society of the Spectacle," Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter (London: Virago, 1994) 98-116: 103.

speculation) militates against the fixing of the female/maternal body as image that occurs in many male postmodern texts. The ambiguous, disturbing feminine space which is and is not the mark of castration, imaged by the scar in Shadow Dance, is explored more explicitly in The Passion of New Eve in which, as previously mentioned, the castration myth is literalised when the male protagonist, Evelyn, undergoes a sex-change operation in Mother's cave/wound/ womb beneath the desert and is transformed, anatomically, into a woman. Carter again parodies and plays with the hidden power residing within the image of the masochistic, suffering woman through the sado-masochistic figure of Mother, who proclaims: "I am the wound that does not heal. I am the source of all desire!" (PNE, 64). Here, the image of the open scar which frames Shadow Dance is linked to femininity which is the origin of desire, of the world and word. The female body is, in Mother's description, not simply the source of life, the restoring, nourishing female/maternal body of patriarchal mythology but, more importantly, the source of unappeasable desire, the death in life, the ongoing process that representations of the feminine and maternal attempt to mask. Thus, although Mother's eclectic matriarchal religion is parodied for its usurpation and reappropriation of phallic power which makes it merely patriarchy's inverse, similarly based on the law of the same,<sup>9</sup> the *unheimlich* space that is Beulah--the most specifically unaccommodating space in the novel--is unforgettably ambiguous.

The scar image in Shadow Dance, the threshold of the heterogeneous "feminine space" that dominates that novel, also becomes the entrance to Mother's dwelling place/space in The Passion of New Eve. This is revealed when the broken pillar, a sculpture of a detumescent phallus (it is broken so that it looks detumescent or even castrated, like the truncated column that is the insignia of the women terrorists) is drawn back, "pillar, pediment and base fell back together,

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<sup>9</sup> This is Elaine Jordan's criticism of Mother, whose matriarchal underground world she finds as totalitarian and repressive as patriarchal systems which disallow or at least repress difference in the name of (phallic) unity. See Elaine Jordan, "Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions," Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction, ed. Linda Anderson (London: Edward Arnold, 1990) 19-40: 35.

with a crash, and disclosed a yawning opening in the sand beneath them, a sloping pit that led down" (PNE, 48). The underground habitation to which this opening leads is a reworking of Blake's utopia, Beulah. Evelyn describes it as, "a place where contraries exist together" (PNE, 48), so it echoes the description of the chaotic city which, "embraces all opposing forms in a state of undifferentiated dissolution"(PNE,14). Beulah is also: "a profane place. It is a crucible" (PNE,14), a system of underground caves which are reached through a downward, spiralling maze.

Evelyn is led further and further into the heart of Beulah, a room in which Mother resides, which is explicitly womb-like with pulsating red walls. And Carter reverses the idea that whenever a man enters a strange place he is liable to be reminded of the womb he has come from (put forward by Freud in "The 'Uncanny'"), when Evelyn exclaims, on first glimpse of the self-made Goddess: "And when I saw her, I knew I had come home, yet a desolating strangeness overwhelmed me, for I knew I could not stay there" (PNE, 58).

Armitt draws attention to the fusion (rather than the separation) of binaries that takes place within this space in the creation of the cyborg--new Eve--who is a parodic embodiment of the marriage between Adam and Eve, "the one flesh" described in the Book of Genesis: "This one flesh is Carter's own cyborg: a complex combination of masculine and feminine, goddess and whore, secular and sacred and spirit and flesh".<sup>10</sup> This is not the sort of fusion through dissolution imagined by Bataille in Eroticism in which "both (male and female) are mingled attaining at length the same degree of dissolution," because neither are successfully dissolved or mingled.<sup>11</sup> Whilst undergoing a physical transformation that makes him an incarnation of a playboy fantasy, Evelyn retains a masculine outlook, viewing his transformed body as an object of desire, "--how can I put it-- the cock in my head, still, twitched at the sight of myself" (PNE, 74). Indeed,

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<sup>10</sup>Armitt 165.

<sup>11</sup> Georges Bataille, Eroticism, trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Boyars, 1987).



Armitt goes on to note that, along with Eve/lyn "Certainly, most of the characters we encounter in this narrative comply, in one way or another, with Bakhtinian readings of the extraordinary human being", which leads her to define The Passion of New Eve as a "wild, anatomical fantasy"<sup>12</sup> that leaves us with worrying deconstructions of gender.

At first it might seem that Carter is simply repeating the creation myth in which the female is cast as secondary to the man (born of man), for Eve is created out of Evelyn.<sup>13</sup> But it might also be read as a subtle reversal of this myth, for the primacy of the penis which is taken as the signifier of sexual difference in Freud's reworking of the creation myth is parodied. It is implied that masculine ontology is based entirely upon this organ, which, as Armitt points out, is reduced within this text to a mere dangling appendage. Mother mocks the equation of masculinity with the phallus when she exclaims: " 'I've no quarrel with you just because you are a man! I think your pretty little virility is just darling, harmless as a dove, such a delight! A lovely toy for a young girl... '" (PNE, 66). Earlier in the novel Evelyn tells us that, in response to Leilah's seductive power: "All my existence was now gone away into my tumescence; I was nothing but cock and I dropped down upon her like, I suppose, a bird of prey, although my prey, throughout the pursuit, had played the hunter" (PNE, 25). This again equates masculinity with the erect penis which becomes useless, powerless in the face of Mother: "Before this overwhelming woman, the instrument that dangled from my belly was useless" (PNE,60). Pages later, the penis/phallus is ridiculed and dethroned within the novel (Carter indeed plays about with this sign), as the male body is metonymically displaced by the female body which opens up beneath it, or at least highlights the fact that masculine identity is built upon the suppression of the female body.

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<sup>12</sup> Armitt 179.

<sup>13</sup> As discussed in the introduction.

Eve/lyn highlights the fact that sight is the organising sense in Western metaphysics, the metaphysics of presence, when he explains, "she excised everything I had been and left me instead with a wound that would, in future, bleed once a month, at the bidding of the moon"(PNE,71). The penis, that which can be seen, is contrasted with the wound which is associated with being. Of course the notion of the woman as castrated male is present, inescapable even, in Evelyn's description of his new body. But as in Shadow Dance there is something else going on, as the wound like the scar, is not static. It could be read as a tear or rupture in the male self calling into question the places/boundaries allocated by patriarchal discourse.

When Eve/lyn declares, "where I remembered my cock, was nothing. Only a void, an insistent absence, like a noisy silence" (PNE,75), we are reminded the wound of castration: the "nothing to be seen" of Freudian psychoanalytic discourse as critiqued by Irigaray. Irigaray writes of the little girl in Freud's explication of the castration complex and its effects: "She comes out of it feminized by a decision which she is duty bound to ratify, that there cannot be a nothing to see. The idea that a "nothing to be seen", a something not subject to the rule of visibility or specula(riza)tion, might yet have some reality, would indeed be intolerable to man".<sup>14</sup> Irigaray's description of the way in which the male analyst speaks in the place of the girl, silencing her desires as he puts them in a framework which only acknowledges the male sex and the masculine libido, a framework in which sight and presence dominate, are invoked and undermined in Evelyn's oxymoronic phrases, "insistent absence" (PNE, 75) and "noisy silence" (PNE, 75) which play with misogynistic representations of the women's sexual organs, as they simultaneously emphasise the power and reality of the "nothing to be seen". Such paradoxical phrases confirm patriarchy's ultimate inability to silence the female sex and to ward off the fear of female power.

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<sup>14</sup> Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 150.

## Where is Woman? The Haunting Absence of The Passion of New Eve

Elisabeth Bronfen invokes the work of Teresa de Lauretis in order to explain the paradoxical status of women in western representational discourse. Bronfen says that de Lauretis argues that woman:

... is the very foundation of representation: its object and its support, its telos and origin. At the same time Woman is nowhere as reference to her image. Western representations work as texts telling 'the story of male desire by performing the absence of woman and by producing woman as text, as pure representation.' In this sense also, death is at work in the cultural construction of femininity.<sup>15</sup>

In forwarding this idea de Lauretis echoes Irigaray, when Irigaray says that the woman is mirror to the man. Woman's sexual difference goes unrecognised and thus her ontological status in Western metaphysics is not even simply problematic but in fact non-existent. In the last chapter I explored Ghislaine and her scar in relation to these ideas. Again, in The Passion of New Eve, Carter highlights de Lauretis's notion of the absentness or "nowhere-ness" of women in relation to their images through her exaggerated representations of male representations of women. These images expose the violence at the heart of the construction of femininity, and the canny feminine other, thus going some way towards deconstructing these representations. Bronfen explains that the texts of feminist novelists will often:

...instate, within the parameters of their representational system, the knowledge of the dual contradiction my reading has sought to uncover: the dilemma that Woman cannot be defined outside discursive formations that assign to femininity the position of the void, of silence, of a lack of fixed place, and the aporia that death is at once the real before and beyond language as well as a hyperbolic trope.<sup>16</sup>

The statement encapsulates one of Carter's constant preoccupations regarding gender and the social construction of sexual identity, the idea that woman, within

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<sup>15</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, Over Her Dead Body: Femininity and the Aesthetic (London: Blackwell, 1992 ) Introduction (xii).

<sup>16</sup> Bronfen 424.

the present representational system, exists as an endless series of reflections and Roberta Rubenstein speaks of the "narrative's ubiquitous mirroring surfaces"<sup>17</sup> which reinforce this idea. Irigaray attempts to show how the burial of men's relation to mother-matter and the positioning of women as the ground of subjecthood, of essence and its precondition in man, has been the founding aporia of Western metaphysics. Irigaray believes that Freud repeats ancient crimes, what she terms as "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry", in which:

the Other must...serve to mirror the one, reduplicating what man is assumed to know already, as the place of (his) production. 'She' must be only the path, the method, the theory, the *mirror* which leads back, by a process of repetition to the recognition of (his) origin for the 'subject'.<sup>18</sup>

This is the issue Carter parodies in The Passion of New Eve, and the idea is also explored in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman.<sup>19</sup> At the same time the ambivalence/ambivalent status of some of the "women" in the novels looks at times to be a source of power (the radical otherness of the liminal feminine position they inhabit breaks through), but this is more the case in The Passion of New Eve than in Hoffman.

Rubenstein explains that there are no realistic, psychologically complex "characters" in The Passion of New Eve: "Rather, her [Carter's] expressionistic psychodrama is patterned through the deliberate invocation--and frequently, exaggeration and parody--of figures and symbols from western cultural mythology..."<sup>20</sup> Each of the women in The Passion of New Eve is, as Rubenstein notes, reminiscent of the enigmatic figures of classical or contemporary mythology; Sphinx-like in the sense that her identity presents Evelyn and the

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<sup>17</sup> Roberta Rubenstein, "Intersexions: Gender Metamorphosis in Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve and Lois Gould's A Sea Change," Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 12:1 (1993):103-188.

<sup>18</sup> Irigaray, Speculum 239.

<sup>19</sup> Henceforth, Hoffman

<sup>20</sup> Rubenstein 106.

reader with riddles and a haunting sense of presence-in-absence. Woman as a tangible entity is nowhere in this text, which juggles with masculine representations of the feminine, yet, very importantly, her alterior presence is hinted as lying beneath the many tropes and, at certain points in the text, this alterity emerges causing disruptions similar to those in Shadow Dance.

Leilah is split int(w)o a daytime and a nighttime self and is presented as a fantastic hybrid of animal and ideal beauty, albeit through Evelyn's eyes. She is a hyperbolic trope and, as we shall see, she is intrinsically connected with death and there is a sense in which her difference cannot be contained or eradicated. Like Leilah, Mother similarly defies easy categorisation. A gigantic, monstrous incarnation of mythical goddess-mothers, she appears at once as both hideously phallic-destructive and strangely nurturing. This is illustrated by her wielding of an "obsidian knife", as black as Mother herself: "Oh, the dreadful symbolism of that knife! To be castrated with a phallic symbol! (But what else, says Mother, could do the trick?)" (PNE, 70). Rubenstein sees her as "the overwhelming being who is both sexually seductive and terrifying", explaining her as the figure of the repressed mother buried in the male psyche, going on to note that Mother and her inhabitation form no lost Eden, but that instead, what appears to be "the entrance to Paradise becomes a *vagina dentata* as Evelyn is engulfed, raped, and expelled with dispatch".<sup>21</sup>

Here then, the monstrous representation of female genitalia as a toothed vagina, which is inseparable from the deification of woman as goddess-mother (the *vagina dentata* stands for the castrative presence of death-in-life that representations of the eternal-maternal attempt to mask), is, as Rubenstein shows, implicated in the portrayal of Beulah. It is used in a parodic fashion to disturb and subvert, as is the case with the scar in Shadow Dance, which, as we have seen, is also implicitly connected with Medusa/the *vagina dentata*. So too, the figure of Mother and her carnivalesque, grotesque fleshliness (Irigaray's "mother-matter" is here hideously

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<sup>21</sup> Rubenstein 110.

realised), along with her hyperbolic utterances that parody creation myths, breaks apart masculine constructions of the mythical mother-goddess (and the containment/stasis the mother-goddess signifies), through sheer excess. And strangely enough her overwhelming presence in fact marks an absence. Indeed, Armitt realises that The Passion of New Eve works to confirm that Mother is, "artificial, spurious and ultimately absent".<sup>22</sup> This is truly the most disturbing, and the most liberating, thing about Mother in The Passion of New Eve.

In direct contrast to Mother stands the ethereal, in-substantial figure of the suffering filmstar, Tristessa. On screen Tristessa is a perfect example of woman as presence-in-absence, and, when encountered in the flesh, seems but an absent presence. To further confuse the issue, "she" is later discovered to possess male genitalia. Whether Tristessa is a man or a woman remains unanswered, however. The aphorism "Seeing is Believing" is savagely parodied through the "most haunting of paradoxes" (PNE,6), the conundrum that is Tristessa, who appears to be a woman but turns out to have a male anatomy. As Evelyn exclaims, proleptically, at the beginning of his narrative: "Tristessa. Enigma. Illusion. Woman? Ah! And all you signified was false!" (PNE,6). This statement aptly describes one of the fundamental concerns of the novel which unfolds a nightmarish, dystopian world, a series of wastelands in which signs and referents have come adrift and "nothing connects with nothing" and where the reader's perceptions are consistently turned upside down as the foundations of philosophy become subject to blackly humorous inversion, parody and ironic reversal.

Again, Sophia, one of Mother's priestesses who tends to Evelyn before and after his operation, appears an uncanny figure who is automaton-like and mysterious in turn. When she first meets Evelyn she honours him, "with the most extraordinary smile, radiant but ambiguous, smile of an ecstatic Sphinx which changed her face entirely, gave her a demented maenad look" (PNE, 56). Like Leilah-as-guerilla-fighter, she displays a curiously un"feminine" empathy towards Evelyn after his

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<sup>22</sup> Armitt 172.

operation. Her detached and almost scientific concern has a positively "masculine" quality about it which confuses and humiliates Evelyn. She is not so much like a sister as a male doctor with a female patient. Indeed, this is a presiding irony of this novel: where male doctors might work to suture female wounds, these "female" doctors create them, asking all the while: "Is it such a bad thing to become like me?" (PNE,68).<sup>23</sup>

And what of New Eve him/herself? He becomes a truly split subject--a man trapped in a woman's body: " But when I looked in the mirror, I saw Eve; I did not see myself. I saw a young woman who, though she was I, I could in no way acknowledge as myself, for this one was only a lyrical abstraction of femininity to me, a tinted arrangement of curved lines" (PNE,74). As both Punter and Rubenstein are both concerned to show, the novel explores the notion of woman as split subject and the sensation, that of existing outside oneself, that women, banished from patriarchal models of subjectivity, experience in the process of their objectification.<sup>24</sup> Like Leilah and Eve, Evelyn comes to experience being located as the place of splitting and becoming, which Carter's texts always explore in relation to women.

Punter has written that when Evelyn looks into the mirror after his/her operation he/she feels the "vertiginous doubleness which, it is implied, is parallel to the feminine impasse", and he summarises this as "inner self forced apart from the subject of self-presentation, an awareness of hollowness, a disbelief that this self-on-view can be taken as a full representation of the person alongside the bitter knowledge that it will be, that at every point the woman is locked into the metaphysical insult of the masculine gaze".<sup>25</sup> Thus, although Eve/lyn refers to

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<sup>23</sup> See Kaja Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana UP) for an interesting analysis of medical discourse in early Hollywood films manifesting a fascination with the spaces inside women's bodies.

<sup>24</sup> David Punter, "Angela Carter: Supersessions of the Masculine," Critique 25 (Summer 1984) 209-221, and Keenan "From Myth to Memory: The Revisionary Writings of Angela Carter, Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston," diss. U. of Essex, 1992, 36-37.

<sup>25</sup> Punter 216.

"the change in my ontological status" (PNE, 72), ontology, and especially female ontology, is clearly problematised throughout The Passion of New Eve. In a sense Evelyn's arousal at the sight of himself ironically confirms the fact that, as Bronfen puts it: "Woman must know masculine desire if she is to simulate its object with her appearance. In her complicity with her cultural gender position, she must vacillate between masculinity and femininity".<sup>26</sup> This issue is highlighted earlier in the novel when Leilah stares in the mirror.

Although both Rubenstein and Punter emphasise Leilah's/woman's powerlessness in the face of the male gaze there is a sense in which Leilah escapes complete subordination to it. In the last chapter I showed the ways in which the male gaze failed in the face of a powerful "plural" femininity and The Passion of New Eve also questions the absolute power of the male gaze and the male imagination and desire, playing on the tenuous boundary between Leilah's capture in a male specular economy and her subversion of it.<sup>27</sup> I want now to examine the issue of Leilah's narcissism and the ambiguities surrounding female narcissism in more detail.

### **Leilah: Narcissism and Empowerment (?)**

Leilah, who is beautiful, self-contained and obsessed with her reflection might be read, perhaps, as the paradigmatic narcissistic woman. Narcissistic women, according to Freud's essay, "love only themselves, they would do so just as intensely as a man would love them. Their need does not make them aspire to love but to be loved, and they are pleased by a man who fulfils this condition".<sup>28</sup> This narcissistic condition is, according to Sarah Kofman, a threat to male

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<sup>26</sup> Bronfen 282.

<sup>27</sup> The way in which a woman's desire is turned back on itself and she becomes a divided being is the subject of chapter three which will examine the issue of female narcissism in The Magic Toyshop where I also look at the play between confinement and escape from the gaze/masculine representations that Carter employs via the trope of the mirror.

<sup>28</sup> Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol.14, trans. and ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) 73-102.



supremacy and must therefore (according to logocentric reasoning) be overcome, and Evelyn displays this desire to conquer and tame.<sup>29</sup>

Patricia Parker sees a logic of reversal at work in "On Narcissism", in which Freud repeats the ideas of the exegesists of the book of Genesis and, most notably, those of Milton as found in book four of Paradise Lost.<sup>30</sup> Freud is less overt in his condemnation of female narcissism than Milton but he is obviously troubled by it because it is "unfavourable to the development of a true object-choice".<sup>31</sup> This is in contrast to narcissism's opposite, what Freud terms "anaclisis". Anaclisis is explained as an object-choice which is based on a pre-existing relation to a parental figure: the subject makes attachments in accordance with the fulfilment of certain desires s/he had as a young child. The attachment could either be to the image of the mother who fed the infant or the father who protected the infant. The narcissistic or homosexual object choice is modelled on the subject's relation to herself. She can love what she is, was and would like to be as well as someone who was once part of herself (here Freud refers to the mother who loves her child as it was once part of her body). Freud states that female object choice is generally narcissistic, while that of the male tends to be anaclitic.<sup>32</sup>

As well as being far too simplistic a reading of a woman's relationship to her image, Freud's essay "On Narcissism", like Milton's representation of Eve in

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<sup>29</sup> Sarah Kofman, "The Narcissistic Woman: Freud, Girard," French Feminist Thought: A Reader ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988) 210-226.

<sup>30</sup> Patricia Parker, Literary Fat Ladies and the Generation of the Text (London: Methuen, 1987).

<sup>31</sup> Freud, "On Narcissism," 80 .

<sup>32</sup> Constance Penley has drawn attention to Freud's assertion that the distinction between anaclisis and narcissism is only schematic and that both stand for ideals: in practice, elements of each object choice can be alternated and combined in the individual. She points out that even Freud's examples of these supposedly antithetical object choices do not really hold up and that Lacan's mirror stage undermines the binary explanations even further in providing an explanation of the narcissistic character of *all* object relations, "a child can only take another for an object once it has taken itself as an object" ( 74 ). Narcissism is implicit in Freud's idea of anaclisis because it can be viewed as a narcissistic delegation in which Narcissus is the other, in Freud's case, the woman. See Constance Penley, The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota UP, 1989).

Paradise Lost, betrays a deep fear and mistrust of the woman, who supposedly conducts a love affair with herself. This is because the self-sufficient female poses a threat to the concept of male primacy and the phallic law which would maintain women as objects of exchange rather than autonomous subjects.

Freud believes that a narcissistic woman may be converted (led away from the narcissistic position) through motherhood, which he upholds as the true end of female development, as is the case with Eve in Paradise Lost. Patricia Parker comments on Freud's description of the narcissistic woman, in which narcissism is an obstacle to be overcome on the path of narrative progress:

In *Three Essays on Sexuality or The Theory of Sexuality* the initial stage of 'holding back' is ultimately superseded, just as in *On Narcissism* the initial or primary narcissism of the female is overcome in the narrative of an ultimate destination, that 'road which leads to complete object-love' and the end of motherhood, the production of a substitute for the sign of lack in '*His Majesty the Baby*.'<sup>33</sup>

What Eve sees in Adam in order to convert her love for herself into love for him alone is never actually stated, says Parker.

In Freud's essay on femininity we learn that her self-love is nothing when compared with what she sees the boy has, that is "his far superior" equipment and it is only in marriage the woman may be able to make up by her apparent lack of the penis through conceiving and giving birth. This is especially fulfilling if the child is a boy. In marriage woman serves to reflect back to man an image of himself and to bear his children. To give birth to a boy child can be a woman's highest achievement. Leilah displays the narcissistic self-containment that Evelyn, like Freud, finds enticing yet threatening. Evelyn talks of Leilah as a hybrid, she is a wild creature, not an animal or beast but "some in-between thing" (PNE, 21). Interestingly, Freud compares narcissistic women to beasts of prey and, so, Leilah also has the qualities of a lion or tiger. She is the exotic other of Evelyn's/ the masculine imagination who attracts because of her self-containment:

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<sup>33</sup> Parker 229.

Her vague song, now loud, now soft, her lascivious totter that sometimes broke into a stumbling dance for a few seconds, the hot animal perfume she exuded--all these were the palpable manifestations of seduction.

Yet she seemed to manufacture about herself an inviolable space.

(PNE, 21)

Here Leilah is a temptress to whom Evelyn attributes all the responsibility for his desire and in his eyes she is already fallen. Sally Keenan says that Leilah's liminal status is an essential element of the seductress in the patriarchal imagination, parodied through Carter's exaggeration. She is: "not quite human, the potentially supernatural being, a perception of the woman which relieves the man of any responsibility for the seduction".<sup>34</sup> However, despite the way Leilah is conceptualised by Evelyn, the sense that she is toying with him also comes across, for her seduction technique owes much to her air of indifference, her don't-care playfulness which allows her a certain ironic distance from the role she assumes. At one point, noting Leilah's "curious, ironic laugh" in response to his violence towards her, Evelyn sneers "isn't irony the victim's only weapon?"(PNE, 28). It is as if irony is a hopeless response (a passive activity), but irony is active and dynamic in this text.

Evelyn's aim is to violate Leilah's inviolable space, to invade her world and her body and to convert her pleasure to his own. Like Jeanne Duval in "Black Venus," Leilah indulges in hashish in the daylight hours in order to escape her surroundings and Evelyn, it is implied, cannot cope with her separateness/self-containment and so must attempt to inhabit this world himself: "I wandered through the disordered streets, now in full possession of Leilah's sweet, blurred, safe world of early childhood" (PNE, 27). Leilah's name phonetically invokes that of another literary "child-seductress", Lolita, and in the same way Humboldt Humboldt constructs Lolita out of/over and above Dolores Haze, who becomes a signifier of the beloved which erases the threat of ambiguity she poses, so Evelyn

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<sup>34</sup> Keenan 35.

tries to fix Leilah as the sign woman-as-passive-victim/prey/meat.<sup>35</sup> This process is reflected in the mirror scene in which, as Sally Keenan notes, she turns herself into a fetish object.<sup>36</sup>

Leilah's nightly ritual before the mirror enables her to leave her daytime self behind for good: "To decorate the other was her sole preoccupation at these times; she did not hear me if I spoke to her. When at last she assumed the darkly luminous appearance of Lily-in-the-mirror, she became her...." (PNE, 28). We are told that Leilah spends hours upon this ceremony which she so clearly enjoys, but her creative process is always mediated by the male gaze. Evelyn's presence highlights the way in which a woman's relationship with/to herself is intersected by male notions of her as an object of desire--something to be consumed. Indeed, this night-time Leilah is described by Evelyn as "dressed meat" (PNE,31): her role now not that of hunter but prey. Leilah's narcissism is clearly a "turn-on" for Evelyn in the same way that the idea of O masturbating in front of him is a turn-on for Sir Stephen in The Story of O, something to overcome, a preliminary to the "proper end" which is intercourse with him. Evelyn says that Leilah's contemplations always arouse him to rape: "I always managed to have her somehow, at the last minute, even if it was up against the wall" (PNE, 31). In this way female autoeroticism becomes an incentive to the male to exercise his power over her.

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<sup>35</sup> I am referring here to Bronfen's analysis of Lolita in which she says that, "in this narrative an excessively figural rendition of the 'beloved' killed into the trope of the muse... inevitably also articulates the real subject position of the effaced child-bride, Dolores Haze" (371). As she goes on to note, the materialisation of H.H.'s desire is intended to turn deferral into completion and to stabilise the inbetweenness of the nymphet through "the stability of concrete physical ravishment"(376), and the text insistently attempts to stage the birth of the poet and his creations over the effacement of that which Bronfen yokes together as "materiality-maternity-morality"(376), all of which Dolores Haze, as a historical woman subject, is connected with, and all of which threaten the "powers" of this academic/artist. Evelyn is also an academic/artist and, like H.H. he attempts to imaginatively appropriate Leilah. What Bronfen terms, "the illusory portrait of the artist as an autonomous man"(380) that Leilah helps to underpin is soon shattered in a brutal way, when Evelyn comes to experience the violence perpetrated on female bodies as they become the material for artistic representations. This is because he himself is turned into the "perfect" woman. See Bronfen 371-382.

<sup>36</sup> Keenan 37.

But Leilah is a survivor, and not quite the extreme masochist Evelyn imagines her to be, as he finds out later. Although The Story of O is intertextually present in chapter two, Leilah does not display the self-abnegation of O, and like Dolores Haze/Dolly Schilling (Lolita's maiden and married names) the difference between the projected Leilah and the actual woman occasionally seeps through Evelyn's narrative, and her subjectivity "contradicts his allegorising reduction".<sup>37</sup> Leilah's making-up ritual involves applying rouge to her nipples which echoes those passages in The Story of O in which O spends her time dressing her body for male delectation:

Applying rouge to her nether lips and the purple or peony or scarlet grease to her mouth and nipples; powders and unguents and all the colours of the rainbow went on to the skin in the sockets of her eyes; with the manual dexterity of an assembler of precision instruments, she glued on the fringe of false eyelashes. The topiary of her hair she would sometimes thread with beads or dust with glinting bronze powder she also applied to her pubic mound. Then she sprayed herself with dark perfumes that enhanced rather than concealed the lingering odour of sexuality that was her own perfume. (PNE, 29)

In the drawer of her dressing table she found some cake-rouge which she'd never used before but which managed to accentuate the halo round her nipples.... At first she thought she'd applied too much, wiped it off a little with alcohol--it didn't wipe off easily or well--and began again: she achieved a dark peony red: two flowers blossomed at the tips of her breasts. In vain she sought to rouge the lips the fleece of her belly hid.<sup>38</sup>

After this, O applies perfume and rolls on her stockings. She then waits quietly until she is fetched by René, her lover, and he takes her to meet Sir Stephen who becomes "joint owner" of O. O becomes a pawn of exchange between these two men.

Despite the similarities in the above passages there is a difference in the way the two women go about their toilettes. Leilah's is swift and functional and O's more hesitant and fumbling and this may have something to do in the way they perceive themselves and of the use to which they put their femininity. The

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<sup>37</sup> Bronfen 749.

<sup>38</sup> Pauline Réage, Story of O (London: Corgi Books, 1995) 90.

difference between O and Leilah is that O "ritually incarnates" (PNE, 31) herself for what she believes is love. Love, for O, means existing entirely for another which necessitates relinquishing any control over one's body except the power to give it up time and time again, to be opened up and turned inside out; it involves martyrdom. In the previous chapter I invoked Williams's work on the power of the masochist which she believes has been overlooked or at least undermined. The Story of O demonstrates the way in which this power can be slowly eroded, and highlights how masochism is bound up with Christianity and the suppression of desire. O has a fully developed sense of shame and disgust about her desire for others and it is only through humiliations and bodily tortures inflicted upon her by others that she believes her "unhealthy" desires may be exorcised. She gives herself up in the name of one man, her lover René, who is like a God to her. Where Leilah's job as a dancer in bars, theatres and restaurants is undertaken simply in order to exist--she must "give up" her body as spectacle in order to survive, utilising her femininity so that she can also maintain some independence--for O, the essence of womanhood consists in being displayed and opened up, penetrated and bound as she is at Roissy and Sir Stephen's house.

Williams also highlights the complex intersection of sadism and masochism<sup>39</sup> and it is obvious that O has a sadistic streak, but what is disturbing is that her sadistic fantasies are never directed towards men, only women. In this sense, O has well and truly imbibed patriarchal notions of women as objects of desire, beings who are inherently sinful and must be sacrificed on the altar of masculine desire; the legitimate desire. The exclusive men's clubs that O is sent to, clubs in which women are turned against one another and instructed to torture and open each other up in readiness for their male lovers; clubs in which women are pawns of exchange between members, might be taken as microcosms of the world that appears to exist outside their four walls and to have nothing to do with them. O

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<sup>39</sup> Linda Williams, Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible (London: Pandora Press, 1990).

never questions the male ownership of her body. Her subordination to the band of brothers to which René belongs, and within which he exchanges her disturbs her, but in due course she submits completely. At the close of the novel, as Kaja Silverman shows, the marking out of O's body as male property is complete.<sup>40</sup> René leaves her and she is passed over to Sir Stephen. Her labia are pierced with the rings which make her a slave to Sir Stephen and she is branded with his initials. At a party recounted in the final chapter of the novel she is presented to a man whose desire it is that his girlfriend might be marked out in the same way, as an example of complete submission:

But even though they did these things to O, used her thus, even taking her as an example or for a sample, or for the object of a demonstration not once did anyone address a word to her. Was she then a thing of stone or wax, or a creature of some other world, and was it that they thought it pointless to try to speak to her, or was it that they didn't dare?<sup>41</sup>

No answers are given, but in a sense the questions are irrelevant because they do not make any difference to O's predicament. The novel ends with O's penetration by the Commander and Sir Stephen, "now one, now the other,"<sup>42</sup> in a Sadeian scenario of repeated abuse. O has become the Justine figure Carter writes of in The Sadeian Woman.<sup>43</sup> An alternative ending is provided in which O foresees she is about to be abandoned by Sir Stephen and commits suicide. The irony is that both endings involve the death of O, for in her isolation in the first ending it would seem that she is turned into a member of the living dead. Life involves interaction, flux and change, which she will no longer experience.

In contrast to O, Leilah constructs her body as a fortress, a dazzling facade which she can use to her financial advantage. Whereas O must dress so as to

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<sup>40</sup> Kaja Silverman, "*Histoire d'O: The Construction of a Female Subject*," Exploring Female Sexuality: Pleasure and Danger, ed. Carol Vance (London: Pandora Press, 1992) 320-345.

<sup>41</sup> Réage 262.

<sup>42</sup> Réage 262.

<sup>43</sup> Angela Carter, The Sadeian Woman (London: Virago, 1993).

leave her body accessible to anyone who knows her "secret", Leilah displays her genitalia, "the sequined knickers that function as no more than a decorative and inadequate parenthesis round your sex?" (PNE, 29). O is lashed by the whips of those to whom she submits her body whereas Leilah lashes her thong sandals to her legs as if in preparation for battle. Although all of these factors illustrate woman's entrapment in a patriarchal system, and even though Leilah dons what Makinen calls, "the paraphernalia of fetishistic pornography"<sup>44</sup> which would seem in some ways to reinforce the power of the phallus as symbol of sexual difference, she has some of the self-sufficiency and grit of Fevvers. Leilah as cabaret dancer foreshadows Carter's later working girls who will take feminine performance to its extreme in their subversion(s) of the masculine specular economy.

At those times when Evelyn determines to possess Leilah before she leaves for the cabaret in bars and restaurants she tries to fight him off, displaying the angry resistance of Marianne of Heroes and Villains "her lips back to show their dark gums in an agony of affront and she gasped: No!... " (PNE, 31). Even when she nearly dies from her botched abortion, when her womb caves in, she recovers and later reappears in fighting mode. So, even though her womb collapses, she does not.

As we have seen, Evelyn attempts to conquer and then abandons Leilah, but when, in a reversal of the episode in which he "picks her up", she, in the guise of a freedom fighter, stops the car she is driving to pick *him* up, he wonders: "Had she all the time been engaged on guerilla warfare for her mother? Had that gorgeous piece of flesh been all the time a show, an imitation, an illusion?" (PNE, 172). The reader, too, is left guessing whether the earlier Leilah was mostly a figment of Evelyn's imagination, a projection of his desires like Tristessa, or if this is all part of Leilah's masquerade, making-herself-up-as-she-goes along, a process the empowering quality of which was merely hinted at earlier in the novel.

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<sup>44</sup> Merja Makinen, "Sexual and Textual Aggression in The Sadeian Woman and The Passion of New Eve," The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London: Longman, 1997) 157.



If the latter is the case, then the illusion appears to be getting her own back by consciously playing on her doubleness and the duplicitous nature Evelyn ascribes to her earlier on in the novel. Perhaps this is underlined by the fact that we later discover Leilah is really named Lilith, the name of Adam's wife in the first Genesis story, in which she is his equal and not subordinate to him, as is Eve in the second version of the creation myth.<sup>45</sup> As Punter says of The Passion of New Eve:

The divided self which has been produced in women cannot be reunified; but it can be turned into a weapon and a sanctuary; worn on the sleeve as the simultaneous mark of threat and rejection, of the conjoined liberation and despair which are signified by the broken phallus which, in *New Eve*, gapes backwards to reveal the unslakeable womb beneath the skin.<sup>46</sup>

Incidentally, Punter's comment appears to lead us back to the idea of the womb/wound as a displacing zone and to the scar and the abject, which is always in process/overrunning.

### **The Shifting "I"/Eye in The Passion of New Eve and The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman**

I have just briefly examined the gaze in relation to Leilah and Punter draws attention to the central trope of the eye and of seeing in Hoffman, noting that a key term cropping up in the wanderings or adventures of the novel's protagonist, Desiderio, is "persistence of Vision" as this is what gives us the idea of some sort of consistency and coherence in the world and is that which "moulds our discrete presence into a coherent narrative".<sup>47</sup> However, if we refer to Irigaray's critique of the specular organisation of the world as being based upon a solely masculine desire to see the masculine subject reflected everywhere, then it would be reasonable to conclude that the narrative which guarantees the consistency and

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<sup>45</sup> See my introduction.

<sup>46</sup> Punter, "Supersessions," 221

<sup>47</sup> Punter, "Supersessions," 213.

coherence of the self would always be a masculine narrative, a phallogentric discourse which is by definition solipsistic, monologic and represses the feminine in order to guarantee wholeness. The "I"/eye which sees is the rigid masculine subject.

In the introduction to his story Desiderio warns readers that they should not expect a love story or a murder story, but must instead: "Expect a tale of picaresque adventure, for I was a great hero in my time though I am now an old man and no longer the "I" of my own story and my time is past".<sup>48</sup> This statement shows a retrospective awareness of the "I" that shifts and changes through time/space, as Desiderio simultaneously attempts to resurrect the notion of the coherent self by describing the narrative as a heroic one in which the hero transcends all difficulties and overcomes all obstacles. In fact, Desiderio's narrative is markedly *unheroic* in this sense because he is continuously trapped on his journeying and the story is merely a string of discontinuous moments assembled long after they have occurred, in order to confer some unity upon experience. Punter picks up on this when he writes:

*Doctor Hoffman*, then, attempts a subversion of narrative, on the grounds that narrative itself is ideological in form, even before we begin to consider its content; in other words, that narrative attempts to bind together and naturalise the disunited subject and that this attempt is made at the service of specific societal ends.<sup>49</sup>

Desiderio also expresses the desire for a pure self when he says, "I must unravel my life as if it were so much knitting and pick out from that tangle the single, original thread of myself" (DH,11). The notion of the discontinuous self underlying Desiderio's narrative, which he can only half acknowledge, is a new departure in this genre and might be read as an implicit critique of it.

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<sup>48</sup> Angela Carter, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* 13. All further page references appear in the text.

<sup>49</sup> Punter, "Supersessions," 212.

As mentioned earlier, Suleiman and Jordan both draw attention to the multitude of texts incorporated and parodied within The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, which includes E.T.A Hoffman's short story "The Sandman". The fact that Albertina's father is named Hoffman and the reference in the title of the novel to infernal desire machines, brings to mind the beautiful automaton, Olympia, in Hoffman's tale. Olympia, constructed by a man named Spalanzani, has had her eyes put in by an optician called Giuseppe Coppola. The protagonist of the tale, Nathaniel, is initially duped into believing she is real and, despite the fact that she is dumb, he falls madly in love with her. As with E.T.A Hoffman, Bruno Schultz and other writers interested in the fantastic and the macabre, Carter has a passionate interest in toys. Her novels and short stories brim with puppets, clockwork dolls and other automata; uncanny figures that confound and perplex as they call into question the divide between art and life. She uses these "toys" to challenge the reader's accepted notions of what is real and what is not and to open up questions around issues of ontology and epistemology. In this sense, her fictions literally play with ideas; the toys are often the means for playing with certain subjects.

In his essay "The 'Uncanny'",<sup>50</sup> Freud cites "The Sandman" as a perfect example of a story which evokes a "quite unparalleled atmosphere of uncanniness". Freud also cites Jentsch, who believes that the uncanny is often aroused by "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate". Although Freud can accept this, he is not willing to agree with Jentsch when he writes that the uncanniness of "The Sandman" is generated by the uncertainty over Olympia's ontological status which the reader experiences and which is never resolved. Although Freud sees that this story is one which is designed to challenge the reader's accepted ideas about states of being/mind, "we know now that we are not

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<sup>50</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" The Penguin Freud Library, vol.14: Art and Literature, ed. Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 339-376.

supposed to be looking on at the products of a madman's imagination behind which we with the superiority of rational minds are able to detect the sober truth". Nevertheless, he goes on to give a rational explanation of Nathaniel's state of mind, as if he were one of his patients. Freud focuses on the motif of the eyes within the story, linking this to an anxiety about castration:

A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. The self-blinding of the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration--the only punishment that was adequate for him by the *lex talionis*.

Freud says there is a substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ and that in "The Sandman" all connection between fears about the eye and castration become intelligible as soon as the Sandman is replaced by the "Dreaded father" at whose hands castration is expected.<sup>51</sup>

Hélène Cixous has criticised Freud's essay for its exclusive focus on the motif of the eyes and for his explanation of the fear of the unknown or the uncanny as a displaced sexual anxiety. Cixous believes that the uncanny effect of the tale is not as simple as Freud would have us believe. Freud sees the uncanny as expressing drives which have to be repressed for the sake of cultural continuity and Cixous is sceptical about this notion. She regards the uncanny not as the projection of absolute, knowable and categorisable desires of particular individual (and gendered) psyches but, instead, as a relational signifier: "the uncanny is in effect composite, it infiltrates itself in between things, in the interstices, it asserts a gap where one would like to be assured of unity".<sup>52</sup> In this sense, Cixous aligns herself with Jentsch, who saw that uncanny effects were produced in texts which contained beings whose ontological status was uncertain and that this ontological instability was fear-inducing in itself for the reader of such a text, as it placed

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<sup>51</sup> Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," 348, 347, 352, 353 and 353 respectively.

<sup>52</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche*," New Literary History Vol. 7:3 (1976) 525-48.

them in a similarly unstable position. As Morag Shiach explains, the difficulty with Freud's reading is that it is so neat it tends to erase the uncanniness it sets out to explore.

Olympia and the Sandman do not stand for certain fears which can be rationally explained by reference to an Oedipal complex. These characters are not metaphors for a state of mind which Freud's essay implies existed before Nathaniel encountered them, in a simplistic chain of cause and effect. The story is, rather, about the processes of the mind and/in the construction of the real. It represents the working of the mind in which the imaginary and the real are completely fused, existing in a symbiotic relationship. This is the process of all thought and thus of all reading and writing. In this sense tale and the reader of the tale become united and indistinguishable. There is no outside (the reader) and inside (of the book--the written words). The reader of a story like "The Sandman" is denied any omniscience or authority over the "characters", which depends on certainty of what is real and what is fantastic or "what is not". S/he may have to admit therefore, that s/he is no more true or real than the linguistic creations she or he reads. Freud, however, cannot resist imposing closure upon a text that derives its unsettling power from its openness, imposing the rationality of the daylight world on that of the night world of dreams/nightmares/the unconscious which "The Sandman" opens up and which derives its power from the uncertainty it engenders.

In his erection of the eye/phallus connection over the gaps in Hoffman's text, Freud is perhaps covering up his own fear of femininity which inhabits and always threatens to destabilise the rigid masculine subject--"I". Indeed, Shiach notices that in Freud's reading, Olympia becomes merely a figure in the Oedipal relation of father and son, whereas Cixous, returning to Olympia, attempts to centralise the clockwork doll in her consideration of "the ways in which the possibility of a perfect copy threatens the economy of representation, destroying the completeness

and uniqueness on which it depends".<sup>53</sup> The confusion between a doll and a living person brings into focus Derrida's notion of the simulacrum, which Cixous takes as to be a disorder in the economy of representation.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the invocation of "The Sandman" and of Freud's essay on the uncanny within Hoffman is particularly interesting because "The Sandman" marks a shift or change in the realm of fantastic fiction.<sup>55</sup> Its powerfully unsettling quality may be linked to a crisis not, as Freud would have it, of the writer, Hoffman, but, more generally, to a crisis of representation discussed in the previous chapter, and the space or gap opening up in the story is that of the troublingly heterogeneous feminine in the shape of Olympia. Olympia, in Cixous's critique of Freud's essay, becomes a metaphor for disruption: "A little too much woman in the automaton, a little too much automaton in the woman, the same painful threat of heterogeneity disturbs".<sup>56</sup> If we are looking at Hoffman in relation to "The Sandman" and "The Uncanny", then it would seem that the hybridic, metamorphic Albertina, Desiderio's elusive lover and Hoffman's daughter, is in dialogue in some way with Olympia about the fantastic and femininity. Does Albertina have the disruptive

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<sup>53</sup> Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing (London, New York: Routledge, 1991) 48.

<sup>54</sup> Shiach 48.

<sup>55</sup> Jackson speaks of how metamorphosis, or what might be more technically described as the slippage of object into subject has, in post-Romantic fantastic texts, become something horrifying rather than redemptive and this is connected, to put it crudely, to the loss of belief in a merciful God. Whereas in fairy tales, allegories and medieval romances, metamorphosis was situated in a frame which gave it a teleological function, Jackson believes that the modern fantastic has no such frame and thus the slipping of object into subject in these texts produces, not utopian dreams of a superhuman or magical subject, but: "Perverse images of mutilation, horror and monstrosity" (82). It is Jackson's premise that from Gothic literature onwards there was a gradual shift from the marvellous to the uncanny and that, "the history of the survival of Gothic horror is one of progressive internalisation and recognition of fears as generated by the self"(24). Jackson's work is informative and ground breaking, yet is notable for its lack of sustained inquiry into issues of gender in fantastic texts. When she speaks of fears of the self, to which notions of self is she referring? If we have recourse to Irigaray's work again, in which the self or subject is always masculine, as there is no "true" female self except perhaps somewhere outside of the Symbolic order, (woman is constructed to reflect what the subject wants to see i.e., only versions of himself), then we might see those fears Jackson mentions as connected, more widely, with the threatened collapse of a specular economy and the power of a feminine sexuality/libidinal economy which threatens to emerge and destroy the phallogocentric order we know as "reality".

<sup>56</sup> Cixous, "Les Noms du Pire," Prenoms de Personne (Paris: Seuil, 1974) 29-99: 52.

power that Cixous attributes to Olympia-as-simulacrum, or is she a mere illustration of the reification of women under patriarchy, forced to assume the position of object rather than subject of desire ?

Bronfen writes of Albertina as purely a male fantasy figure and nothing else. Most particularly she is an exploration of the muse as dead beloved, but one thing is for certain, she has no power to disrupt. Bronfen also believes that Carter obliterates the possibility of any ambivalence in interpretation of Albertina:

Neither of her two paternal worlds leave space for the uncanny difference of femininity, not even that of oscillation, whether it be Hoffman's order of actualised desire and lawless images that emerge from a set of samples he controls, or Desiderio's order of arbitrary but conventionally accepted symbols.<sup>57</sup>

In a similar vein to Bronfen--who views Hoffman as a text which leaves no space for the slippage of meaning, its task being only to render clichés explicit--John Sears singles out the episode in *The House of Anonymity*. Sears believes Carter employs images of the monstrous--feminine in order to illustrate the fact that the free reign of fantasy and dreams may not be a liberation (as the Surrealists liked to believe) but a perpetuation of misogynistic stereotypes issuing from a male imaginary. The prostitutes in *The House of Anonymity* are hybrids of animal, vegetable and mineral that mix, "disparate 'parts', in a violation of conventional unity". Thus, in Sears's analysis, they conform to the common classical definition of monstrosity:

These monstrous ideals of femininity are thus apparently intended to arouse male desire (as the narrator and his companion are quick to realise). The monstrous-feminine is here both spectacular, because the prostitutes are confined to cages so that they can be perused by the male clients, and illusory, because the ideals of the feminine are overwhelmingly artificial, being clockwork automata beneath their hybrid exteriors.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Bronfen 424.

<sup>58</sup> Sears, 14 and 15 respectively.

Here the clockwork is used satirically against male representations of monstrous femininity as it exposes the prostitutes as mere constructs, articulations of male desires, like Lady Purple in "The Loves of Lady Purple".<sup>59</sup> But Lady Purple becomes a puppet-turned-avenger. She is definitely like Olympia writ large, a disturbing simulacra who threatens the economy of representation. The prostitutes in *The House of Anonymity* only render clichés explicit. They do not have the destabilising quality of Olympia as described by Cixous. *The House of Anonymity* is an implicit critique of the pornographic aspects of Surrealism which reproduce the monstrous feminine, the flipside of their deification of woman as beautiful goddess. As Carter says in "The Alchemy of the World", despite her attraction to "Surrealism's undercurrent of joy, of delight"<sup>60</sup> which she sees as springing from a faith in humankind's ability to reinvent itself, it was a misogynistic movement that, like other avant-garde movements, did not allow women liberty. This is why she left it behind.

In *Nights at the Circus*<sup>61</sup> Carter draws on the power of imagination and desire embraced by the Surrealists, as she presents us with a dream made flesh in the service of sexual difference and feminine eros (Fevvers). Fevvers is a means of fantasising and seeing otherwise. But in *Hoffman* the Surrealist premise, that subjective states powered by desire can affect the physical world, is consistently linked to what Sears calls a "pornographic logic",<sup>62</sup> which is in turn linked to the male gaze. Like Freud, the specularising philosopher who is master of his insight (as his essay "The 'Uncanny'" demonstrates) the Surrealists' art and philosophy repeats "the blind spot of a dream of symmetry". In the last chapter I explained the way in which Ghislaine's scar undermined the male gaze. Later, I will show

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<sup>59</sup> Angela Carter, "The Loves of Lady Purple," *Fireworks* (London: Virago, 1988).

<sup>60</sup> Angela Carter, "The Alchemy of the World," *Expletives Deleted* (London: Vintage, 1992) 267-73: 67.

<sup>61</sup> Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus* (London: Vintage, 1984).

<sup>62</sup> Sears 21.



how the peepshows go some way towards deconstructing the myth of the womb/tomb and desire for union with the Mother which underlies pornographic representations, a myth dealt with more extensively in The Passion of New Eve.

Generally speaking, however, The Infernal Desire Machines is far less speculative than The Passion of New Eve. Like Ghislaine, though, Albertina is teasingly elusive and hybrid, similarly flickering in and out of the text's pages, haunting Desiderio in her refusal to be defined. As Sears says "her perpetual vacillation between genders and identities destabilises the gender opposition upon which Desiderio's masculine authority is based, while at the same time offering the figure of the monstrous-feminine as a potentially liberating position for women to occupy".<sup>63</sup> It is the monstrous-feminine, the contradictory shifting shape of Albertina who/which undermines the masculine I/eye, undercutting the masculine concept of subjectivity that lies behind the Surrealist notion of art as a philosophical adventure. Again, like Ghislaine, Albertina is murdered at the close of the novel. Desiderio stabs her with a knife. Sears tells us that: " Her wound symbolises her castration, and stabilises Desiderio's masculine position, rendering him as a 'whole' and her as a 'hole', a lack; and the challenge and threat of Albertina's monstrosity is eliminated by male (phallic) violence".<sup>64</sup> However, Desiderio is haunted by Albertina for ever after. She is always present in her absence. Again, the text poses the problem of femininity, the contradictory other who/which cannot be eradicated.

Like Desiderio, Evelyn also exemplifies the mutable self or eye/I as it moves through space and time. During Evelyn's stay amidst disintegration he delights in his distance as a stranger in New York and the thought that he is the observer, the anthropologist of this apocalypse, who can pick and choose his experiences (much like Walser in Nights at the Circus, who, at the start of that novel, is confident that he is commander of his own fate). But like Walser, and like Desiderio at various

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<sup>63</sup> Sears 17.

<sup>64</sup> Sears 18.

points in his narrative, Evelyn becomes the observed rather than the observer. His story becomes her story (The Passion of New Eve), and the distance between Evelyn and problematic femininity is erased. It is only retrospectively that Evelyn can write: "there, in the ocean of sand, among the bleached rocks of the untenanted part of the world, I thought I might find that most elusive of all chimeras, myself" (PNE, 38). Ironically, it is only through becoming a woman that he realises that the tangible, unified self is an illusion.

The "plot" of The Passion of New Eve is an inversion of the traditional quest plot in which the picaro searches for answers to the questions of "being" in the world, finding reflections of himself in the environments in which he travels. These are like those "natural" spaces which are constructed by and through his narrative, as the hero in Mulvey's analysis of the classic Hollywood movie commands and creates its action in order to underline his centrality in the universe. However, Eve/lyn turned New Eve is, like Desiderio, faced with obstacles that often appear insurmountable and non-transcendable.

### **The Metamorphic Cityscapes of The Passion of New Eve and The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman**

Like Shadow Dance, and like each of Carter's novels, in fact, The Passion of New Eve is a scarred text in the sense that it is riven with contradictions and the issues raised within it remain unresolved and troubling. As with Shadow Dance, the process of renewal and the release of *jouissance* is frequently short-circuited within the text and thus issues of transgression and utopian dreams are inherently problematised. This is not to say that the book fails to articulate hope for a better future.

If signs no longer correlate with reality then all signification becomes false, or at least epistemological access to the truth becomes unavailable. As Armitage points out, in The Passion of New Eve alongside the decentering of the fully gendered subject "is a parallel decentring of spatial territory where the desert becomes a

place of rebirth and the city becomes a desert of death".<sup>65</sup> In both the city and the desert of The Passion of New Eve the boundaries between the bodily space and its geographical location become indistinct as nature and culture collapse into one another in chaotic confusion. Evelyn's plane carries him across the border of his safe English habitation into the abject site/sight of New York under siege which fills him with a terrible pleasure. But, unlike Morris in Shadow Dance, Evelyn takes a self-conscious delight in such masochism: "Child of a moist, green, gentle island that I was, how could I resist the promise of violence, fear, madness?" (PNE,15). This comment on his native land is obviously heavily loaded with irony, implying not so much a distinction as a connection between the place he leaves and the one he arrives in.<sup>66</sup> As he says later:

Built on a grid like the harmonious cities of the Chinese Empire, planned, like those cities, in strict accord with the dictates of the doctrine of reason, the streets had been designed in clean, abstract lines, discrete blocks, geometric intersections, to avoid just those vile repositories of the past, sewers of history, that poison the lives of European cities. A city of visible reason--that had been the intention. And this city, built to a specification that precluded the notion of the Old Adam, had hence become uniquely vulnerable to that which the streamlined spires conspired to ignore, for the darkness had lain, unacknowledged, within the builders. ( PNE, 16)

The buildings of New York, those solid phallic constructions which represent the zenith of Enlightenment thought and the drive to tame, to conquer and order cannot keep the dark past at bay. That which is repressed comes to haunt and destabilise the constructs built to keep it out and the narrator implies that the making of symbols (here the phallic skyscrapers:"streamlined spires") involves the suppression or sacrifice of something else which will gradually re-emerge and confound such efforts. It is interesting that European history is likened to waste matter, "the sewers of history", and to darkness that reappears once the city begins

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<sup>65</sup>Armitt 164.

<sup>66</sup> In this novel, Eliot's quintessentially English beach (Margate Sands) and the desert of "What the Thunder Said" section of The Waste Land become American desert, whilst the decaying, abject London turns into New York. T.S Eliot, "The Waste Land," The Selected Works of T.S Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1990) 51-64.

to break down: "It was chaos, dissolution, nigredo, night" (PNE, 16), because this process is feminised at other points in the narrative. For instance, Leilah the black prostitute whom Evelyn chases and attempts to conquer has already been described in exactly the same way: "But Baroslav's gold was genuine; later, I gave it to a girl named Leilah, a girl all softly black in colour--nigredo, the stage of darkness, when the material in the vessel has broken down to dead matter. The matter putrefies. Dissolution. Leilah" (PNE,14).

So too, Tristessa, the ethereal filmstar, is linked with disintegration: "Our Lady of Dissolution was presiding over the catastrophe of the city" (PNE,15). In this sense European history, the darkness that lies unacknowledged within the builders, only to exceed its containment at a later date, is gendered--it is coded as feminine. The repressed history that erupts in the city is implied as her story but her story is incomplete, elliptical, nonsensical and painful. It is connected with the death-in-life which the ordered city kept at bay by presenting an illusion of perfectability and wholeness.<sup>67</sup>

In the context of Evelyn's transformation later in The Passion of New Eve, it is ironic that the solid, linear masculine form of the city in this novel is under erosion or attack from women terrorists. Like so many of Carter's "beginnings" the opening of The Passion of New Eve is self-consciously proleptic. Thus, the transformation of the city foreshadows Evelyn's own metamorphosis, and it is no surprise that Armitt makes a connection between the city and the women in the novel:

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<sup>67</sup> The darkness reemerging can also be read as the return or re-presence of what Toni Morrison describes as the absent black body which shapes American cultural identity. Indeed, this body is crucial to white Americans' concept of freedom, "The American Dream". As she says, nothing highlights freedom like slavery; American freedom could even be said to have been created in relation to the slavery of the Afro-American. Like Evelyn, Morrison describes the way in which the white settlers were haunted by fears brought with them from the old world, fears which they projected onto the African American population: "What rose up out of collective needs to allay internal fears and to rationalise external exploitation was an American-African--a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm and desire that is uniquely American". Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (New York: Picador, 1994).

in true Bakhtinian tradition, in The Passion of New Eve we read that 'by the time the winter was over [Zero and his wives] believed the cities would have all broken open like boils' (PNE 98). Living off and as rubbish, their bodies have become the city displaced. That Evelyn also perceives Leilah to be a gift from the city (PNE,36) implies that women are of the same essence.<sup>68</sup>

Armitt goes on to note that this particular association between the body of woman and the city reverses the usual connection between the phallic erections of urban architecture and its ability to intimidate the women who dwell beneath such structures. In addition to this, the demise of these buildings produces a kind of castrated cityscape which is reflective of the women terrorists' revenge on masculine constructions, just as Mother will take "mythical" revenge on Evelyn.

The Women who terrorise New York have, as their insignia, a broken phallus and the vagina dentata, and the sexual/textual landscapes in the novel stage an elaborate "feminist" revenge drama in which the Law of the Father and the reign of the phallus are in the process of being put to death. But, as Armitt points out, Carter invokes the Bakhtinian grotesque and dark carnival in her description of New York, which is far from rejuvenating and celebratory: "Carter returns to the image of the grotesque, restructuring the urban jungle as mounds of rotting flesh".<sup>69</sup> The body of the transformed city could, in relation to this observation, be read as the mythologically castrated, wounded female form, which in itself is also decaying, mutating. The demise of one mythical set-up, the orderly structured masculine cityscape, reveals/produces its horrifying inverse, the excessive underside which is associated with femininity in the cultural imagination--all that is irrational, dark and chaotic and in a state of permanent flux. Elisabeth Bronfen's observation that: "Femininity is culturally constructed as a figure of contradiction, and positioned as the symptom at which culture's repression of death emerges",<sup>70</sup> aptly describes the feminine city space of this novel. As Brian

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<sup>68</sup> Armitt 164.

<sup>69</sup> Armitt 164.

<sup>70</sup> Bronfen 209.

McHale says of what he terms the postmodern fantastic generally, Carter's strategy, "can be seen as a sort of jiu jitsu that uses representation itself to overthrow representation".<sup>71</sup>

In revealing the conjunction of femininity, blackness and death, does Carter run the risk of complying/identifying with these images? In a way, yes, but this rhetorical performance also works to reveal the effacement of the black, female body such representations enact. Keenan points out that the "equation of a black, female body with chaos, decay and dissolution and death is risky but deliberate on Carter's part. It serves to underscore the savage coupling of sexism and racism that so readily exists within the 'romantic' imaginings of patriarchy".<sup>72</sup> I agree with this but believe it does more than simply underscore discourses of the excessive other by rendering them explicit. The description of the mutable city in turn exposes other meanings.

In Over Her Dead Body Bronfen explains that femininity and death are the major threats to stability and order which, at times, create ambivalence, disruption or duplicity within supposedly seamless systems. By eradicating death and the feminine, stability and order can be reinforced once more and the threat they pose is recuperated through representation in which absence is staged as a form of presence or return which nullifies the threat of real death, sexual insufficiency and the fragmented or split self. However, Bronfen writes, the "re" of recuperation or return can only suggest change, whilst it creates the illusion that something lost has been regained once more:

Instead the regained order encompasses a shift; that is to say it never again/no longer is entirely devoid of traces of difference. The recuperation is imperfect, the regained stability not safe, the urge for order inhabited by a fascination with disruption and split, and certainty emerging over and out of uncertainty.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Brian McHale, Postmodernist Fiction (New York, London: Methuen, 1987) 75.

<sup>72</sup> Keenan 36.

<sup>73</sup> Bronfen Introduction (xii).

In The Passion of New Eve the threat of femininity and death is seemingly ineradicable and recuperation of order simply impossible: disorder becomes "reality". The description of New York exceeds the cultural representations it incorporates and critiques. This is because it reintroduces feminine and black power buried beneath woman's and blacks' social deformation by and through such cultural representations. The "wounded" cityspace, like the scar in Shadow Dance, plays with the idea of the feminine space as locus of non-representation--a crack opening inside the ordered space which actively disrupts systems from within. Unlike the feminised cityspace of Hoffman, however, the description of the changed city in The Passion of New Eve has a powerful resonance because the origin of the transformation cannot be easily traced and it is thus far more perplexing.

The feminine is unfixed, like chaos: "'Chaos,' said the Czech alchemist with grim relish, 'embraces all opposing forms in a state of undifferentiated dissolution'" (PNE, 14). Leilah, the gift from the grotesque, rotting feminised body of the city reflects its decay and dissolution in the description of the "poisoned wound of love between her thighs" (PNE, 25), and displaced vagina: her voluptuous purple mouth, whose lips are painted the same colour as her labia, in which her teeth are rotting due to her penchant for hash candy. When Evelyn kisses her for the first time he notes that: "Her mouth had a strange flavour, like that of mysterious fruits, such as the medlar, that are not fit to eat until they are rotten; her tongue was incandescent" (PNE, 25). Here Evelyn emphasises his position as the consumer and the woman as rotten flesh to be consumed, as if by imbibing her he might put a stop to her transience and difficult in-between state. Each time Evelyn attempts to conquer Leilah and the strangely disruptive yet inviolable space she represents to him, it seems he erases the fear which tantalises him, but this always returns so that he must constantly find new and different ways of punishing her. Even when Leilah has nearly died from a backstreet abortion and Evelyn escapes her, she still haunts him. He feels he has been infected by her:

I said to myself: her slow, sweet flesh has suffused my own with its corrupt languor. The sickness of the ghetto and the slow delirious sickness of femininity, its passivity, its narcissism have infected me because of her. She has been doubly degraded, through her race and through her sex; this affliction she has given me is therefore twice as virulent.... (PNE, 37-8).

Again, it is only in retrospect, through his experience of femininity, that Evelyn can understand these feelings towards Leilah as projections of his own fear of otherness. So too, in relation to race and otherness, as Morrison puts it:

The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. It requires hard work *not* to see this.<sup>74</sup>

The idea that Leilah's tongue is incandescent and the many references to Leilah's fiery nature and to her passion, her desire to consume as well as to be consumed, actually complicate the picture of Evelyn and Leilah's relationship, in which both play out active and passive roles, or rather, these binaries are dismantled as they oscillate within the text. Rubenstein writes of The Passion of New Eve that: "Femininity/female is equated with passivity, emptiness, abasement, and terrifying vulnerability or with voracious, engulfing 'suction'; masculinity/male is characterised by sadism and sexual violence...".<sup>75</sup> I wouldn't argue with this necessarily, as, on the surface, it appears to be true. But I would add that there is a subtle subversion of these equations going on throughout the text for, as with Shadow Dance, sadism and masochism are at times confusingly intermeshed. Pain and pleasure and power and submission are shown to be similarly inextricable in this novel and possible in both men and women. Margaret Atwood explains this in relation to The Bloody Chamber stories:

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<sup>74</sup> Morrison 14.

<sup>75</sup> Rubenstein 116.



the nature of men is not fixed by Carter as inevitably predatory, with females as their natural prey. Lambhood and tigerishness may be found in either gender, and in the same individual at different times. In this respect, Carter's arrangements are much more subject to mutability than are de Sade's.<sup>76</sup>

This insight into the complexity of human behaviour is clearly visible throughout her fiction, from the very beginning of her writing career.

In The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (henceforth Hoffman) there is a similar metamorphosis of a cityscape to that in The Passion of New Eve. Hoffman, like The Passion of New Eve, is a self-reflexive work combining aspects of science fiction and pornography, these being genres which have always asked "profoundly ontological questions by radically deforming the self". In Hoffman, the acrobats of desire actually take themselves apart and juggle with their different body parts as if to illustrate the fragmentary self, and both novels adapt science fiction's motifs of temporal and spatial displacement in order to project their future dystopian worlds.

Hoffman is a novel concerned with the liberation of the unconscious and desire, and the tension between rationalism and madness in Carter's novels emerges more explicitly here than ever before. As McHale points out in relation to what he terms the "Manichaeic" allegory of Hoffman, "the Apollonian vs. Dionysian struggle has specifically ontological overtones: the Apollonian authority figure, the Minister of Determination, is a relentless empiricist bent on preserving the integrity of reality against Doctor Hoffman, Dionysian agent of fantasy and pleasure".<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Atwood, "Running with the Tigers," in Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter, ed. Lorna Sage. 122.

<sup>77</sup> McHale 143. In gender terms, this struggle between desire and rationalism is linked to an unstable dialogue between subversive carnivalesque elements which at times appear to repeat (and thus appear to be collusive with) pornographic representations of women (this is the Sadeian voice according to Carter in The Sadeian Woman) and, on the other hand, a feminist anxiety to speak in the privileged voice of political concern.

A transformation initiated by Doctor Hoffman turns the orderly, stable city of the Minister of Determination, whose history is sedimented in layers, upside-down:

Consider the nature of a city. It is a vast repository of time, the discarded times of all the men and women who have lived, worked, dreamed and died in the streets which grow like a wilfully organic thing, unfurl like the petals of a mired rose and yet lack evanescence so entirely that they preserve the past in haphazard layers, so this alley is old while the avenue that runs beside it is newly built but nevertheless has been built over the deep-down dead in the ground relics of the older, perhaps the original, huddle of alleys which germinated the entire quarter. Dr. Hoffman's gigantic generators sent out a series of seismic vibrations which made great cracks in the hitherto immutable surface of the time and space equation we had informally formulated in order to realise our city.... (DH, 17).

His campaign results in the surfacing of desires that were once latent, so that the inhabitants are plunged into a fearful world of the imagination where violent excess reigns supreme. Images/signs mutate incessantly in metonymic displacements of one another. In this city the boundaries between the world of consciousness and sleep and of the dead and the living dissolve so that the inhabitants find that they are constantly rubbing shoulders with ghosts and revenants. Buildings and birds, inanimate and animate objects grow to giant size, just as they do in fairy tales: "Fanged sparrows plucked out the eyes of little children. Snarling flocks of starlings swooped down upon some starving wretch picking over a mess of dreams and refuse in the gutter and tore what remained of his flesh off his bones" (DH, 19-20). Here we have elements of the grotesque carnival that Armitage detects in Carter's description of New York in The Passion of New Eve.

It is interesting that the solid sediments which somehow order the city's rich history, crack open. These cracks from which "nobody knew what would come next" (DH,17), are reminiscent of the originary symbol, the scar, in Shadow Dance which throws the real into question. Indeed, the changes in the city make the inhabitants feel like Morris when he contemplates Ghislaine's scar: "we...felt

the vertigo of those teetering on the edge of a magic precipice" (DH, 21). Thresholds appear and other worlds are entered as the tangible city disappears; replaced by intangible and ephemeral and ever-changing metamorphic worlds.

In contrast to the description of the pre-revolutionary city in The Passion of New Eve, whose masculine character is merely intimated, Carter makes it abundantly clear in Hoffman that the city which is suddenly swamped with dreamlike phenomena is masculine:

Some cities are women and must be loved; others are men and can only be admired or bargained with and my city settled serge-clad buttocks as vulgar ease as if in a leather armchair. His pockets were stuffed with money and his belly with rich food. Historically, he had taken a circuitous path to arrive at such a smug, impenetrable, bourgeois affluence; he started life as a slaver, a pimp, a gun-runner, a murderer and a pirate, a rakish villain, the exiled scum of Europe-and look at him lording it! The city was built on a tidal river and the slums and the area around the docks still pullulated with blacks, browns and Orientals who lived in a picturesque squalor the city fathers in their veranda'd suburbs contrived to ignore. (DH,16)

This city is the capitalist centre of Desiderio's homeland which sounds much like a South American country, shaped by imperialist colonisation, that has pushed the indigenous inhabitants from the centre to the margins. Simultaneously, it calls to mind the cities of Italo Calvino's Imaginary Cities with their fictional histories and geographies.<sup>78</sup> The irony here is that the non-whites are not ignored--they remain a constant threat to the precarious identity of the white, masculine city, as Leilah remains a threat to Evelyn. As Desiderio goes on to note, although it is prosperous, the city remains nervous. The threat of the excluded/marginalised other in white, male heterosexual identity, which is mirrored in the identity of capitalist cities and nation states, is constantly reiterated and parodied in Carter's novels. The city could represent the Symbolic Order--a linguistic/cultural system that is predicated on the Law of the Father and is, like the pre-revolutionary city of

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<sup>78</sup> Italo Calvino, Imaginary Cities, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974).

New York in The Passion of New Eve, a place which attempts to banish all difference from itself.

Hoffman's guerrillas which invade and insidiously change the shape of the city are described as having slithered through cracks in mirrors,<sup>79</sup> so that Carter appears to be using the mirror as a boundary between different worlds. Jackson has written that the mirror in fantastic texts functions as a metaphor for the possibilities of re-entrance to the imaginary realm. The imaginary is defined by Lacan as the realm in which the mother and child exist in union with one another, in which there is no distinction as yet between subject and object. This describes an ego-less state and Jackson has described the desire of fantastic texts as a drive to reach beyond or behind the mirror and to rupture the process of ego formation which takes place during the mirror stage: "Dualism and dismemberment are symptoms of this desire for the imaginary".<sup>80</sup> In Hoffman this process is reversed, as what might be termed the Imaginary Realm is described as actively invading the Symbolic Realm, irrupting within it and disrupting the unities of space and time.

When Desiderio witnesses the peepshow, the link between masculinity and phallogocentricity becomes apparent. Exhibit six of the peepshow is entitled "The Key To The City" and is a candle in the shape of "a penis of excessive size, with scrotum attached, in a state of pronounced tumescence" (DH, 46). After describing the way it tips forward accusingly, Desiderio tells the reader "I was struck with the notion that this was supposed to represent the minister's penis" (DH, 46). Determination, logocentricism and the city are associated with the phallus and there is the suggestion that the space and time that are transformed by Hoffman are inherently phallogocentric. The invasive imaginary at this point could be read as playing a feminising role within the city. If we refer to Jardine's thesis

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<sup>79</sup> Note how the idea of the crack, first used in relation to the cracks in the city's foundations, is repeated in this image.

<sup>80</sup> Jackson 90.

invoked in the previous chapter, the new spaces that open up with the demise of the ordered cityspace of the Minister of Determination could again be read as subversively mutable and ambiguous, but in this novel the new worlds/spaces visited by Desiderio simply repeat inequalities of the world he knows, rather than transforming things beyond recognition and thus throwing phallogentrism/the Law of the Father into question. Jordan reads the Doctor's transformation of the city as a feminisation of sorts, but she stresses the ultimate fraternity between the Minister and the Doctor who are both totalitarian: "Hoffman, the father of fantasy, feminizes the city, makes it beautiful; but in fact he and the Minister are brothers really. Their war makes the world we live in".<sup>81</sup>

Like Evelyn, who observes the chaos of New York from a distance, Desiderio believes that he manages to survive the transformations wrought by the Doctor because of his sardonic disposition and detachment, but in his opening descriptions of the changing city he charts the demise of many of its inhabitants who cannot cope with the fluctuating phantasmagoria. The "new" city is a frightening and dangerous place in which to live, because the death drive is wholly unleashed:

the cumulative psychological effect of all these distortions, combined with the dislocation of every day life and the hardships and privations we began to suffer, created a deep-seated anxiety and a sense of profound melancholy. It seemed each one of us was trapped in some downward-drooping convoluted spiral of unreality from which we could never escape. Many committed suicide. (DH, 20)

The city imprisons those who dwell in it more absolutely than it did previously. In releasing the cultural unconscious as it were, Doctor Hoffman initiates an escalation of violence that is a magnification of that which resided unseen in the Minister of Determination's city and Carter ultimately shows Dr. Hoffman's world to be as restrictive as the one he challenges. Punter writes of the worlds of desire and of the machine in the novel as inextricably entangled with the world of the

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<sup>81</sup> Jordan, "Enthralment" 32.

infernal, "for all these scenarios are, seen from one point of view, visions of hell in that they proffer a determinist bondage from which there is no escape".<sup>82</sup>

Throughout this picaresque novel, a genre traditionally associated with the freedom to explore and the exploration of freedom, Carter employs Gothic images of containment: the mansion in which Mary Anne resides, the boathouse of the River people, the caravan of the acrobats of desire, the Sadeian House of Anonymity, the home of the centaurs and the Kafkaesque castle of Doctor Hoffman; all frame in miniature the power relations which continue to govern and regulate sexuality, so that in this respect nothing really changes.<sup>83</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman believes that the novel demonstrates, "that even the most revolutionary technological advances do not change the relations between women and men",<sup>84</sup> drawing attention to the sexual politics of inequality that characterises every single society Desiderio encounters.

Elaine Jordan astutely observes that Carter's:

makers and maintainers of myth are aligned with her scientists--Donally and Uncle Philip, and Mother in The Passion of New Eve, and Mme. Durand in The Sadeian Woman, are akin in their will to experiment with people and their consciousness, to transform and dominate. It is in the light of such closed systems that Angela Carter's insistence on the dialectical openness of her fictions has to be understood....<sup>85</sup>

Doctor Hoffman is initially described as a poet whose imagery comes from the borderline between the thinkable and the unthinkable, but he is gradually revealed to have the will to experiment and dominate that is characteristic of the scientist he opposes. His transformation has a deadly systematic quality about it. The extent to which the Minister of Determination's city is radically feminised, in the

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<sup>82</sup> Punter, "Essential Imaginings: Angela Carter and Russell Hoban," in The British Novel Since the 1960's, ed. James Acheson (New York: St. Martin's P, 1991) 142-58: 147.

<sup>83</sup> Lorna Sage has also drawn attention to the "static pull" exerted by the images in Carter's picaresque novels, such as the glass palace in The Passion of New Eve. Sage, "A Savage Sideshow," New Review 39 (1977) 51-57: 56.

<sup>84</sup> Suleiman 113.

<sup>85</sup> Jordan, "Enthralment" 35.

sense that feminisation is a process of opening up as discussed in the last chapter (and which aptly describes Carter's textual strategy), is thus questionable, for the law upon which the Doctor's universe is based is no less phallic than the one he believes he is destroying. As Punter says: "Sexual energy is the key to the manifestation of desire; but to subdue this perpetual explosion to the logistics of orgasm and climax is to submit ourselves to a teleology which merely demonstrates our obsessional inability to escape the family which gave us birth".<sup>86</sup> Suleiman points out that, "...despite the son's heroisation, the father wins. It doesn't matter which Father, the Minister or Doctor Hoffman, for they both want to lay down the law-and even if it is not the same law, women's place remains identical in both".<sup>87</sup>

The final image of confinement in the novel, the cages in Hoffman's laboratory, utilise the Gothic motif of enclosure in a contemporary context. Indeed, these cages filled with copulating couples going through repetitious sexual motions in a static fashion are reminiscent of the sort of masculine libidinal economy described by Cixous. Perhaps this is why the scenarios that are produced/generated by such rigorous and restrictive means are swamped with deathliness, for this type of economy is characterised by the desire for preservation and inevitably comes into contact with that it seeks to deny: death. These cages, Doctor Hoffman's desiring machines, are the equivalent of the rooms within rooms within houses that one finds in Gothic texts, The Bloody Chamber, for example,<sup>88</sup> and link the private, confining space with the public sphere, where science and technology (inherently linked to surveillance and specularisation) increasingly dominate and determine the way in which people live. Unlike Deleuze and Guattari's desiring machines, these cage-machines short-circuit desire

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<sup>86</sup> Punter, "Supersessions" 210.

<sup>87</sup> Suleiman 115.

<sup>88</sup> See Lucie Armitt for an interesting discussion of this motif in The Bloody Chamber, "The Fragile Frames of 'The Bloody Chamber'," The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London: Longman, 1997) 88-98.

and the fluids/bodily excesses are not allowed to flow freely; they are collected in trays and utilised in the Doctor's system.<sup>89</sup>

In releasing the collective dreams of a nation the Doctor could perhaps be said to unveil the grotesqueries of a system that is based upon the exploitation and maintenance of inequalities. This novel is exemplary of Moers's definition of the female gothic, which I discuss in the next chapter, where the unseen becomes visible and more hideous for being revealed.<sup>90</sup> Suleiman highlights the fact that women are in a horrifyingly subordinate position in most of the societies that Desiderio visits:

In the African tribe, women are raised to be soulless soldiers by having all feeling, including maternal feeling, literally excised out of them. Among centaurs, women do all the work while the men pray--and women are 'tattooed all over, even in their faces, in order to cause them more suffering, for (the Centaurs) believed women were born only to suffer' (p.172).<sup>91</sup>

What Carter seems to suggest is that people are simply contained in different ways within different cultures. As Carter tells Sage, "sexual conflict is what-makes-the-world-go round, is what produces the tensions that any society needs to continue forward".<sup>92</sup> This is an ambiguous statement, at once inferring that the violence of traditional sexual attitudes is inescapable whilst simultaneously suggesting that a different state of affairs might one day be reached. And this is typical of Carter whose view of desire and power is closer to that of Foucault's in The History of Sexuality than to Marcuse's in Eros and Civilisation,<sup>93</sup> although it appears from the preface to the 1962 edition of this book (a book whose ideas

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<sup>89</sup> See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Robert Hurley, (Minneapolis: U. of Minneapolis P, 1983).

<sup>90</sup> Ellen Moers, Literary Women (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976).

<sup>91</sup> Suleiman 113.

<sup>92</sup> Cited by Sage, "The Savage Sideshow" 57.

<sup>93</sup> Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Vol 1, intro. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) and Herbert Marcuse Eros and Civilisation, with a new preface by the author (New York: Vintage, 1992).



were soon to be adopted by radical groups in the sixties) that Marcuse was moving towards a more complex notion of desire and power. Foucault and Carter differ from the Marcuse of Eros and Civilisation in their acknowledgement of sex as a strategy of power and knowledge, a discourse that is reflexively constituted, rather than something existing totally outside of language and culture that will break in and disrupt and radically transform it in one easy swoop.<sup>94</sup>

In her discussion of the relevance of the "Japanese experience" to Hoffman, Suleiman invokes Guy Debord's work La Societie du Spectacle.<sup>95</sup> Debord views the proliferation of images in Japan as indicative of a society poised on the brink of a consumer boom which will mark the last stage in world capitalism. According to Suleiman there is no question that the society of the spectacle, for Debord, is the result of technology gone bad and that, "The reign of images technology makes possible is linked to the increasingly abstract relation of people to each other and to their environment".<sup>96</sup>

Marcuse, according to Suleiman, became increasingly despondent about the way in which liberationist philosophies (which emphasised the liberating potential of fantasy and desire) were appropriated by capitalist technology. Marcuse, like Wilhelm Reich and the Surrealists before him, had hoped that the Pleasure principle would triumph over the Reality principle so that even work would become a form of play. Later, the man who was once so hopeful about the power of eros and the imagination in this respect, came to despair at the way in which desire was speedily turned back upon itself and incorporated, literally and metaphorically, into the capitalist machinery, resulting in what he termed "repressive desublimation". This was the antithesis of the "non-repressive" desublimation he had hypothesised in Eros and Civilisation which was about the possible release of the erotic impulse into all areas of life, decreasing aggression

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<sup>94</sup> Suleiman 113.

<sup>95</sup> Guy Debord, La Societie du Spectacle (Paris: Champ Libre, 1971).

<sup>96</sup> Suleiman 110.

and generating creativity in the process. "Repressive sublimation" is described as the inverse of this, a process in which play--or even love--became work.

By 1961, in his preface to that year's edition of Eros and Civilisation Marcuse was writing about the ways in which social forms of control had been fortified since the first publication of the book in 1955. Suleiman picks up on the starkness of his conclusion to this preface which marks the collapse of hopes he once held for a brighter future, for the technologies that were to have made non-repressive sublimation possible by releasing human beings from alienated labour, were being used to further enslave them. Suleiman regards Carter's Hoffman as a text which negotiates the markedly different views on the imagination and the image:

"Carter's novel stages, in a wonderfully inventive way, the question I ask more abstractedly in the title of this essay: Is there a future for the totally free imagination espoused by Surrealism.... in a society ruled by images?"<sup>97</sup>

Carter's scepticism towards the liberation of the body and the emergence of some sort of true, knowable and "wholesome" sexuality runs throughout her early work but was heightened by her trip to Japan. The New Society articles on Japan reveal a fascination with socio-cultural differences, especially the treatment of sex and the organisation of desire within the social body, but they never suggest Japan is a less restrictive culture for all its imaginative possibility and celebrate it in the utopian tones that, say, Roland Barthes does.<sup>98</sup> Carter is very aware that Japan is liberating on an individual level but not, perhaps, on any other. She seems aware that the extent of the freedom she experiences is completely linked to the restrictions which Judeo-Christian culture had wrought within her.<sup>99</sup>

Her increased awareness of different discourses of desire led Carter to a critique in Hoffman of the Western *scientia sexualis*, or the discourses of

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<sup>97</sup> Suleiman 100.

<sup>98</sup> Collected in Angela Carter, Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings (London: Virago, 1982) in a section titled "Oriental Romances--Japan".

<sup>99</sup> See Suleiman.

humanism. Despite her constant contrasting of, and marvelling at, the vastly different attitudes towards sex that prevaricate in the East and the West in her journalistic articles, Carter's novel points to a continuum; that is, the representation of women in both systems as objects of desire and the absence of women as desiring subjects. Linda Williams, in her study of hardcore pornography, draws attention to this common blind spot in ancient, Eastern constructions of erotic art and in the Western construction of knowledge pleasure; a blind spot that Foucault fails to pick up on. She explains that although "sex" differs radically in the various cultures that make up the globe, the pleasure of women is usually alien to most systems. She draws a comparison between the East and the West: in the East a detailed knowledge of women's pleasure was not sought out whilst in the West woman's difference is incessantly examined or probed; this is precisely the basis of the pornographic film:

My point, however, is simply to note that, for women, one constant of the history of sexuality has been a failure to imagine their pleasures outside a dominant male economy. This is to suggest that the disciplinary practices Foucault describes so well have operated more powerfully on the bodies of women than of on those of men; indeed, that even so radical a questioner of the values of humanism and of historical discontinuity can succumb to the phallogentric norms that are at the root of all humanist thought.<sup>100</sup>

Throughout Hoffman Carter makes connections between the world the doctor is projecting via his machinery and the world of film, and it is interesting that the unities of space and time are altered by the Doctor as they are in films. Here, Carter is perhaps commenting on the fact that postmodern culture hovers between "reality" and cinematic fictions, an idea which, as we have seen, she takes to greater lengths in The Passion of New Eve. Brian McHale says that cinematic discourse in some contemporary novels could be read "as the sign of a narrative level interposed between the text and the real".<sup>101</sup> This confusion between what

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<sup>100</sup> Linda Williams, Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1989) 4.

<sup>101</sup> McHale 129.

McHale terms ontological levels is also present in Hoffman, a novel which McHale examines but without picking up on the filmic references, for it certainly seems as if Carter is making a connection here between fantastic texts and the cinema as projections of the unconscious, and of both as attempts to understand the nature of desire.

In the chapter "The City Under Siege", Desiderio likens his experience in the fluctuating city to watching a film and not long after this we learn that the Doctor's friend (and great influence) Mendoza, once invented a time-machine which involved watching newsreels and early silent comedies:

These films had, as it were, slots in them in which the members of the audience could insert themselves and so become part of the shadow show they witnessed. I spoke with a man who, as a child, had been in this fashion an eye-witness of the assassination at Sarajevo. He said it had been raining heavily at the time and everybody moved with the spasmodic jerkiness of clockwork figures. (DH, 27)

Here the word "members", with its phallic overtones, links cinematography to the probing urge that Williams mentions regarding *scientia sexualis*, and in reference to Foucault and his theories regarding discourses of sexuality, film can be taken as the zenith of the Western preoccupation with the desire to know the truth about sex, the ultimate surveillance device as well as what Williams terms a "transfer point" of knowledge, power and pleasure. As she points out in Hardcore, "Discourses about sexuality elaborated in the modern age reach a crescendo in what film historian Jean-Louis Comolli has called 'machines of the visible'".<sup>102</sup>

Cinema wants to yield up the "secrets" of the unconscious, the mystery of sex that culture itself has created, by honing in on bodies and their pleasures (according to Williams, hardcore pornographic films are the "ultimate" in this sense as they focus on bodies and sexual organs to the exclusion of everything else). The "desiring machines" of the cinema would hope to penetrate the invisible

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<sup>102</sup> Williams 36.

through the visible, to reflect the unconscious and to express its "power" but this ultimately escapes representation. The Doctor's machines could be read as versions of Comolli's machines of the visible/pornographic films, and the doctor as one compelled to reach the power (secrets) of the unconscious through the bodies of those "acting" for him. So, too, the peepshow promises to bestow sexual knowledge on the "peeper" but, like the Doctor's transformed worlds, they attest to the possibility of closure and unity that lies beneath this Enlightenment compulsion for knowledge and truth.

### **Critiquing Transcendence and Exploring Female Desire**

In a well-known article on The Bloody Chamber Patricia Duncker accuses Carter of writing female desire as simply a response to male desire, but this is a complete misreading, not just of The Bloody Chamber stories, but of Carter's project generally, which works to undermine supposedly seamless phallic systems of power and desire.<sup>103</sup> This often reveals, in the process, a much more interesting open-ended libidinal economy, even if it is often grotesque, painful and in some senses entrapping. Here is a description of Leilah's curious desire, for instance, which supersedes Evelyn's attempts to contain her as an object of curiosity he might one day work out; a puzzle he might solve:

Her sex palpitated under my fingers like a wet, terrified cat yet she was voracious, insatiable, though coldly so, as if driven by a drier, more cerebral need than a sexual one, as if forced to the act again and again by, perhaps, an exacerbated, never-to-be-satisfied curiosity. And, almost, a vindictiveness--yet a vindictiveness directed towards herself, as though, each time she submitted herself, not to me, but to a craving she despised, or else to a loathed but imperiously demanding ritual, as if this, this exorcism by sensuality, was what her sensuality needed to make it real. (PNE, 18)

This extract is interesting because it reverses the traditional association of the male with the mind and spirit and the woman with flesh, presenting Leilah's needs

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<sup>103</sup> See Patricia Duncker, "Re-imagining the Fairy Tales: Angela Carter's Bloody Chambers," Literature and History 10 (1984) 3-14.

as mental rather than physical ones. Her coldness here contrasts with her fieriness touched upon in the narrative at other points and although Evelyn is desperate to enter and colonise Leilah's private space and to stop up the wound to his narcissism that she represents, there is a sense in which he is always denied such closure, for she always manages to escape and thus to exceed his attempts to control and contain her. The nature of Leilah's desire which, it would seem, has nothing to do with Evelyn, mocks the repetitiousness of Evelyn's drive/desire to "fix her" in place through intercourse and forms an animate mobility which is characteristic of the feminine libidinal economy that Cixous speaks of; an economy of excessive exhaustion.

Even so, Leilah's actions are still tinged with despair, and Carter never attempts to gloss over the difficulties female ontology raises in women's lived experience and the problems which fictions of femininity pose for women on a daily basis, and this passage brilliantly explores the drive for the elusive "something else" which characterises a specifically female experience of the world. Although Leilah, like Ghislaine, is described as in some way physically mutilated, in the episode in which she attempts intercourse with Evelyn at night, it is most definitely not his penis that she wants ultimately. It seems that she quests after something unnameable/ intangible beyond the physical, although Carter never names this elusive "something", for to do so would be to risk falling back into a religious discourse:

Sometimes, when I was exhausted and she was not, still riven by her carnal curiosity, she would clamber on top of me in the middle of the night, the darkness in the room made flesh, and thrust my limp cock inside herself, twittering away as she did so, like a distracted canary, while I came to life in my sleep. Waking just before she tore the orgasm from me, I would, in my astonishment, remember the myth of the succubus, the devils in female form who come by night to seduce the saints. (PNE, 27)

This particular episode employs yet undercuts Bataille's notions of erotic desire, which Bataille views as a dissolution of the person as *he* exists in the realm of discontinuity and an entering into a primal continuity which links us "with

everything that there is".<sup>104</sup> Bataille, despite his radicalism on some matters, reproduces the reductive binary model of sexuality whereby the male equals the active principle and the female equals the passive one. Furthermore, he continues:

The passive, female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity. But for the male partner the dissolution of the passive partner means one thing only: it is paving the way for a fusion where both are mingled, attaining at length the same degree of dissolution.<sup>105</sup>

Keenan has already drawn attention to Carter's attraction to a history of transgressive writing by male avant-garde writers such as Bataille, which equates dissolution with eroticism. According to Robinson, Carter has an affinity with this tradition because it offers a way out of a restrictive and reactionary victim position feminism and it is:

... less of a defence of Sade than a revolt against a counter-affirmative aspect of feminist discourse prevalent at that time which tended to inscribe women as the passive victims of male aggression, reinforcing old sexual binaries of female virtue/male vice, at the expense of locating women's powers of resistance to their subordination.<sup>106</sup>

Keenan does not fail to note that Carter parodies the dominant sexual ideology underlying Bataille's discourse of the erotic, in which the dissolution of the "passive" female partner works to ensure what she terms "the sovereign selfhood" in man, through the figure of Tristessa. Tristessa, the deathly other, Keenan writes, is the paradigm of femininity as fixed Otherness: "Passivity, absence, transparency: these are the qualities that make her the ideal feminine figure, constituting her essential inhumanity".<sup>107</sup> As we have seen, Leilah is also explicitly defined as dissolution, but in the passage in which she clambers upon Evelyn it is she who is the active partner, not he.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Bataille 15.

<sup>105</sup> Bataille 17.

<sup>106</sup> Keenan 24-5.

<sup>107</sup> Keenan 40.

<sup>108</sup> Keenan is correct in her explanation of Tristessa's position as a passive spectacle within the novel as forming a parody of the equation of femininity, passivity and negativity which is too

Bataille's writing on eroticism is intertextually present in Hoffman also. In a room called the Sphere of Spheres at the heart of the brothel where Albertina and Desiderio embrace, Desiderio experiences a similar feeling to that described by Bataille, but here it appears that Albertina is the active partner in the process: "Her arms clasped my neck and her belly pressed against my nakedness as if striving to transcend the mortal flaw that divided us and so effect a total visceral mingling, binding us for ever" (DH, 136). When their lovemaking is interrupted by the arrival of the Count's doppelgänger, Desiderio clings to Albertina in order to protect her and to try and maintain the mingling experienced in their previous sexual union. However, the transitory nature of joining and transcendence in the sexual act is literally brought home to Desiderio when Albertina melts in his arms. She is likened to a woman of snow: "As I was holding her, she grew less and less. She dissolved. Still weeping, she dissipated into the air" (DH, 137). Carter again takes up this image of the melting woman in a disturbing short tale entitled "The Snow Child" which I mentioned in the last chapter.<sup>109</sup>

Margaret Atwood has explained the snow child's death and melting as relating to the fact that "she is just an idea...which cannot survive actual passion",<sup>110</sup> and Carter appears to be exemplifying such a notion in this scene too. The masculine

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frequently repeated in the work of "radical" writers like Bataille. Leilah, too, is often directly equated with a fixed negativity or Otherness, yet she proves a more complex figure than Tristessa, for her Otherness is usually more disruptive. For instance, Leilah, like the city, is not dissolved but dissolving and disorientating and Leilah mostly resists Evelyn's assaults upon her body and launches assaults on his. Leilah's "carnal curiosity" (PNE, 27) is experienced as a devilish transgression by Evelyn. He can only understand it in a framework in which a woman's desire is viewed as sinful and monstrous and again, as is the case with the frequent episodes where Morris encounters Ghislaine in Shadow Dance, the passage simultaneously illustrates the way in which mythical images of women structure men's reactions towards and experiences of/with women. Leilah's curiosity is punished in the same way Eve's is, for Evelyn subsequently ties her to the bed for frightening him. Like Morris, Evelyn fears incorporation by Leilah but, unlike Morris, he is aware that fear and desire are inseparable and his retrospective narrative of events enables him to exert control over them: "I felt all the ghastly attraction of the fall. Like a man upon a precipice, irresistibly lured by gravity, I succumbed at once" (PNE, 25). Such narrative control is a sham, or at least an illusion, however, for the reader learns that his fall comes after this event in a series of events in which, like Eve in the book of Genesis, his free will is removed.

<sup>109</sup> Carter, "The Snow Child," The Bloody Chamber (London: Vintage, 1996).

<sup>110</sup> Margaret Atwood, "Running With the Tigers," in Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter (London: Virago, 1994) 128.



desire for transcendence through sexual congress is taken up once more in Nights at The Circus, when Christian Rosencreutz attempts to have sex with Fevvers so that he might gain immortality. But Fevvers will not let herself be reduced to an idea and eventually manages to escape his clutches and literally fly away.

Although it is Albertina who draws Desiderio to her in the Sphere of Spheres, it is he who narrates the event, using the language of transcendence in which the woman must reflect back to the man his desire for himself, therefore erasing sexual difference and reducing polymorphous desire to sameness. The failure to acknowledge that a woman's desire might be different and that the notion of unity through intercourse can only be an illusion, does not occur to Desiderio. Here, as in the work of Bataille and the metaphysical poets whom Bataille strangely echoes, it is ultimately the male partner who desires the dissolution and mingling of both individuals. Marvell is quoted along with Mozart as one of Desiderio's heroes and much of the Sphere of Spheres passage contains echoes of "To His Coy Mistress".<sup>111</sup>

The notion of dissolution of the masculine subject through intercourse is most heavily parodied in the Beulah section of The Passion of New Eve. This is hideously realised in Evelyn's meeting with Mother:

For in this room lies the focus of darkness. She is the destination of all men, the inaccessible silence, the darkness that glides, at the last moment, always out of reach; the door called orgasm slams in his face, closes fast on the nirvana of non-being which is gone as soon as it is glimpsed. She, this darkest one, this fleshly extinction, beyond time, beyond imagination.... (PNE, 58-9)

What is interesting about The Passion of New Eve is that although the narrative appears to be obsessed with finding Mother, there is an inherent repulsion towards the mother built in to the text and an equally strong force propelling the protagonist away from her. This dichotomy informs all of Carter's works which,

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<sup>111</sup> Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," The Complete Works of Andrew Marvell (London: Routledge, 1952) 21-22.

like the protagonists, appear saturated with desire/curiosity over/for origins as they simultaneously realise their impossibility. Only in her later novels, however, does the acknowledgement of the impossibility of origins become a source of textual and sexual power and creativity, although it is hinted at in the ending of The Passion of New Eve.

When Mother proclaims in Beulah: "...Journey backwards to the source" (PNE, 53), she foreshadows the last events in the novel when Eve/lyn travels forwards through a series of caves in order to go backwards in mythological time, an event which mirrors the author's purpose. But, like the (vaginal) eye in the peepshow in the town of S. in Hoffman these caves form a series of Chinese boxes, infinitely receding. This exhibit, a model of eternal regression, shows the curious voyeur/reader that the source of the eye/I can never be reached; it is a microcosmic reflection of the novel's general message and form. The dark/red-purple of the (bloody) vaginal lips of the first exhibit frame a ceaseless changing landscape of the interior, the womb as an endlessly receding vista, where a Sadeian chateau promising no home comforts, but pain and estrangement, can be glimpsed in the far distance. Suleiman speaks of the peepshows as horribly misogynistic, " they are ...unmistakably male voyeuristic fantasies (as Surrealist paintings often are) representing female orifices and body parts and scenes of extreme sexual violence perpetrated on the bodies of women", and they make all viewers into voyeurs.<sup>112</sup> She refers specifically to Marcel Duchamp's *Etant Donn *, a work she feels is echoed in Carter's second peepshow.<sup>113</sup>

But here Suleiman repeats the transcendental /teleological bias of film theorists such as Baudry and Metz (reproduced by Mulvey), where the viewing subject is cast as a sadistic gazer. She also overlooks the subversive, deconstructive aspects of the peepshows, or at least of the first and second peepshows, as well as the possibility of seeing and writing pornography differently. As Elaine Jordan says,

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<sup>112</sup> Suleiman 114.

<sup>113</sup> Suleiman 114. Duchamp's installation is in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

some of Carter's fiction challenges Susan Sontag's premise in Radical Styles of Will, which is that pornography cannot be parodied because pornography itself is parodic.<sup>114</sup> Read in the context of Carter's oeuvre the peepshows of Hoffman cannot be seen to uncritically reproduce the violence of Surrealist images, but to play on the fragmentation of the female body in a parodic fashion, suggesting once again that the lack and fragmentation at the heart of subjectivity is perpetually projected onto the bodies of women. In their simultaneous critique and subversion of patriarchal representations, both Hoffman and The Passion of New Eve continue to utilise the teasing contrariness that marked Shadow Dance.

If the first and second peepshows are, in some ways, like Baudry's cinematic apparatus which assimilates the vision of the spectator and which allows the spectator to regress to the other scene (the Imaginary realm, which is linked with the mother's body) it ultimately shows that this place is impossible, as it does in The Passion of New Eve. The second peepshow foreshadows the theme above, which is expanded in The Passion of New Eve--the idea that the nirvana of non-being associated with the womb/tomb will always be unavailable. The drive behind pornography is the drive for this place, this "truth". It is linked with the myth of woman as mystery, enigma, goddess that Carter attacks in a more straightforward fashion in The Sadeian Woman. In The Passion of New Eve the image of the cracked mirror of Hoffman appears again. It is discovered by New Eve in Mother's cave by the sea at the end of the novel, when Mother has had a breakdown and retired to the shore outside the cave. This cracked mirror shatters into tiny pieces, implying that there is no entry into the imaginary realm and reunion with the mother (at the same time as it gestures optimistically towards something different/other beyond the confines of the Symbolic and the specular economy). Indeed, the earlier Beulah passage emphasised the ghastly reality/literalisation of the myth of reunion with Mother come-true, an incident

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<sup>114</sup> Susan Sontag, "The Pornographic Imagination," Radical Styles of Will (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969) 51.

which bears out Jackson's point that: "They [literary fantasies from Sade onwards] express a desire for the imaginary, for that which has not yet been caught and confined by a Symbolic Order, yet the self-mutilation, cruelty, horror and violence which they have to employ to return to the imaginary suggests its inaccessibility".<sup>115</sup>

In the next chapter I want to examine the way in which The Magic Toyshop teases out the associations Freud makes in his essay "The 'Uncanny'" between uncanny feelings and the body of the woman. Melanie's experience shows that in a phallogocentric society in which the figure of the woman/mother is imbued with the properties of both life and death, the experience of femininity might prove to be an extremely uncanny, dislocating sensation.

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<sup>115</sup> Jackson 91.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE MAGIC TOYSHOP: FEMALE GHOSTS AND/OR THE (M)OTHER SELF

#### **Writing Their Way Out of Patriarchal Enclosures: Women's Fiction and the Domestic Space**

The Magic Toyshop is a fantastic, macabre tale which combines aspects of the Gothic and fairy tale in order to explore issues surrounding female identity and sexuality in patriarchal culture. These genres are employed because they explore the threshold of the "real", calling the conventions of the real and realist fiction into question. The estrangement from the familiar and the known with a subsequent "fall" into a dark and ominous environment is a commonplace of fairy stories and fantastic texts and is a constant in Carter's work.

This estrangement occurs in The Magic Toyshop<sup>1</sup> when Melanie, the adolescent protagonist, dresses up in her mother's wedding gown and ruins it whilst attempting to climb an apple tree in the garden. In true fairytale style her parents are killed in a plane crash that very night, and she and her sister Victoria and her brother Jonathon are sent to live in South London, in their maternal Uncle's toyshop. Thus, like so many of the children in fairy tales, Melanie is orphaned and exiled from familiar surroundings. Melanie compares herself to another famous literary orphan, Jane Eyre: "But with a brother and sister whom she must look after for they had nothing left but her" (MT, 32). Indeed, Jane Eyre echoes throughout The Magic Toyshop and both Melanie and Jane are like Kristeva's stranger/foreigner who lacks a sense of her own

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<sup>1</sup> Angela Carter, The Magic Toyshop (London: Virago, 1993).

proper place or home and is unable to entirely extricate herself from a sense of abjection.<sup>2</sup>

Uncle Philip, puppetmaker and owner of the toyshop, is a wicked fairy tale stepfather figure whilst Aunt Margaret, his young, Irish wife is a thwarted good fairy. In the confined space of the toyshop Melanie is faced with problems generated by desire and the unconscious. In her book Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion Rosemary Jackson has explained the way in which the fantastic text "problematizes consciousness, vision and perception as the self, the 'I', becomes other to itself".<sup>3</sup> Plunged into a dark area from which anything may emerge, Melanie's sense of who she is is radically undermined and she must fight for survival.

The idea that domestic enclosure and marriage are psychical as well as physical traps is explored in this novel. The home, the domestic space which has, throughout fiction, been defined in relation to woman (the private "feminine" enclosure traditionally opposed to the public "masculine" domain), is exposed in Carter's early novels as a trap in which women are bound to conform to male desires and ideas of what she should be, notions that the male deems infallibly right and natural. The toyshop might be read on one level as a metaphor for the sexual subjugation of women in the home and family and the laws unspoken but laid down by Uncle Philip can be read as functions of the Law of the Father. This is a place in which pleasure and self-expression are denied and where all difference is outlawed as the inhabitants must conform to one man's desires and notions of what is right. This amounts to the imposition of a law of the same upon those that surround him. The difference that is suppressed remains latent, however. Later I will explore the "otherness" of the toyshop (its strangeness which produces uncanny effects upon both the reader

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<sup>2</sup> See Julia Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion (London: Methuen and Co., 1981) 51.

and in Melanie) as linked to the repression and containment of the maternal body.

The theme of entrapment addressed in The Magic Toyshop is the subject of an important feminist text, The Madwoman in The Attic, which explores themes and motifs in the fiction of nineteenth-century women writers. The authors, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, note that most of the women whose texts are under discussion in their book experienced imprisonment in men's homes and, figuratively speaking, in their texts as well: "texts from which they could escape only through ingenuity and indirection".<sup>4</sup>

Echoes of Milton's version of the creation myth, which places Eve as second to her husband, abound in The Magic Toyshop.<sup>5</sup> The female protagonist, Melanie, has imbibed the "womanly" ideals of marriage and motherhood, ideals which seem less attractive the nearer she gets to living them out. Her "fall" from a cosy, bourgeois home into the toyshop precipitates changes in her outlook and challenges her romantic imaginings. Like Eve in Paradise Lost, Melanie appears to have little or no control over her choice of partner and, like Jane Eyre, Melanie's dream of existing for another conflicts with her actual experiences of that other when she meets him. Feminist revisions of Paradise Lost are nothing new, as Gilbert and Gubar point out. In addressing the misogyny that informs the creation myth, questioning Eve's place as second-best, as property of Adam and scapegoat for the ills of the world following the fall, Carter is following what these critics take to be a female tradition, a tradition which attempts to grapple with the poem's assertion of masculine origins, and to revise or rewrite these.

Gilbert and Gubar note that women writers' connection to Paradise Lost has become increasingly figurative in the twentieth century, a phenomenon which is partly to do with the strength contemporary women writers find in

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<sup>4</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gilbert, The Madwoman In The Attic (Mass.: Harvard UP, 1979) 83.

<sup>5</sup> John Milton, Paradise Lost (1667), ed. Alaster Fowler (London and NY: Longman, 1990).

being able to draw on the inspirational work of their female predecessors who reworked the poem.<sup>6</sup> Most of the women who choose to reinterpret Paradise Lost eschew realism as the literary mode through which they might effect a reversal of Milton's premises, combining elements of the Gothic and fairy tale in fantastic explorations of what Gilbert and Gubar take to be main preoccupations of the woman writer; that is, the themes of containment and enclosure that women experience as a result of their mythical second place in "God's scheme". Carter clearly follows this tradition.

The Magic Toyshop emphasises the hierarchical organisation of the sexes and the way in which the public masculine world structures the domestic sphere, outlawing woman's speech and autonomy. The wooden figures that Uncle Philip labours over lovingly in his workshop and operates in the puppet shows he forces his "family" to attend, are simulacra who have no will of their own and depend on Uncle Philip to bring them to life.<sup>7</sup> Puppets cannot speak and are completely powerless and this is how Uncle Philip (whose word is law) likes those who surround him to be, especially "his" women.

Aunt Margaret has not spoken since the day she married Uncle Philip, as Finn explains to Melanie: "It is a terrible affliction; it came to her on her wedding day, like a curse. Her silence" (MT, 37). Whether her muteness is voluntary or imposed upon her by her husband is never stated, but when we learn of his penchant for silence the latter suggestion is more probable.<sup>8</sup> Her

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<sup>6</sup> Gilbert and Gubar 220-221.

<sup>7</sup> Lorna Sage, in noting that the plot of The Magic Toyshop makes Finn, as well as Melanie, a puppet, speaks of them as toys who rebel and objects who insist on being subjects. Certainly this is the case, but the rebellion, for Melanie in particular, is shown to be less than straightforward. Lorna Sage, Women in the House of Fiction: Postwar Women Novelists (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1992) 170.

<sup>8</sup> In the film The Piano (dir. Jane Campion, 1995), the main female character, played by Holly Hunter, is similarly mute and the spectator never learns the origins of her silence. The woman's daughter explains that her mother was unable to speak after a shocking accident which killed her husband, but whether this is a child's fantasy, a fiction, or the truth, remains open, suggesting perhaps the interconnection between fantasy and reality--an abiding aspect of Carter's work. The Piano explores many themes that occur repeatedly in Carter's fiction: family romance, the question of origins, the representation of female sexuality as dangerous and excessive, female mutilation and masochism. Perhaps most interesting in relation to the study of The Magic Toyshop is the scene in



role is that of the passive, obedient wife and her subservience is enforced by the gift of the silver choker which restricts her throat. In this house everybody's potential and creative talents are controlled (and thus thwarted) by Melanie's grim relative, who is at once rarely present and omnipresent, like the Old Testament God. When Melanie is commanded by Uncle Philip to play Leda to his puppet-swan in Chapter Six, it is implied that she might as well be a puppet herself for she will have no power as long as she resides in Uncle Philip's house where his rules must be adhered to.

In this scheme woman is deprived of economic, social and political power, for "the patriarchal order is indeed the one that functions as the *organization and monopolization of private property* to the benefit of the head of the family. It is his proper name, the name of the father, that determines ownership for the family, including the wife and children".<sup>9</sup> Although everyone is under Uncle Philip's tutelage there is a marked divide between the sort of work that the men and women perform within the household. Finn, Jonathon, and occasionally Francie, are each allowed to participate in the serious business of toy-making and puppet-making, conceived by Philip as "higher" creative pursuits, whereas the women are relegated to the realms of the kitchen and the shop. The women are bereft of economic power as they are forbidden to handle money or to be any way involved in generating the toyshop's income. For instance, Melanie is only allowed to go out for the purpose of shopping and even then she is not given money to spend:

The isolation of the Flower household on its South suburban hilltop was complete. Melanie left the house, a basket on her arm and a list in her pocket like a French housewife, only to do the shopping. But she

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which women and children of the Puritan community in New Zealand, where the film is set, present a theatrical production of the tale of Bluebeard and his wives, a story which rears its ugly head time and again in Carter's work. The production highlights the embeddedness of the myth of women's wayward sexuality and women's complicity in codes which oppress them.

<sup>9</sup> As claimed by Luce Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine," in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 118-132: 129-130.

was never given any money for the Flowers had credit at all the shops with which they dealt and Uncle Philip paid the bills quarterly, by cheque. (MT, 88)

As Luce Irigaray has said, women are never allowed to go to market alone.<sup>10</sup> This is a rule of the toyshop. The women's lack of economic power within the Flower household ensures that they remain the objects and not the agents of exchange. Later on, when Melanie asks Aunt Margaret for some money with which to buy Mrs. Rundle a Christmas present, Aunt Margaret informs her that Uncle Philip does not trust her with money and that they have credit in the shops because this is her husband's "way". In this sort of situation Melanie must swap her presence for goods. She is in a position external to the laws of exchange, yet she is included in these as nothing more than a commodity. We might say that Melanie is material in a materialist process. When Melanie tells Aunt Margaret that she understands, it seems that she has begun to grasp his means of empowerment: "An ancient female look passed between them; they were poor women pensioners, planets around a male sun" (MT, 140).

It is interesting that women in The Magic Toyshop are always handling fabric and making clothes and exchanging them amongst themselves as this exchange of fabrics between women perhaps emphasises their powerlessness within the wider, public market of exchange in which they are the materials/fabrics to be circulated between men. This is made clear in the ritual of the wedding ceremony, in which the woman is literally "given away" (passed from one man to another), a notion highlighted earlier on in the novel when Melanie dreams of a phantom bridegroom, wrapping herself in net curtains as a gift to be given away (MT, 2).

The idea that the exchange of women between men forms the bedrock of capitalist societies and the family unit is explained frequently in the works of

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<sup>10</sup> Luce Irigaray, "Women on the Market," This Sex Which is Not One, trans. Carolyn Burke with Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).

Irigaray, who interprets it as a sacrificing of daughters, and in turn, mothers. She demonstrates the way in which the silent (silenced) bodies of women form the reproductive basis of society and are circulated and controlled by men. The installment of patriarchy must be seen to be based on matricide, and men thus owe an unpaid debt to women. Irigaray employs the term "mother-matter" to describe the foundation upon which patriarchy is built.<sup>11</sup> In this context women become associated only with their role as reproducer--a feminine identity that is ultimately restrictive and deathly. The sexual economy on which culture is founded denies women pleasure as it recognises only the male desire for transcendence and mastery. Irigaray's work has been instrumental in highlighting the fact that relations between men maintain the social order and that this order/economy in which women are the objects of exchange and men the exchanging subjects, is *hom(m)osexual*.<sup>12</sup> Woman is nameless (as far as Philip is concerned, Melanie is nameless). In contrast to his denial of Melanie and her little sister, Victoria. Uncle Philip initiates Melanie's serious, boat-making brother into a patriarchal fellowship as a kind of surrogate son, who shares his masculine identity and "creative" powers.

In "Women On The Market" Irigaray develops her theories through critical engagement with the work of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose work is a springboard from which she articulates her feminist disquiet. Lévi-Strauss's arguments have a value in that they describe the way in which culture functions yet the assumptions that underpin his description of the way in which endogamous societies become exogamous exemplifies the power that the myth of woman's secondariness exerts over the male imagination.

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<sup>11</sup> Luce Irigaray, "The Bodily Encounter With the Mother," in *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 34-46.

<sup>12</sup> That is to say, there is a presumed identity between those doing the exchanging and a different but equally homogenous one between those who are exchanged.

## Lévi-Strauss: Women as Gifts of Exchange

In The Elementary Structures of Kinship<sup>13</sup> Lévi-Strauss insists that incest is at the heart of culture, perhaps incest *is* culture. He cannot find an explanation for the incest taboo other than that it is a principle for organising and expanding societies and he states that: "There is nothing more dubious than this alleged instinctive repugnance, for although prohibited by law and morals, incest does exist and is no doubt even more frequent by far than a collective conspiracy of silence would lead us to believe".<sup>14</sup> The incest prohibition is a means of "freezing" women within the family so that control of this commodity belongs with the group. Marriage is not a discontinuous process, but is rather the basis for the extension of the group, a ritual of reciprocity in which the woman is but a sign; the "supreme gift amongst gifts".<sup>15</sup> The process of giving and receiving gifts, according to Lévi-Strauss, effects a transition from hostility to alliance and from fear to friendship:

The total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman, where each owes and receives something, but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners between whom the exchange takes place.<sup>16</sup>

In her reading of The Elementary Structures of Kinship Irigaray says women are cast on the side of the excluded. They are the nameless, silent bodies upon which culture depends, yet culture denies them a name. Inscribed within the Symbolic Order of language and culture as objects of exchange/commodities, they are effaced in The-Name-of The Father against

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<sup>13</sup> Lévi Strauss, The Elementary Structures of Kinship, trans. James Harley Bell, Rodney Needham and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston: Beacon P, 1969).

<sup>14</sup> Lévi-Strauss 17.

<sup>15</sup> Lévi-Strauss 65.

<sup>16</sup> Lévi-Strauss 115.

which all commodities acquire their relative value.<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Grosz explains that Irigaray:

deconstructs the Lacanian (and Lévi-Straussian) notion of the Symbolic Order, the order which founds and regulates social exchange. She projects a Marxist theory of commodity production onto Lévi-Strauss' understanding of the patriarchal exchange of women--that is, the axis of class onto that of sex--reviewing the unspoken position of women in kinship and economic relations.<sup>18</sup>

All of Irigaray's work is concerned with challenging phallogocentric assumptions that underlie analyses such as Lévi-Strauss's and with looking for ways in which women might stake out some autonomy and rupture a system which would contain them. The notion of woman's place as second-class citizen allows patriarchy to function smoothly. The place of the second-class citizen, the exchangeable commodity whose fate must be decided for her, is deemed the domestic realm, the home, which is the reproductive unit of patriarchal culture. But what happens when women start to question this/their place? What if they believe their role has been made up for them and that they would rather decide their own fate?

Carter's texts examine this very issue and the problematics that arise when women consciously or unconsciously rebel against their assigned place, revealing the ridiculous fallac(phallus)ies that entrap people whilst simultaneously showing the immense difficulties that individual women experience in overcoming them. In other words, they might be seen to trace out the complex dialectic between being a woman, which involves experiencing the good girl/bad girl split and breaking free from such a stereotype. It is Carter's belief that if femininity is a fiction then there always exists the possibility of creating new and better versions of it. Like Irigaray and other

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<sup>17</sup> Luce Irigaray, "Commodities Among Themselves," This Sex Which is Not One, trans. Carolyn Burke and Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 172.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1985) 146.

feminists, her work constantly addresses problems that such myths or fictions of femininity raise in women's everyday experiences and in the formation of feminine identity.

In Chapter One I examined the myth of the monstrous Medusan woman and explored the way in which this mythical figure is linked to the concept of motherhood and fear of female sexuality which is repressed in order for the phallic law to function smoothly. Shadow Dance plays with these myths, highlighting the way in which they shape lives. The myth of the weak, emotionally unstable woman whose sexuality is dangerous and whose bleeding womb/wound is a mark of her irrationality, and thus her inferiority, is perpetuated through symbols of the monstrous-feminine which equate motherhood with death in the male imagination. Masculine projections of the fear of maternal incorporation and female power result in a proliferation of negative, deathly images of female sexuality which maintain women's marginal status in patriarchal culture. As Verena Andermatt Conley writes: "Masculine narcissism and the male need for recognition relegates woman to death".<sup>19</sup>

As I illustrated in relation to Shadow Dance, however, the tenuous boundaries of categories such as femininity and masculinity are constantly revealed as symbolic constructs which restrict human beings. The desire inherent in Morris's "horrified" gaze may be connected to the moment of separation from and loss of the mother and a desire to return to a state when mother and child were one. This desire is likely to be more pronounced in men because the accession to masculinity necessitates complete separation from the mother and the maternal body and a repression of the "feminine" aspect(s) of themselves. Claire Kahane describes the associations that attend the pre-Oedipal mother, the attachments to whom must be severed in order for the male subject to attain identity:

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<sup>19</sup> Verena Andermatt-Conley, Hélène Cixous (Harvester Wheatsheaf: Herts, 1992) 31.

Experienced originally as part of nature itself before we learn her boundaries, the mother-woman traditionally embodies the mysterious not-me world with its unknown forces, as well as the world of the flesh, the body which is both our habitat and our jailor. And even though an infant gradually becomes conscious of a limited other, the whole realm of nature remains imaginatively linked to that first magical figure who seems to hold the power of life and death.<sup>20</sup>

The Magic Toyshop deals more specifically with a young woman's experience of the (m)other and of maternal loss which is experienced primarily through narcissistic mirror activity.<sup>21</sup> Here motherhood is more specifically linked to the way in which an adolescent girl struggles with the ideas of marriage and maternity that are her cultural inheritance and the novel embodies the complex mixture of desire and guilt that attend the adolescent girl's journey into womanhood. It is through the male's authority he bestows upon himself as not-woman/mother and the privileging of male characteristics that Kahane sees culture warding off what she terms "maternal blackness," or the engulfment of non-separation that defines the pre-Oedipal period. But this is not as simple for women, as:

women share the female body, and its symbolic place in our culture. For women, then, the struggle for a separate identity is not only more tenuous, but is fundamentally ambivalent, an ongoing battle with a mirror-image who is both me and not me. Not only does the girl's gender identification with her mother make it difficult to grasp firmly her separateness, but her mother frequently impedes that process by seeing in her daughter a duplication of herself, and reflecting that confusion. Mother-daughter confusion is thus woven into the subjectivity of each....<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Claire Kahane, "Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity," Centennial Review, vol. 24, (1980) 43-64: 48.

<sup>21</sup> Many critics have commented on the absence of the mother in Carter's texts and some, like Nicole Ward Jouve, feel very troubled about her omission. See Nicole Ward Jouve, "Mother is a Figure of Speech," Flesh and the Mirror, ed., Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994) 136-171. However, on the contrary, I will argue that the mother is always omnipresent in her novels

<sup>22</sup> Kahane 48.

The Magic Toyshop and Heroes and Villains are interesting as they show young women struggling with the constraints of femininity and the difficulty of female independence in a culture in which their identity is based on relationality and not separateness.<sup>23</sup> These texts are disturbing because they bear witness to the fact that there is, as yet, no place in society or language where women can truly be accepted as desiring beings in their own right, illustrating the double-bind by which culture ties them. Marianne in Heroes and Villains is more aware than Melanie of the limitations and difficulties that await her in her accession to womanhood, for she has been brought up in an academic environment in which analytical, rational thought is encouraged. She discusses ideas with her professor father and has certain discourses at her disposal and already realises that the academic world is stultifying. Marianne thirsts for something else and this becomes apparent in a conversation she has with her father about marriage.

Like Melanie, Marianne is ejected from the situation she has known all her life, her safe existence in this community, and marries an outsider named Jewel who belongs to the Barbarian tribe. Both Heroes and Villains and The Magic Toyshop force their adolescent female protagonists into an explicit confrontation with the Other. The name Jewel is significant in this regard. A jewel is something exotic, a treasure, "other". Marianne experiences Jewel's difference/otherness as attractive but frightening; in many ways his otherness is a projection of the stranger within herself. A jewel has a reflective, mirror-like surface and it is through her relationship with him that Marianne faces the

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<sup>23</sup> I am invoking the ideas of Nancy Chodorow here, as explained in Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory (Cambridge: Polity P, 1989), in which she speaks of relationality as being able to recognise another's subjectivity as one recognises one's own, and of a certain permeability of boundaries between self and other. Women are culturally more likely to develop this relationality because, in a society where children are parented primarily by women, they are not encouraged to separate from the mother and other women until a much later age than boys. Chodorow looks upon relationality as distinct from individualism (which she views as a masculinist ontology) and as a more positive, beneficial mode of being than separatism. But Chodorow does go on to examine the suffocating aspect of the mother-daughter relationship in patriarchy and the passing on of sacrifice, suffering and self diminishment from one generation of women to the next, something I shall discuss in more detail later.



otherness within herself (as Morris in Shadow Dance encounters the strangeness within himself). Jewel is like the mirror in which a woman sees the image of herself as the man wants her to be, that is an image of himself, yet at the same time something else beyond this. Indeed, Meaney notes the feminisation of Jewel who, like woman, is homeless, a foreigner:

Jewel, Thomas Stern and Heathcliff are projections of libido, which need not be assigned a sex since only one is thinkable. They are also, however, the inscriptional space for the unconscious, thus fulfilling a function which Irigaray defines as feminine. These demon lover figures thus confound the differentiation between masculine and feminine.<sup>24</sup>

Lorna Sage also speaks of Finn as mirror-like: "Once upon a time male subjectivity lent a shadow of itself to the chosen female; Finn, though, is only another denizen of the mirror...."<sup>25</sup>

The only time Melanie views her reflection after the move to South London is when she sees herself (framed) in Finn's eyes in the Pleasure Gardens, which serves to reassure her of herself after a disorientating kiss, and bears out Jenijoy La Belle's point that a woman's severance from her mirror image can sometimes be more disturbing than over-identification with it, "she stood in his arms and watched herself in his eyes. It was a comfort to see herself as she thought she looked" (MT, 105).<sup>26</sup> This incident highlights the fact that at other points the mirror is Melanie's medium of identity and the way in which the female "I" is so bound up with the male eye, issues we shall discuss later. Again, as with Jewel, Finn is exotic/ other to Melanie, his habits are foreign and alienating. Indeed, like Jewel, he appears to have come from another world, and her ongoing encounter with his strangeness and difference ties in with the theme of origins that subtends the novel.

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<sup>24</sup> Gerardine Meaney, Unlike Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction (New York: Routledge, 1993) 92.

<sup>25</sup> Lorna Sage, Women 170.

<sup>26</sup> Jenijoy La Belle, Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 113.

Marianne's encounter with the foreignness in Jewel is, according to Meaney, an encounter with the outlawed maternal body and thus a search for origins. There are no easy answers offered to the problem of origins however, as the mother's womb is already *unheimlich*: "Not only is homecoming impossible, it is no longer possible to postulate home or origin as the premiss for an 'us' or an exclusion of the other. Nothing is stranger than where we come from".<sup>27</sup> The Magic Toyshop also takes the reader on a journey/quest after origins, which remain frustratingly elusive and intangible as the maternal body. We travel with Melanie, whose move away from the place/home of her mother (ruled over by her authoritarian novelist father who likes to read at mass on Sundays) also takes her towards her, for the journey which is undertaken after Melanie has smashed her mother's mirror is a journey into the unconscious and thus a quest after origins. In narrative and plot terms Melanie appears to move in a straight line, on a linear trajectory, but this is a novel about a foray into another world, into the unknown, and this other place is still the place of her mother in as much as it resembles a womb and contains traces of her.<sup>28</sup> Hence it mystifies rather than placates her. The toyshop is reminiscent of the room Carter speaks of in "The Curious Room", which begins with the words:

" There's a theory, one I find persuasive, that the quest for knowledge is, at bottom, the search for the answer to the question: Where was I before I was born? In the beginning was... what? Perhaps, in the beginning, there was a curious room crammed with wonders; and now the room and all it contains are forbidden you... " <sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Meaney 108.

<sup>28</sup> At the beginning of Chapter two the narrator tells us that Mrs. Rundle, the housekeeper and sometime-surrogate mother to Melanie, Jonathon and Victoria, is disappointed because there are no remains to be buried. What was left of Melanie's parents after their plane crash is imagined to be scattered over the Nevada desert. This is highly ironic in the context of subsequent events, for traces of Melanie's mother abound in the toyshop. She is truly present in her absence and, in many ways, Melanie is the trace of her mother.

<sup>29</sup> Angela Carter, "The Curious Room or Alice in Prague," Old Ghosts and Old World Wonders (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993) 127.

### **"Mirror, Mirror..." : Female Narcissism and Masquerade**

The Magic Toyshop presents an adolescent quite different from Marianne, a girl who takes femininity for granted. Despite this, the way in which she tries out costumes in front of the mirror draws attention to the constructedness of what she deems natural. Femininity is something that has to be acquired or put on. When Melanie looks in the mirror and poses as Cranach's Venus or one of Toulouse Lautrec's models, Carter highlights the way in which art intersects with life, and this intertextual play effectively breaks down the distinction between the two supposedly separate spheres. The imaginary realm and so-called real life are exposed as intersecting dynamically, influencing one another in perpetuity, in a dialectical relationship. Melanie's dressing-up activities are linked with childhood play and her childishness is emphasised through her attachment to her old Edward bear and books, yet her growing preoccupation with her reflection also signals her becoming a woman. The mirror is Melanie's medium of identity and the contemplation of her image a quest for self-knowledge fraught with difficulties and dangers of which she is only vaguely aware. In all her mirror activity there is an ominous inevitability about her domestic role as wife and mother.

After her mother's death Melanie smashes her mirror and this act could be read as breaking the frame which would contain her, symbolising the possibility of a different identity. Yet Carter appears to suggest, like Lizzie in Nights at the Circus, that "it's going to be more complicated than that,"<sup>30</sup> for the accident which results in her firm position as surrogate-mother in the toyshop also carries her further into the realm of what Kahane terms the maternal blackness, an implicit threat of Gothic texts: "Beneath the crumbling

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<sup>30</sup> Carter, Nights at the Circus (London: Vintage, 1994) 285.

shell of paternal authority, lies the maternal blackness, imagined by the gothic writer as a prison, a torture chamber".<sup>31</sup>

At one point Melanie enquires as to whether Mrs. Rundle, the children's nanny, has known many dead people, and we learn that: "Melanie thought of death as a room like a cellar, in which one was locked up and no light at all" (MT, 6). In Carter's fiction motherhood is often likened to a living death for women and later on in the dark, dingy house and toyshop Melanie senses some of the deathly feelings she could only imagine beforehand: "She was in limbo and would be for the rest of her life, if you could call it a life, dragging out its weary length with no more great joys or fearful griefs for her, for her blood was wearing thin" (MT, 76).

In The Madwoman in The Attic, Gilbert and Gubar draw attention to Jane Eyre's preoccupation with the mirror in the red room in which she is locked for misbehaving, and the alien and disturbing reflection of herself in that mirror. This leads them to note that a mirror, too, is often a kind of chamber, "a mysterious enclosure in which images of the self are trapped like 'divers parchments.'" Carter, like many women writers, is fascinated by the relation women have with mirrors. The mirror is a frequent motif in her works, appearing in all of her novels and many short stories. In the opening passages of The Magic Toyshop Melanie's playful activity in her bedroom mirror is markedly different from Jane's confrontation with her distorted image in the mirror of the red room (with which she feels no connection).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Kahane 47.

<sup>32</sup> Gilbert and Gubar 340. Gilbert and Gubar speak of the red room at Gateshead Hall in which Jane is locked and from which she attempts to escape, as a "patriarchal death chamber" (341). All of Jane's subsequent struggles in the novel are "in one way or another, variations on the central, red-room motif of enclosure and escape" (341). The red room clearly has socio-biological connotations being reminiscent of the womb and the colour of blood. Jane is locked here as an adolescent and thus the room might be taken as a symbol for the onset of her menses and the ensuing entrapment in femininity, so closely linked to maternity, which the adolescent female experiences at this sign of her accession to womanhood. The Magic Toyshop explores the split between Melanie's body and self (that is between her "self" and the archetype she is expected to emulate) that tends to occur with the onset of menstruation and adolescence. At this point in The Magic Toyshop Melanie's world, unlike Jane's, is one of bourgeois security that reminds one of the habitat of an Austen heroine in the more traditional female à clef. This is foregrounded in The

Jenijoy La Belle has extensively researched the mirror scenes in women's fiction. She entertains the ideas that the mirror is not only something in which the woman sees herself as the world sees her, as an object, and is thus, as Simone de Beauvoir states, doubled, for, "instead of coinciding exactly with herself, she now begins to exist outside", but is also a tool of self-creation. La Belle speaks of the woman's reflection in the glass as oxymoronic: at once both the self and a radical otherness, "an image privileged with a truth beyond the subjective and at the same time taken to be the very essence of that subjectivity". This idea connects with what Kahane says about the mirror image of the mother, who is simultaneously "both me and not me". Women's identities are more precarious and vulnerable perhaps because, as La Belle notes, they are tied up with notions of their visual presence, structured in part and continued by acts of mirroring. This is in direct contrast to the epistemology of the male: "What women do with mirrors is clearly distinct from and psychically more important than what men do with mirrors in their pursuit of generally utilitarian goals". Unlike women: "Men look at their their faces and their bodies, but what they are is another matter entirely-ultimately, a transcendental concept of self".<sup>33</sup>

The opening of The Magic Toyshop captures the ambiguity of the woman's mirror image as it is explained by Kahane and La Belle. Like most of the female protagonists in Carter's sixties novels, Melanie constructs possible identities out of the art she is absorbed in. She reconstructs herself as the women of whom she reads in erotic literature and that she has viewed in paintings. The mirror is shown here as a tool of self-creation as Melanie plays

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The Magic Toyshop which inscribes and simultaneously parodies the conventions of novels such as Pride and Prejudice and Middlemarch in which spirited, virginal heroines living in bourgeois luxury dream of marriage: "The House was red-brick, with Edwardian gables, standing by itself with an acre or two of its own grounds; it smelled of lavender polish and money. Melanie had grown up with the smell of money and did not recognise the way it permeated the air she breathed" (MT,7).

<sup>33</sup> La Belle 86, 9, 9, 9 respectively.

with her image. However, as we shall see, the contemplation of her reflection has sinister implications, anticipating the struggle that lies ahead as she comes to experience existence outside herself which leads to the sense of disconnection and doubleness outlined by Beauvoir and the possibility of the sort of psychic disturbance Jane Eyre undergoes in the red room.

Although she imagines herself as Toulouse Lautrec's *objet d'art*, Carter's treatment of Melanie's fantasy as nude model is tongue-in-cheek, for Melanie is not a passive muse (Carter has spoken disparagingly of the muse elsewhere<sup>34</sup>) and imagines herself as more than inspirational aesthetic object: "In these fantasies she helped and loved him, since he was a dwarf and a genius" (MT, 2). Indeed, there is an air of girlish rebellion about her patronage of Lautrec but despite this there is no escaping her appropriation of the role of nurturer in these fantasies.

Although Melanie dreams of a fairy tale romance and marriage and dreads the thought of ending up like Mrs Rundle, she fears cosy homeliness and senses the drabness at the heart of married life. She can imagine no other role for herself than that of wife but decides that marriage will be different for her than it is for her mother: " 'I will not have it plain. No. Fancy. It must be fancy.' She meant her future" (MT, 7). At fourteen Melanie likes to think that she is perfect and beautifully formed and she fears growing fat. Her looks please her for she believes that now she is a young woman, men will desire her and her future might be sealed. Carter foregrounds the fact that in patriarchal culture, women's value resides in their body/appearance and that women themselves take this for granted. These ocular restrictions are not simply spatial but temporal also, so when Melanie cups her bare breasts and states: "Physically, I have probably reached my peak, and can do nothing but deteriorate from now

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<sup>34</sup> See "The Alchemy of the Word", an essay on the Surrealists which critiques their "use" of lovers as muses, Angela Carter, *Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings* (London: Virago, 1982) 67-73: 72. Also see "Black Venus" in *Black Venus* (London: Picador, 1986), a story in which Baudelaire's black mistress-muse gets her own back on the colonising French poet.

on, or perhaps mature" (MT, 9), the way in which a woman's life and sense of time is marked by her appearance and how others respond to her emerges. The woman's body is a sight in which temporality resides and yet, paradoxically, this sight/site is not under her control. The frame of the mirror is in some ways a metaphor for the limitations and strictures of a Symbolic Order which ties women to their images, for better and for worse. Feminine aspirations take shape within the parameters of the glass yet they always appear curtailed by the very boundaries in which they come into play.

As touched upon earlier, although it seems impossible to break out of the frame of the mirror without feeling cut off and disturbed, La Belle insists that knowledge of the power of the mirror and of her image may actually enable a woman to play self-consciously with that image within the frame, creating multifarious selves or images in order to overcome the initial loss of being she may experience.<sup>35</sup> This ironic playfulness is what has become commonly known in feminist theory as masquerade, something Mary Russo speaks of as a parody or a revision of female narcissism, which is usually taken as the canonical representation of the feminine.<sup>36</sup> It should be noted at this point that feminists are not wholly in agreement about masquerade. Some, like Mary Ann Doane, theorise it as a transgressive practice but others, like Irigaray, use it as a *description* of a woman's role in patriarchal culture and we shall examine her ideas further in the thesis.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> La Belle also notes that when a woman feels disconnected from her mirror image (as does Jane Eyre) it is usually the sign of a revolt against a previous idea of herself, or of a psychological disturbance. For men, however, the split is a sign of neither of these things, it is normative. For many women their reflected image is a sign that they exist at all and a fracturing of the relationship with the mirror can often seem more dangerous than overidentification with their image.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Russo, The Female Grotesque; Risk, Excess and Modernity (London: Routledge, 1994) 162.

<sup>37</sup> See Mary Ann Doane, "Film and Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," 17-33, and "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator," 33-44. Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis (New York: Routledge, 1991).

As Russo points out, female narcissism is returned to time and time again as a scene of failed transcendence in Carter's fiction. Later on, after her parents' death and her move to the toyshop, Melanie imagines the ghost of her previous self haunts the new owners of her parents' house. In this phantasy it is her desire, "to appear in mirrors where the new owner expected the reflection of his own face" (MT, 31), and thus perhaps expresses a desire for female transcendence of a male specular economy and a desire for empowerment.

Russo quotes a passage from Carter's short story "Flesh and the Mirror" in order to draw out the complexities of these issues surrounding female narcissism and masquerade.<sup>38</sup> According to Russo the estrangement that the girl in Carter's "Flesh and the Mirror" story experiences away from her reflection eventually appears normal. This is the estrangement of performance mentioned by John Berger: "Whilst she is walking across a room or weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping".<sup>39</sup> Russo writes of the story's narrator's accession to this state: "The difference is that the normal now is recognised as merely the habitual and the performative: 'The most difficult performance in the world is acting naturally, isn't it?'"<sup>40</sup> Femininity is shown in "Flesh and the Mirror" to be a form of theatre or masquerade and Irigaray explains that the female Oedipal complex is an entry onto a system of values that is not woman's (like the marketplace discussed earlier). She can, "'appear' and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/ fantasies of men".<sup>41</sup>

"Flesh and the Mirror" might be read as girl's confused entry into this system of values, but in Nights at The Circus Fevvers takes the idea of

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<sup>38</sup> Angela Carter, "Flesh and the Mirror," Fireworks (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1987). See Russo's reading of the story, p. 162-164.

<sup>39</sup> John Berger, Ways of Seeing (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 46.

<sup>40</sup> Carter, "Flesh and the Mirror," 77. See Russo, p.164.

<sup>41</sup> Luce Irigaray, "Questions," in The Irigaray Reader 136.



femininity as an act or spectacle to extremes in her masquerade: "The heroine of Nights at the Circus begins in some ways where the heroine of "Flesh and the Mirror" leaves off, trying to act natural which, in her case, will mean acting flamboyantly artificial".<sup>42</sup> Carter, through the character of Fevvers, shows femininity to be not something truthful and natural. It is not a biological given but a social and psychological construct and in this case is something that the author suggests might be changed. Flaunting the constructed nature of the feminine in masquerades is, in this reading, much like the gay celebration of marginality through self-mockery and parody in camp behaviour. Indeed, Lorna Sage comments that Carter's fascination with Camp sensibility stemmed from the fact: "it represented a fault line running through contemporary culture, where the binary opposition of masculine and feminine broke down. Camp mocked at the seriousness, sincerity, authenticity ( in any case values established and guaranteed by the male avant-garde)".<sup>43</sup> The faultline mentioned here is reminiscent of the scar I talked about in the first chapter. Sage mentions Sontag's phrase "Theatricalization of experience" used to describe Camp culture<sup>44</sup> in conjunction with Carter's artistic practice, for it is a phrase which seems to capture it beautifully, especially her later work which is concerned with showgirls/performers.

Sage says that in Carter's early fiction people "dress up or down to play themselves; they parade their characters as acts".<sup>45</sup> This is true, but dressing up does not necessarily free the characters *per se*. The carnivalesque liberty implied in such play-acting is shown to be quite difficult for women to access. In the earlier novels the possibilities of feminine transgression through masquerade (women ironically producing themselves as/through spectacle) are

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<sup>42</sup> Russo 164.

<sup>43</sup> Sage, Angela Carter 9.

<sup>44</sup> Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," A Susan Sontag Reader (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

<sup>45</sup> Sage, Angela Carter 9.

shown to be limited. Annabel in Love ends up becoming the doll she turns herself into; dead, lifeless, and Melanie becomes increasingly aware of woman's doll-like status in patriarchy which perhaps saves her from the worst aspects of objectification (although we never know her fate--that's left for the reader to fill in). The Magic Toyshop shows masquerade as coterminous with femininity but not necessarily with female desire; as a process women do not have much choice about participating in. In this way the novel's treatment of masquerade is less like Russo or Doane's notion of maquerade and more like Irigaray's. Irigaray sees masquerade as a means of recuperating an element of desire, but this is a male desire: "In the masquerade, they [women] submit to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain 'on the market' in spite of everything. But they are there as objects of sexual enjoyment, not as those who enjoy".<sup>46</sup> In other words, it is extremely difficult to be ironic and self-mocking in a world which takes your appearance to be your essence.

The experience of dressing up and posing as a nude model has an air of exuberance and display that defines campness but Melanie's corporeal revelations always imply her ultimate containment within a patriarchal value system. There is an element of black humour to her bedroom antics and this derives from the Edenic myth that hovers over Melanie, a myth which equates a woman's body/ sexuality with perverse transgression, with sin and evil, and locates this within the woman herself. Her guilt, "well developed ...that summer" (MT, 5), has no shameful edge because she doesn't really understand the nature of her crime/sin, yet it appears that the myth of woman's monstrous excessiveness has already affected her self-perception and I now want to examine this in more detail.

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<sup>46</sup> Irigaray, "Questions," in The Irigaray Reader 135-6.

## Whose Body?

The opening of The Magic Toyshop is an ambiguous passage, encouraging the reader to think and feel beyond ordinary myths (woman's original sin) whilst simultaneously attesting to the power of such non-sensical and imprisoning creations. We are presented with Melanie gazing at her body and a line from Donne's "Going To Bed"<sup>47</sup>:

The summer she was fifteen, Melanie discovered she was made of flesh and blood. O, my America, my new found land. She embarked on a tranced voyage, exploring the whole of herself, clambering her own mountain ranges, penetrating the moist riches of her secret valleys, a physiological Cortez, de Gama or Mungo park. (MT,1)

This focus on the body subverts the opening one might expect of a romantic novel whose traditional concerns are states of mind and sensibilities. At first it appears to be a rather beautiful and uplifting passage in which a young virgin enters into a form of ecstatic communion with herself. It might be read as a revelatory masturbatory enchantment tinged with carnivalesque rebellion. The implied orifices in the lovely "penetrating the moist riches of her secret valleys" and protuberances which are the girl's "mountain ranges," calls to mind Bakhtin's description of the carnival body with its openings and its sproutings. However, the lyrical beginning is marred or at least problematised by the comparison with colonial invasion. Here the narcissistic virgin state is treated as a complex intersection of discourses making up a body which threatens to break free but never quite manages to overcome the limitations that are always already there. Virginité in this description might, on the one hand, appear wrenched from its usual cultural definition where the untouched body of the woman is not really hers but defined in relation to what man/men will do to "it". The potential for virginité as a specifically feminine ontological state in

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<sup>47</sup> John Donne, "Going to Bed," The Complete Poetry of John Donne, intro. John Shawcross (London: London UP Ltd., 1968) 57-8. Lines 27-28: "O my America! my new-found-land,/ My kingdome, safeliest when with one man man'd...". The woman to whom the poem is addressed wears virginal white, which Melanie will later wear when she dresses in her mother's wedding gown.

which the virgin derives strength from the separateness of her body from others and communes with and within her body/self (taking delight from it as does Eve from her reflection in the pool in Paradise Lost) is also present in this opening, however. Later we hear that: "Since she was thirteen, when her periods began, she had felt she was pregnant with herself, bearing the slowly ripening embryo of Melanie grown-up inside herself for a gestation time of which she was not precisely aware" (MT, 20).

In John Milton's original, Eve narrates the poolside incident, which occurs in her first moments in the garden, before she meets Adam. After awakening near to a pool of water which issues from a cave, she goes to lay on the bank beside the lake and looks into it:

As I bent down to look, just opposite/A shape within the watery gleam  
appeared/Bending to look on me/ I started back/It started back, but  
pleased I soon returned/Pleased it returned as soon with answering  
looks/Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed/Mine eyes till now, and  
pined with vain desire/Had not a voice thus warned me...

Warned not to linger over her reflection Eve follows to the place where there is one, "whose image thou art, him thou shall enjoy/inseperably thine". The warning voice is clearly that of God and he leads her to Adam, a being she does not consider as attractive as herself but to whom she succumbs because she sees, "how beauty is excelled by manly grace,/ And wisdom, which alone is truly fair".<sup>48</sup> Adam/man is linked with the mind and with rationality, as he is in Aristotle's writings, and Eve is noted for her body rather than for her mind. Her essence seems inextricable from her appearance but we learn that this beauty is for Adam's benefit and not her own, in the way that the nudes Berger discusses in Ways of Seeing are painted and bought for male pleasure.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> John Milton, Paradise Lost, ed. Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Longman 1990), Book Four, lines 460-473, 472-3 and 490-1 respectively.

<sup>49</sup> See Berger, chapter 3, 45-64.

Berger's chapter on the tradition of nude paintings, like La Belle's introduction to The Literature of The Looking Glass, is intent on exposing the hypocrisy of a patriarchal culture which insists that a woman's value resides in her appearance whilst simultaneously attributing an inherent sinfulness to her preoccupation with her reflection. In speaking of the tradition of painting female nudes Berger summarises the double-standards succinctly:

You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting Vanity, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure. The real function of the mirror was otherwise. It was to make a woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight.<sup>50</sup>

And indeed, this is the process we see Melanie going through at the start of the novel. Berger explains that a favourite topic for European nude paintings was the Genesis story and the depiction of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. In the medieval period the paintings form a sort of narrative but during the Renaissance the narrative sequence is abandoned in favour of a single moment where Adam and Eve experience shame in relation to the spectator. As the tradition of nude painting becomes increasingly secular, this shame becomes a display and other non-Biblical themes are taken up. Berger believes that despite these metamorphoses there is, however, a constant in the painting of nudes "...in them all there remains the implication that the subject (a woman) is aware of being seen by a spectator".<sup>51</sup> In this tradition a woman experiences nakedness not in and for herself but in relation to another who is usually male, and her beauty is inextricably connected with shamefulness. So too, in the crucial passage of Paradise Lost, intellectual qualities are placed above physical beauty which is implied as deceptive (MT, 76).

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<sup>50</sup> Berger 51.

<sup>51</sup> Berger 49.

As the poem progresses, Eve's outer beauty is shown to mask an inner deformity which links her with Satan and later on with Sin. In Milton's version of events Eve is made out of Adam's rib and in his image rather than God's, and she is made *for* him. Her narcissistic involvement at the pool is seen as misguided (she is indeed guided *away* from her reflection), for it is not Eve's place to love herself. She has been created as a "solace" and "helpmeet" for Adam ( we can see the resonance of this myth in the way Melanie imagines herself as Lautrec's solace and helpmeet). The word to describe Eve's desire for her self-reflection is "vain" which implies that a woman's desire for herself is "in vain", that is to say, impossible, as well as morally reprehensible and there are hints that Eve's narcissistic preoccupation with herself minutes after her "birth" is a mark of her waywardness and corruptibility.

Although it is extremely tempting to read the opening of The Magic Toyshop as a celebratory description of a young girl's intimate dialogue with herself, something akin to the dialogue Irigaray talks about in her essay "When Our Lips Speak Together",<sup>52</sup> the Genesis story of male origins as expounded in Paradise Lost pulls against a more celebratory reading of Melanie's auto-eroticism. In Carter's later speculative works the notion of powerful virginity (in contrast to meek vulnerable innocence) is taken up once again. It is an idea Carter less cautiously embraces in The Bloody Chamber tales. But in The Magic Toyshop Melanie's body is always shown as experienced in relation to others, especially her mother, so that her playful making-up in the mirror cannot be taken as truly liberating. The discourse of woman's sinfulness so cleverly reworked in Paradise Lost always lurks beneath the girl's activity. We can see the power of the poem working in the mirror of Carter's reworking as it does in those women's texts mentioned by Gilbert and Gubar.

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<sup>52</sup> Luce Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together," This Sex Which is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).

As Eve's daughter, Melanie is fully aware that her narcissistic actions are morally reprehensible: " She always felt particularly wicked when she posed for Lautrec" (MT,1) as if her preoccupation with her desire (which is indistinguishable from her desirability) is forbidden, although there is no logic to this guilt, just as there is no logic in distinguishing between originals and copies. The myth of female secondariness is inscribed upon Melanie's body as it informs/inveigles her adolescent fantasies of existing for another, and this set-up is relayed to the reader through the trope of the reflection, the mirror image of the girl who explores herself as the voyagers ranged over the virgin soil of America. The allusion to Donne might be seen as part of the literary tradition which figures the new world as the body of a woman, virgin territory which waits for a lover or conqueror. Indeed, as Patricia Parker has pointed out, the territory of Virginia was named after Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen.<sup>53</sup>

When Melanie scrutinises her mother's wedding photograph later in the novel, the link between her body and America (gendered as female by travellers to the New World) takes on a more sinister aspect. For the young daughter who wanders into her parent's room, the only link to her mother's past, her life before marriage to Melanie's father, is through the figure of this brother, Uncle Philip, present in the wedding photo. Photographs are described as "chunks of time you can hold in your hand" (MT, 11), but Uncle Philip seems not to belong even to the presentness of the photographic moment Melanie contemplates. It is as if he has wandered in by chance out of another era or another group. Interestingly, the groups he may have wandered from are those conquerors and colonisers of the new world: "an Elk's solemn reunion or the grand funeral of the ancient and honorable order of Buffaloes, or, even, from a gathering of veterans from the American civil war" (MT, 11-12).

The comparison of Melanie's body with America and then the comparison of Uncle Philip with an American coloniser begins to take on disturbing

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<sup>53</sup> Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies and the Generation of the Text* (London: Methuen, 1987).

implications when we reflect on what La Belle and Berger say about woman's appearance as essence and her status as object of desire in the patriarchal system. Even when touching and adorning herself, as she does in the privacy of her bedroom, it always seems as if there is an interloper present. Her body is intersected and shaped by male visions, she watches herself as if through male eyes. Philip is seen as part of a group of men, a band of brothers with the same end in mind (colonisation, ownership) and in this sense he is linked more widely to the afore-mentioned patriarchal system in which women are objects of exchange to be bought and sold and surveyed like paintings of nudes. Melanie's culturally sanctioned place is to exist not on her own terms, but for another, as the skin of the nude is not her own but something she wears for the delectation of the male spectator to whom she belongs.

In reading this passage women are perhaps made to re-live their own strange, adolescent, guilt-ridden pleasure and to question the source of the guilt, thus beginning the sort of dismantling process that La Belle sees as inherent in the literature of the looking glass:

the representation of the mirror in women's literature is often used as a means for deconstructing the binary oppositions on which patriarchal culture depends for its representations of masculine selfhood. It questions the dichotomies which underlie western philosophy such as those between self and reflected image, between spirit and flesh, between psychological presence and physical body.<sup>54</sup>

### **"White Satin Shows Every Mark": The Semiotics of the Wedding Gown**

Melanie's nakedness and openness at the beginning of the novel are in direct contrast to her heavily clothed parents. Melanie does not see her parents as bodies but as arrangements of materials, a conglomeration of fabrics that admit no chinks of flesh. Her father is composed of an alliterative triad of tweed, typewriter ribbon and tobacco (the last two connote smells important to her

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<sup>54</sup> La Belle 1.



idea of him, as later Finn is defined through his stale, unwashed tobacco smell—the direct inverse of her father's rich tobacco scent<sup>55</sup>). Her mother is described as an "emphatically clothed woman" (MT, 10), who composes herself and her surroundings from those things advertised in glossy Sunday supplements.

When she lives in the toyshop, Melanie remembers that, "when she was a little girl and her mother cuddled her, the embraces were always muffled in thick cloth—wool, cotton or linen, according to the season of the year" (MT, 10). The re-membrance ironically implies the distance rather than the closeness of the maternal body which remains out of bounds yet is omnipresent in the girl's mirror image. This desiring absence, Melanie's wanting something that is unavailable, grows stronger after her mother actually dies, but she experiences loss beforehand. Finn, too, is an orphan and his desiring absence manifests itself in his need for Melanie who increasingly "mothers" him.

The way in which Melanie's parents painstakingly conceal their bodies from their children suggests a guilty middle-class morality that implies flesh is sinful. Melanie's curiosity is, not surprisingly, aroused by this blatant "cover-up": "Melanie tried but could not imagine her parent's nakedness. When she thought of her mother and father, their clothes seemed part of their bodies, like

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<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere in Carter's fiction scent is an indicator of sexual difference, as in the musky animal smells of "The Bloody Chamber" and in "The Tiger's Bride". This is similarly the case with Finn, Uncle Philip's brother-in-law, with whom Melanie becomes involved. In contrast to the dream bridegroom whom she conjures up at the beginning of the novel, Melanie associates Finn with animal desire (although at some points it would appear that she wants to succumb to his animality). Thus, although Melanie finds a friend and lover—in the toyshop, Finn is a far cry from the man of whom she had dreamed before her old world collapsed. Margaret Mc Dowell has written that Carter's novels often contain dark figures who simultaneously attract and repel the protagonist. Finn of *The Magic Toyshop*, Jewel in *Heroes and Villains*, and Lee in *Love* are all of this sort. In Jungian terms they might be seen as the animus of the young women of the novels yet ironically the lover fails to live up to expectations. Lorna Sage has seen, in the early texts, one of the few attempts by a woman writer to describe the male as an object of desire, a strategy which turns the textual tables on the countless male writers who have portrayed women in this way: "In Carter's novels, the young men are described as erotic objects; not in the romance fashion... but as self-regarding arrangements of flesh, pigments, clothes, smells and sidelong glances" (Sage, *Women* 169). She believes that Finn's squint which means Melanie can never meet his eye makes him quite mysterious yet does not help Melanie to gain a sense of who she is. Interestingly, Sage also describes *The Magic Toyshop* as a feminist rereading of *Paradise Lost* but her short study does not allow her to explicate this view in as much depth as I have here. She focuses on the end of the novel when the toyshop is set on fire by Uncle Philip, and Finn and Melanie flee the building via the garden, comparing this episode to expulsion from the garden of Eden.

hair or toenails" (MT,10). Her parents' corporeal inaccessibility is a metaphor for a more general inaccessibility and silence on other matters. Melanie's attempts at disclosing the secrets she senses are in her parents' room fail, and only lead her to ask further questions about love, sex and marriage. The scene in which she enters her parents' bedroom is a prolepsis to her stay in the toyshop in which she is often situated as gothic interloper whose quest for knowledge (origins) is a circular process which seems to further confuse her rather than satisfy her curiosity.

On the fateful night in which she enters her parents' bedroom and disturbs the order of things Melanie does so because she cannot sleep. Her wakefulness, it is implied, is connected to pre-menstrual physiology:

One night, Melanie could not sleep. It was late in the summer and the red swollen moon winked in the apple tree and kept her awake. The bed was hot. She itched. She turned and twisted and thumped her pillow. Her skin prickled with wakefulness and her nerves were as raw as if a hundred knives were squeaking across a hundred plates in a concert. (MT, 9).

The full moon usually foreshadows important events in Jane Eyre's life and Carter invokes Charlotte Bronte's novel throughout The Magic Toyshop. The moon is a Romantic symbol for the imagination.<sup>56</sup> In Jane Eyre the full moon signals a threatening burgeoning of inexplicable desire within the protagonist. Here it is perhaps employed as a metaphor for Melanie's swollen womb, and the description of her raw nerves is probably familiar to all women who have lain awake unable to sleep because of pre-menstrual tension. We may infer, as we do with Jane Eyre, that Melanie has just started menstruating.<sup>57</sup> She thus inhabits the aforementioned threshold between girlhood and womanhood and is

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<sup>56</sup> The red, swollen moon is reminiscent of the moon that appears at the end of "The Fall of the House of Usher," shining on the fissures that have appeared in the walls of the house: "The radiance was that of the full, setting and blood-red moon" and is perhaps an intertextual reference, as this moon also shines on the night of a fall. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," in The Oxford Book of Short Stories, ed. V.S Pritchett (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988).

<sup>57</sup> Melanie is the same age as Jane Eyre is when she is locked in the red room at Gateshead.

the sort of liminal being, who is a familiar protagonist in fairy tales. Carter often introduces the adolescent girl in her fictions for this very reason. She is at once ripe for absorbing the lessons of femininity which her culture inevitably passes on (along with the constraints that these impose upon her person) and at the same time the harbinger of so much antithetical, revolutionary energy.

In The Magic Toyshop there is a constant tension between the Melanie who is expected to play out roles that patriarchy has conceived for her (the girl who has accepted these roles as natural), and the girl who wants something more exciting, more adventurous, even if it is within the parameters of marriage and motherhood. She declares: "I will not have it plain. No. Fancy. It must be fancy.' She meant her future" [MT, 7]). Like Marianne and Jane Eyre she is caught up in longing and desire for something more exotic than her present situation.<sup>58</sup> However, the potential of her in-between state always looks as if it will be thwarted and returned to the true "end" of womanhood according to the male imaginary, that is, to marriage and motherhood.

Interesting in Parker's exploration of the gendering of America as female is the biblical link she sees American travel literature make with the image of the Promised land or Paradise.<sup>59</sup> The Magic Toyshop uses the metaphor of America as a new Eden and creation myths in the tale of Melanie's tale of sexual awakening and in a broader sense with women's sexuality and epistemology. The story of the Fall is written on Melanie's body as a sense of guilt is already etched in her mind and Carter highlights how the guilt that attends a woman's desire continually prevents her from being really free, demonstrating the way in which discursive practices and real bodies shape each other.

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<sup>58</sup> When Melanie lives in the toyshop she has to come to terms with the reversal of her dreams for she finds that her future is plainer than she could have ever imagined. Fanciness is out of the question as Uncle Philip's puritanical outlook is comparable to that of Mr. Brocklehurst in Jane Eyre .

<sup>59</sup> See Parker 148.

When Melanie discovers her mother's wedding dress there is a textual questioning of the semiotics of the gown. Its preservation in a box which Melanie, the trespasser into forbidden territory, opens up like a latter-day Eve (for it seems an almost sinful activity), precipitates this questioning: "Her mother was a woman of sentiment. In a trunk starred with faded stickers from foreign places, under a piece of Indian embroidery thrown over it to conceal it prettily, there lay the wedding-dress, all treasured up, swathed in blue tissue to keep the satin white. What did she keep it for?" (MT,13).

The idea that the embroidery conceals "prettily" implies that it invites attention at the same time as it hides the dress and it is no wonder that Melanie should want to get it out and muse on its significance. In the same way that the cloth hides the dress, so the dress covers the woman's nakedness as it spells out the naked truth about her status as object of exchange. It is used to display rather than to conceal the fact that her hymen is intact and that she is as yet unused and ready for opening up.

The dress is a memento mori, but Melanie asks herself, a memento of what exactly? In the preceding paragraph the narrator muses on the significance of the colour white for bridal gowns, a colour which denotes virtue and its fragility: "White satin shows every mark" (MT,17). Melanie's mother intends to preserve an idea of herself in preserving the dress and keeping it white, but preservation of something always involves the notion of loss as well. Melanie speculates about the dress and the truth it supposedly announces; that is the truth about the woman's sexual status. Although this thought is amusing because it illustrates her sexual desire as more powerful than her desire for marriage, it draws attention to the sacrifice of the woman that is inherent in the ritual of marriage: "She examined the wedding dress more closely. It seemed a funny way to dress up just in order to lose your virginity" (MT,13). The myth of the Fall which insists on woman's innate wickedness and sexual appetite lurks again in Melanie's curiosity about the wedding gown. She looks for the

meaning of the dress and for information about her mother, but the only meanings the reader may discern are those which condemn her as the Genesis story condemns Eve.

In a parallel incident to this one, Marianne in Heroes and Villains is forced to put on a wedding dress but there is no delight in her response to it. Marianne had once imagined that relationships in the Barbarian tribe might give women more freedom than her own community: "The domestic life of the Barbarians was a mystery to her; she thought they would have no marriage or taking in marriage" (HV, 13) but this is soon revealed as a misconception, for life in this group is worse than anything she might have imagined. When Marianne is shown the hideous, mouldering, wedding dress Donally would like her to wear to the wedding ceremony he sets up, she is repulsed. The dress is old and filthy. She fears it will contaminate her and in this sense it is symbolic of marriage for her. Marianne tries to distance herself from the event so that it will have no effect on her--she hates anyone exercising their will over her. The box, like that belonging to Melanie's mother, is:

Starred with singed stickers of foreign places dating from those times when foreign places had more than an imaginative existence, for where was Paris anymore, where they had briefly worshipped the goddess reason. She recoiled from the dress. It became an image of terror. Some young woman had worn it before her for a wedding in the old style with cakes, wine and speeches; afterwards, the sky opened an umbrella of fire. Marianne pressed herself against the wall, face down on the floorboards, and screwed her eyes shut, clenching her fists, attempting to force herself into a condition of attachment menaced as she was by this crumbling anachronism. (HV, 68-69)

Marianne's view of marriage is in direct contrast to Melanie's for, as I mentioned earlier, she is fully aware of the mechanics of patriarchy in which she will become a sign of exchange. In The Magic Toyshop the menace of the wedding dress (which spells future constraint) is implicit. Firstly she is ensnared in the wreath of tulle: "Melanie was trapped, a mackerel in a net; the veil blew up around her, blinding her eyes and filling her nostrils. She turned

this way and that but only entangled herself more", and then the material of the dress seems unaccommodating and unpleasant, "It was very cold to the touch. It slithered over her, cold as a hosing with ice water, and she shivered and caught her breath" (MT,15).

In Heroes and Villains the dress's threatening symbolism seems infinitely worse because of the wearer's awareness of its historical significance which, unlike the material it is made from, has not eroded with time. Although Donally insists that he wants to institute a "new" symbol, he chooses the ancient phallic snake for, ironically, he can only readapt old forms of control. Fearing the arrival of Marianne in the camp, he attempts to crush any sense of identity she might possess, marrying her to Jewel, instructing Jewel to "consume" Marianne. Again this suggests a fear that she might otherwise consume Donally; the fear of the power of the independent woman whose desire is figured as monstrous.

Donally decides from the moment he sets eyes upon Marianne the role she will play in his scheme of things: "' Our lady of the wilderness' amplified Donally with a delighted smile. The Virgin of the swamp' " (HV, 50), but his expanding egomania only fuels Marianne with the determination to hang on to an idea of herself and to resist the imposition of the roles of wife and mother. In fact Meaney describes Marianne's role as anthropologist of the text. During her marriage ceremony, for instance, she understands her position as a sign, which is that of "memory of a bride" (HV, 72). Her distance from the event disturbs the basis of society, for the woman who understands her position as a unit of exchange between men begins the work of undoing the sexual economy which makes her a sacrifice. Lévi-Strauss says that women cannot alter what he terms the "supreme rule of the gift,"<sup>60</sup> they are only able to allow the exchange of themselves to take place. However, even though Marianne cannot stop the

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<sup>60</sup> Lévi-Strauss 481.

wedding from taking place, her resistance to, and her distance from the event, emphasises its cruel nature.<sup>61</sup>

When on their wedding night Jewel declares his hatred for Marianne she is almost pleased because it entitles her to fight against him, and against incorporation into her assigned role. One night Marianne hears Jewel growling: "Conceive you bitch" (HV,90). She is horrified and driven to her wits' end at the thought that she might become the mother she dreads and her battle against incorporation into this role will have been in vain. When Marianne asks Jewel his purpose for impregnating her he tells her what she has known all along: "It's a patriarchal system. I need a son, don't I, to dig my grave when I'm gone. A son to ensure my status" (HV, 90). This father-son genealogy submits the mother-daughter genealogy to a masculine line of filiation, the Oedipal structure, which becomes the only recognised form of accession to the cultural order. In this order, the mother-daughter relationship remains unsymbolised and women's relation to origin remains a dark, unclear area as women's lives are marked by loss deriving from this maternal blankness and inaccessibility.

### **Murderous Daughters**

As I hope is becoming clear, The Magic Toyshop is very much concerned with mother-daughter relationships and a phenomenon of patriarchy in which the daughter is pitted against the mother and vice-versa, as discussed by Irigaray in Speculum of the Other Woman.<sup>62</sup> This is a disturbing aspect of our culture in which the mother's ability to act or to be seen as a sexual being in her own right, the ability to be a "woman" as opposed to being a mother, is curtailed. Irigaray sees that maternity exiles the daughter from womanhood as well because she has no role model with which to identify except that of her mother

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<sup>61</sup> See Meaney for an extended discussion of these aspects of Heroes and Villains, 105-107.

<sup>62</sup> Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).

and, in this way, she too is cut off from womanhood. The only opportunity available to the daughter is to take up the socially validated position of mother, but this involves symbolically killing her own mother. The daughter must suppress the mother in order to take her place whilst she is torn away from her first desires and prevented from understanding her sexuality.

As women are submerged in maternity which is inherently linked with notions of the feminine in Western culture, it seems that they can never experience their sexuality except in a mediated way, and Irigaray suggests that women are not yet truly women because they exist as projections of masculine desire within the Symbolic Order and as objects of exchange between men. What she is describing in Speculum is the lack of distinct identity for women, and the non-symbolisation of the mother-daughter relationship. In her attempts to reveal the mysteries that her parents cover up (the mysteries of the flesh), Melanie is trapped into the circular action of repetition by then acting out her mother's part as bride in her mother's mirror. She actually ends up compulsively re-veiling the truths (the desires) she believes she may be disclosing by literally putting on her mother's veil and symbolically taking her place as she recreates the bride she sees in the wedding photograph in the mirror.

The linking of death, marriage and motherhood that runs throughout The Magic Toyshop is made explicit in the wedding-dress episode: "She felt wicked, like a grave robber, but the coin had fallen and the die was cast" (MT,15). The merging of daughter into mother and the inevitability of this occurrence is foregrounded as Melanie applies her mother's Chanel perfume: she "at once smelled so like her mother that she glanced at herself in the mirror to make sure she was still Melanie" (MT,14). This is a recurring theme of the novel throughout which the mother-daughter distinction becomes increasingly hazy. Margaret Whitford has summarised the problem for women trapped by the maternal role in the Symbolic Order, as outlined by Irigaray: "There is no



genealogy on the side of women, the generational differences are blurred; the man takes the woman as substitute for his mother while the woman simply takes her mother's place. So that women (in the Symbolic) are a kind of continuous present; they represent the death drives".<sup>63</sup>

In the mirror Melanie literally effaces her own mother. The Magic Toyshop seems to be constantly raising Irigaray's question:

You look at yourself in the mirror. And already you see your own mother there. And soon your daughter, a mother. Between the two, what are you? What space is yours alone? In what frame must you contain Yourself? And how to let your face show through, beyond all the masks?<sup>64</sup>

Like the girl in "The Company of Wolves," Melanie is a Snow White to look at, with long black hair and markedly white skin. The mirror tells Melanie that she is beautiful in the bridal gown and she is thrilled by the vision of herself. She moves from her mother's mirror to her own and back again and sees the same lovely young girl reflected in both of the glasses (this movement, in itself, suggests that the glass of the daughter and the mother are identical). The mother is present in her absence because she resides within Melanie; the mother is always present in the daughter and the sense of the daughter's sexual awakening seems to bring her a step closer towards filling her place.

Woman's subjection to a loss of identity eventually turns love into a duty, a pathology and an alienation for her and we can see in The Magic Toyshop the way in which the struggle for identity (inherently linked to mothering) affects Melanie. The wedding dress episode fully embodies this struggle for identity. On the one hand it suggests autonomy and celebratory narcissism, and on the other, enslavement, through a similar textual play to that which occurs in the opening mirror scene of the novel.

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<sup>63</sup> Margaret Whitford, Philosophy in the Feminine (London: Routledge, 1991) 87.

<sup>64</sup> Luce Irigaray, The Ethics of Sexual Difference (London: Athlone, 1993).

Like Fevvers, Melanie displays herself as spectacle. She uses the same words as Fevvers: "'Look at me!' she cried passionately to the apple tree as it fattened its placid fruit in the country silence of the night. 'Look at me!' she cried passionately to the pumpkin moon, as it smiled, jovial and round faced as a child's idea of itself" (MT,16). The moon and Melanie are clearly interchangeable here. She wants the night to witness her youthful revelation in her materiality and connectedness with the universe. Her narcissistic love is, however, linked to her mother's narcissism displayed in the picture and in turn to the narcissism of the mother of mothers, Eve, as it is expounded in book four of Paradise Lost. Thus, when Melanie looks at the wedding photograph the text implies a form of infinite regress as regards women's relationship to themselves. They are linked to their mothers in a chain which recedes into infinity. Autonomy in this sense is a joke. The photograph subtly undercuts the suggestion of independence that is implied by Melanie's narcissistic state (which is such, at that particular moment, that she has no need of a groom): "A bride. Whose bride? But she was, tonight, sufficient for herself in her own glory" (MT,16). Melanie's ecstatic foray into the garden at night is like the beginning of Eve's dream recounted in Paradise Lost book five. Eve hears a voice beckoning to her:

'Why sleep'st thou Eve? now is the pleasant time,  
The cool, the silent,  
save where silence yields/ to the night-warbling bird, that now awake/  
Tunes sweetest his love laboured song; now reigns/ Full orb'd the  
moon, and with more pleasing light/ Shadowy sets off the face of  
things; in vain,/ If none regard, heaven wakes with all his eyes,/ Whom  
to behold, but thee, nature's desire/ In whose sight all things joy with  
ravishment.....'<sup>65</sup>

Gilbert and Gubar explain that Eve's visionary longings, her fantasy of a Satanic flight of escape from oppression foreshadows the writings of women: "innumerable other Eves of female origin have flown, fallen, surfaced, or

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<sup>65</sup> Milton, Paradise Lost Book v, 38-46.

feared to fly, as if to acknowledge in a backhanded sort of way the power of the dream Milton let Satan grant to Eve".<sup>66</sup> Melanie follows in Eve's footsteps as poetic dreamer, and later Fevvers will actually fly (albeit briefly). The wonderful sensation, of being-a-joy-unto-oneself experienced by Eve in her dream and by Melanie in the garden (which echoes the garden of Eden), is also present in Melanie's mother in the wedding-photo scrutinised by Melanie. In this photograph her mother outshines her father. Indeed she actually obscures him. Melanie's mother appears to be in love with the idea of romantic love and the man she is marrying, it is suggested, is perhaps only secondary to the idea of herself as bride:

cut low in front to show a love-token locket nestling in the hollow of her throat, her white satin dress had scooping sleeves, wide as the wing of swans, and it flowed out from a tiny waist into a great white train, arranged around in front of her for the photograph so that the dress appeared as if it reflected in a pool of itself. A wreath of artificial roses was pressed low down on her forehead and a fountain of tulle sprang up and around it and spouted in foam past her waist. (MT,11)

The description of the roses on her head here recalls the flowers in the hair of Milton's Eve and the dress bizarrely reflected in a pool of itself suggests the passage in Book Four of Paradise Lost, in which a native vanity is attributed to Eve when she gazes upon her reflection in a pool in the Garden of Eden. Like the "Donne passage", the text seems in some ways to be laying claim to the idea that the virginal state is a positive state to be celebrated. However, this is the moment in which the virgin is to be separated from her former self.

In the narrative of female secondariness that comprises Book Four of Paradise Lost, Eve's autonomy, like that of Melanie's mother, is outlawed; she becomes a gift from God to Adam and is made a sign of reciprocal relations between man and his maker rather than a subject in her own right. The initial meeting between Adam and Eve, whereby Eve renounces her love of her image in favour of Adam's wisdom and leadership, is recounted as a marriage. As she

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<sup>66</sup> Gilbert and Gubar 202.

speaks she gazes at him: "with eyes/of conjugal attraction unreproved". But the moment of Eve's self-reflection in the pool and her conversion to marriage to Adam begs the question, why? Why is it that Eve should have to choose between being for herself and existing for another? As we have seen, she doesn't really even choose, the decision is made for her and she is made to succumb to her secondary position. In Parker's analysis, the incorporation of Eve's primary narcissism at the pool delays and enhances the moment in which she reaches her "proper" destination. Here, again, is the conversion of a threatening primacy to second place.

This process is similarly captured in the wedding photograph of Melanie's mother, for even as it displays an air of narcissistic containment as the bride blocks her father from view: "So extravagantly, wholeheartedly had she dressed herself that her flying hems quite obscured Melanie's father. One could see only his shy grin, misted over with blown tulle" (MT,11), the moment of her objectification is caught in time. She is immortalised in the photograph as wife and (potential) mother and the description hints simultaneously at the woman's imminent bondage in marriage. The sleeves of the dress are like the wings of swans, foreshadowing the later "Leda and the Swan" episode in which Melanie is pinned beneath the swan in a simulated rape and, a page on, Carter writes of the bride's capture through the objectifying gaze of the camera lens and the institution of marriage: "the smiling and youthful mother was as if stabbed through the middle by the camera and caught for ever under glass, like a butterfly in an exhibition case" (MT,13). The description of the photograph again explores female narcissism as a specular prison (the lens of the camera is like a miniature mirror), in which self-love and female primacy is converted into existence for another and the recognition of patriarchal authority.

In the discussions of the woman-mother in the Symbolic Order, Irigaray is referring to the pre-Oedipal mother who exists in relation to the family. In the novels discussed by Gilbert and Gubar the women characters often struggle

with woman's assigned place in the family and home and with the role of the "angel-in-the-house," the perfect mother, that they are expected to play out. To go beyond this, or at least to fight against this assigned position makes a woman hellish and grotesque and more often than not results in her turning against other women. It seems that she is trapped into having to choose between two extremes: the dual and opposing images of femininity, those of "angel" and "monster". These dual images have been so prevalent in the writings of men that it is inevitable they should haunt the work of women writers. Yet Gilbert and Gubar draw attention to the fact that so few women writers manage to kill them off.

Gilbert and Gubar take "Snow White" to be a story which dramatises the "essential but equivocal relationship between the angel-woman and the monster-woman".<sup>67</sup> They interpret this fairy story as a struggle between two women, an angel and a monster. Snow White is the pale, passive and obedient daughter who contrasts with the figure of the stepmother, an older, artful and active woman, "the one a sort of angel, the other an undeniable witch".<sup>68</sup> In the first of Uncle Philip's puppet shows there is a scene entitled "Morte d'une Sylphe or Death of A Wood Nymph" which involves one puppet. This nymph in white tulle with "wooden lips set in a smile of excessive sweetness" (MT, 127) who is dressed in white, like Snow White, is one of those passive images of women that delight the male imagination. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, this type of woman is present not only in bourgeois versions of fairy tales but is revered in the work of Dante, Milton and Goethe and appears as a frequent figure in the poetry of the Romantics. It is this childlike Snow White figure that Melanie must later play out in Philip's staging of the Leda and the Swan myth, from which, I suggest, Uncle Philip gains a perverse delight in exercising his power over her.

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<sup>67</sup> Gilbert and Gubar 36.

<sup>68</sup> Gilbert and Gubar 36.

The stifling intensity of the story of "Snow White" derives from the focus on the conflict between mother and daughter, woman and woman and self and self. Snow White and the wicked Queen fight out their conflict in the "transparent enclosure" in which they are both trapped and which may be read as both a magic looking glass and an enchanted glass coffin.<sup>69</sup> Although the King appears to play a minor role in the tale Gilbert and Gubar see that, like Uncle Philip, he is in fact instrumental in setting up these relationships:

His, surely, is the voice of the looking glass, the patriarchal voice of judgement that rules the Queen's-and every woman's self-evaluation. He it is who decides, first that his consort is 'the fairest of all,' and then, as she becomes maddened, rebellious, witchlike, that she must be replaced by his angelically innocent and dutiful daughter, a girl who is therefore defined as 'more beautiful still' than the Queen.<sup>70</sup>

Once the Queen has internalised the rules of the king (that a fair and innocent woman is far preferable to any other), there is no longer any need for him to inhabit the story as her mind is now colonised by his notion of femininity. There are disturbing incestuous undertones inherent in the King's words. Both the Queen and Snow White are treated as the King's possessions and are ranked in accordance with beauty and sexual "purity".

What Gilbert and Gubar seem to be describing here may be linked to what Irigaray has said about women as passive objects of exchange in a masculine economy of desire. This economy which prevents women from accessing their own desires and therefore denies them autonomy is one in which the mother will always be eclipsed by a younger model, the virgin girl, who like her former self, will be used up on the market. In Marxist terms her use value equals her exchange value. In this framework (here represented by the mirror) women are trapped into accepting their eventual replacement by a younger model of the

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<sup>69</sup> Gilbert and Gubar 37.

<sup>70</sup> Gilbert and Gubar 37.

same, their symbolic murdering, or, if they refuse to acquiesce, they face cultural rejection which is another sort of death.

Rather than gazing like the first queen, the second Queen turns inward to an introspective relationship with the mirror. In this sense she tries to escape from her representation as death drive (the "continuous present"<sup>71</sup>) and unlike the inactive first queen stakes out a claim to life. In her desperate attempts to live up to unrealisable ideals of femininity, this Queen turns the tools of what are generally connoted as the domestic arts against her child, in what amount to various failed attempts at murder. With reference to Irigaray's theories we might view this as an attempt on the part of the queen to resist her own symbolic murder by Snow White and to break the murderous chain.

Gilbert and Gubar use the "Snow White" story, and the behaviour of the queen especially, to exemplify the ways in which women are turned against themselves and each other in a phallogentric culture. This is because they are denied autonomy and punished in their efforts to achieve freedom from the restraints patriarchal laws impose on their bodies and minds. The only way out of the imprisoning mirror and the passive, contemplative image of self is through " 'badness,' through plots and stories, duplicitous schemes, wild dreams, fierce fictions, mad impersonations".<sup>72</sup> The life of action that a woman like the Queen in "Snow White" must take up in order to escape a nullifying, restrained one means she will be viewed as monstrous, unnatural and destructive. The queen cannot see that it is her husband and, by extension, the Law of the Father that confines her as passive object and punishes her for transgression; nor that Snow White is really as trapped as she. In patriarchal culture mothers and daughters are locked into a position of stalemate but, if

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<sup>71</sup> See Margaret Whitford, *Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991) 87, whom I quoted earlier on this issue. Whitford discusses Irigaray's work on the blurring of identities between women, due to the lack of a female genealogy under patriarchy.

<sup>72</sup> Gilbert and Gubar 42.

either woman attempts to break out of the confines of the roles conferred upon them, they risk madness and alienate one another in the process.

After Melanie dresses up in the bridal gown she scrambles up the old apple tree and the dress is torn and becomes covered with blood. As well as representing the tearing of the hymen and the loss of virginity and the special relationship that the virgin woman has with herself (if we recall Irigaray's thesis, the girl is torn away from her first desires) this might also represent the rupturing of the mother-daughter link and later, Melanie is described as an amputee (MT, 31). Soon after entering the garden Melanie discovers that she has locked herself out of the house and desperately wants to reach the safety of her bedroom. Dressed in her mother's bridal gown, standing under the apple tree, there are links again with Eve in the Garden of Eden. As she climbs the tree, Melanie is overwhelmed by the enormity of space as she gazes into the sky:

How lonely God must be, thought Melanie when she was seven. When she was fifteen she stood lost in eternity wearing a crazy dress, watching the immense sky...which was too big for her, as the dress had been. She was too young for it. The loneliness seized her by the throat and suddenly she could not bear it. She panicked. She was lost in this alien loneliness and terror crashed into the garden, and she was defenceless against it, drunk as she was on black wine. (MT,18)

The sudden vertigo Melanie experiences anticipates the disorientation that occurs in the toyshop in which she experiences a Gothic *dis-ease*. The secrets and mysteries that entice her suddenly become too much for her to bear. It is as if she is being locked out of her childhood for ever and wants to return at all costs. Ironically she never will, as this incident is a prolepsis to her stay in the toyshop and a journeying further into the labyrinth of feminine identity.

Claire Kahane writes of the Gothic experience of the female protagonist as profoundly ambivalent one for it enables her to transgress gender boundaries in a tomboyish way and to confront dangerous extremes in the manner usually reserved for male adventurers. Yet, in the imaginary space of the enclosed



Gothic world which allows for the more aggressive, less inhibited pleasures of childhood, she/I (the female reader), is also:

seduced by the experience of terror; I delight in the dizzying verge of that ubiquitous Gothic precipice on the edge of maternal blackness. Ultimately, what I confront are the mysteries of identity, which turn on discovering the boundary between self and a mother-imago archaically conceived who threatens all boundaries.<sup>73</sup>

It is interesting, regarding Kahane's description of the tomboy-transgressor, that Melanie hasn't climbed the tree since the more adventurous days of childhood: "she had given up climbing when she started to grow her hair and stopped wearing shorts every day of the summer holidays", when she was, in fact, "a crop-haired tomboy" (MT, 20). When Melanie learns of her mother's death she believes that she is the cause of this disaster and again: "She met herself in the mirror, white face, black hair. The girl who killed her mother" (MT, 24). Her guilt, which is different from her earlier guilt as she admired her reflection, is deeper and more painful and perhaps indicates women's subconscious realisation that they efface their own mothers as they step into their shoes.

On the day that Melanie, Jonathon and Victoria leave the family home for the toyshop in South London, Mrs. Rundle the housekeeper does not accompany them and Melanie must look after her younger brother and sister. She feels that, as substitute for her mother, she is "no longer a free agent" (MT,31). However, the mirror scenes illustrate the lack of agency that Melanie really has within a phallogentric system. Melanie's future may actually be no different from her mother's, even if she is a wiser child than the one she started out as. As we shall see, Melanie does not necessarily choose to face her m(other) in the toyshop but is forced into this relationship by Uncle Philip, as Snow White is forced to oppose her stepmother.

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<sup>73</sup> Kahane 52.

Melanie is set up in relation to her absent mother by Uncle Philip who, like the King in the "Snow White" story, treats her as if she were her mother's younger reflection. The Magic Toyshop is, itself, a novel of compulsive returns in which Melanie is constantly made to face questions about origins and selfhood, returning time and time again to the image or the memory of her mother who, although literally dead, haunts her new life in the South London toyshop and is surely the ghost in this text (as Madeleine Usher is the ghost who haunts "The House of Usher").

Indeed, in her essay on the Gothic and feminine identity, Kahane picks up on the numerous dead and displaced mothers who inhabit the secret places of Gothic texts. Kahane does not accept the motif of incest within an Oedipal plot which is the interpretation of the Gothic given by many critics of the genre, from which perspective "the latent configuration of the Gothic paradigm would seem to be that of a helpless daughter confronting the erotic power of a father or brother". Instead, she is drawn inward, alongside the female protagonist(s), by "the spectral presence of a dead-undead mother, archaic and all encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of female identity which the heroine must confront". It is this figure she sees locked in to "the forbidden center of the Gothic".<sup>74</sup>

### **Family Romance ? : Incestuous Desire, Masculine Power and the Difficulty of Female Origins**

The critics who elaborate the Oedipal point of view in studies of the Gothic usually bypass the issue of the protagonist's sexual anxieties that are triggered by the threat of the father or brother's erotic power, focusing instead on male authors and protagonists, for: "As the very name of the Oedipus complex suggests, the male experience is weighted more heavily".<sup>75</sup> In his essay on the

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<sup>74</sup> Kahane 47.

<sup>75</sup> Kahane 47.

uncanny Freud associates the unfamiliar feelings provoked by an uncanny place with the revelation of that which is usually hidden. The uncanny place is a place of concealed desire and the Gothic is a genre which deals in uncanny sensation.

A critic like Leslie Fiedler sees the mystery of the Gothic as issuing from mother/son incest and the breaching of the primal taboo against the father. The Gothic, according to Fiedler, is about the son's confrontation with paternal authority. There is certainly an element of this in The Magic Toyshop as Finn repeatedly challenges Uncle Philip's authority, eventually chopping up his swan puppet. Worse than this, Francie sleeps with his sister, Uncle Philip's wife, Aunt Margaret, and thus, perhaps, more radically challenges his authority. However, Aunt Margaret who, like Melanie, takes her mother's place when she dies, looks after her siblings in the same way as Melanie cares for Jonathon and Victoria. In this sense we might read Francie and Margaret's incestuous coupling not as brother and sister, but as son and surrogate-mother. From a feminist perspective this does not read so much as a challenge to patriarchal authority than another twist on the theme of the exchange of women.

The uncanniness of the toyshop may be connected to a parallel desire of Philip's for his own sister, Melanie's dead mother, a desire which is projected in turn upon Melanie. This is the secret it could harbour but which is never referred to explicitly, because of course the uncanny is (about) uncertainty. Aunt Margaret is more or less entirely ignored by her husband throughout the novel and when he finally catches her on the parlour floor with her own brother, his ensuing fit of rage may have more to do with his feelings for his dead sister than with any jealous feelings about Aunt Margaret. Uncle Philip likes to see Melanie as her mother's, and not her father's, child, and thus as a Flower, for as Finn says: "He couldn't stand your father and he can't stand you and the other kids being your father's children, though he doesn't mind you being your mother's. You represent the enemy to him who use toilet paper and

fish knives" (MT, 152). Finn defines the antagonism that Uncle Philip displays towards Melanie's father as issuing from class-consciousness and class *is* an important issue within the novel.<sup>76</sup>

As well as class considerations, Finn is aware that Philip's rantings about Melanie's father have sexual undertones, an awareness he reveals later on during a rehearsal for the "Leda and the Swan" puppet show. When Uncle Philip examines Melanie to see how she fits his image of Leda he comments: "'You've got a bit of a look of your ma. Not much but a bit. None of your father thank God. I never could abide your father. He thought 'isself too good for the Flowers by a long chalk, he did '" (MT,144). He shows an unusual interest in Melanie's developing body, asking if she has started her periods and commenting on the size of her breasts. These are peculiarly intimate questions considering that he claims not to know Melanie's name. This, itself, is indicative of the power that Uncle Philip likes to wield, for when names are so closely linked to identity, to pretend not to know someone's name reduces them to an object.

Finn is asked by Uncle Philip to play the swan to Melanie's Leda in a practice-run before the staging of the show, something that Finn perceives to be a set-up in which Philip will deflower Melanie by proxy, in the same way that he fantasised deflowering her mother:

'It was his fault,' he said. 'Suddenly I saw it all, when we were lying there. He's pulled our strings as if we were his puppets, and there I was, all ready to touch you up just as he wanted. He told me to rehearse Leda and the swan with you. Somewhere private. Like in your room, he said. Go up and rehearse a rape with Melanie in your bedroom. Christ. He wanted me to do you and he set the scene. Ah, he's evil!' (MT,152)

In what must be the most ironic statement in the novel, a statement uttered in response to the knowledge that Philip's wife, Aunt Margaret, is the lover of her

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<sup>76</sup> This novel perhaps represents a good challenge to the common (mis) conception that psychoanalysis is a bourgeois, anti-materialist discourse. Psychoanalysis and class issues need not be mutually exclusive.

own brother, Melanie draws attention to the "mystery" that envelops the toyshop, " 'I have never encountered it before' she said. 'Not incest. Not in my family.' " (MT,195). In the context of events in the novel, such as the "Leda and the Swan" puppet show in which Uncle Philip asks Melanie to play virginal Leda to his swan (her white outfit resembles her mother's wedding dress, The Magic Toyshop being full of these kinds of echoes), Philip's name, Flower, is important. Names, as previously noted, are linked with a person's identity. The name Flower carries sexual connotations and hints at his desire to de-flower women in the family (although Melanie's mother is literally de-flowered by Melanie's father--names also show that Uncle Philip can never achieve this materially). Finn's revelations do not reveal Uncle Philip as a "pervert" so much as the intersection of gender and class in the machinations of power. In order for Philip to maintain control and to keep women within "his" group he has to reverse the incest taboo and allow Finn to deflower Melanie. Finn is a pawn in Uncle Philip's class/sex war because he doesn't see him as belonging in any category: " So he thinks I should do you because he despises me, too, and thinks I'm God's scum...And I should do you because you shave under your armpits and maybe you would have a baby and that would spite your father" (MT, 152-3). Uncle Philip's desire is inseparable from his need to dominate.

Compared with what the reader knows about Uncle Philip, information about Melanie's mother is scant. At the beginning of the novel we discover that the family has seen less of its relatives since her father's success. There is the suggestion that her mother and father are attempting to escape their own origins and that money has enabled them to distance themselves from their immediate families. But their histories remain indistinct. The only way Melanie can situate her mother is through class. For instance, when she plays with her five fingers one day she fantasises that they are the members of her family in some never-to-be-future:

The thumb the father, short and thick set, probably a Northcountryman, with flat, assertive vowels in his speech, and the forefinger the mother, a tall, willowy lady of middle-class origins, who said; 'dahling' frequently and ate dessert oranges with a knife and fork. Had he married above his station in the flush of self-made money? He had the bluff upright stance of a man who has made his own in the world. And three fine children, two full grown, a big boy and girl, and one just coming into its teens. (MT, 161-2)

This episode could be linked to the passage in which Melanie faints when she believes she sees a small, plump severed hand in a drawer. We are told that this particular hand has a child's ring on the fourth finger which leads to the heart, the hand of a young girl. Along with the imaginary chopped up bodies in the cupboard and the puppet swan which is chopped by Finn later on in the novel, this image implies severance and heartache, which links up with the notion of the rupturing of the mother-daughter bond due to the lack of the symbolisation of the mother-daughter relation, and the lack of a female genealogy that we have been discussing. As Whitford says, in a discussion of Irigaray's work on these matters:

This effective 'castration' (*castration réalisé*) that Freud accounts for in terms of 'nature', 'anatomy', could equally well, or rather, be interpreted as the impossibility, the prohibition that prevents woman...from ever imagining, conceiving of, representing or symbolising...her own relation to the beginning.<sup>77</sup>

Melanie's mother's origins are very unclear, indicating perhaps the difficulties/haziness of women's relations to their origins generally, giving a different slant here upon the notion of the female wound/wounded woman that is so central to Carter's work. Despite the fragments of her mother's life that are captured in photographs, Melanie really does not know her mother at all. Her mother's story remains palimpsestically hidden beneath the story of marriage and motherhood in which/by which she is framed, and when Melanie tries to describe her to Finn she finds that she can only muster a statement such as:

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<sup>77</sup> Whitford 87.

"My mother was the sort of woman wore hats and gloves and sat on committees"(MT,116).

Unlike the wool which hides the body of Melanie's mother and acts as a defence against carnal knowledge, the Jowles are described as the sort of wool which invites touch, but for a while she is locked out of their charmed circle, of which she is the voyeur: " They were an entity, the Jowles, warm as wool. She envied them bitterly. 'Make yourself at home.' How could she? It all fell apart, her detachment. Suddenly, she yearned above all things to break into their home movie" (MT,76). Melanie is denied a mirror in the toyshop in which she might have continued constructing a self and wants to be re-cognised by Margaret, Francie and Finn who appear the only substantial things in it. They are the lifeblood (the red people) of the toyshop and she needs them to make her feel alive again. Melanie can only come close to exorcising her loss periodically through listening to their music. They are a trio who are doubly dispossessed, as orphans *and* strangers in a foreign land: "she gripped her hands together to help herself bear the wailing glory of the music which was a lament for all lost and gone, loved things, an expression of a grief she had thought too deep to express" (MT, 50).

In Wise Children the narrator says that if someone does not have a family of their own they will make up their own, and this is how the Chance family comes about. A shared past is an important concept for Melanie, who feels that she doesn't have anybody to share hers with. She becomes increasingly obsessed with family romance and seduced by the Promethean fieriness of the Irish trio, so that when they adopt her she invents origins for them. Interestingly the past takes shape in her imagination through the body of the mother, transmitted through Francie's violin music:

Their shared past sprang up between them, tangible, their years together, their own old home, their parents. The woman in the brothers' bedroom, their mother. What was her name? How had she talked to them and showed how she loved them and what family names, little

names, did she have for them? How had she died? Did they get their red hair from her or what colour had her hair been? And how had she worn it? All Melanie knew of her was her guarded face and the feel of her dead eyelids, transmitted to her fingertips from Francie, through Finn. (MT,109)

Sage points out the toyshop is crammed with copies of things, kitsch artefacts, which confound the distinction between art and life. Melanie, Jonathon and Victoria end up in a house "where there are no mirrors and no books, *because it is the world you find in books and mirrors*, the region of copies and images and representations".<sup>78</sup> After smashing her mother's mirror, it is as if Melanie has travelled through to the other side of the glass; she journeys "through the glass darkly". Indeed, Rosemary Jackson tells us that "many of the strange worlds of modern fantasy are located in, or through, or beyond, the mirror. They are spaces behind the visible, behind the image..."<sup>79</sup> At the beginning of the novel the narrator informs us that, "the woman was gone and the man was gone, the man standing diffidently behind his bride squinting because the sun was in his eyes" (MT,25). However, in the toyshop she encounters her own squinting man, Finn, whose bizarre paintings render the familiar unfamiliar, reflecting the strangeness of this mirror world.

Melanie's journey beyond the mirror actually presents her with an unsolvable riddle. In her naivety, she believes she is travelling from one time zone into a completely different one: "The train was a kind of purgatory, a waiting time, between the known and completed past and the unguessable future which had not yet begun" (MT, 25), yet this linear concept of time proves to be misleading as the move to her Uncle's toyshop brings her into a closer relationship with her mother who, paradoxically, remains as elusive and out of reach as she had been when she was alive although she is tantalisingly omnipresent in her absence. Beyond the frame of the mirror and of marriage (which forms the framework of the bourgeois

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<sup>78</sup> Sage, Angela Carter 15.

<sup>79</sup> Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion (London: Methuen, 1981) 43.



realist novel), in which the woman is caught as an object of exchange and desire, Melanie does not only find a world of representations she finds that *she is taken as a copy or representation of her mother*. In the toyshop she feels that she is a shadow and she is haunted by the spectre of the dead/undead mother that Kahane mentions.

Although she smashes the mirror then, she does not escape the confusing ambivalence of femininity posed by the mirror. She finds herself still locked in what Kahane terms, "an ongoing battle with a mirror image who is me and not-me..."<sup>80</sup>, the (m)other who haunts the toyshop. Earlier, when she wants her mother and father back she asks herself despairingly, "how could the dead return?" (MT, 25). In the penultimate chapter, when she glimpses their wedding photograph in Uncle Philip and Aunt Margaret's bedroom, however, she is aware that the toyshop is haunted (MT, 187). She fully believes her parents might come alive again. This is because the toyshop/gothic mansion is a realm of inbetweenness in which life and death collapse into each other. It forms a place/space in which the reader may have to question her own boundaries and face her own fears of loss and death echoed in the text.

In Gothic texts the uncanny effect (the dis-ease) experienced by readers of the genre is very often linked to the experience of the gothic interloper/protagonist whose identity is thrown into question, and whose safety appears endangered through encounters with ghosts that confuse the past and present and life and death. We can see how gothic fears and the instability that is the essence of the genre are inherently linked to questions surrounding femininity and feminine identity. To quote Bronfen once more:

Femininity like the image, like death, is a fundamentally uncanny position. As site of assurance and disruption it stages control and its impossibility. It endorses an intellectual hesitation between fear and

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<sup>80</sup> Kahane 52.

desire, between self and other, between a surmounting of loss and its irrecoverable fulfilment.<sup>81</sup>

### **Hauntings: Desire, the Unconscious and the Body of the Mother**

I now want to examine a description of the toyshop as it is first seen by Melanie and to discuss the way in which it conveys the feelings described by Freud in his essay "The 'Uncanny'",<sup>82</sup> a text which is quite obviously encoded within the novel:

Between a failed, boarded-up jewellers and a grocers displaying a windowful of sunshine cornflakes, was a dark cavern of a shop, so dimly lit, one did not at first notice it as it bowed its head under the tenement above. In the cave could be seen the vague outlines of a rocking-horse and the sharper scarlet of its flaring nostrils, and stiff-limbed puppets, dressed in rich, sombre colours, dangling from their strings; but the varnish of the horse and the plums and purples of the puppets made such a murk together that very little could be seen.  
(MT, 25)

The toyshop has a fairy tale, surreal quality, framed between two, ordinary looking shops it seems to stand out, inviting inspection because it promises secrets. The comparison of the shop to a cave, a dark inner space, with its "murk" of plums and purples implies some sort of depth against which the scarlet nostrils of the rocking horse and the stiff limbs of the puppets stand out like the surface details of a painting. The description involves both stasis (the puppets are dangling from their strings as if in suspension) and movement, as the toys recede into the general darkness (which is partly "made up" by their colours). One feels that there is more to this building than meets the eye as "very little could be seen". What seems important is the fact that it does not fix the reader's gaze. The scene is shifting and unstable (like the scene of writing itself) and the very murkiness of the shop described challenges assumptions

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<sup>81</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic (London: Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>82</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" The Penguin Freud Library: Art and Literature, Vol.14, ed. Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 339-376.

about the representation of life in art, of the idea that art can and must faithfully mirror an objectively knowable reality. Representation is problematised in a passage such as this for Carter's reality is open and fluctuating, murky rather than clear and transparent. In this descriptive passage objects appear to merge into one another, indeed, into themselves, so that the familiar (a South London shop window) becomes strange and the reader experiences the effects of the uncanny. Indeed, the toyshop embodies the dynamic of the uncanny, oscillating between revealing and veiling secrets.

On her first morning in the toyshop Melanie gets up early in order to explore the house and to familiarise herself with the new surroundings: "She had to make herself at home, somehow. She could not bear to feel such a stranger, so alien, and somehow so insecure in her own personality, as if she found herself hard to recognise in these new surroundings" (MT, 58). The link between place and person is here made explicit, between the setting, the interior of the toyshop, and Melanie's mind, as the toyshop estranges rather than accommodates her. This is a feature of the gothic in general, in which the distinction between inside and outside is frequently blurred, confounding the distinctions between life and death, birth and sexuality and body and mind.

Perhaps the most famous example of a gothic short story which uses the house as an allegory for the mind and body is E.A. Poe's "The Fall of The House of Usher". The House of Usher, with its "vacant eyelike windows"<sup>83</sup> which perhaps suggest a head, is, as its name implies, inextricably linked with its occupants. The main source of the story's irony lies in the narrator's battle against the fear that the house and Roderick Usher instil in him and his futile attempts to rationalise these fears and fancies away. The very willfulness of his attempts to explain and to stave off dissolution indicate disorder within his own mind. The narrator of the tale has to shake off the idea that he is dreaming

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<sup>83</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," *The Oxford Book of Short Stories*, ed. V.S. Pritchett. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 43.

when he looks upon the house and experiences the uncomfortable feeling which occurs when something known becomes strange: "I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this--I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up".<sup>84</sup> This is exactly the process Melanie experiences in her initial exploration of the toyshop. Again, if we refer to Freud's essay we will see that he uses the German word *unheimlich* to describe feelings of dislocation. Rendered in German, it literally means "unhomely" for its opposite, *heimlich*, means familiar, homely. All Melanie's efforts to fit in and feel at home in the toyshop fail her so that she feels like a stranger stranded in a foreign land. As mentioned, she only begins to feel safe ("at home") when she becomes closer to Finn, Francie and Margaret who are also exiles struggling with their displacement and confinement.

The magic, closed space in which she often feels trapped and miserable is likened to a forest: "All the red people lighting a bonfire for her, to brighten away the wolves and tigers of this dreadful forest in which she lived" (MT, 122). The forest is a familiar setting in fairy tales, a place where children are abandoned by their parents or lose their way, and in "The Curious Room", Carter speaks of the fascination with the forest as a motif for the unconscious, or at least a journey into the unknown realms of one's psyche. Her short story entitled "Overture and Incidental Music for A Midsummer Night's Dream" contrasts the forest of fairy tales with the Shakespearean wood. There is always a way out of the wood, which is enchanted rather than haunted. As we said earlier, the toyshop, according to Melanie, appears as definitely haunted, and here we can see it is linked to issues of the unconscious and thus to forbidden and/or repressed desires (other selves) which threaten her identity. In contrast to the wood, the forest is a place in which someone will lose themselves:

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<sup>84</sup> Poe 46.

to be lost in the forest is to be lost to this world, to be abandoned by the light, to lose yourself utterly with no guarantee you will find yourself or else be found, to be committed against your will-or worse, of your own desire.<sup>85</sup>

The forest is an existential catastrophe because, according to the narrator, it is as boundless as the human heart.

The magic (*unheimlich*) toyshop/forest in the text mirrors the novel that is The Magic Toyshop, which is an *unheimlich* text. Interestingly, Hélène Cixous describes the *unheimlich* as "the baroque forest of the dictionary",<sup>86</sup> meaning that it is the intangible, enlivening underside of rational structures (the Symbolic Order/language). Finn sinisterly predicts Melanie's journey into the depths of the psyche and to the heart of desire and identity on the day they first meet. In response to Melanie's remark that it is beginning to get dark he tells her it will get darker: "His voice suddenly warmed. There was a certain ritual quality in this exchange, as though Melanie had stumbled on the secret sequence of words that would lead her safe over the sword-edge bridge into the castle of Corbenic" (MT, 37). The irony, of course, is that the magic, disorientating space of the toyshop is not safe at all, and this is where The Magic Toyshop departs from more formulaic fantastic texts.

Carter also uses another fairy-tale setting in a description of the toyshop, namely Bluebeard's castle. Melanie wanders alone down the brown corridors of her uncle's house fearing there are secrets hidden behind the doors. Clockwork automata may at any minute roll out, or the rooms occupied at night by the Flowers may contain something more hideous by day.<sup>87</sup> This passage once

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<sup>85</sup> Carter, "Overture and Incidental Music for a Midsummer's Night Dream," Black Venus (London: Picador, 1985) 68.

<sup>86</sup> Cixous, "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The 'Uncanny')," New Literary History Vol 7.3 (1976) 525-48: 531.

<sup>87</sup> In some ways Melanie's attitude is similar to that of Catherine in Northanger Abbey. Like Catherine Melanie has a vivid imagination, she has absorbed the fairytales which prey on her mind in the same way that the Gothic novels and romances that Catherine reads affect her perception of Northanger Abbey and what goes on inside it. Jane Austen annexes the imaginary realm from "reality" in the conclusion of Northanger Abbey when Catherine's convictions are proven to be completely far-fetched and the product of a frivolous and reprehensible immersion in the popular fictions of her day. Catherine's assumptions are shown to be nothing more than girlish fantasies

again echoes Jane Eyre, when Jane explores the upper floor of Thornfield, lingering in a long, narrow passage, "looking, with its two rows of small, black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle".<sup>88</sup> Melanie similarly thinks of her uncle's house as containing hideous secrets:

Bluebeard's castle, it was, or Mr. Fox's manor with 'Be bold, be bold but not too bold' written up over every lintel and chopped up corpses piled neatly in all the wardrobes and airing cupboards, on top of the sheets and pillowslips. Melanie knew that she was unreasonable, that empty rooms and quiet beds lay all around her, but the fright was still there... (MT, 83)

Like the narrator of "The House of Usher", Melanie attempts to rationalise away the disquiet she experiences, but the more she attempts to stave off her unease the nearer she gets to what Kahane terms the edge of the Gothic precipice and maternal blackness. In her discussion of the Gothic, Kahane invokes an essay by Norman Holland and Leona Sherman, in which they explore the gender-related attraction of eighteenth-century Gothic literature as having something to do with the fact that Gothic texts highlight the importance of mother-child relationships:

Both find the castle to be the pivotal image, a nighttime house which admits various projections.' It becomes all the possibilities of a parent or a body,' they write,' a total environment in one-to-one relation with the victim, like the all-powerful mother of early childhood.' But toward this environment, characteristically untrustworthy in Gothic fiction, their responses break down along gender lines.<sup>89</sup>

The castle of eighteenth-century Gothic literature is replaced in Carter's novel by the magic toyshop, yet the same associations are there, for the shop is

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when juxtaposed against the solid, empirically knowable real world which, the text implies, she must learn to inhabit. Jane Austen appears to elevate realism over fantasy as a literary mode in her exposure of Catherine as foolish because of her choice of reading material. In contrast to this, Carter actually shows the fairytale, imaginary realm as intersecting with reality. Melanie's perception of the toyshop as Bluebeard's castle is in some ways true and not as crazy as she might like to believe this imagining to be.

<sup>88</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) 138.

<sup>89</sup> Kahane 49. See Leona Sherman and Norman H. Holland, "Gothic Possibilities," New Literary History 8 (Winter 1976) 279-294.

likened to a human figure, "it bowed its head under the tenement above", and it may also be feasible to suggest that there is an analogy being drawn between the shop and the female body as its cavernous interior is clearly womb-like. Indeed, in an interview with Lorna Sage, Carter says that looking back on her fictions she realises that she was drawing an analogy between the houses she describes, and the body of the mother.<sup>90</sup> The cave/womb which becomes Melanie's home could be said to reflect what Gayatri Spivak terms the uterine social organization, which supports the phallic norm of capitalism and denies women pleasure: "the arrangement of the world in terms of the reproduction of future generations, where the uterus is the chief agent and means of production".<sup>91</sup> The imposition of Uncle Philip's laws upon the inhabitants of the toyshop displays the violence of the phallogentric law which governs the Symbolic and murders mother-matter in order to signify. But the pull of the maternal body with its threats and its pleasures cannot be completely contained or ignored.

The toyshop might also be compared to the pre-Oedipal realm where self and m(other) are merged, just as the puppets merge in the gloom/womb of the toyshop. The logic governing the toyshop is so very precarious because the toyshop itself promises to exceed it, as the room in Bluebeard's castle threatens to yield forth the secrets that the patriarch (whose power resides in exploiting the mysteries of the female body whilst he outlaws female desire) has taken such pains to conceal. And if the toyshop is the body of the mother, then Melanie's active exploration of her imprisonment within this space is also, "an exploration of her relation to the maternal body which she too shares, with all its connotations of power over, and vulnerability to, forces within and

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<sup>90</sup> Angela Carter interviewed by Lorna Sage in *New Writing*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and J. Cooke (London: Minerva Press, 1992) 185-93.

<sup>91</sup> Gayatri Spivak, "French Feminism in an International Frame," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981). 154-84: 183 (Issue on "Feminist Readings: French Texts/American Contexts").

without".<sup>92</sup> The toyshop part of The Magic Toyshop continues to deal with female narcissism and woman's relation to origins. Melanie is denied a mirror in the toyshop, but if the toyshop is the body of the mother it is a reflection of her own body as it is represented in Symbolic discourses. It is, however, that very body which makes such discourses possible in the first place, and which always contains the possibility of exceeding and disrupting the tenuous parameters within which it is placed. By way of illustrating what I mean here, I will refer to Cixous's essay on Freud's "'The Uncanny'" once more:

What unfolds without fail before the reader's eyes is a kind of puppet theater in which real dolls or fake dolls, real and simulated life, are manipulated by a capricious stage setter. The net is tightly stretched, bowed, and tangled: the scenes are centred and dispersed; narratives are begun and left in suspension. Just as the reader thinks he is following some demonstration, he senses that the surface is cracking...<sup>93</sup>

Cixous draws attention to Freud's manipulation of Hoffman's "The Sandman" here, illustrating how he diminishes the texture of the tale, simultaneously showing how the uncanny otherness, the uncertainty Freud's text attempts to elide, reverberates doubly as a result.

In "The 'Uncanny'", Freud allocates a central place to the womb which is the "former Home" of the subject. In the three classes of things associated with the uncanny, the womb comes under the third term: that is, feelings associated with unfamiliar places.<sup>94</sup> Along with womb fantasies Freud also lists losing one's way and the haunted house and he makes a link between the haunted house and the womb. The house is haunted by the ghost or trace of a memory, which takes the individual back to the early relationship to the mother when they were still as one. The magic of the title The Magic Toyshop implies that the toyshop

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<sup>92</sup> Kahane 50.

<sup>93</sup> Cixous 526.

<sup>94</sup> The things which frighten Melanie can be found in Freud's list of uncanny objects: the portrait of a bulldog, automata/puppets, and a severed hand.



is an uncanny place and the descriptions of it invoke Freud's reference to the uncanny nature of womb phantasies and the uncanniness of the haunted house.

The uncanny is also discussed as a series of compulsive returns. In an essay entitled "Beyond The Pleasure Principle",<sup>95</sup> written a year after the essay on the uncanny, Freud pointed out that the compulsion to repeat is one of the most common aspects of neurosis and he linked this behaviour to what he called the death drive, which he had become convinced of through his work with suicidal survivors from the trenches in the first world war. This death instinct, or the thanatic impulse, is connected to an organism's wish to return to a desireless state, to a state of stasis (as may be experienced in the womb). Elizabeth Wright writes that the death instinct is not a comforting notion, for "it is a threat to the ego's narcissistic desire for omnipotence, and hence immortality, and yet, as it works in conjunction with the life instincts, it will keep desire circling round its lost object instead of fixating on the self".<sup>96</sup> This circulating movement is the uncanny movement, and in this sense we can see how the loss of the mother and the desire for a return to the womb is in itself uncanny.

Yet when Freud speaks of the uncanny desire to return to the womb, he speaks only of the male subject's fantasies of stasis and undifferentiation that such a return would inevitably entail. The death instinct so clearly linked to the mother's body, which represents annihilation of the ego, works against the life instinct, which in the binary schema of phallogocentric reasoning must be commensurate with masculinity. When Elizabeth Wright speaks of the ego's narcissistic desire for omnipotence, I believe that she speaks of the masculine desire for mastery of transcendence of the natural world, which is continually equated with the body of the woman/mother which remains on the other side of culture, outside the Symbolic. As long as otherness, death and annihilation are

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<sup>95</sup> Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," (1920) in On Metapsychology, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards, The Penguin Freud Library Vol. 11 Harmondsworth (Penguin, 1984).

<sup>96</sup> Elizabeth Wright, Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice (London: Methuen, 1984) 43.

projected onto women, uncanny dislocation might be successfully warded off by the masculine subject. As Kahane says of Holland and Sherman's essay: "Uncomfortable with the gothic plot, Holland, the male reader, concentrates on strategies for avoiding vulnerability to that environment..."<sup>97</sup> In his reading of the Gothic text, Holland repeats not so much a death wish as a desire for transcendence and mastery of the threat of the feminine, posed by the castle representing the female body.

The female subject experiences the uncanny differently, not as a force exerting itself from entirely without but also from within herself. She comes from her mother's womb but she has her own womb. In the Symbolic Order, however, the womb takes on a universal significance. All wombs are *the* womb--the place from which life and death emanates. Earlier I talked about the way in which a girl takes her mother's place and I will extend this in the context of the discussion here to say that she displaces her as womb. In this system a girl cannot have a desire to return to the womb for she is the universal womb--the uncanny place is located within her person. The fear that a woman reader of the Gothic might experience is the uncanny sensation of repetition, not of having been here before, but of *always* having been here, repeating her foremothers' position of stasis in a patriarchal order. This is perhaps why Sherman, in contrast to Holland, reads the primary motivating fear of the Gothic as a fear of nothingness and non-separation. Being unable to distinguish between outside and inside in Gothic texts is a mark of mother--daughter confusion within feminine identity. The earlier Gothic text with the castle/ mother's body at its centre would seem to display the misogynistic implications that underpin Freud's essay on the uncanny, and that form the dynamics of the Symbolic Order, as it allows the male reader to transcend and escape the restrictions of its nightmarish space whilst it works to confirm the

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<sup>97</sup> Kahane 49.

female reader's incarceration in the hall of mirrors (the glass coffin ) that is her position within this system.

As Kahane, by way of Sherman's reading, explains however, this narcissistic body/ trap with its associated masochistic pleasures does also suggest the possibility of desiring female sexuality in the way that the mirror suggests other possibilities and developments. Beside or behind the spectre of the archaic mother within whose frame (which is also her frame, her body) the female protagonist/reader appears to be trapped, hovers the spectre of the sexual transgressor. Such a text thus repeats the warnings of the Old Testament God or of Bluebeard, reinforcing the message that in order to avoid punishment you must remain outside your being/body. To step too far into the bloody chamber of female inheritance, to give in to your curiosity and desire in your exploration of this (your) dangerous body will lead to mutilation, madness or death. In this framework a woman is only allowed to be a victim and not an agent of desire. Her body, with its strange secrets and longings, must remain a sight of enquiry rather than something the female subject has her own knowledge of, and control over.<sup>98</sup>

In her earlier work, Carter uses the figure of the puppet master (Uncle Philip in The Magic Toyshop) and of the scientist (Donally in Heroes and Villains) to represent the masculine ego, that which elevates itself above what it determines as nature in order to dominate and control it. All through her work, Carter implies, and often categorically states, that to be doomed to immanence is tantamount to being doomed to a living death (women representing the death drives). If you do not weave the schemes and plots of

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<sup>98</sup> Simone de Beauvoir turned around the debate on the difference between the sexes in France when she explained this phenomenon in The Second Sex. In the introduction to this important feminist text, Beauvoir describes the way in which, historically, women have been represented as objects of knowledge: interrogatory sites rather than knowing subjects or those whose prerogative it is to quest after knowledge and self-enlightenment. In order to justify his existence, Beauvoir argues, man seemed to need to stabilise woman as an object, "and to doom her to immanence, since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego (conscience) which is essential and sovereign". Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. and ed. H.M Parshley (London: Picador, 1988) 29.

the wicked stepmother, if you avoid the fierce fictions and wild dreams that Gilbert and Gubar associate with such a woman, you will be consigned to a ghostly existence. Like Beauvoir, Carter appears to believe that transcendence for women is impossible but her work as a whole challenges the notion of transcendence, based as it is on a humanistic ideal of ontological wholeness and pureness.

Carter works within an alternative literary tradition which, contrary to realism, suggests that discontinuity and death reside within life and that the self will always seem intangible and out of reach as it remains always unfinished, marked by desiring absence. To understand that one is always lost to oneself and that life itself is a journey in search of answers you will never find, could be construed as liberating. In some ways this growing realisation is helpful to Melanie, who eventually wants to give away her relics and accept loss as a part of life, rather than shoring up the fragments against her ruin! The problem for women is that they are projected as the site of life and death/loss/absence which characterises desire, and so their desire is doubly estranging as it appears to have nowhere to go, no place. Uncanniness for women will always be part of their lived experience which is felt somatically. In this sense (and certainly in the context of The Magic Toyshop) the adage "there's no place like home" takes on an extremely ironic cast. How can you feel at home in a body that is supposedly so excessive and dangerous that it must be taken under someone else's control? Certainly Melanie cannot cope with such an idea, for when the huge puppet swan, which has been constructed by Uncle Philip to reinforce this point, swoops upon her in a simulated rape, she loses consciousness.

Turning inwards for answers, like the Queen in the Snow White story, a woman only finds that her curiosity leads to punishment for daring to question her place as a woman (which of course involves her relation to other women) and laying claim to a desire of her own. Her story which, like Melanie's, involves a journey into the looking glass (travelling behind the frame or inside

her body/being), takes her to the/her originary place, the bloody chamber with its horrific secrets, a place of death and loss, the strange inner place of containment in/with which she can never feel at home because it is not, and never really has been, hers. As Meaney says, "there is nothing stranger than where we came from".<sup>99</sup> This is the strangeness that characterises Melanie's struggle in the toyshop. Excessive desire and curiosity aroused by the woman's confinement within the home and within her body are turned back upon her. Is there no escaping the tyranny of the symbol of the bleeding wound/womb that is her legacy? Inside/outside, mother/daughter, womb/wound--the Gothic text, like the discourse of psychoanalysis, as Kahane so brilliantly shows, breaks down these distinctions and reveals the cruel truth at the heart of a patriarchal system (which is paradoxically the dynamic of such texts)-- the tenuous but nevertheless incarcerating parameters of feminine identity which punish women whichever way they choose to turn.

### **Circular Flights And Vertiginous Endings**

The endings of eighteenth-century Gothic texts place women outside of the inside--this difficult and fearful truth--and away from the troubling mess and chaos of the bloody chamber littered with its destabilising women figures (in Kahane's reading, the spectres of the dead-undead mother) who confront her with her own uncanny position on the threshold between life and death. They eventually plump for mastery and transcendence in a ("masculine") bid to stop the flow of disturbing, confusing and unnerving imagery. Paradoxically, these very texts hint at other endings and beginnings residing within the fantastic space/ text/ body of the woman mother that are waiting to be taken up and explored. According to Kahane, the difference between eighteenth-century and twentieth century Gothic texts rests on the source of terror and its

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<sup>99</sup> Meaney 108.

representation. Instead of the sublime terror of the eighteenth-century Gothic, based on things hidden and unseen, glimpsed only momentarily, then retreating into the darkness once more, contemporary Gothic fiction gives the fear of the self as a visual fear, so that "what had once remained in the pre-Freudian darkness, is now unveiled and more terrifying for being seen".<sup>100</sup> In this context, the spectral mother of earlier Gothic novels emerges as an *actual* figure: "She and not some threatening villain becomes the primary antagonist. With that shift, the heroine is imprisoned not in a house, but in a female body, which itself embodies the female legacy".<sup>101</sup>

Kahane traces this change in the Gothic through the work of Flannery O'Connor, in which the female body is presented as freakish and grotesque and her characters encounter annihilating maternal images in carnivals and side-shows; thus fear of maternity is made the manifest theme of many of her tales. In such fictions the bloody chamber of female inheritance--the story of transgression, punishment, self hatred and entrapment that stems from the myth of the castrated female--allows no escape to a country idyll. Ideals remain out of bounds, for the fear of femaleness looms as a mutilating threat to the illusion of ontological intactness. In O'Connor's work: "Although her various female characters continually attempt to escape by repudiating their womanhood, their flight invariably proves to be circular, nightmarishly bringing them face to face with the danger inherent in female identity--face to face--that is--with mothers"<sup>102</sup>, something we see happening to Melanie. This circular action imitates the "hole", the lack by which women are represented in patriarchal discourses, the bloody mark of their sexual difference.

Carter's fiction, whose originary symbol in Shadow Dance is this very strange place, returns to the womb/wound repeatedly, even compulsively. In

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<sup>100</sup> Kahane 57.

<sup>101</sup> Kahane 57.

<sup>102</sup> Kahane 59.

work, as John Sears has written, deals head-on with the specular nature of the monstrous-feminine inextricably linked with fears of the maternal.<sup>103</sup> Like O'Connor she exposes the horrors of a culture predicated on the defilement of women's bodies which impinges on their self-conception.

As I mentioned earlier, the myth of woman as secondary to man, inheritor of the sinful flesh that must be contained within the boundary of marriage and motherhood, seems mostly inescapable in The Magic Toyshop. But in her more speculative novels, as we have seen, Carter writes the female/ maternal body palimpsestically over and against the textualised body of masculine representations, re-presenting the grotesquery of traditional imagery in such an excessive manner as to rupture myths, in the same way that Cixous's Medusa explodes the system (that would contain her as a negative symbol of lack) with her excessive laughter.

Sage's reading of the novel emphasises the means of escape available to Melanie above the restraints the toyshop imposes.<sup>104</sup> Sage rightly draws attention to the duplicitous means and rebellious schemes of those who are oppressed by the authoritarian puppetmaker in The Magic Toyshop because they do foreshadow Carter's later, more fully developed fictional engagements with folk literature of the past, with the oral stories which exhibit a spirit of resistance, presenting women who attempt to combat confining structures from within; fictions I shall be examining in the next chapter. However, as Sage notes elsewhere, Melanie and her lover Finn are left looking at each other in "wild surmise" in the garden at night. This quote from Keats's sonnet on Chapman's Homer exemplifies the vertiginous state that contemporary male-female relationships have reached. As she says: "The book's ending is full of

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<sup>103</sup> John Sears, Angela Carter's Monstrous Women, (Sheffield: Pavic Publicators, 1992).

<sup>104</sup> Sage, Women 170.

quotations that act as ironic reminders of a time when there were 'souls'<sup>105</sup> and thus it precludes any easy solutions to the dilemmas the novel throws up.

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<sup>105</sup> Sage, Women 170.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **FAIRY TALES AS "FEMININE" FICTIONS: ANGELA CARTER'S THE BLOODY CHAMBER**

#### **The Oral Pleasures of The Bloody Chamber**

The title of Carter's acclaimed collection of fairy tales, The Bloody Chamber, is an overt reference to the bloody womb/wound of castration that we have been tracing throughout her work, the wound that signals the fall into language and desire and which forms the mythical mark of feminine difference. Again, as is the case with Shadow Dance, the scar/wound of the title of the collection frames the text(s) which, like The Magic Toyshop, invites/entices us into the tricky labyrinth of feminine identity with its associated fears and its threats as well as its transformative possibilities. Note how the title The Bloody Chamber also signals one place whilst it actually opens up into many. The book itself forms a *mise en abyme*, confusing notions of inside and outside as the text's title, the tales and the strange figures within them all mirror one another's lack of unity (rather like a reversal of Lacan's mirror stage). Like the second peepshow in Hoffman, which opens onto the view of the interior of the female body as a lush, excessive interior with the seemingly incongruous, torturous Sadeian castle looming in the far distance, this particular textual body, as Armitt has pointed out, is precariously situated on the verge of excessive (narrative) overspill and containment, and of pleasurable gratification on the one hand and masochistic (un) pleasures on the other.<sup>1</sup>

Armitt reads it as an abject, gothic text whose underlying (readerly-writerly) dynamic is that of the oral compulsion to repeat, a compulsion which becomes masochistically self-consuming: "rather than satisfying our voracious desires, Carter's stories of excess only promise us a sequence of (albeit beautifully

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<sup>1</sup>Lucie Armitt, "The Fragile Frames of The Bloody Chamber," The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter, ed. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London and New York: Longman, 1997) 91.

arranged) mouthfuls of nouvelle cuisine".<sup>2</sup> This is also why, according to Armitt, the critic returns to the collection trying to make it do what she wants it to do, a mark of its achievement perhaps. The notion of readerly orality and appetite in relation to The Bloody Chamber (a notion which Armitt develops in defiance of Norman Holland's assertion that "literature creates hunger in the reader and then gratifies us"<sup>3</sup>), is an interesting play on the "oral" roots of the fairy tale, for the fairy tale as we know it has been transcribed from a rich oral tradition into literature and fairy tales were primarily a communal art form, constituting a large part of what might be termed the popular culture of the past. The reference to the tales in relation to orality and appetite also plays on the latent sexual content of the tales, which frequently deal in the darker aspects of human desire: lust, bestiality, cannibalism and cruelty.

Carter is keen to stress that fairy tales form "the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labour created our world" (VFT1, intro. ix) and, unsurprisingly, it is the open-ended capacity of the fairy tale deriving from the oral tradition, which draws her to it. Before tales were recorded and subsumed into what Zipes terms the civilising process and geared towards the regulation of sexuality and the spread of bourgeois manners,<sup>4</sup> there existed greater possibilities for change and embellishment of tales through constant interaction between tellers and tales. In this sense the old art of telling fairy tales (which is an art of process) has much in common with the domestic arts. Indeed, Carter compares the pre-written art of fairy story narration as similar to the making of soup, where the recipe is constantly altered as it is passed from one person to another and bits added or taken away to create different textures and flavours.<sup>5</sup> Here we are back to the issues of creation and consumption posed by

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<sup>2</sup> Armitt 91.

<sup>3</sup> As Quoted in Armitt 91.

<sup>4</sup> Zipes 21.

<sup>5</sup> Angela Carter, ed., The Virago Book of Fairy Tales (London: Virago P, 1991). Introduction x.

Armitt, and I want to address such issues in terms of the oral history of the folk tale, for the oral tradition was controlled by peasants and, as Warner shows, folk and fairy tales were, by and large, disseminated by women:

although male writers and collectors have dominated the production and dissemination of popular wonder tales, they often pass on women's stories from intimate or domestic milieux: their tale spinners often figure as so many scheherazades, using narrative to bring about a resolution of satisfaction and justice.<sup>6</sup>

This idea of narrative control belonging to women appeals to Carter who, in her introduction to The Virago Book of Fairy Tales, notes that the term "old wives tales" is applied to fairy tales in a derogatory way. She tells us: "Old wives' tales—that is, worthless stories, untruth, trivial gossip, a derisive label that allots the art of storytelling to women at the same time as it takes all value from it" (VFT1, intro. xi.).

Extending the notion of orality and masochism to the metamorphic structure of the tales in The Bloody Chamber, Armitt declares: "rather than being fairy tales which contain a few gothic elements, these are actually tales that prey on the restrictive enclosures of fairy-story formulae in a manner that threatens to become masochistically self-destructive".<sup>7</sup> Despite the fact that Armitt's readings of the tales themselves form a profound critique of the restrictive formulae of the literary versions of tales, and of the readings of them as consolatory fictions or "closed dream texts",<sup>8</sup> her essay does not address the historicity of the tale and Carter's fascination with the oral ancestry of the tales (which increased around the time she translated Charles Perrault's tales into English).<sup>9</sup> Of course, other critics have drawn attention to the importance of the tales in terms of their female genealogy

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<sup>6</sup> See Marina Warner, From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairytales and Their Tellers (London: Vintage, 1995) 17. She stresses that women's arts *within* fairy tales are very prominent, and that most of them are verbal.

<sup>7</sup> Armitt 89.

<sup>8</sup> See Armitt's explanation 90.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Perrault, The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault, trans. Angela Carter, illus. Martin Ware (London: Gollancz, 1977).

and the female concerns they frequently articulate.<sup>10</sup> Warner tells us, in the introduction to The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales,<sup>11</sup> that in snatching useful stories for women out of the "jaws of misogyny", Carter follows in the footsteps of the resourceful women in those very stories and that such tales also: "offered her a means of flying--of finding and telling an alternative story, of shifting something in mind, just as so many fairy-tale characters shift something in their shape" (VFT 2, intro.ix). In a similar vein Sage writes that Carter actually becomes a version of the fairy godmother: "Going back to these preliterate forms of storytelling was 'radical' for her... She could experiment with her own writer's role, ally herself in imagination with the countless, anonymous narrators who stood behind literary redactors like Perrault (or much later) the Brothers Grimm".<sup>12</sup> As Williams says, in Carter's fiction we may discern a move from a connection with the father to one with the mother: "Carter's emphasis changes, from classic Oedipus to 'negative Oedipus' (the term used to characterize the infant's desire for the same sex)"<sup>13</sup> and, as Sage implies, Carter herself seemed to increasingly desire a grounding, and sought after some sort of origins for her ribald and dangerous fictions, which she accordingly found in the *vieilles* of the forests of a pre-industrial age. These were the crones and gossips, the grandmothers and "old mother geese" whose presence Perrault liked to invoke in his versions of the tales but whose oral versions he mocked as far inferior, due to their being, "so filled with dirt".

In fact what Carter particularly likes and admires about fairy tales of the oral tradition *is* their rude humour and their survivalist spirit, the aspects of European folk tales which, as we shall see, were gradually and purposefully eliminated as a

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<sup>10</sup> Warner points out that it would be absurd to argue that storytelling was an exclusively female activity, "but it is worth trying to puzzle out what different ways the patterns of the fairytale romancing might be drawn when women are the tellers" 21.

<sup>11</sup> Marina Warner, intro. to The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales (London: Virago, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Lorna Sage, Angela Carter (Plymouth: Northcote House) 40.

<sup>13</sup> Linda Ruth Williams, Critical Desire: Psychoanalysis and the Literary Subject (London: Edward Arnold, 1995) 122.

result of a growing preoccupation with the collecting and recording of fairy tales which began in the late seventeenth-century and reached its zenith in the Victorian period. Such a process was connected with the divorce from the land and the growing predominance of culture over nature, writes Carter (VFT 1, xxi), a theory which is borne out in Jack Zipes's extensive socio-historical study of the fairy tale. Zipes explains that:

The entire period from 1480 to 1650 can be seen as a historical transition in which the Catholic Church and the reform movement of Protestantism combined efforts with the support of the mercantile and industrial classes to rationalize society and literally to exterminate social deviates who were associated with the devil, such as female witches, male werewolves, Jews and Gipsies.<sup>14</sup>

The witch hunts of this period resulted in the greater rationalisation and regulation of the social and spiritual life, a process which coincided with the rise of the bourgeoisie due to their increased economic power. The drive behind what Zipes terms the civilising process<sup>15</sup> was born out of the bourgeoisie's need and ability to adopt and transform courtly models for purposes of expansion and consolidation of their interests, and one way of spreading these interests at a subliminal level was through literary socialization. Regulating children's behaviour by means of instructive literary material became of tantamount importance. Pamphlets on table manners, natural functions, bedroom etiquette and so forth were produced in abundance. The child could even be said to be a product of the civilising process. The early life of a child was seen as ripe with potential for its future development as a civilised adult, and childhood became a realm of "natural innocence" as the world of children was gradually divorced from that of adults.

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<sup>14</sup> Jack Zipes, Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization (New York: Routledge, 1983) 22.

<sup>15</sup> Zipes, Subversion. This is a term he borrows from Norbert Elias, whose book is actually entitled The Civilising Process (New York: Urizen, 1978).

The role of fairy tales in the process of the internalisation of social norms and requirements was seen as crucially important. Charles Perrault was the first major collector and adaptor of fairy tales explicitly seeking to colonise the internal and external development of children in the mutual interests of a bourgeois-aristocratic elite and, in 1697, he published Contes du temps passé.<sup>16</sup> Zipes, drawing on the work of Norbert Elias, explains that in the late seventeenth century the aristocracy had to expand their circles in order to ensure their rule and thus provided an élite group access to their circles. Perrault happened to be one of these:

Perrault was among the fortunate members of the *haute bourgeoisie* to be honoured by the court. He was a high, royal civil servant, one of the first members of the Academie Francaise, a respected polemicist, and a significant figure in literary salons. Moreover, he endorsed the expansive political wars of Louis XIV and believed in the exalted mission of the French absolutist regime to 'civilize' Europe and the rest of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Within the hands of a socio-political, patriarchal order, male dominance and female subservience became central to the literary versions of fairy tales and it is Zipes, along with Warner, who gives the most comprehensive documentation and analysis of the part fairy tales have played in the construction and dissemination of gender roles so crucial to the success of the civilising process. Noting that particular behavioural standards had to be incorporated for particular socio-political ends, Zipes goes on to explain how Perrault wove the notion of *civilité* into his tales via very specific depictions of masculinity and femininity that he wanted children to emulate: "From his fears and desires he shaped the configurations of the fairy tale to engender an aesthetic-ideological constellation of dependable and temperant male governance over whimsical naivete".<sup>18</sup> Women were seen as potentially destructive and potentially harmful to the civil order and

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<sup>16</sup> See Histories or Tales of Olden Times, trans. Robert Samber (London, 1737).

<sup>17</sup> Zipes, Subversion 20.

<sup>18</sup> Zipes, Subversion 35.

their gossiping and storytelling powers had somehow to be tamed and shaped to suit the tastes of the time.

In the context of the bowdlerisation and shaping of the once-mutable fairy-tale form for particular ideological ends, the story of "Little Red Riding Hood" is a particularly interesting example of a parable created to extol the bourgeois virtues of female passivity and restraint, the outlawing of women as actively desiring subjects and the crystallisation of gender categories/binaries that this entailed. It becomes a prohibitive tale primarily concerned with the control of women, who are equated with their supposedly unruly and dangerous desires. In Perrault's original version, Little Red Riding Hood brings about both her grandmother's and her own downfall by giving into this (her punishable) desire. The moral tells us outright that control must be exercised over female desire, otherwise little girls may be in danger of being devoured by their own libidos, as is represented by the wolf in Perrault's transformed adaption of an earlier oral version of the tale.<sup>19</sup> The Brothers Grimm revise the Perrault version of "Little Red Riding Hood" in the nineteenth century, the changes made being reflective of wider social transformations in the way children were being viewed and reared.<sup>20</sup> According to

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<sup>19</sup> Warner says that the consumption of Little Red Riding Hood and the grandmother by the wolf, to whom they are assimilated, could have represented the wildness of the peasant folk untouched by "imported acculturation". On the other hand, the wolf in the moral at the end is compared to a smooth, urbane male, a "smooth-tongued" wolf, who could be seen as overwhelming the rustic girl and her grandmother, "in the way, one could say, as classical learning, metropolitan manners and other customs, alien rather than autochthonous, swallow up the homebred nursery culture of old women and their protégées, of Mother Goose and her listeners." 182-183. "Autochthonous" is a Greek word meaning "sprung from the earth". In this context it relates to the culture of indigenous peoples.

<sup>20</sup> The Grimm brothers' aim was to foster a strong national identity through recourse to Germanic folklore and related French and central and northern European folklore, conforming to and simultaneously bolstering the social mores and tastes of the time. Their collection of tales went through an extreme modification process and was revised seven times in order for it to convey the right level of purity, justice and truth for the education of the young middle-class: "in the process they carefully eliminated those passages which they thought would be harmful for children's eyes. This became a consistent pattern in the revisions after 1819." Zipes, *Subversions* 48. Emphasis was placed on the qualities of duty, passivity and self-sacrifice for girls and activity, competition and money-making for boys, thus sinisterly foreshadowing the ideological programme of the Hitler youth. See Zipes's chapter "The Fight Over Fairy-Tale Discourse: Family, Friction and Socialization in the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany" Zipes, *Subversions* 134-169, for an interesting discussion of the ideological struggle over fairy tales in this period.

Zipes, the Grimms found the Perrault version both too cruel and too sexually explicit. They tagged on a happy ending and attempted to "desexualise" Little Red Cap by transforming her into an even more helpless, sacrificial lamb type. The moral of the Grimm's version stresses the result of disobedience through indulgence of sensual pleasure generally, rather than the all-consuming sexuality of Perrault's Little Red Riding Hood. In Perrault's story, the girl cannot save herself, she is raped, as if to say *this* will be your punishment for giving into your desire, and she dies. Whereas Perrault kills her, the Grimms have her saved by a hunter who represents the protective father(land). In both cases the girl is sacrificed for the nation state and the extension of male hegemony.

Later I will examine what I call Carter's "wolf trilogy", but for now it will suffice to say that in her rewritings of "Little Red Riding Hood", her return to the period in which tales were transmitted orally calls attention to the important part played by women in the transmission of history and the imaginative life of the poor. Although it would be ahistorical to impose upon this period a romantic imagining of women existing and co-existing in sisterly freedom, her tales remind us that the art of storytelling has never been an exclusively white male, middle-class preserve. It is important to stress that women's past relationships are not *necessarily* to be exalted or emulated, for Carter rightly notes that many fairy tales told by women were "downright unsisterly" (VFT 1, intro. xiii), something that is borne out in Warner's study in which she focuses on the figure of the storyteller, examining the social circumstances that lie behind the depictions of female evil which abound in tales told by women.<sup>21</sup> For instance, the portrayal of the wicked and antagonistic stepmother who figures in many tales is read as reflective of a profound historical reality, that is to say, the death of the mother in childbirth, as a result of which men frequently married more than once. Warner is intent on showing that the content of fairy tales reveals the hardship of the lives of the poor

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<sup>21</sup> See Warner, "Absent Mothers: Cinderella," 201-217, and "Wicked Stepmothers: the Sleeping Beauty," 218-240.



and the familiar strife arising from specific socio-historical circumstances. For women, such circumstances often proved particularly debilitating because, as Warner tells us, "the conflicting claims on women of their paternal and marital homes, continued throughout their lives and exacerbated their insecurity and stirred up much misery and misogyny in consequence".<sup>22</sup>

Whilst pointing out that fairy tales reflect the suffering of women and the lower classes, in many ways reaffirming the patriarchal status quo, prejudices and the behavioural codes to which they were supposed to adhere, Warner, like Zipes, claims that they also have subversive potential, explaining that the popularity of fairy tales has grown at times of increased control and domination: "While fairy tales have shored up traditional aspirations (for fame and fortune above all) they can also act as fifth columnists, burrowing from within..."<sup>23</sup> Historically, the telling of fairy tales provided women with the opportunity to express themselves and to explore their relation to the world at times when other modes of speech were unavailable to them, and the ribald voice of Mother Goose, and the tough, garrulous survivalist women Carter admires in the the Virago books of fairy tales find their way into her own tales. Indeed, as Warner observes: "The issue of women's speech, of women's noise of their/our clamour and laughter and weeping and shouting and hooting runs all through Angela Carter's writing and informed her love of the folk tale" (VFT2, intro. x).

### **Bettelheim and the Taming of the Id**

I have already referred to Bettelheim's work, and at this point it is perhaps pertinent to examine his readings in more detail, for they have been widely acclaimed and subsumed by educators. Along with Perrault and Grimm's versions of fairy tales, they can be viewed as one of the recent major contributions to the

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<sup>22</sup> Warner 227-228.

<sup>23</sup> Warner 411.

de-fusing of the tales' radical potential, or the civilising process. As Maria Tatar puts it, no readings of fairy tales can avoid being/becoming rewritings/workings of them and Bettelheim's "versions" which may initially appear as innocuous in their seemingly benevolent attitude toward children reveal, on closer inspection, disturbing presumptions, both about children and about female sexuality.<sup>24</sup> Warner lumps Bettelheim in with those (men, usually) who have helped towards cutting the tales adrift from their historical context, the "particular web of tensions in which women were enmeshed"<sup>25</sup> and towards the concretising of the "wicked women" of the tales as psychical archetypes. Both Warner and Carter's view of fairy tales as adaptable forms which take on different meanings in different times and locations (varying with tellers and audiences) strongly contrasts with Bettelheim's characterisation of the fairy tale as a vehicle for the expression of *universal* human problems.

In The Uses of Enchantment, Bettelheim draws upon both Freud and Jung in an examination of the best known fairytales. Significantly, he analyses the written form of the tales, those of the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault in particular. In an interview Carter refers to A. Darnton's observation that wolves were a very real mortal threat in the woods of seventeenth century France, hence Perrault's marginal directions at the point where the wolf pounces on Little Red Riding Hood. Perrault tells the reader that: "the storyteller should do likewise", that is to say, pounce on the one whom they are reading to. As Carter says: "Acting out the story has always been part of the story traditionally. It turns into something completely different--a rough kind of game--which is obviously something that Bettelheim didn't know; he's only had it as text, not from the oral tradition".<sup>26</sup> Here

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<sup>24</sup> Maria Tatar, Off With Their Heads (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1992) Preface, xxv.

<sup>25</sup> Warner 417. Steven Spielberg and Robert Bly are quoted as other examples, representatives of "new" mannish discourses which (perhaps unwittingly) reproduce destructive feminine archetypes.

<sup>26</sup> Angela Carter, Novelists in Interview, ed. John Haffenden (London: Methuen, 1985) 83-84.

Carter hints at her own textual practice, which is to involve rather than to inform the reader, whereas Bettelheim reads fairy tales (ultimately) as the articulation of consensus, failing to see within them an expression of conflict other than that between a child and its parents. For Carter, as we have seen, the fairy tale is generated by social conflict in a wider context, and has a more radical potential than Bettelheim could ever acknowledge.

Echoing Joseph Campbell's study of mythology, The Hero With A Thousand Faces, a work positing the theory that the myth is a homogenous type with multifarious manifestations among varying cultures, Bettelheim claims: "There is a general agreement that myths and fairy tales speak to us in the language of symbols representing unconscious content...in the fairy tales' content the inner psychological phenomena are given body in symbolic form".<sup>27</sup> Campbell's study, as its title suggests, focuses on the mythic hero and the heroic lifestyle: "The composite hero of the monomyth is a personage of exceptional gifts. Frequently he is honoured by his society, frequently unrecognised or disdained. He and/or the world in which he finds himself suffers from a symbolical deficiency".<sup>28</sup> Heroic action is represented as physical, moral, or both, and heroic adventures occur in a region where supernatural forces are encountered. In this other world the hero must primarily conquer himself, achieving inner integration through self-knowledge, which he can then impart to the rest of the world. The heroic cycle is described by Campbell as a process of rediscovery, rather than discovery, for:

The hero is symbolical of that divine creative and redemptive image which is hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life.... The two--the hero and his ultimate god, the seeker and the found--are thus understood as the outside and inside of a single self-mirrored mystery, which is identical with the mystery of the manifest world.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Bettelheim 36.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Campbell, The Hero With A Thousand Faces (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968) 37.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell 40.

According to Bettelheim myths, like fairy tales, centre on psychic journeys and can help the child towards integration and redemption. They differ in one major respect, however. Whereas the myth elevates a singular individual with special attributes and a particular vision or ideal, the fairy tale characterises all forms of humanity; they are "always presented as ordinary, something that could happen to you or me or the person next door when out on a walk in the woods. Even the most remarkable encounters are related in casual, everyday ways in fairy tales".<sup>30</sup> And fairy tales are inherently optimistic believes Bettelheim.

What is most fascinating about Bettelheim's work is that he does actually read sexuality and dark magic "back" into the fairy tale and into the child, explaining it as a form which works to undo, or to "tap" repressions. The child, through subconscious engagement with the latent content of the tales, may learn how the conflicting demands of the Id and the Superego can be reconciled whilst the need for ego ideals is simultaneously recognised. He promotes the reading of fairy tales as a useful means by which the child reader or listener may live out harmful and destructive (sexual) aggressions towards parental figures in a cathartic fashion, their symbols allowing for some form of psychological projection and purgation, whilst still reassuring a child that "there is a happy solution to his Oedipal problems".<sup>31</sup> Where Oedipus was ultimately destroyed by the gods, malevolent representations of the Superego, the happy endings of fairy tales persuade the child that the final outcome will be positive:

Gaining his kingdom through being united in love and marriage with the most appropriate and desirable partner--a union which the parents thoroughly approve and which leads to happiness for everybody but the villains--symbolises the perfect resolution of oedipal difficulties, as well as the gaining of true independence and complete personality integration.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Bettelheim 37.

<sup>31</sup> Bettelheim 39.

<sup>32</sup> Bettelheim 130.

The trouble is, that although Bettelheim is aware of the disruptive elements of fairy stories connected with their latent sexual content and the complexities of desire, he stresses the happy endings of tales over and above their ability to shock and to estrange. He wants to diffuse the power of the desires which literary versions of fairy tales paradoxically articulate via their silence on such matters, sanitising them once more through crass utopian statements such as:

Fairy tales suggest that eventually there comes a time when we must learn what we have not known before--or to put it psychoanalytically, to undo the repression of sex. What we had experienced as dangerous loathsome, something to be shunned, must change its appearance so that it is experienced as truly beautiful. It is love which permits this to happen.<sup>33</sup>

Although this *appears* an attractively optimistic reading, taking us back to the happy outcomes of many tales from the oral tradition,<sup>34</sup> his belief in the power of love which he takes to be the subtext of many fairy tales (The Animal Groom cycle in particular), becomes more sinister as we learn that Bettelheim situates love as existing firmly within the realm of marriage and restrictive heterosexual codes of behaviour.<sup>35</sup> The family reigns supreme as his paradigm of the happy ending. Little girls, like little boys, are recognised as desiring beings, yet it would seem that Bettelheim can only conceive of the girl's sexuality within the final frame of wife and motherhood, consistently implying that a girl's deepest desire will always be to eventually exist for someone else: this, for a female subject, is the essence of love. Bettelheim's reading goes against the historical grain of fairy tales which have, as Warner illustrates, consistently been adopted by women in

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<sup>33</sup> Bettelheim 279.

<sup>34</sup> Zipes says of the fairy/folk tale prior to its transformation through the civising process that most dealt in happy endings which expressed an open-ended utopianism: "Whatever the outcomes of the tales are--and for the most part, they are happy ends and 'exemplary' in that they affirm a more just feudal order with democratizing elements--the impulse and critique of the "magic" are rooted in an historically explicable desire to overcome oppression and change society." Zipes, *Subversion* 8.

<sup>35</sup> Tatar points out that Bettelheim focuses most heavily and intently on female oedipal dramas and the animal groom stories. His book is noticeable for its lack of any exploration of animal bride stories. In this respect he does not differ all that much from Perrault and the Grimms who feared the potential power of women's sexuality.

order to plot escape from imposed limits and to reveal other, different routes of action, tales containing girls and women who reflect(ed) the teller's desire for a better, fairer existence. We will look at this issue in more detail when we examine Carter's wolf tales. Noting the residual misogyny in the readings, Tatar complains that Bettelheim is continually making girls guilty of seductive behaviour or sexual betrayal, and that he positions the child as a transgressor, "whose delivered punishment provides a lesson for unruly children".<sup>36</sup>

Carter has stated that many of the tales in The Bloody Chamber are the result of furious argumentation with the ideas of Bettelheim,<sup>37</sup> and her most powerful images appear opposed to the notion of psychic integration/unity of which Bettelheim speaks and approves as she introduces liminal beings, places and times who/which induce readerly hesitations. Moreover, her hybridic, metamorphic images/representations disrupt the misogyny which has come to pervade the fairy tale and its static representations of masculinity and femininity, suggesting that the realisation of the metamorphic effects of desire can actually help towards the transformation of social relations, and of the "reality" Bettelheim appears so keen for children to inhabit. Bettelheim's invocation of the Oedipal myth as the basis of his analysis of the fairy tale is as restrictive as it is illuminating, for, as Sylvia Bryant recognises:

The narrative fixity of women in fairy tales falls into peripheral positions which are either undesirable in their extremities or contradictory in their desirability....under the rubric of the oedipal myth, woman's story is/can be only man's story--which is, after all, the same old story.<sup>38</sup>

As Warner explains, in "The Bloody Chamber" Carter moves beyond these fairytale stereotypes: "She shakes out the fear and dislike of women they once

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<sup>36</sup> Tatar, preface xxv.

<sup>37</sup> Angela Carter, Novelists in Interview, ed. John Haffenden, (Methuen: London, 1985) 76-97: 82.

<sup>38</sup> Sylvia Bryant, "Reconstructing Oedipus Through Beauty and the Beast," Criticism 31 (1989) 439-453: 440.

expressed to create a new set of values about strong, outspoken, zestful, sexual women who can't be kept down" and, in the introduction to The Virago Book Of Fairy Tales, Carter presents her offering of fairy tales about tough, wise women in "a valedictory spirit, as a reminder of how wise, clever, perceptive, occasionally lyrical, eccentric, and sometimes downright crazy our great-grandmothers were" (VFT1, intro. xxii).

Harnessing the energy and gusto of her foremothers and sisters, Carter attempts to break the static monologic structures of the tales as we know them in their written form, and to open them up to new narrative possibilities. And although Carter constantly reiterates that she is in the demythologising business, a dedicated materialist and anti-essentialist, what she seems to be doing in a few of the stories of The Bloody Chamber (in "The Company of Wolves" and "Wolf Alice" in particular) is, by claiming an active sexuality for women and in creating them as subjects of desire, positing an essence for women. This is not as reactionary as it might at first sound, for in her discussion of the constructionist versus essentialist debate Diane Fuss explains that:

A woman who lays claim to an essence of her own undoes the conventional binarisms of essence/accident, form/matter, and actuality/potentiality. In this specific historical context, to essentialise 'woman' can be a politically strategic gesture of displacement.<sup>39</sup>

As Whitford also explains, to demythologise and to essentialise do not have to be regarded as mutually exclusive positions: "Feminist utopian visions... are mostly of the dynamic rather than the programmatic kind; they do not seek to offer blueprints of the ideal future, still less the steps towards attaining it. They are intended more to bring about shifts in consciousness (paradigm shifts)".<sup>40</sup> This sounds close to the dynamics of the fairy tale as explained by Warner, who speaks

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<sup>39</sup> Diane Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference, (London: Routledge, 1989) 71.

<sup>40</sup> Whitford 20.

of the idea of awakening at the heart of the form, and who concludes her volume by telling us that the chamber of fairy tales: "offers magical metamorphoses to the one who opens the door, who passes on what was found there, and to those who hears what the storyteller brings. The faculty of wonder, like curiosity, can make things happen: it is time for wishful thinking to have its due".<sup>41</sup>

### **The Radical Morphology of The Bloody Chamber**

It is worth looking at Irigaray's ideas on the female Imaginary in more detail in order to draw out the significance of what I have been saying about the radical, dynamic morphology<sup>42</sup> of Carter's tales, the hybridity of which are reflected in/by the multiple hybrids that pad or walk through them (the hybrid being "neither one nor two"<sup>43</sup>). The animal-human figures such as Mr. Lyon, the tiger and the wolves in Carter's fairy tales take the place of the foreign lovers in the early novels (such as Jewel and Finn), as the mirrors of the young girl protagonists' otherness, and on a wider level what Gerardine Meaney (borrowing Irigaray's theoretical terminology) calls the female Imaginary--a place where identities may be recast. To requote Meaney, whom I invoked in the last chapter:

Jewel, Thomas Stern and Heathcliff are projections of libido, which need not be assigned a sex since only one is thinkable. They are also, however, the inscriptional space for the unconscious, thus fulfilling a function which Irigaray defines as feminine. These

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<sup>41</sup> Warner 418.

<sup>42</sup> Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, second edition. intro. Alan Dundes, preface Louis A. Wagner (London: Texas UP, 1975). In his foreword Propp describes morphology thus: "The word 'morphology' means the study of forms. In botany the term 'morphology' means the study of the component parts of a plant, of their relationship to each other and to the whole-in other words, the study of the plant's structure. But what about a 'morphology of the folktale'? Scarcely anyone has thought about the possibility of the concept."

<sup>43</sup> I am referring to Irigaray's "When Our Lips Speak Together," This Sex Which is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), which I discussed in the first chapter. To recap, Irigaray focuses on the genitals as emblematic of a woman's capacity for decentred, multiple sexuality--the labial lips, neither one nor two, are constantly rubbing together, forever dynamic, permitting an uninterrupted autoeroticism.



demon lovers thus confound the differentiation between masculine and feminine.<sup>44</sup>

Irigaray has reclaimed the Imaginary from its established conceptualisation in Lacan in her attempt to discover what underlies the fragile rationality of Western culture and metaphysics and to discover and explore the repressed or unconscious of culture. She believes that it is possible to view psychoanalysis as a branch of philosophical discourse and thus she is able to historicise the Imaginary / the unconscious and, in so doing, conflates a phenomenological definition with a psychoanalytic one, moving fluently between the two. As Whitford explains, the concept of the "Imaginary" comes initially from Sartre, and:

according to Sartre's definition, the imaginary is the intentional object of the imagining consciousness, whether it is as an object in the mind (fantasies, daydreams, evocations of absent persons and so on) or external objects which are products of the imagination (such as novels or painting).<sup>45</sup>

Whitford explains that as well as re-theorising the Imaginary as both conscious, Imaging and imagining mind, *and* the psychoanalytic unconscious/phantasising mind, Irigaray conceives of the Imaginary as gendered. It either: "bears the morphological marks of the male body, whose cultural products are characterised by unity, teleology, linearity and so on or it bears the morphological marks of the female body, characterised by plurality, non-linearity and fluid identity".<sup>46</sup> It must be said that the unconscious, invisible identifications require external sites, visible products of the imagination, and Irigaray's own poetic writings are attempts to mobilise a possible other (female) Imaginary.

In the sense that Irigaray links the Imaginary with the products of the imagination, she places the Imaginary within the social realm, and begins to

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<sup>44</sup> Gerardine Meaney, Unlike Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction (New York: Routledge, 1993) 92.

<sup>45</sup> Whitford 54.

<sup>46</sup> Whitford 54.

psychoanalyse the psychoanalysts and the unconscious fantasies underlying Freudian and Lacanian explanatory systems (their writings). When she notes Freud's recognition of the male sex only, and the inscriptions of these unconscious beliefs on accounts of the psychology of women, and when she criticises the use of a flat mirror in Lacan's theory of the subject, where the mirror is the image of representation,<sup>47</sup> Irigaray is deconstructing the male Imaginary of the ruling Symbolic and the ontology of speculation in the West, the Imaginary that does not recognise sexual difference. At the moment, the female Imaginary's function in the Symbolic processes is to represent that which is outside discourse (beyond its specular circularity). This is the space I examined in chapter one, in conjunction with Alice Jardine's work. Margaret Whitford explains this place of the Other:

The emergence of distinctions, determinate identities, or social organisations, always implies something else--that original state of non-differentiation from which they have emerged. The outside, which is non-graspable, since it is by definition outside the categories that allow one to posit its existence, is traditionally conceptualised as female. Within this sexual symbolism, the determinate, that which has form or identity, belongs to the other half of the pair and is therefore male. Within this schema, rationality falls on the male and determinate side.<sup>48</sup>

When Irigaray describes the female Imaginary she is merely drawing attention to the way in which the feminine functions in Symbolic discourse and is *not being prescriptive*. She shows that what is understood to be the untransformable order of reality is imaginary and is thus open to change, and this is where she differs from Lacan. To analyse the unconscious of Western thought, the female Imaginary in the first sense (as described above) is a prerogative. It is only after such analysis

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<sup>47</sup> Women's sexual organs are reflected as a hole in the plane mirror, as a "nothing to be seen", and Irigaray criticises Lacan for placing an even greater emphasis on woman's "lack" in his rewriting of Freud's theories of sexual difference. The speculum of the title Speculum of the Other Woman is described in the dictionary as a surgical instrument for "dilating cavities of human body for inspection." The speculum thus reflects the *specificity* of the female genitals, rather than reflecting them as castrated. For a brilliant discussion of the way in which the form of this book attempts to form a speculum or vaginal shaped structure, see Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics (London, Routledge, 1985) 130-131.

<sup>48</sup> Whitford 66-67.

that we might be able to move towards the relation between male and female elements differently, and this might well effect a change in the social Imaginary. The female Imaginary might then be viewed completely differently, for identity would be radically altered.

When fairy tales of the oral tradition are regarded as distinctively (although obviously not *exclusively*) feminine forms, then their sanitisation via the civilising process might be taken as a form of repression, and the oral tradition could be viewed as a constituent part of the Western unconscious--a buried or eroded language of feminine guile and eroticism if you like. By reintroducing the language of blood and aspects of references to the body and the lower bodily stratum and excrement in order to unsettle the reader and to dismantle the good/bad girl distinction that has been constructed in written forms of the tales, Carter accordingly attempts to exonerate women and their bodies from/of blame and shame. This is a sort of feminine or feminist carnivalesque practice which reclaims the grotesque female body from the destructive form of abjection described in chapter one. Through this textual practice, Carter breaks with the symbolic system in which women are eternally indebted to the Woman-Mother, who is the sacrifice upon which patriarchy builds its structures:

Woman is the guardian of the blood. But as both she and it have had to use their substance to nourish the universal consciousness of self, it is in the form of *bloodless* shadows--of unconscious fantasies--that they maintain an underground subsistence... femininity consists essentially in laying the dead man back in the womb of the earth, and giving him eternal life.<sup>49</sup>

Deploying shifts in narrative voice, effecting a double (or multi-voiced) discourse, the oral inhabits the literary within Carter's fairy tales and high level of ironic inversion and parody ensues as Carter plays with traditional conceptions of time and progressivist notions of history, exploding the misconception of the

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<sup>49</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 225.

fairy tale as a timeless form expressing universal truths. In patriarchal discourses and realist narratives the past and present are frequently conceived as separate and distinct zones. The refrains of the past tellers of tales coexist with a contemporary voice in The Bloody Chamber highlighting the links between the past and the present and the way in which the past palimpsestically inhabits the present. In the canonical versions, the oral tradition's disruptive presence is increasingly silenced (or transformed into something quite different and less radical)--it is the unsaid or underside of the texts. Zipes, convinced of the subversiveness of the fairy tale believes that:

To have a fairy tale published is like a symbolic public announcement, an intercession, an intercession on behalf of oneself, of children, of civilisation. It is an historical statement. History is not conceived of here as chronology but rather as absence and rupture--in need of a text. The symbolic act of writing a fairy tale is problematized by the asking of questions which link the fairy tale to society and our political unconscious... My own critical text is obviously an endeavor to make the absent cause of history speak for itself.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps we can link what Zipes says about making absent causes of history speak to Irigaray's work on the female Imaginary where she says that unconscious invisible identifications need external sites--visible products of the imagination. If the history of the "censored" fairy tale is seen as part of the history of the repression of the feminine which is also the Western unconscious, then it could be said that The Bloody Chamber also makes the absent cause of history speak by reintroducing the voices/personas (those riddling dames) of the women storytellers who are absented from the fairy tale canon (or, at least, transformed into more "palatable" figures), and the outlawed bodily references that were once the norm.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Zipes, Subversion 11.

<sup>51</sup> It would be wrong to say that the orality of the tales has been completely obliterated, for Warner's study shows that the orality of the genre remained an important claim in a great deal of the literary versions of the tale, following on from Perrault's initial incorporation of the Mother Goose figure into his own collection.

By restoring the polymorphous perversity of past fairy tale heroines to women in her own tales, Carter unravels the moral skein that has been woven out of the threads of older, bolder versions of the tales which the outlawed "gossips" once spun.

If we think of the prevalence of blood, mainly menstrual blood, and other fluids in Carter's fairy tales, they could be regarded as the return of the repressed which flows back into/forming a text which is amorphous, shape shifting. Armitt says that the ten tales "seem always to be dissolving into each other",<sup>52</sup> defying their boundaries. Could we perhaps view The Bloody Chamber as a work which articulates (fleshes out) the female Imaginary (in the second sense), that which bears the marks of the female body and is fluid and non-sensical, unresolved, unruly, sensual; reaching hopefully beyond the confines of the masculine economy outlined above? I do not see why a socio-historical and a speculative psychoanalytic approach might not work in tandem with one another, enriching appreciation of these tales' rich, heterogeneous forms and content.

### **The Wolf Trilogy and the Socio-Cultural History of "Little Red Riding Hood"**

In "The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves" the reader is invited to imagine the late medieval period, a transitional period when, as we have demonstrated, orally transmitted tales about young children and wolves and other wild animals were common. Moving from an exploration of the wolf as the diabolic and feared Other in "The Werewolf", to a simultaneous critique and celebration of the wolf as the female Imaginary in "The Company of Wolves", we end up with a tale which enacts an ironic reversal of the familiar written version's established norms and suggested transformations. In "Wolf-Alice", women's relation to origin is the theme, the hybrid "characters" reflecting a highly hybrid structure which draws upon Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland and Alice Through the Looking Glass, Webster's The Duchess of Malfi, Cinderella and the Book of Genesis, as well as

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<sup>52</sup> Armitt 98.

the psychoanalytic works of Lacan and anthropological theories such as those of Lévi-Strauss, which we have touched on in other chapters. Carter re-eroticises the literary fairy tale by exploring the different connotations it has carried through the centuries: her tales all play with our twentieth century understanding of/ assumptions concerning the "Little Red Riding Hood" tale as it has been passed on to us in order to imagine new sexual and social relations.

As I mentioned earlier, it was only from Perrault onwards that Little Red Riding Hood became associated with laziness, vanity and negligence, all those "bad" qualities construed as the reasons for her downfall. Folklorists have shown that previous to Perrault's literary tale there existed a vigorous oral version or versions of the tale. Drawing on the work of Marianne Rumpf, Zipes tells us that "The Grandmother's Tale", the source of Perrault's version, emanated from a general superstition about werewolves in France.<sup>53</sup> Up until the late Middle Ages, most Europeans, particularly the French, believed in werewolves and they were regarded as positive figures, integrating the cultural and the wild aspects of human nature. From 1400 to 1700 however, as a the result of the Church's intervention this began to change, and werewolves were increasingly associated with the devil in the popular imagination:

Whereas it had previously been considered nonsensical to believe in werewolves from the official Catholic viewpoint, in an about-face toward the end of the fifteenth century, the Church deemed it necessary to believe in witches. Along with cats, werewolves were allegedly the favourite cohorts of witches, and in many werewolf trials of the 16th and seventeenth centuries there was no real distinction made between werewolf and witch.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Marianne Rumpf, "Rotkappchen: Eine vergleichende Marchenuntersuchung," diss., University of Gottingen, 1951, and "Catterinella: Ein italienisches Warnmarchen," *Fabula* 1 (1957) 76-84. As quoted in Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 82. Also translated by Zipes.

<sup>54</sup> Zipes, *Trials* 68.

The oral version of the folk tale did not only warn of the dangers of the forests but also celebrated the onset of a young girl's menstruation and of her independence and bravery as she outwits the wolf:

The young girl symbolically replaces the grandmother by eating her flesh and drinking her blood. It is a matter of self-assertion through learning and conflict. Unlike the literary versions, where the grandmother is reified and reduced to a sex-object, her death in the folk-tale signifies the continuity and reinvigoration of custom, which was important to the preservation of society.<sup>55</sup>

Although Perrault's version *could* be read as a simple warning about the literal ferocity and potentially life-endangering threat of wild beasts in the forests (for such dangers still existed at the time he transcribed the tale), Zipes informs us that despite the fact that wolves were not *overtly* connected with the devil in the period in which Perrault collected and recorded popular folk tales:

Nevertheless, Perrault's audience still identified the wolf with the bloody werewolf, the devil, insatiable lust and chaotic nature, *if not with a witch*. The wolf as witch may strike readers today as far-fetched, but it was not far from the minds of 17th and 18th century readers.<sup>56</sup>

The connections made between the devil and his cohorts made a deep impression on the popular imagination and, for this audience, all those who entered into a Faustian pact with the devil or his associates (witches and werewolves) were forced into a struggle for their souls. That which was portrayed as essentially evil or unacceptable in Red Riding Hood and came to be symbolised by the rapacious wolf (the girl, being swallowed up by chaos/desire, became one with the wolf), was socially defined so that women might be brought under control. Whereas, in earlier orally transmitted versions such as "The Grandmother's Tale", a young girl might be openly praised for her bravery in the face of an attacking beast, as we have seen, the adolescent girl in Perrault's

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<sup>55</sup> Zipes, *Trials* 24.

<sup>56</sup> Zipes, *Trials* 76.

version, "Little Red Riding Hood" is devoured by the projection of her libido, an aspect of her psyche which Perrault and the Grimm versions imply she must deny in order to survive.<sup>57</sup> Bettelheim is, then, both right and wrong when he writes of Perrault's version: "since in response to such direct and obvious seduction Little Red Riding Hood makes no move to escape or fight back, either she is stupid or wants to be seduced"<sup>58</sup> for this is how our female protagonist appears when judged in accordance with patriarchal law. Zipes reminds us (recalling Adorno and Horkheimer's Dialectic of Enlightenment<sup>59</sup>) rationality emanates from irrational fear and the desire to control and speak for the Other:

Little Red Riding Hood reflects men's fear of women's sexuality and of their own as well. The curbing and regulation of sexual drives is fully portrayed in this bourgeois literary tale on the basis of deprived male needs. Red Riding Hood is to blame for her own rape. The wolf is not really a male but symbolises natural urges and social nonconformity. The real hero of the tale, the hero-gamekeeper, is male governance.

In this respect, however, Bettelheim proves to be no less of a sexual regulator in his analysis of the tale. He sees the tale as a means through which the young girl may work out her ambivalence about whether to live by the pleasure principle or the reality principle, as if the two were completely separable. The reality principle is connected with the world of "home and duty" and the world of pleasure lies beyond this: "'Little Red Cap' takes up some crucial problems the school-age girl has to solve if oedipal attachments linger on in the unconscious, which may drive her to expose herself dangerously to the possibility of seduction".<sup>60</sup> In speaking of

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<sup>57</sup> See Charles Perrault, "Little Red Riding Hood" (1697) trans. Jack Zipes, in Trials 91-93. Also Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Little Red Cap" (1812) trans. Jack Zipes, in Trials 135-138.

<sup>58</sup> Bettelheim 169.

<sup>59</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, The Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

<sup>60</sup> Bettelheim 170. Unsurprisingly, Bettelheim also reads "Bluebeard" as a tale about a woman's "sexual indiscretion" whose moral is: "Women, don't give in to your sexual curiosity; men, don't give into your anger at being sexually betrayed" 302.



"destructive encounters" beyond the home which the girl must be warned about through the tale, blame seems to be laid upon the little girl in response to a predatory male sexuality. Similarly, in discussing the mother's warning to keep to the straight path of the literary tale, Bettelheim reinforces the Grimms' implicit judgement on girls who stray off it, assuming a morally reprehensible Bluebeard's wifish sexual curiosity on the part of the girl child: "her mother is aware of Little Red Cap's proclivity for straying off the beaten path, and for spying into corners to discover the secrets of adults".<sup>61</sup> Bettelheim's wolf represents the sadistic side of male sexuality (in this, Bettelheim highlights the sexist, cautionary nature of the tales he reads), and is also a projection of the girl's dark, violent drives which she must learn are dangerous, and which must be repressed until they turn (as if by magic) into something healthier when she's a bit older:

It is much better, she learns, not to rebel against the mother, not to try to seduce or to permit herself to be seduced by the as yet dangerous aspects of the male. Much better, despite one's ambivalent desires, to settle for the protection the father provides when she is not seen in her seductive aspects. She has learned that it is better to build father and mother, and their values, deeper and in more adult ways into one's superego, to become able to deal with life's dangers.<sup>62</sup>

Zipes tells us that since Perrault recorded the Grandmother's tale as "Little Red Riding Hood" it has become part of the male myth about rape (through the creation of Red Riding Hood an object of desire who wants to be seduced and raped, and the rationalisation of male dominance): "In this regard, Perrault began a series of literary transformations which have caused nothing but trouble for the female object of desire and have also reflected the crippling aspect of male desire itself".<sup>63</sup>

As we shall see, Carter's tales work together to undo Bettelheim's prohibitive and implicitly sexist reading of the tale and they revel in the ambivalence of

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<sup>61</sup> Bettelheim 171.

<sup>62</sup> Bettelheim 181.

<sup>63</sup> Zipes, *Trials* 52.

desire. Mary Kaiser tells us that: "Although she recounts the plots of the same fairy tales--"Beauty and the Beast" twice, "Little Red Riding Hood" three times--Carter changes the cultural context from tale to tale and, as a result, each retelling generates a different narrative".<sup>64</sup> Kaiser goes on to examine "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Snow Child", but I want to examine her "Little Red Riding Hood" tales which regenerate the motif of the wolf.

### **"The Werewolf"**

Recalling the opening of "The Tiger's Bride", in which the woman connects the weather in her native Russia with a particular philosophical outlook (in the northern hemisphere, nature is conceptualised as hostile): "We come from countries of cold weather; at home we are at war with nature..." (BC, 51), "The Werewolf" begins by associating human nature with the elements: "it is a northern country; they have cold weather, they have cold hearts" (BC,108). Both these sentences play on the idea of the woman as a feared representative of nature who must be brought under control; the idea which underpinned the witch hunt period discussed above. Being "at war with nature" could account for the northern villagers' cold hearts, a fact borne out at the end of the story when they stone the "witch" (associated with untamed nature) to death. So although the story self-consciously collapses inner and outer nature in the opening sentence, it ironically describes a stage in the process by which reason came to dominate natural needs, and nature became the prime object of exploitation.

The first two paragraphs conjure up a late medieval rustic setting with the reader as onlooker on the scene of past times. Indeed, the first paragraph recollects the form of stage directions, further distancing the reader from the scene being depicted:

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<sup>64</sup> Mary Kaiser, "Fairy Tale as Sexual Allegory: Intertextuality in The Bloody Chamber," Review of Contemporary Fiction 14: 3 (1993) 30-36.

Cold; tempests; wild beasts in the forest. It is a hard life. Their houses are built of logs. Dark and smoky within. There will be a crude icon of the virgin behind the guttering candle, the leg of a pig hung up to cure, a string of drying mushrooms. A bed, a stool, a table. Harsh, brief, poor lives. (BC, 108)

Claudia Honneger explains that the idea of woman disintegrated into diverse images of the unnatural virgin and the natural witch in the fifteenth century, and only found a tenuous synthesis in the "good mother" of the eighteenth century: "The Maria Cult and the witch craze introduced that transformation which changed the woman as representative of nature into an object no longer capable of dominating her nature".<sup>65</sup> It is clearly the fifteenth century's dichotomous images of virgin versus witch that are being re-created here and suddenly, rather than being observers of times past, we are drawn right into the scene. In a magic-realist moment we are forced to relive the certainty of evil embodied in particular figures lurking in what was becoming the distinctively external world, as the narrative switches to the present tense: "At midnight, especially on Walpurgisnacht, the devil holds picnics in the graveyards and invites the witches; then they dig up fresh corpses and eat them. Anyone will tell you that" (BC, 108). The gap between the organic unity of society and nature, between "human beings as subjects and the objective outside world"<sup>66</sup> that was deepening as a result of the formation of the modern state led to the widespread view of the devil invoked here, and to the pattern of "demonisation" that culminated in the witch hunts.

The girl in this version of "Little Red Riding Hood" has none of the pathetic helplessness of the girl we have come to know through literary versions since Perrault, although the familiar domestic instructions of Red Riding Hood's mother break into the tale in the third paragraph as the narrative changes to indirect free speech: "Go and visit grandmother who has been sick. Take her the oatcakes I have baked for her on the hearthstone and a little pot of butter" (BC, 109). Less

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<sup>65</sup> Claudia Honneger, Die Hexen die Neuzit (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978) 61-62. As quoted in Zipes, Trials 70. Also translated by Zipes.

<sup>66</sup> Zipes, Trials 71.

familiar are the warnings more pertinent to the oral tradition regarding the danger of wild animals: "Do not leave the path because of the bears, the wild boar, the starving wolves. Here, take your father's hunting knife; you know how to use it" (BC,109). In this sense she is very similar to the girl of "The Grandmother's Tale" who is shameless and fearless. As the narrator tells us, when the girl, seeing the wolf, chops its paw off, "any but a mountaineer's child would have died of fright at the sight of it" (BC, 109). However, despite the bravery of the girl, she inhabits a world which is fast-changing and the differences which her society once tolerated are gradually eroding, as this paragraph on witches illustrates:

When they discover a witch--some old woman whose cheeses ripen when her neighbours' do not, another old woman whose black cat, oh sinister! *follows her about all the time*, they strip the crone, search for her marks, for the supernumerary nipple her familiar sucks. They soon find it. Then they stone her to death. (BC, 109).

The insistent monosyllabic rhythm of the final two sentences conveys the speed at which scapegoats are weeded from the community, along with the people's unquestioning belief in the existence of the devil's accomplices. Carter's earlier comment about this time and place where "the devil is as real as you or I" (BC,109) takes on a chilling significance now for the woman reader. The devil could have been as real as you or I: our community might have decided such simply on the basis that our cat followed us around a lot.<sup>67</sup> More chilling is the knowledge of the present we bring to the past, for women are still conceptualised as the diabolical and feared Other and their outlawed desires struggle for expression.

The reader of "The Werewolf" is encouraged to share in the assumptions of the granddaughter and the community; implicated in accusations of witchcraft/madness against the grandmother. The magic realist elements, one of

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<sup>67</sup> The Malleus Maleficarum listed in excruciating detail the different ways an official might identify a witch. Cats were listed in The Malleus Maleficarum as popular familiars. One way of identifying a witch was through an extra nipple, which it was believed the witch used to suckle familiars.

which is the transformation of the wolf's paw into a hand, allows us no escape from such a conclusion: "But it was no longer a wolf's paw. It was a hand, chopped off at the wrist, a hand toughened with work and freckled with old age. There was a wedding ring on the third finger and a wart on the index finger. By the wart she knew it for her grandmother's hand" (BC, 109). This tale raises the epistemological question of how we are to gain access to the past, showing that we are limited in our ability to know it, since we are both spectators of, and actors in, the historical process. The customs of the past are problematised as we realise that the here and now is not so very different and that we are revisiting a painful scene(s) of history involved in the construction of *our* reality.

These assumptions about women and evil live with us still. Women's bodies are still used against women. The female body equated with nature is abused and annihilated today as it was "once upon a time", as men continue to exert their supposed physical and spiritual supremacy via the specular economy that Irigaray talks about :

The (male) subject collects up and stitches together the scattered pieces of female merchandise (scattered in silence, in inconsequential chatter, or in madness) and turns them into coins that have an established value in the marketplace. What needs to be done instead, of course, if she is to begin to speak and be understood and understand and express herself, is to melt down all systems of credit.<sup>68</sup>

If we also read the mutilation of the grandmother as in some ways representative of the mutilation of a proud and vibrant female tradition of storytelling, and of the separation of women from one another, then the next tale goes some way towards changing this state of affairs.

Ellen Cronan Rose reads the story as a reversal of Bettelheim's assumptions. According to her the wolf and the grandmother signify " to be a mature woman

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<sup>68</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum* 234.

means to be sexual, animal",<sup>69</sup> which horrifies the girl. However, she does not go back home to safety and her decision to remain in the grandmother's house is a symbolic declaration of her readiness to grow up. Cronan's is a plausible reading but there is another more depressing reading available. Although the girl in Carter's story is obviously courageous when faced with attack, she could also be seen as subsequently trapped into betraying and murdering her own sex and blood in order to survive. Within a masculine economy which outlaws otherness as diabolical, the diagnosis of a woman's madness or hysteria and the silencing of that woman becomes the price paid for its continuance: "Now the child lived in her grandmother's house; she prospered" (BC, 109). There is no place for women/woman in the Symbolic except as object(s) of exchange, and as long as women continue to accept this instead of challenging it and calling into question the Symbolic contract, then women will continue to be sacrificed and collude in sacrificing one another. As Kristeva says, anthropology has shown that the social order is sacrificial, but sacrifice orders violence, it binds and tames it.

In this reading, "The Werewolf" is not, as Zipes claims, a straightforward celebration of the death of the grandmother in "The Grandmother's Tale" as signifying "the continuity and reinvigoration of custom, which was important for the preservation of society",<sup>70</sup> for the ironic passage on witches which precedes the denouement could be seen as working against this sort of interpretation. It is the control of nature which has resulted in the rupture of the mother-daughter relationship and the undermining of a female genealogy which comes under attack. Carter says that with the rapid changes occurring in advanced and developing countries, the "more and more we need to know who we were in greater and greater detail in order to be able to surmise what we might be" (VFT 1,

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<sup>69</sup> Ellen Cronan Rose, "Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales," *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover: New England UP, 1983) 209-227.

<sup>70</sup> Zipes, *Trials* 24.

intro. x). "The Werewolf" is an exploration of the construction of history and gender categories with this very purpose in mind.

### **"The Company of Wolves"**

Although "The Company of Wolves" is also based on the adventures of Little Red Riding Hood, Carter mixes other tales within this, which instantly prevents her version from becoming the sort of closed text written by the Grimms. Again, the tale situates the reader in a late medieval landscape in which wolves may have been feared mainly for the simple reason that they could destroy lives, but this once more mingles with peasant's superstitious anecdotes about lycanthropes, such as the story of the hunter who killed a wolf which turned into a dying man before his eyes. The first sentence: "One beast and only one howls in the wood by night" (BC, 110) again creates an intimacy and expectation that links the reader back to the oral tradition, reintroducing the voice of the teller into the tale and challenging the blandness of versions such as that of the Grimms, for instance. Along with this intimate voice, which leads us back to the dark forest of a pre-capitalist era, strains of literary versions of the fairy tale are heard. Carter's Little Red Riding Hood is initially compared to the familiar figure of Snow White. She has on her red shawl that:

has the ominous if brilliant look of blood on snow. Her breasts have just begun to swell; her hair is like lint, so fair it hardly makes a shadow on her pale forehead; her cheeks are an emblematic scarlet and white and she has just started her woman's bleeding, the clock inside her that will strike, henceforward, once a month. (BC, 113)

The use of the word "emblematic" plays with the colour symbolism of other literary versions. Red and white have come to convey the co-existence of purity and innocence and of an awakening sexuality which must be tamed. As Zipes says, red is "the label of sin and blood".<sup>71</sup> In this version of "Little Red Riding

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<sup>71</sup> Zipes, Trials 8.

Hood" the idea of the pure, virginal girl who may be corrupted by and through her desires is presented differently. Her virginal state is described as a positively autonomous one, unlike the "bourgeois" Red Riding Hood or Snow White whose body always seems the potential property of men. The girl is much more like the brave young girls in oral tales, and not the meek lamb-type whose development Zipes traces in the "cleaned-up" nineteenth century versions of "Little Red Riding Hood". We can see the return to the (female authored) oral versions where the girl is strong and brave with a hopeful future. It is a means of undoing the centuries of sexual regulation that literary versions of fairy tales have effected (on women's bodies).

Carter makes much of the metonymic slippage between the cloak and the girl in the title of this particular story, the significance of which is completely ignored by Perrault and the brothers Grimm. The cloak is the name of the girl and the girl is the cloak. In this sense inside and outside are interchangeable. The girl displays her changed body on the outside, the cloak being the signifier of the metamorphic body, the body which cannot be controlled by the mind. The cape does not conceal but rather reveals the girl's body, whose time is cyclical, it is "the colour of poppies, the colour of sacrifice, the colour of her menses" (BC, 117). Perrault and the Grimms would like to ignore this troubling aspect of female sexuality for, as I illustrated in the first chapter, this blood is fearful and fearful because it is an unknown quantity which defies categorisation.

By referring to the imminent onset of menstruation which is always implicit in other recorded versions, the story challenges the taboo of menstrual blood which is edited out of literary versions of the tale, although signified by the colour of the cloak. Blood in this story is made explicit, confronting the reader with their pre-conceived ideas about aspects of female sexuality and the fictions that construct it as sacrificial. Although the menstrual cycle is a reminder of mortality, it is simultaneously an affirmation of life.<sup>72</sup> Adopting the terminology of Irigaray, the

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<sup>72</sup> Peter Redgrove and Penelope Shuttleworth forward the belief that dysmenorrhea is the product of civilised societies and that menstrual blood is associated with death whilst mucus "the white



menstruating female is an "open container" or a "volume without contours".<sup>73</sup> The flow of menstrual blood contrasts with the female body in pregnancy as container for a child and this blood flow confirms the male's fears that woman is fluid and therefore something he is unable to traverse or capture. This means she cannot be appropriated by and for his belief system which wants her as solid ground, a mirror to reflect his subjectivity. Their versions of the tale attempt to tame this girl whose inbetween-ness is so threatening. The "uncontainable" fluidity which is converted to monstrous excess in patriarchal representations of women is, as illustrated in the first chapter, used to break such a misogynistic representation.

This adolescent girl is in contrast to grandmother, who appears to represent the colonised Other. The grandmother unquestioningly obeys the law of God; her life has been, and is still being, eaten away by Father Time, represented by the grandfather clock. She is trapped in the pre-contractual state of nature to which the patriarchal Symbolic Order has consigned her, a state the girl is soon to inherit:

She has her Bible for company, she is a pious old woman. She is propped up on several pillows on the bed set into the wall peasant-fashion, wrapped up in the patchwork quilt she made before she was married, more years ago than she cares to remember. Two china spaniels with liver-coloured blotches on their coats and black noses sit on either side of the fire place. There is a bright rug of woven rags, the grandfather clock ticks away her eroding time. We keep the wolves outside by living well. (BC, 115)

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juice" is connected with life: "It is the red aspect which is despised, tabooed, neglected and which, as if in response to this spiteful treatment, in many women hurts". They believe that in relieving the fear of their bodies and its different functions women may be able to experience menstruation without distress. They see their book as going some way towards removing the taboo surrounding menstruation which contributes to women's experience of it as a curse. In her introduction to the book, Margaret Drabble talks about its pioneering emphasis on the period in women's mental as well as their physical lives, something I shall examine in my discussion of "Wolf Alice". See Peter Redgrove and Penelope Shuttleworth, The Wise Wound: Menstruation and Everywoman (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978) 21-22.

<sup>73</sup> Luce Irigaray, "Volume Without Contours," in The Irigaray Reader, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 53-69.

Elaine Jordan believes that the death of the grandmother should not be taken literally. It is the death of what she *represents* in this particular story that is important, which she reads as the imposition of fear on the girl.<sup>74</sup> But we are always reminded in Carter's stories that this fear of sex and of their own bodies bred amongst women is imposed on them through patriarchal power structures and language.

The aspect of elimination that characterises relationships between women is faced again, but in this tale the girl is cast as a tough virgin who decides what she does with her body. She is like the boy in the fairy tale who does not know how to shiver, for she has not learned to feel shame towards her body:

She stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel: she has inside her a magic space, the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane; she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and she is afraid of nothing. (BC,113)

This is a poetic (re)inscription of the adolescent girl's body as a new "magic" space which is entirely hers. It banishes guilt and fear which are a woman's legacy in a culture which refuses to recognise her sexual specificity, and contrasts with the representation of Melanie's body in The Magic Toyshop. The girl in "The Company of Wolves" is not, as Patricia Duncker has said of the female protagonists in The Bloody Chamber, "a willing and eager victim".<sup>75</sup> And Avis Lewallen perhaps takes the wolf too literally as a man or as male desire when she claims that the girl's acceptance of animal sexuality in the face of either rape or death, "might seem logical rather than natural".<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Elaine Jordan, "Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions," Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction, ed. Linda Anderson (New York: Arnold) 1990 19-43: 28.

<sup>75</sup> Patricia Duncker, "Re-Imagining the Fairytales: Angela Carter's Bloody Chambers," Literature and History 10 (1984) 3-14: 10.

<sup>76</sup> Avis Lewallen, "Wayward Girls but Wicked Women? Female Sexuality in Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber," Perspectives on Pornography: Sex in Film and Literature, ed. Clive Bloom and Gary Day (New York: St. Martin's Press) 145-159: 154.

Rather, it is the very troubling and unresolvable nature of desire that Carter explores in "The Company of Wolves". The wolves in this tale, unlike many of their literary predecessors, are ambiguous figures, and it is from them that the story derives its unsettling power. They can be taken as both "men in furry clothing"<sup>77</sup> (masculine sexuality) *and* as female desire/libido, and the reader can never be quite sure how to read them, "fear and flee the wolf: for, worst of all, the wolf may be more than he seems" (BC,111). Carter's aim seems to be to confound her readers and, in the process, to lead them to think beyond the simple stereotypes found in traditional literary forms

At some points earlier in the tale, the wolves *do* seem like Swiftian parodies of men and aggressive sexuality. The several lycanthrope stories interwoven at the beginning illustrate the brutality man shows towards man, and towards women. Although the sudden metamorphosis from man to wolf, and vice versa, is difficult for a twentieth-century reader to believe in, nevertheless, the violence surrounding the wolf figures is real and recognisable enough. The story about the woman whose husband runs away on their wedding night and is transformed into a wolf, only to return some years later when she has remarried and had children, exemplifies the horrors of a masculine economy in which women are objects of exchange, male possessions with often little other than slave status in the home. After demanding a bowl of cabbage soup after his reappearance, the first husband sees the second and their offspring and cries, " I wish I were a wolf again, to teach this whore a lesson" (BC, 112). Ironically, it seems here as if the first and second husband are interchangeable, for although the first husband says that he must take the form of a wolf in order to wreak punishment upon the wife that he left, the second husband, who takes no wolfish form, beats her anyway.

However, to leave the analysis of the symbol of the werewolf at this would be to oversimplify it, for it operates upon another, more suggestive level, and

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<sup>77</sup> Merja Makinen, "Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber' and the Decolonisation of Feminine Sexuality," *Feminist Review* 42 (Autumn 1992) 2-15: 12.

undergoes changes in the second part of the tale. Might it be going too far to suggest that the title "The Company of Wolves" is a self-conscious comment upon the status of this tale as art-work, referring not only to the "threnody" of wolves that sit outside the witch's house and that of the grandmother, but in metafictional fashion, to the multiple associations of the wolf that jostle within the tale?

Another interpretation of the wolves in "The Company of Wolves" might be that they stand for the complexities of desire as, in some ways, they break down distinctions between masculine and feminine sexuality, illustrating the intermeshing of sadistic and masochistic aspects of identity. On the one hand they are aggressive and invasive: "There is no winter's night the cottager does not fear to see a lean, grey famished snout questing under the door and there was once a woman bitten in her own kitchen as she was straining the macaroni" (BC, 111). They look to others for sensual (carnal) gratification, yet the wolves, foreshadowing the Duke's predicament in "Wolf-Alice", are locked up in their condition, like the vampire of "The Lady of the House of Love." Trapped in the all-consuming circle of their desires, their introverted, imprisoning, never-ending longing is described as imposing a kind of masochistic existence whereby the desire to return or to repeat, to "come back into the moment of origin...itself disappears into myth once the circle closes".<sup>78</sup> These wolves, so it seems, can never return home:

There is a vast melancholy in the canticles of the wolves, melancholy infinite as the forest, endless as these long nights of winter and yet that ghastly sadness, that mourning for their own, irremediable appetites, can never move the heart for not one phrase in it hints at the possibility of redemption; grace could not come to the wolf from its own despair, only through some external mediator, so that, sometimes, the beast will look as if he half welcomes the knife that despatches him. (BC, 112)

The forest and the wolves are linked within the tale and appear to be representative of the unconscious, articulating a centripetal, disruptive desire.

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<sup>78</sup> L.R. Williams 183.

Returning to the earlier discussion of the fairy tale's morphology and Irigaray's conception of the female Imaginary, we could also read the wolves as initially representative of the female Imaginary in its first state: the rootless, fragmented exiled feminine. The narrator of "The Company of Wolves" informs us of the wolves' phosphorescent eyes, which at times reflect the moon, that ancient metaphor which stands for the female and (hence?) lunacy: "If a wolf's eyes reflect only moonlight, then they gleam only a cold and unnatural green, a mineral, a piercing colour" (BC, 110). Later on, we are told that of all the fearful creatures of the night, "the wolf is worst for he cannot listen to reason" (BC,111). Here the wolf seems connected more generally with irrationality, the flipside of culture, with something intangible and psychological, yet connected to the body, as these similes attest: "They are grey as famine, they are unkind as plague" (BC,111). As with the wolves in Carter's tale, the female Imaginary is often cast as a pathology of the individual and social mind--the wolves are like the "negative" female Imaginary described earlier.

When Carter writes, "she closed the window on the wolves' threnody and took off her scarlet shawl, the colour of sacrifices, the colour of her menses, and since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid" (BC,118), the narrative could be said to symbolise a break with the masculine sexual economy for/in which women's blood is exploited so that man may move on to more sublime pursuits. The fear and guilt that hold women back are dispelled with, and this girl's actions signify a freeing from the vicious cycle Irigaray describes in Speculum whereby: "Woman's instincts are inhibited, turned back into their opposites, transformed into feelings of affection that will never manage to satisfy the sexual need that gave rise to them",<sup>79</sup> as the tale suggests possibilities beyond the role of virgin, mother and redundant old woman that are assigned to women in Western religions and phallogentric culture. The entrance of the wolves into the grandmother's hitherto neat and cosy but stagnant room might represent the

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<sup>79</sup> Irigaray, Speculum 127.

disruption of the codes of imprisoning patriarchy and patriarchal time-space which the grandmother's home embodies. Hence the female Imaginary irrupts within the Symbolic in what I call a "negative utopian" (or open-ended utopian) moment: "Midnight; and the clock strikes. It is Christmas Day, the werewolf's birthday, the door stands wide; let them all sink through" (BC, 118). This in-between, "witching" time becomes a gap of possibility, opening up a space of becoming which erases guilt and fear.

In The Magic Toyshop and "The Werewolf," as well as earlier in this story, Walpurgisnacht, "the hinge of the year when things do not fit together as well as they should" (BC, 112), is associated with the uncanny and with fearful sensation, but here it is utilised as a more celebratory carnivalesque moment of becoming. The girl indulges her instincts with relish; she transgresses joyfully, enjoying her own sexual specificity and perversity:

The girl burst out laughing; she knew that she was nobody's meat. She laughed at him full in the face, she ripped of his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing. The flames danced like dead souls on Walpurgisnacht and the old bones under the bed set up a terrible clattering, but she did not pay them any heed. (BC, 118)

Here is one of Carter's favourite metaphors: flesh as meat, something that is displayed, sold in the market place and consumed, yet this girl has taken a step away from this fate in the specular masculine libidinal economy, and towards control over her own body and destiny. The oxymoronic description of the kiss she bestows upon the werewolf, "every wolf in the world now howled a prothalamion outside the window as she freely gave the kiss she owed him" (BC, 118), points towards a different economy and time-space in which women are no longer objects of exchange but subjects in their own right.

Carter's revised tale implies that the recognition of sexual difference and the birth of new sexual identities, along with the transformation of the female Imaginary, will not be easy for, as she tells us at the beginning of the tale: "The wolf's song is the sound of the rending you will suffer, in itself a murdering" (BC,

110). The transformation of old notions of identity is a painful as well as a rewarding process but one we are to go through with if we are to imagine a new and better future. This wise child symbolises a move from objectification towards subjecthood. She is one who begins to "melt down all systems of credit".<sup>80</sup>

### **"Wolf-Alice"**

In "Wolf-Alice", Carter uses the hybrid figure of the wolf-girl to explore Woman's relation to origin and originary myths via the image of her bloody wound and perhaps to imagine new possibilities in the relationships of men and women. The story takes us back to the Edenic myth and the related issue of female narcissism that I examined in the last chapter, a myth which, as Sally Keenan rightly notes, is continually revised in Carter's fictions.<sup>81</sup> Early on in "Wolf-Alice" the narrator asks whether, and by what means, the "bitten apple might flesh out its scar again?" (BC, 121), which also takes us back to the originary symbol of Shadow Dance. How might Eve/Woman escape or destroy the shame and alienation heaped upon her by Christianity regarding her supposed transgression in the Garden of Eden? Is it possible or desirable to "flesh out the scar"? Can the ambiguity of the unhealed space/scar be viewed as creative in itself? We are told of Wolf-Alice that "Mutilation is her lot" (BC, 121). Thus the tale also raises the question as to whether the pain of female mutilation that springs from the Edenic myth, and which is perpetuated in certain contemporary discourses on femininity, can ever be assuaged.

The scar here opens up many issues. It is directly connected, in Lacanian terms, to our fall into language--with the transition we make from the pre-Oedipal to the Symbolic Order--which, according to Lacan, causes us all to become other to ourselves; that is to say, split or scarred subjects. It is also linked with the idea

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<sup>80</sup> Irigaray, Speculum 234

<sup>81</sup> Sally Keenan, From Myth to Memory: The Revisionary Writings of Angela Carter. Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston," diss., U. of Essex, 1992, 18.

of Eve's sin as a sin of speech: "The prejudice against women's speech has scriptural legacy", for Eve sinned when she bit into the apple (she sinned by mouth), and when she spoke to the serpent and then to Adam.<sup>82</sup>

With its "bubbling, delicious" sounds (BC, 119), Wolf-Alice's language as a pre-fallen language, a compound of silence and howling: "a language as authentic as any language of nature" (BC, 121), is reminiscent of the mother as source and origin of the voice that, according to Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément in La Jeune Née, may be heard in all female texts.<sup>83</sup> Thus Wolf-Alice may be seen in a pre-Oedipal context (wonderland) that has its source in a time before the Law of the father existed. Her language could represent a lost maternal tongue in the psychoanalytic sense, the nameless voice which is the mother and her body--hence the reference to Eve: "If you could transport her, in her filth and rags and feral disorder, to the Eden of our first beginnings where Eve and grunting Adam squat on a daisy bank, picking the lice from one another's pelts, then she might prove to be the wise child who leads them all...." (BC,121). Toril Moi explains that Cixous sees that a woman is completely and physically present in her voice, of which her writing is an extension:

The voice in each woman, moreover, is not only her own, but springs from the deepest layers of her psyche: her own song becomes the echo of the primeval song she once heard, the voice of the incarnation of the 'first voice of love which all women preserve alive... in each woman sings the first nameless love' (JN, 172). It is, in short, the Voice of the Mother, that omnipotent figure that dominates the fantasies of the pre-Oedipal baby...<sup>84</sup>

But the reference to speech and language in "Wolf-Alice" also raises issues of female genealogy, women's speech and the oral tradition of storytelling, which allows us to read Alice's language from a socio-historical perspective also. Alice's "bubbling" similarly recalls the gossiping and storytelling of women throughout

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<sup>82</sup> Warner 30-31.

<sup>83</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née Union General d'editions, 10/18, 1975.

<sup>84</sup> Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Routledge, 1985) 114.



the centuries, the "corrupt" speech of the crones and "witches" who resisted being silenced and tamed, as Alice resists taming at the hands of the nuns and makes her own life (story). Indeed, the wolf's mouth, which in one psychoanalytic reading of "Little Red Riding Hood" stands for the breast, could also be associated with another maternal nurturance: "oral knowledge".<sup>85</sup>

Throughout the tale, the narrator assumes a complicity with the reader that is based on the difference between "us" and Alice and the Duke ("them"), who are liminal, inbetween beings: " Nothing about her is human except that she is *not* a wolf; it is as if the fur she thought she wore had melted into her skin and become part of it, although it does not exist" (BC, 119). The description is an ironic means of questioning the thin and wavering line between the human and the bestial that is a major preoccupation of the fairy tale. Like the girl-wolf in Carter's "Peter and the Wolf", and like Romulus and Remus, she has been raised by wolves. She is woman as "untamed nature"--literally: "we secluded her in our animal privacy out of fear of her imperfection because it showed us what we might have been" (BC, 122). The animal is here associated with our fear of the "primal" state, which we construct as a regressive one (as fearfully Other) in order to explain our superior difference as human beings, and with our simultaneous twentieth-century fascination with and attraction to the wild and what Warner calls "the wild brother".<sup>86</sup> We are encouraged by the narrator to think of both Wolf-Alice and the Duke as in some ways "deluded" humans, but there also exists the implication that they are actually representative of our hybrid selves.

Whereas the Duke has moved "backwards" in (Lacanian ) time from the Symbolic Order into the Imaginary realm, "he passed through the mirror, and now, henceforward, lives as if upon the other side of things" (BC, 121), Alice gradually negotiates a kind of Lacanian mirror stage. At first she thinks she sees an other: "She bruised her muzzle on the cold glass and broke her claws trying to tussle

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<sup>85</sup> Warner 182.

<sup>86</sup> See Warner 307.

with this stranger" (BC, 123), yet the conception of herself is fully realised when she looks behind the mirror and sees only cobwebs and dust there: "A little moisture leaked from the corner of her eyes, yet her relation with the mirror was now far more intimate since she knew she saw herself within it" (BC, 124). The split between inner and outer nature that was discussed in conjunction to the cultural context of "The Werewolf" is made explicit in "Wolf-Alice", although in this case it takes place in Alice's *subjective* history, the development of her "self" as distinct from the world, a process which is connected with her mirror play:

She perceived an essential difference between herself and her surroundings that you might say she could not put her finger on--only, the trees and grass of the meadows outside no longer seemed the emanation of her questing nose and erect ears, and yet sufficient to itself, but a kind of backdrop for her, that waited for her, that waited for her arrivals to give it meaning. She saw herself upon it and her eyes, with their sombre clarity, took on a veiled, introspective look. (BC, 124)

The time in which Alice comes to her awareness of herself as distinct from nature/the natural world is paradoxically connected with nature in this tale however. This time is gleaned from her menstruation, which occurs at the return of the full moon and not linear time (time as project, teleology, departure, progression and arrival--history as we know it):

Sequence asserted itself with custom and then she understood the circumambulatory principle of the clock perfectly, even if all clocks were banished from the den where she and the Duke inhabited their separate solitudes, so that you might say she discovered the very action of time by means of this returning cycle.(BC, 123).

In The Wise Wound Shuttleworth and Redgrove write about the way in which patriarchy has damaged women's relation to the cosmic rhythms of their bodies, implying that when men relate to women's cosmic rhythms it is not in harmony or sympathy with women but in competition with them, and at women's expense. In a sense women are denied menstruation as a valuable experience, it is inverted and

made abject and becomes the opposite of what it is supposed to be. Shuttleworth and Redgrove's research reveals that more positive attitudes towards menstruation may well have existed in the past. They trace the association between the menstrual cycle and the cycle of the moon and the flows of the tides, for their investigation shows that more women menstruate at the time of the full moon and the new moon than at any other. Both believe that although there can be no definite relation of cause and effect between a woman's menstrual cycle and the moon, the history of association between lunar and menstrual cycles can be psychologically beneficial for women. These writers wrest menstruation from its negative conception. They suggest that women refrain from denying a possible connection between their bodies and the natural world and that in reclaiming their cycle as their own, individual clock, and by viewing menstruation as a powerful, beneficial time, they may elicit a transformation in the relations between the sexes.<sup>87</sup> We could read "Wolf-Alice" as a story which implicitly suggests these kinds of ideas.

At the close of this tale, she who was mythically constructed as the cause of Man's fall from grace, heals the wound by literally licking at it. But ironically, the wound here is the Duke's, and only Wolf-Alice seems to have the power or the ability to transform him and bring him to a different subjecthood. Because her animal side coexists harmoniously, rather than painfully and awkwardly (as in the Duke's case) with her human one, she is able to tend to him without disgust and to help free him from his ontological imprisonment: "Poor, wounded thing...locked half and half between such strange states, an aborted transformation" (BC, 126). This passage recalls the description of the wolves in The Company of Wolves which I read as the female Imaginary in the first state: the rootless, fragmented and exiled feminine. This state of "trapped" desire, echoing Mother's words in The Passion of New Eve,<sup>88</sup> is explained earlier: "His eyes see only appetite. These eyes

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<sup>87</sup> See Shuttleworth and Redgrove The Wise Wound .

<sup>88</sup> "I am the wound that does not heal. I am the source of all desire!" Angela Carter, The Passion of New Eve (London: Virago, 1977) 64. As quoted in the first chapter.

open to devour the world in which he sees, nowhere, a reflection of himself" (BC, 120). Could Wolf-Alice's tactile administrations also be a self-reflexive comment on the transformations the woman writer of the fairy tales is herself attempting to perform through her reworking of the animal motif? Interestingly, the "final" transformation takes place in a bloody chamber, the Duke's room: "His bedroom is painted terracotta, rusted with a wash of pain, like the interior of an Iberian butcher's shop"(BC, 120).

The lycanthropic Duke, who "believes himself to be both less and more of a man, as if his obscene difference were a sign of grace" (BC, 124), is brought out of a state of non-being/madness/living death by the concern shown him by Wolf-Alice after he is shot at for stealing a dead bride from her grave. Where before he failed to cast a reflection in his bedroom mirror, now as Alice licks him clean:

Little by little, there appeared within it, like the image on photographic paper that emerges, first a formless web of tracery, the prey caught in its own fishing net, then in firmer yet still shadowed outline, until at last as vivid as real life itself, as if brought into being by her soft, moist, gentle tongue, finally, the face of the Duke. (BC, 126)

Lewallen criticises Alice's care of the Duke and her dressing-up antics when she writes: "Even without cultural conditioning young women will want to put on dresses and minister to the sick in a maternal way. Nature has ascendancy over nurture".<sup>89</sup> This reading is very strange, however, as it ignores the irony that Lewallen sees elsewhere in The Bloody Chamber and clearly goes against the grain of Carter's angles on the world. The irony is that Alice isn't "really" a woman; like most of Carter's "women" she is a question mark, an interrogatory site. I cannot read Alice's actions as literally as Lewallen does, but take Alice's dressing up in the wedding gown in the mirror to be a reworking and a parody of the wedding dress episode in The Magic Toyshop. The irony is that the dress becomes meaningless precisely because of Alice's lack of cultural conditioning. It

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<sup>89</sup> Lewallen 154.

is a signifier adrift from the signified. If anything, it shows her that she is somehow different from the wolves she once lived with and is a satire on the Fall myth, for even though "...she knew how to wear clothes and so had put on the visible sign of her difference from them"(BC, 125), she has no sense of shame.

The passage above, whereby Alice tends to the Duke, is an epiphanic moment that leads us to think beyond the binaries (animal/human, woman/wolf, man/wolf, skin/fur, man/woman, nature/nurture) that the entire story (and the collection) has been playing with up until this particular point. The passage is reminiscent of Cixous's La Venue à l'écriture where the prophetess-narrator exclaims: "The waters of the world flow from my eyes, I wash my people in my despair, I bathe them, I lick them with my love..."<sup>90</sup> It is interesting that tactility (licking) in both this passage and that of Wolf-Alice is more important in the process of recognition than the visual sense although, ironically, the mirror, "the rational glass, the master of the visible" (BC, 126) with its threat of imprisonment, "the prey caught in its own fishing net"(BC, 126), is the site where the Duke is reborn or rather, created. I like to read it as another reversal of, or play on, Lacan's mirror stage, anticipating a state beyond the subject/object split, going towards a place in time where the self and other might merge undestructively; that is to say, a state of love where difference is acknowledged and affirmed.

The wolf tales in The Bloody Chamber move speculatively towards an open ethical system which can acknowledge the death drives in order to expand the concept of the social. As Kelly Oliver says of Kristeva's ethical project:

For Kristeva, ethics operates as an open system. It moves between the law and transgression, always in process, on trial, under revision. In this way, even the structure of ethics is open to change. The law is always interactive, never absolute. In order for people to live together ethically, we must acknowledge transgression so that it can be understood by the social. Transgression becomes law, which gives way to transgression. She

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<sup>90</sup> Hélène Cixous (en collaboration avec Annie Leclerc et Madeleine Gagnon), La Venue à l'écriture (Paris: UGE) 10/18. 53.

likens this oscillation between the law and transgression to the Freudian oscillation between eros and the death drive.<sup>91</sup>

Oliver's description forms an apt appraisal of the transgressive dynamics of the trilogy of wolf tales, and of The Bloody Chamber as a whole. In the next chapter I will focus on masquerade of the female protagonists in Nights at the Circus and Wise Children.<sup>92</sup> If, as Irigaray says, women represent the death drives, then masquerade might be viewed as an erotic triumph over the death drives in a specifically feminine form of transgression.

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<sup>91</sup> Kelly Oliver, Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing (New York: Routledge, 1993) 17.

<sup>92</sup> Angela Carter, Nights at the Circus (London: Vintage, 1994) and Wise Children (London: Vintage, 1992).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **FABRICATING A DIFFERENT STORY: WISE CHILDREN and NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS**

#### **Mimicry and Masquerade: Femininity as a Glitch in the System**

In chapter one I drew attention to a passage in one of Carter's essays in which she points to the symbolism of the red-painted mouth.<sup>1</sup> Red lipstick, she writes in this essay, highlights the displaced mouth (the vagina) representing castration and loss in masculine discourses of sexual difference. I have illustrated the way in which in Shadow Dance the image of the mutilated (scarred) female body, the castrated figure of woman, threatens to swallow the text into itself. As an "originary" symbol, the scar is of interest because it is a site of liminality akin to the border of abjection. It threatens loss of being and thus of identity but it is also, paradoxically, a site of creativity. There is a textual obsession with Ghislaine's scar upon which it repeatedly focuses in an uncanny, cyclical movement. This bloody wound remains a powerfully disruptive image which increasingly becomes a metatextual site of displacement and creation in Carter's fiction. The creative aspect of the displaced bloody wound, which Nora and Dora flamboyantly display in Wise Children, is emphasised, (as is Fevvers's, in her "artificial smile"<sup>2</sup>). Indeed they take a pride in putting the wound on. These mischievous trouble-making twins joyfully create it and, ironically, would feel mutilated without it!

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<sup>1</sup> Angela Carter, "The Wound in the Face," Nothing Sacred (London: Virago, 1992) 95-100.

<sup>2</sup> Carter, Nights at the Circus (London: Vintage, 1994).

"We'd feel mutilated if you made us wipe off our Joan Crawford mouths and we always do our hair up in great big victory rolls when we go out" .<sup>3</sup>

Earlier in the thesis, Irigaray's comments on masquerade were referred to as describing the condition of femininity which Melanie in The Magic Toyshop views as a natural state. This form of femininity means existing for another, as the object of the gaze rather than a spectator/subject in one's own right. As explained, Irigaray initially describes masquerade in this way: "I think that the masquerade has to be understood as what women do to recuperate some element of desire, to participate in man's desire, but at the price of renouncing their own. In the masquerade, they submit to the dominant economy".<sup>4</sup> Irigaray's definition of masquerade is close to Joan Riviere's description in an essay which has become an important text within feminist literary criticism. In "Womanliness As Masquerade" Riviere details the actions of a female patient. Her exaggerated femininity is employed to cover-up, or to mask, her attraction to intellectualism, which is associated with masculinity.<sup>5</sup>

However, Irigaray comes to develop a theory which involves distance from discourse/the system of representation. This is construed as a means of playfully revealing the difference that the Symbolic Order and male authored narratives attempt to elide. It is a way in which woman can attempt to recover: "her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be reduced to it",<sup>6</sup> allowing

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<sup>3</sup> Angela Carter, Wise Children (London: Vintage, 1992) 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Luce Irigaray, "Questions," The Feminist Reader, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 135-4.

<sup>5</sup> See Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as Masquerade," Formations of Fantasy, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986) 35-61.

<sup>6</sup> Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell UP, 1985) 76.



for feminist manoeuvre. Playful repetition (mimesis) as a strategy makes visible that which is supposed to remain invisible: "the cover up of a possible operation of the feminine in language".<sup>7</sup> Dora repeatedly informs us that: "On our own you wouldn't look at us twice. But, put us together..." (WC, 77). This statement describes Irigaray's "strategy" of doubling in order to make visible that which would otherwise remain unseen. The twins are a fictional strategy for acclaiming difference in life. They encapsulate a playful repetition which emphasises the power of the ineradicable difference of femininity: Freud's blind spot.<sup>8</sup> As Dora explains: "identical we may be, but symmetrical--never. For the body itself isn't symmetrical. One of your feet is bound to be bigger than the other, one ear will leak more wax. Nora is fluxy; me constipated"(WC, 5). Dora and Nora are also, of course, the identical twins mentioned by Freud in his list of uncanny doubles, bringing to light that which is hidden and disrupting the supposed uniqueness upon which the system of representation depends.<sup>9</sup>

Rosemarie Tong explains Irigaray's mimetic strategy in more detail: "Through her acceptance of what is in any case an ineluctable mimicry, Irigaray doubles it back on itself, thus raising the paratim to the second power... Miming the miming imposed on woman, Irigaray's subtle specular move (her mimicry 'mirrors' that of all women) intends to 'undo' the effects of phallogocentric discourse simply by overdoing them".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Irigaray 76.

<sup>8</sup> I am referring to a subheading in Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) here, entitled "The Blind Spot of a Dream of Symmetry", which criticises Freud for taking the woman as an inferior version of the man under the law of the same.

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," in *Art and Literature*, trans. Alix Strichay, in *The Penguin Freud Library* vol.14, ed. Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 339-376.

<sup>10</sup> Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Routledge: London, 1992) 228.

In Wise Children and Nights at the Circus the mimicry of patriarchal formulations and constructions (such as the mark of "lack" which is ironically repeated in the rouged mouth) unbalances the rigidity and the conventions of a male dominated society, and as doubles the twins themselves challenge the representative economy by doubling it back on itself. Another feminist theorist who approaches the subject of masquerade as potentially liberating is Mary Ann Doane. In an essay entitled "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts On the Female Spectator", she speaks of the importance of distance to a feminist aesthetic.<sup>11</sup> According to Doane, to accept the merging of the theory of linguistic difference with sexual difference is disempowering for women, especially as it appears to leave no room for feminist strategy. To investigate the idea that women are outside of language as an idea, however, and not as an irrevocable and irreversible truth, is for her another matter altogether, and much more important, as it allows for feminist manoeuvre. She refers to her earlier essay "Film and Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator"<sup>12</sup> as an attempt to seek out a gap in the theory which "stipulates a claustrophobic closeness of the woman in relation to her own body".<sup>13</sup> In this way, Doane admits that she was attempting to tear the masquerade out of its conventional context. In this sense there are definite similarities between her project and Irigaray's.

In Riviere's essay on masquerade, Doane finds what she terms "the glitch in the system" in representation, for Riviere's essay draws attention to an internal

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<sup>11</sup> Mary Ann Doane, "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator," Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory and Psychoanalysis (New York: Routledge, 1991) 33-43.

<sup>12</sup> Doane, "Film and Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory and Psychoanalysis (London: Routledge, 1991) 17-33.

<sup>13</sup> Doane 37.

contradiction in the psychoanalytic account of femininity. We could perhaps view Dora and Nora as embodying and reflecting this glitch in the system, for, as we have seen, they represent difference in similarity. Riviere's description of masquerade provides a contradiction in the sense that it, "attributes to the woman the distance, alienation and divisiveness of self (which is constitutive of subjectivity in psychoanalysis) rather than the closeness and excessive presence which are the result of the psychoanalytic drama of sexualised linguistic difference". Doane is particularly interested in Riviere's underlying assumption that femininity is a play of masks, yet that Riviere seems to describe those women who are aware of femininity as a series of masks as pathologically disturbed. The distance from femininity that Riviere's patient experiences is, as Stephen Heath points out, the reason for her disturbance in Riviere's reading. But Doane is swift to comment that, "there is no censure involved in claiming that the woman hides behind the mask when the mask is all there is--it conceals only an absence of pure or real femininity".<sup>14</sup> Like Irigaray's theory of mimicry, Doane's reappraisal of Riviere's essay suggests the masquerade-as-artifice destabilises the image of woman from within; it is a skewing in the system. The idea of the masquerade as something that can be utilised as a means of empowerment is reminiscent of Kristeva's theory of abjection described in the first chapter, whereby the abject threshold may become a place of creativity. The mask, too, opens on to an ambiguous space. It also takes us to Bakhtin's discussion of the mask in Rabelais and His World where he tells us that of all the themes of folk culture, the mask was the most complex, linked with the joy of change and the negation of

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<sup>14</sup> Doane 37.

uniformity. Containing the playful image of life, it was based on the interrelation of reality and image<sup>15</sup> and Walser discovers the freedom that lies behind the clown's mask during his apprenticeship, "the freedom to juggle with being, and, indeed, with the language that it is vital to our being which lies at the heart of burlesque" (NC, 103) and Buffo's statement sounds like the masquerade of femininity which reveals an absence of femininity "what am I without my Buffo's face? Why, nobody at all. Take away my make-up and underneath is merely not-Buffo. An absence, a vacancy" (NC, 122).

Buffo declares the potential liberation inhering in the idea of the mask and to the radical possibilities of marginalisation when he declares: "we possess one privilege that makes of our outcast and disregarded state something wonderful, something precious. We can invent our own faces. We make ourselves (NC, 121)". However, the clowns are abject and miserable melancholics like Morris in Shadow Dance. There are allusions to Yeats (Buffo is "the centre that does not hold") and to T.S. Eliot (the clowns rustle "like hollow men"),<sup>16</sup> so that they express the existential despair at the heart of much modernist writing. Teetering on the abyss of annihilation, they eventually dance the dance of death and disappear (presumably swallowed up by *la néant*) "the dance of disintegration; and of regression; celebration of the primal slime"(NC, 125).

Clare Hanson believes that at this point, "all Carter's powers seem to be engaged in the evocation of hell which cuts straight across the optimism of this

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<sup>15</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968).

<sup>16</sup> T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," Selected Poems (London: Faber and Faber, 1990) 75-86.

text”.<sup>17</sup> Hanson, whose aim is to illustrate the rueful scepticism of Carter’s fiction in defiance to the reading of her work as “unproblematically ‘constructive’”, goes on to discuss what she takes to be an undertone of pessimism that runs right through Nights at the Circus. Although the boundaries of that which constitutes the subject may occasionally be redrawn, “there is ultimately no change in the sum of human happiness, for the rise of one individual or group will always be at the expense of another”. In order to exemplify her criticism, Hanson points to Fevvers’s success, which she sees as depending on her ability to “‘work’ the star system in close association with the arch-capitalist, Colonel Kearney”, and to Fevvers’ domination of Walser, in the woman-on-top position, which she reads as the triumph of Fevvers’s ego and desires over his. According to Hanson, the setting of the novel also clearly reinforces the difficulty in effecting social change, as any contemporary feminist reader, “will be only too well of the discrepancy between Fevvers’s extravagant claims for the future and the actual extent of the changes in women’s lives over the last hundred years”.<sup>18</sup> Wise Children is also read as a text which undercuts its own seemingly celebratory premises. This, for Hanson, is nowhere more apparent than at the end of the novel, where Dora uses the idea of the pause button:

In other words, the happy ending is associated with selection, editing and the willing suspension of disbelief. To create it, the narrator tells us, she edits out the facts which ‘do not belong to the world of comedy’, and the freeze frame cuts off the awkward unravellings of history, so that for a moment, all is laughter, forgiveness, generosity, reconciliation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Claire Hanson, “The Limits of Artifice,” The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London: Longman 1997) 59-71: 65.

<sup>18</sup> Hanson 70, 66 and 67 respectively.

<sup>19</sup> Hanson 67.

Dora's belief that there are limits to the power of laughter is also used to exemplify Carter's view of "the ultimate purpose and efficacy of carnival",<sup>20</sup> which is, in Hanson's estimation, only a temporary respite from the difficulties of existence that *might* help us to think differently. Hanson's essay is not alone in its focus on the tensions in Carter's fiction. Indeed the three essays which begin the very recent collection The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter open Carter up to wider debate than any previous secondary material produced so far. As the editors of the book note, a demythologising of Carter is beginning to take place, a process which is disrupting the "celebratory symbiosis between fiction and theory"<sup>21</sup> that has frequently been employed in criticism of her fiction. But it is a process Carter, as one who showed distaste and sometimes disdain towards canons, may even have welcomed: "Just as Carter seemed about to ascend to the postmodern pantheon, her socialism, her ambivalent but insistent Englishness, her unruly but insistent heterosexuality--characteristics which have passed without notice for far too long--are re-emerging to stall her apotheosis".<sup>22</sup> This collection is compelling, as its mixture of voices, some dissenting, reflect the complexities of Carter's work. Hanson's discussion of difficulties surrounding liberation in Carter's last two novels ties in with my discussion of theories of transgression in the first chapter, and with the unresolvable, contradictory nature of Shadow Dance. This chapter of the thesis (was) developed out of the long period of frustration, even anger, towards Carter. Prior to analysing Shadow Dance, I had written about The

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<sup>20</sup> Hanson 69.

<sup>21</sup> Britzolakis 44.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton, "Introduction," The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter (London and New York: 1997) 1-19: 19.

Bloody Chamber, Nights at the Circus and Wise Children, concentrating on those very celebratory aspects which are treated with caution by many of the authors of the essays in The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter. Reviewing Nights at the Circus and Wise Children in the light of this current criticism and the thinking behind my later work, I realise that in some ways I *wanted* to overlook the scepticism that is woven into Carter's later fictions. I wanted to believe in the power of Fevvers and Nora and Dora, and to endorse the optimistic force of the texts, rather than dwelling on what Hanson calls the "radical Nietzschean pessimism" which works "in tandem" with what might be termed the hopeful drive.<sup>23</sup>

According to Stallybrass and White, "the carnivalesque" is increasingly taken up by historians and literary critics in a naively ahistorical way to describe any vaguely transgressive social or textual practice, regardless of the context in which these practices occur. In this way the carnivalesque is used as a means of description, a term which may be applied by the critic analysing events from an objective position, supposedly "outside" of events. Carnival becomes an absolute category/ label emptied of political force because it overlooks social, historical, racial and gender differences which are the dynamics of carnival or carnivalesque writing practice. In this sense, the carnivalesque has become a rather static concept<sup>24</sup> and such a criticism could perhaps be applied to the reading of Fevvers's body as an anarchic, carnivalesque space later in this chapter. However, as with Meaney's reading of Wise Children, I believe Carter's equation of femininity and

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<sup>23</sup> Hanson 71.

<sup>24</sup> See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (London: Methuen, 1986)

the carnivalesque is an important mode of celebrating difference and releasing its subversive potential.<sup>25</sup> Nora and Dora, for instance, are more inventive versions of the nihilistic clowns Grik and Grok. Grik declares “All I need to do is look in my old pal’s face for, when we made our face together, we created out of nothing each other’s Siamese twin, our nearest and dearest, bound by a tie as strong as liver and shared lights,” (NC,123) thus foreshadowing the Chance sisters who also make something out of nothing yet are, in contrast, adept at overcoming despair.

The importance of the conflicting voices and the contradictions in Carter’s two final novels was not bypassed in my earlier work. Indeed, I chose to discuss Nights at the Circus through a dialogical perspective, which when applied to Carter’s work can help highlight the tensions in and of the fictions, as well as her open-ended textual practice.<sup>26</sup> I have retained a brief analysis of the dialogical relationship between Fevvers and Lizzie as it serves to temper over-optimistic (Fevvers-like) flights of fancy elsewhere in the chapter.

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<sup>25</sup> Gerardine Meaney, (Un)like Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction (London: Routledge, 1993) 139-40.

<sup>26</sup> Magali Cornier Michael writes that in order to “accomplish its aims, the novel [Nights at the Circus] attempts to resolve the tensions that have characterized the uneasy relationship between Marxist feminism and postmodernism,” “Angela Carter’s Nights at the Circus: An Engaged Feminism Via Subversive Postmodern Strategies,” Contemporary Literature 1994 35: 3: 492. Although much of what Michael has to say is useful, I feel that, overall, her reading of the novel misses the mark, for resolution is exactly what we don’t get in Carter. Like Michael, I look at the different types of feminism these characters articulate. However, I am more interested in the way these “characters” conflict and contradict each other and themselves than in any marriage between them. This is where Bakhtin is useful because he was aware of the power conflicts expressed in and through language and in dialogue, and did not paint a harmonious picture of people interacting in a vacuum.



## Performing for a Living; Life as Performance

“What does woman want?” is a question which Nietzsche, like Freud, kept returning to.<sup>27</sup> In Stephen Heath's discussion of Joan Riviere's article, which he discusses in conjunction with Nietzsche's fear of woman not "fitting in" in the Symbolic Order, he writes: "the scandal of women that torments Nietzsche is what can the phallus signify to them, what can it say of them? they 'give themselves' even when they give themselves, they are never who they, phallically are, never really the woman".<sup>28</sup> Heath's questioning style reflects the question of womanliness posed by Riviere's essay. This question is never answered, for the essay embodies the contradictions of its subject: woman remains a question mark.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Nora and Dora's reversal/send up of the Shakespearean bedtrick, in which Nora allows Dora to sleep with her boyfriend, plays simultaneously on the idea of woman as a "tourniquet of reassurance and disturbance"<sup>30</sup> which Heath traces at work in Riviere and Nietzsche's work on masquerade and womanliness as contradiction.<sup>31</sup> It utilises and transforms the fear

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<sup>27</sup> In Stephen Heath, "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade," *Formations of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986) 50. "Was will das Weib? das ewig Weibliche?", quoting Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 84.

<sup>28</sup> Heath 54.

<sup>29</sup> Heath also points out that Riviere's essay, which reveals the constructedness of femininity and sexual identity and the contingent relationship of the psyche and sociality, then denies these premises. Sexual politics gives way to a psychology of sex. As he says, "No doubt it is an articulation of the psychical and social together in the construction of sexuality and sexual identity that we need to break the deadlock; the articulation that psychoanalysis lays a basis for and continually suggests but never makes. Easier said than done."<sup>56</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Heath 54.

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, implying the subversiveness of masquerade and femininity whilst reasserting masculinity as dominant, writes: "If woman does not thereby seek a new *ornament* for herself--I believe ornamentation belongs to the eternally feminine?--why, then, she wishes to make herself feared: perhaps she thereby wishes to get the mastery. But she does not *want* truth--what does a woman care for truth." Frederic Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works*, ed. Oscar Levy and trans. Helen Zimmern (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1909).

inhering in Nietzsche's idea that woman in a sexual act is "just that, in an act", and that "above all, they (women) have to be actresses".<sup>32</sup> Dora is the woman who man wants, that is to say, the term of phallic identity and exchange. But at the same time she is not one but two. Dora ridicules and messes up the masculine libidinal economy because she is not Nora. She masquerades as the essence of Nora/femininity by wearing her perfume. And in this sense Dora "gives herself" (as Nora--the me and the not-me) as she gives herself.<sup>33</sup>

Like Dora, Fevvers's occupation (as a female aerialiste) adds resonance to the account/performance of her life-story. This is just another part in a theatrical life, a life which is always in the process of being staged. The recounting of one's life, the act of representing it, which for Dora is a form of storytelling, is itself a performance.<sup>34</sup> In this sense Dora, and Fevvers, whose recollection of her life story opens (up) Nights at the Circus, inherit the mantle of Mother Goose and other foremothers of the oral tradition. This is particularly so in Fevvers's case, for she is a literal embodiment of those earlier bird women who preside over narrative enchantments. Williams delights in the fact that the twins of Wise Children, "give birth to themselves as the fabrications of theatre entirely with reference to the mirrors of audience, image and their own reflections in each

<sup>32</sup> Heath, 51, quoting Nietzsche in Beyond Good and Evil.

<sup>33</sup> Paulina Palmer reads this episode as a female-bonding incident "Conventional gender roles, in this instance, are reversed. The two women control the situation, while the man is relegated to the subordinate position of sex-object and toy boy. Instead of women cementing the bonds between men, as is generally the case under patriarchy, man cements the ties of affection between women." "Gender as Performance in the Fiction of Carter and Atwood," The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London: Longman, 1997) 24-41: 32.

<sup>34</sup> In postmodern theory and fiction, textual production and reading and writing are viewed as performative acts. These activities replace a preoccupation with the author (he/she who was once believed to be taken as the authority for the meaning of a text and thus of an individual power to influence others).

other".<sup>35</sup> The idea of self-fabrication can also be extended to Dora's love of yarn-spinning. Performing is Dora's life's work, and her life's work is a performance in the process of being staged/written, for, as with so many of Carter's fictions, the novel begins in *medias res*. Like Fevvers, Dora moves backwards in time in order to narrate unconventional beginnings so that she might move forwards and like The Magic Toyshop, Wise Children is a novel which is implicitly concerned with female origins. The figure of the absent mother is always present in her absence (in the Derridean sense, that she exists as a trace of something we can never know). In Nights at the Circus the figure of the mother is also very much present in her absence. Fevvers, we are told, is hatched out of an egg, and Dora and Nora's mother, who is supposedly (as the story goes) a chambermaid, dies giving birth to her twin girls. Nicole Ward Jouve implies that Peregrine's story about Grandma Chance and Melchior is the "true story" of their origins.<sup>36</sup> However, revelations of this sort are not to be taken at face value in the work of a writer like Carter. This version of the twins' origins actually undermines Dora's thoughts earlier in the evening which are that, "a mother is always a mother, since a mother is a biological fact, whilst father is a moveable feast...." (WC, 216). Female origins and their impossibility (discussed in chapter three) become a source of creation and desire, bound up with the articulation of a feminine eros. As

Williams says:

Life in Carter is 'inflicted' in a variety of ways: daughters are hatched from eggs, surgically constructed in caves; they even bring themselves into being in front of the mirror. Here I am thinking of Leilah's act of giving birth to herself as she makes up in front of the mirror of The Passion of New Eve, or the twin old women of Wise

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<sup>35</sup> Linda Ruth Williams, Critical Desire (London: Edward Arnold: 1995) 123.

<sup>36</sup> Nicole Ward Jouve, "Mother Is A Figure of Speech," Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994) 136-170: 166.

Children, making girls of themselves from the old images they have become.<sup>37</sup>

The twins' illegitimate status proves the romance of marginalisation as a bitter fiction, "to tell the truth, there was sod all romantic about our illegitimacy. At best it was a farce, at worst a tragedy, and a chronic inconvenience the rest of the time" (WC, 11). Despite these drawbacks, the twins' illegitimacy does allow them the freedom of self-fabrication. Theirs is an alternative family romance, like Melanie's with the Flowers, yet the Chance family is free from the shackles of patriarchal inheritance: "Grandma raised us, not out of duty, or due to history, but because of pure love, it was a genuine family romance, she fell in love with us the moment she clapped eyes on us" (WC, 12). In both Wise Children and Nights at the Circus, Williams explains, the alternative family romances: "decentre the traditional image of the life-giver and nurturer, and reposition her somewhere 'in the distinction between woman and mother'. The mirror dramatizes yet another set of alternative identities from which a final choice is never made. The play of making-up is kept open".<sup>38</sup> No longer is the absent mother the terrible, haunting source of loss and grief she was in The Magic Toyshop.

In both Wise Children and in Nights at the Circus, the women, like those in the earlier novels, want men in order to legitimise their existence in some way. Certainly, Fevvers relies to some extent on Walser to reassure her that she exists, although this only happens at times when her confidence trick fails: "In Walser's eyes she saw herself, at last, swimming into definition, like the image of photographic paper; but, instead of Fevvers, she saw two perfect miniatures of a dream" (NC, 290). And along with the twins' prevailing disdain towards their

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<sup>37</sup> L.R. Williams 123.

own absent, neglectful father is a longing for his acknowledgement. They never stop experiencing jealousy towards the "legitimate" twins, Saskia and Imogen and part of their anger towards Melchior stems from the fact that, despite their heightened visibility in the public eye, they remain invisible to him, "those eyes of his looked at us but did not see us" (WC, 72). Whether Fevvers, Dora and Nora actually need men to ground their existence is an entirely different matter however. Both novels actually subvert patrilinear history, the specular economy and patriarchal discourses through their very structures and narrative strategies. They work as interrogatory sites which revisit history and historical representations in order to revise and rewrite it/them differently. In realist novels history tends to lend credence and "veracity" to the text and the written or reading subject but Carter, like many of her contemporaries, writes these historical characters and happenings within her texts so that she might expose the historical "truth" as a construct.

This technique, which draws attention to history as a discursive structure and a process, has usefully been termed "historiographic metafiction".<sup>39</sup> Linda Hutcheon believes that writers such as Carter, Rushdie, Fowles, Coetzee and others encourage their readers to view history as something that cannot be known outside of texts and to question the notion of "timeless transcendent meaning".<sup>40</sup> Their works contest the idea that language refers directly and unproblematically to actual objects. In these writers' works: "The interaction of the historiographic and the metafictional foregrounds the rejection of the claims of both 'authentic'

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<sup>38</sup> L.R,Williams 124.

<sup>39</sup> Linda Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism (New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>40</sup> Hutcheon 19.

representation and 'inauthentic' copy alike and the very meaning of artistic originality is as forcefully challenged as is the transparency of historical referentiality".<sup>41</sup> This is not to say that the occurrence of particular events is refuted. The past is not denied, rather the way in which history is disseminated and received becomes all-important within postmodern art. Far from being a pure literary form, the postmodern novel would seem to confirm and to self-reflexively play upon Mikhail Bakhtin's assertion that the novel is a hybrid genre which is cross-fertilised by multiple discourses and other genres.<sup>42</sup> A "celestial fishwife," (NC, 43) earthily physical yet capable of flight, a woman who, as Fevvers is a human oxymoron who challenges gender stereotypes, and her hybrid nature as a winged woman works self-reflexively, like Lizzie's. She is an analogue for the novel of which she is a part, a novel which parodies other authors and so speaks with a double voice of intertextuality calling into question canonical male texts by Shakespeare, Dickens, Goethe, Yeats and Günter Grass amongst others.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hutcheon 19.

<sup>42</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, Four Essays, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 304, 361.

<sup>43</sup> Elaine Jordan says, "I would and would not like to produce the annotated edition of one page of Nights at the Circus, which is not to say that Angela Carter is not a highly original writer". "The Dangers of Angela Carter," New Feminist Discourses, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992) 117-130: 131 (notes). Yeats is a particularly interesting intertext of Nights at the Circus. In "Byzantium" we read of the poet's metamorphosis into a "Miracle bird or golden handiwork/More miracle than bird/Planted on the starlit golden bough," (p.298, lines 17-19) and the utopian dream of a lost paradise is clearly encoded within the poem, along with a certain foreknowledge of its failure. "The Circus Animals Desertion" is also clearly present in Nights (Carter quotes verbatim Yeats's line "the rag and bone shop of the heart" (section 3, line 10, p.395) but recontextualises it, in the sense that it describes Mignon's and other women's suffering). The millennial concerns of "The Gyres" (340) also lie behind Fevvers's millenarian speeches. Interestingly, Yeats was fascinated by the idea of the mask and the self-fashioning poet. Carter's text implicitly challenges Yeats's desire for the ideal self (which contains the seeds of its own destruction). Quoting from W.B. Yeats, The Poems ed. Daniel Albright (London: J.M Dent and Sons Ltd.,1990).

In its mingling of voices and perspectives, and through its dialogic questioning, the novel is frequently able to subvert authoritarian claims to truth. A Bakhtinian, dialogical approach in both Wise Children and Nights at the Circus provides Carter with the means to question patriarchal constructs, representations and assumptions, as well as the complex ontological problems inherent in the feminist project. In Nights at the Circus hybrid idioms such as historiographic metafiction are employed specifically in order to undermine and decentre masculine suppositions.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, these highly self-reflexive works ironically capture reality more effectively than realism. This derives from the fact that the dialogue of these novels is organised as an unclosed whole of life itself, life poised on the threshold, in a state of becoming.<sup>45</sup> Dora's life story, for instance, which is made up of multiple intersecting stories of other lives, attests to the heterogeneity of the world. Similarly, the notion of life as continually surprising that comes across in the narrative defies the idea of a "scripted" destiny and of the power of the omniscient author-creator. The novels' structures reflect their female protagonists' status as subjects-in-process.<sup>46</sup> Instead of historical characters and

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<sup>44</sup> The white, male, all-knowing subject who is able to effectively intervene in the processes of history and, through sheer force of will, change the course of events, is exposed in postmodern theory and artistic practice as a mythical construct. This rational subject is itself a product of Enlightenment discourse which needed such a view of the subject in order to anchor national mythologies. This God-like subject is exposed as being built on the repression of others. In contrast to this, the subject in postmodern art is re-presented as always linguistically and culturally situated, a meeting point/ constellation of variables, always changing and thus never finished or complete, like Kristeva's subject-in-process. This subject has no presence or identity outside of language.

<sup>45</sup> See Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, second edition, ed. and trans. C. Emerson (Minneapolis, M.N: University of Minnesota P, 1963) where he talks about Dostoevsky's novels as poised on the threshold of life.

<sup>46</sup> I am referring, of course, to Kristeva's theory of the subject-in-process; the subject who is not a closed and finite unit but changing constantly through his/her dynamic, interactive connection with the other.

events proving the truth of the fiction they prove history itself to be a fiction: a textual construct. At the beginning of Nights at the Circus we learn that Fevvers has just returned from a European tour:

On that European tour of hers, Parisians shot themselves in droves for her sake; not just Lautrec but all the post-Impressionists vied to paint her; Willy gave her supper and she gave Colette some good advice. Alfred Jarry proposed marriage. When she arrived at the railway station in Cologne, a cheering bevy of students unhitched her horses and pulled her carriage to the hotel themselves. In Berlin her photograph was displayed everywhere in the newsagent's window next to that of the Kaiser. In Vienna she deformed the dreams of that entire generation who would immediately commit themselves wholeheartedly to psychoanalysis. Everywhere she went, rivers parted for her, wars were threatened, suns eclipsed, showers of frogs and footwear were reported in the press and the King of Portugal gave her a skipping rope of egg-shaped pearls which she banked. (NC, 11).

This passage inscribes and establishes history whilst simultaneously abusing and undermining it, for the implication is that if history is a construct known only to us through texts, then it is possible to dismantle history and write a different version of events. Carter is subsequently able to rewrite history from a woman's point of view, as in postmodern fiction, the fictional becomes real. The implicit reference to Freud is particularly hilarious as it shows this powerful feminine figure of the imagination "getting her own back" on the analyst who could never openly concede the power of female sexuality. The logic of female secondariness is reversed in this passage, perhaps reflecting the author's desire to reach beyond the confines of patriarchal literary genealogies. In a similar way to the parodic inversion of Freud's importance here, Shakespeare is consistently alluded to within Wise Children. If in Carter's earlier fictions, the toybox of childhood is ransacked in order to expose and to explore the dark, pathological areas of family life and the power of patriarchs, in Wise Children it becomes the means by which would-be



patriarchs are well and truly mocked. Uncle Philip's papier-mâché swan is horrifying, but in Wise Children, Melchior's papier-mâché crown only makes him ridiculous. Through Melchior and his childish props and pretensions, Carter toys sacrilegiously with the construction of "the bard". Shakespeare has a God-like status throughout the novel which is constantly mocked, for instance when Dora speaks of the imminent trip to Hollywood she calls it a mission to spread the Word. The papier-mâché props with whom the patriarchs are equated imply that masculinity is just as much a construct (just as "staged") as femininity, and later the twins will compound this message by constructing themselves as tragic heroes. As Paul Magrs says of Evelyn in The Passion of New Eve: "The hitherto brutalized and brutalizing Evelyn is shown that, actually, rather than his maleness being a given and natural thing, he is making a conscious effort to keep his end up in the question of identity".<sup>47</sup> The ending of Wise Children actually reinforces the fictional quality of patriarchy and by extension, patriarchal genealogies. Although the twins are reunited with their father, they come away feeling disappointed and suspicious:

‘ Nora...don't you think our father looked two-dimensional; tonight?’ She gave a look that said, tell me more. ‘Too kind, too handsome, too repentant.... And tonight he had an imitation look, even when he was crying, especially when he was crying, like one of those great big papier-mâché heads they have in the Notting Hill parade, larger than life, but not lifelike.(WC, 230)

The implication is that Melchior is no more or less than than one of his flimsy "carnival" objects/props, which mask an absence of life.

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Magrs, "Boys Keep Swinging: Angela Carter and the Subject of Men," The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London and New York: Longman, 1997) 184-197: 189.

## Challenging the Premises of the Fetishistic Scene

In an essay entitled "Angela Carter's Fetishism", Christina Britzolakis argues that not only do the characters in Carter's novels masquerade, but Carter's style is itself a masquerading one. Britzolakis describes masquerade as displaying a transgressive wish, the fantasy of theft of the paternal phallus:

Thus the masquerade is a strategy for survival in a man's world. The spectre of this aggressive tactic haunts even Carter's most avowedly and joyfully affirmative texts... gender performance is...I would argue, a double-edged sword in the analysis of Carter's work. It enables us to argue that Carter deploys masquerade-like tactics in order to expose the fictional and inessential character of femininity. But it also enables us to argue that she is at least equally engaged by the male scenario of fetishism which lies behind, and is required by, the female scenario of the masquerade.<sup>48</sup>

But why should Carter's masquerade (and those of her characters) always lead us back to a phallic power structure, as if it were an irreversible given? Can it not utilise it as a "jumping off" point? Indeed, I would argue, contrary to Britzolakis, that the female masquerade in Nights at the Circus and Wise Children challenge the premises of "the male scenario of fetishism", knocking the phallus over from the "other" side. The act of creating oneself through a carefully selected assortment of clothes and make-up, a sartorial willing-oneself-into-being, is described by Dora as a habit one acquires. Dora speaks knowingly of the twins' excesses and artifices: "The habit of applying warpaint outlasts the battle; haven't had a man for yonks but still we slap it on" (WC, 6). Such a statement could be seen as describing and reflecting Carter's "phallic-aggressive"

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<sup>48</sup> Christina Britzolakis, "Angela Carter's Fetishism," The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London and New York: Longman, 1997) 43-56: 53.

masquerading tactic as it is read by Britzolakis: writing and self-creation are merely appropriations of (phallic) power in the “battle between the sexes”. However, Dora is telling us that although the process of making-up was once connected with making up to men, it is revealed in time, or has become in time, an autoerotic sort of pleasure that bypasses men. Self-creation is detailed with a precision that betrays an absolute delight in the materiality of the goods the twins apply to their bodies:

Two kinds of blusher, one to highlight the Hazard bones, another to give us rosy cheeks. Nora likes to put the faintest dab on the end of her nose, why I can't fathom, old habits die hard. Three kinds of eyeshadow--dark blue, light blue blended on the eyelids with the little finger, then a frosting overall of silver. Then we put on two coats of mascara. Today for lipstick, Rubies in the Snow by Revlon. (WC, 192)

There is no modernist nausea towards mass-produced products here. This is, rather, a celebration of cosmetics as affirming the life principle. Even the names of the twins' perfumes, Shalimar and Mitsouko, become delightfully poetic on Dora's tongue. Dora's love of words is made clear from the account of her days in Hollywood where she falls in love with a would-be poet who lends her his books. Her mimicry of Irish's “high faluting” style and overblown purple prose on her “abandonment” of him can be viewed as a form of the mimicry Irigaray advocates whereby the man's language is overdone to the point of bursting it asunder.<sup>49</sup> These passages reveal masculinity as just as much a masquerade as femininity

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<sup>49</sup> Irish's description of Dora as “the treacherous chorus girl with her bright red lipstick that bleeds over everything and her bright red fingernails and her scarlet heart, sexy, rapacious, deceitful. Vulgar as hell” (WC, 119), refers back to the wound of castration I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in conjunction with Dora and Nora's lipstick and Carter's essay “The Wound in the Face”. Here Dora exposes the way in which the myth inhabits the way men think of and construct women. In this case Dora becomes a vagina dentata--the powerful castratrix-dominatrix. Dora, who learns the “use of metaphor” with Irish is punished for desiring to break with him and her fate reflects the fate of the woman writer who inhabiting man's language will be seen as a vengeful vampiric harpy when she begins to create her own, alternative means of expression.

and contrary to Dora's comment that tragedy always upstages comedy, the novel frequently mocks the equation of masculinity with the "higher" dramatic form. In scenes such as that where Melchior mourns the loss of his crown in the house fire, the male tragedian appears nothing less than farcical.

The masquerade that is femininity becomes clearer with the passing of time: " 'It's every woman's tragedy', " said Nora, as we contemplated our painted masterpieces, 'that after a certain age, she looks like a female impersonator.' Mind you, we've known some lovely impersonators in our time" (WC, 192). Furthermore, Dora and Nora's masquerade is the means by which they resist the slide into oblivion that seems to characterise old age for women in the West: "nobody could say that the Chance sisters were going gently into that good night" (WC,6). Dora and Nora oppose oblivion by dressing up and going out on the town, fully aware that they are making a spectacle of themselves and loving every minute of it, "two batty old hags, buy us a drink and we'll sing you a song" (WC, 5) so that the abject connotations of the female grotesque and the monstrous-feminine are erased. They become associated with Eros rather than Thanatos.<sup>50</sup> In her essay on Carter's short story, "The Bloody Chamber", Karri Lokke contrasts a twentieth century feminine grotesque with the nihilistic grotesque ethic she sees

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<sup>50</sup> See Sarah Sceats's essay for an interesting discussion of Eros and Thanatos in relation to appetite, and of the interconnections between food and sexuality in Carter's work. According to Sceats, Saskia, one of the "legitimate" twins, forms a sharp contrast in her thanatic impulses. Her "carnally macabre" tastes privilege "associations of death and decay over those of sensual delight" Sarah Sceats, "The Infernal Appetites of Angela Carter," *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter*, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London and New York: Longman, 1997) 100-113: 105.

expressed in many of the male modernists' work.<sup>51</sup> The feminine grotesque is, according to Lokke, a welcome departure from this bleak masculine perspective:

In its joyful acceptance of both body and soul, its irreverent humour and its vision of the regenerative power of love and hope, this grotesque fills the emancipatory function that Bakhtin attributes to the original Renaissance grotesque--the destruction of rigidified hierarchy and the celebration of the unending cycle of life, death and rebirth.<sup>52</sup>

The grotesque body is expressive of carnival properties. According to Bakhtin, the carnival suspended all hierarchies, ranks and prohibitions, it celebrated change, becoming and renewal and was hostile to perfection and completeness. The grotesque body was not separate from the world, but joined with it: "It is not a closed, completed unit; it is finished, outgrows itself and its own limits.... This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body".<sup>53</sup> The insertion of the grotesque figure of Fevvers into official, historical time could also be regarded as a feminist appropriation of the carnivalesque, or a conflation of the carnivalesque (via the grotesque body) and the female Imaginary. A grotesque symbol, Fevvers is a woman of gargantuan proportions described as being the size of a house, with a face as "broad and oval as a meat dish" (NC, 12). Her appetite reflects her size: she is introduced as a glutton, one who loves her food and drink, indulging excessively in eel pies, caviar and champagne.<sup>54</sup> Like Bakhtin's grotesque body, Fevvers is in a state of becoming and might also be compared to the bird woman

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<sup>51</sup> This is the bleak aspect of modernism which Carter alludes to in the clowns' chapter (chapter 4) of Nights at the Circus, discussed earlier.

<sup>52</sup> Kari E. Lokke, "Bluebeard and "The Bloody Chamber": The Grotesque of Self-Parody and Self Assertion," Frontiers vol.10 1988, 7-12: 12.

<sup>53</sup> Bakhtin Rabelais 26.

<sup>54</sup> As Rory P.B. Turner points out, both seafoods are charged with grotesque regenerative sexuality. See "Subjects and Symbols: Transformations of Identity in Nights at the Circus," Folklore Forum 20, 1981, 39-60:43.

Hélène Cixous describes in "Sorties". And if she is a language (langue) she might be *féminine écriture*:

Flying is a woman's gesture, flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques....It is no accident women take after birds and robbers ....They (elles) go by, fly by the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space in disorienting it, changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures and turning propriety upside down.<sup>55</sup>

*Féminine écriture* can only be notional since "to define is to encodify and thus reinstate the dominant linguistic system".<sup>56</sup> But this is why Cixous claims for it a revolutionary potential, simply because it is not controlled and limited, but fragmentary and analogous to *flying* or diving. Cixous's notion of a "feminine" libidinal economy, which she sees expressed only in certain types of writing might be compared with Bakhtin's belief in the open-endedness of language which he attributed to the fact that each response we make is directed toward some real or hypothetical other: "The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer word. It provides an answer, anticipates and structures itself in the answers's direction".<sup>57</sup>

Although a connection between Bakhtin's approach to language and a feminist approach to language might at first appear to be tenuous, the two in fact have much in common as they both work towards the development of an ethics of alterity. A novelist who attempts to do justice to the polyphony of everyday life prevents it from becoming monologic, from imposing a "one-eyed" view of things

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<sup>55</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Sorties," *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, trans. Isabelle de Courtivron and Elaine Marks (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981) 90.

<sup>56</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Body and the Text*, eds. Helen Wilcox, Keith McWatters, AnnThompson and Linda R. Williams (New York: Harvester, 1990) 67.

<sup>57</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems* 200

upon the reader. Cixous's belief in a feminine libidinal economy derives from such an open-endedness, although she places more emphasis on the reader's response than Bakhtin: "The person who receives is the giver. The person who sends away can only send if she or he believes that there will be somebody else, someone else in another time, to receive".<sup>58</sup> Here we find the basis of the feminine libidinal economy, a desire to share, and to give. Expenditure rather than capitalisation is emphasised along with a willingness to take risks. She describes the libidinal economy as one that, "has a more subtle relation to property which can stand freedom--for instance the other's freedom.... It's an economy that tolerates the movements of the Other, that tolerates the comings and goings".<sup>59</sup> The word "feminine" that Cixous gives to this libidinal economy stems from Freud's labelling of the economies inherent in the latent double sexuality of a child before it learns to speak-- the masculine and the feminine economies exist in potentia at this time, but as the child is initiated into the Symbolic order of language, the masculine economy, signified by the phallus, becomes dominant. In poetic writing, Cixous believes that the two merge and are reborn: "The body is linked to the unconscious. It is not separated from the soul. It is dreamed unspoken. It produces signs. When one speaks, or writes, or sings, one does so from the body. The body feels and expresses joy, anxiety, suffering and sexual pleasure".<sup>60</sup> What Cixous says might also be related to the carnivalesque-carnival categories that Bakhtin believed were transposed over thousands of years into literature and reincarnated within the novel. The spirit of carnival can be linked to

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<sup>58</sup> Cixous, "Difficult Joys," in Body 26.

<sup>59</sup> Cixous, "Difficult Joys," in Body 38.

<sup>60</sup> Cixous, "Difficult Joys," Body 38

Cixous's feminine libidinal economy as it incorporates, "incompleteness, becoming, ambiguity, indefinability, non-canonicalism- indeed, all that jolts us out of our normal expectations and epistemological complacency".<sup>61</sup> Both Cixous and Bakhtin emphasise the psyche and language as interactive social entities, and both write in a way that illustrates language's essentially double nature.

Carter is also a writer who self-consciously collapses the classificatory body of culture and Fevvers, her supremely ambiguous character who confuses them all with her undefinable body, definitely has the qualities of the alternative libidinal economy Cixous speaks of. Like a Dostoevskyan hero, she relates to the consciousness of others dialogically and does not perceive, analyse or define the consciousness of others as objects or things.<sup>62</sup> As if to highlight the connection between body and language, and challenging high and low categorisations in the process, Fevvers's own speech (*parole*), is also hybrid. Cockney expletives, over-educated phrases and obscure words jostle together in a highly articulate and energetic outpouring; an enchanting display of verbal acrobatics. Carter takes an obvious delight in giving voice to this huge and hilarious Scheherezadic storyteller. Nights at the Circus deploys a joyful self-reflection a delight in language's potential for generating images through the sound and feel of language; the materiality of language. Some of the metaphors of the novel play with Romantic and modernist metaphors whereby the natural world takes on a divine, mystical aspect. Fevvers's eyes are at one point "as dark blue as a sailor's trousers"

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<sup>61</sup> Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin (Camb. Mass.:Harvard UP,1984) 312.

<sup>62</sup> Bakhtin, Problems 68. In this sense, Dostoevsky's heroes reflect their author, whose polyphonic novels form the basis of Bakhtin's study of dialogics. According to Bakhtin, "The author of a polyphonic novel is not required to renounce himself or his own consciousness, but he must, to an extraordinary extent, broaden, deepen and rearrange this consciousness (to be sure in a specific direction) in order to accommodate the consciousness of others" (68).



(NC, 206) and in Siberia the circus members huddle “under a sky the colour and texture of an army blanket” (NC, 227). At the end of chapter one Walser reflects sceptically on the style of Fevvers's storytelling as one might about Fevvers's acrobatic style: "He flicked through his notes. What a performance. Such style, such vigour!" (NC, 90). As an analogue for the feminist postmodernist artist, Fevvers showing her wings is like her creator, having fun in exploiting the border between fact and fiction and turning a specular economy upside-down:

In her pink fleshings, her breast bones stood out like the brow of a ship; the Iron Maiden cantilevered her bosom whilst paring down her waist to almost nothing, so she looked as if she might snap in two at any careless movement. The leotard was adorned with a spangle of sequins on her crotch and nipples, nothing else. Her hair was hidden away under the dyed plumes that added a good eighteen inches to her already immense height. On her back she bore an airy burden of furred plumage as gaudy as that of a Brazilian cockatoo. On her red mouth there was an artificial smile. Look at me! With a grand, proud ironic grace she exhibited herself before the eyes of the audience as if she were a marvellous presence, too good to be played with. Look, not touch. She was twice as large as life and succinctly finite as any object that is intended to be seen not handled. Look! Hands off!  
LOOK AT ME! (NC,15)

In this description, Fevvers's body is a political space in itself, a space which abolishes centuries of colonisation of the female body, and which re-writes Leilah's position as cabaret dancer more affirmatively. Revelling in her exotic appearance she displays herself openly in a manner which seems to expunge the years through which women have carried guilt about their sexuality. She consciously chooses to become an *objet d'art* to be wondered and stared at. Her finite status brings to mind Bakhtin's critique of the classical statue, raised up on a

plinth.<sup>63</sup> Yet she has chosen to be the object of the gaze. As Michael says, "Fevvers exhibits herself as object for the audience's gaze; yet, as author of herself as object, she is also a subject and thus has control over how much she will allow herself to be consumed by her viewers".<sup>64</sup> She knows exactly what she is up to and she loves it, gleefully exploiting her audience's need for enchantment. In this passage, Fevvers is a signifier with no signified and in this way she is like *féminine écriture* whereby, "the barrier separating the signified and the signifier is actually deconstructed, liberating the musical self of the word beyond its meaning".<sup>65</sup> As Palmer and Michael amongst others have noted, Fevvers's laughter at the end of the novel relates to Bakhtin's belief that laughter has a subversive potential. It liberates us (human beings) not only from external censorship but, first of all, from the great interior censor.<sup>66</sup> This passage also recalls Cixous's essay 'The Laugh Of The Medusa', "If she's a her-she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the 'truth with laughter' ".<sup>67</sup> Like Wise Children the overwhelming impression Nights At The Circus gives is of the possibility of change and transformation.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> In Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin compares the classical statue which represents finality, closure and is raised up and apart from the world, displaying no openings or orifices, with the grotesque body, which is completely connected with it. He uses the analogy to describe different ideologies and forms of art.

<sup>64</sup> Magali Cornier Michael, "An Engaged Feminism Via Subversive Postmodern Strategies," Contemporary Literature 35:3, 1994, 500.

<sup>65</sup> Body 121.

<sup>66</sup> See Bakhtin, Rabelais 94.

<sup>67</sup> Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," New French Feminisms, eds. Isabelle de Courtivron and Elaine Marks (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980) 245-265:258.

<sup>68</sup> The desire to take Fevvers as unproblematically embodying an entirely different economy is open to criticism as certain aspects of her contradictory character cannot be overlooked. Although generous in many ways, Fevvers also has a hard, meretricious side. She always has one eye on her bank balance. For instance, she has Mae West's heart of gold but also Mae West's business-like acumen which Hanson reads as a complicity with capitalism. One way to describe her

Language's "utopian" potential is here celebrated as it is exploited. I have been speaking about the delights of making-up, of creation and fabrication, and in Nights at the Circus there is a joyous self-reflexivity, a delight in language's potential, of the new images it generates and of the sound and feel of words. Language and the female body are at one in the description of Fevvers on the high wire, pushing against the deathliness in life and fulfilling the process Foucault describes in Language to Infinity: "headed towards death, language turns back on itself...to stop this death which would stop it, it possesses but a single power: that of giving birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that has no limit".<sup>69</sup> Dora and Nora's death-defying masquerade and their relationship as mirrors to one another might also align them with language. As mentioned at the opening of the chapter, they reveal the feminine in language which is equated with eros and sexual difference. Foucault's view of language, hurtling towards death and forever reproducing itself in the face of death's limit, is connected with a cultural shift in the attitude towards death which he explains as occurring at the end of the eighteenth-century. The fact that death came to be the absolute view over life, "opening on to its truth", meant that the individual came up against death in daily

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extraordinary personality is as a dialogical interaction with The Marquis de Sade's texts The Complete Justine and Juliette, the sisters discussed in The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History (London: Virago, 1983).

Carter says that Justine and Juliette conduct a dialectical relationship with one another. Sade's texts could also be seen to form a dialogue with one another, opening up a space for the creation of a different femininity than those he describes. Fevvers is a dialogue between the redeemable aspects of Justine and those of Juliette too, rising, as it were, from the ashes of the dead goddess--the mythical goddess represented by Justine's masochistic heroism and her antithesis in Juliette. Fevvers is like Justine in the sense that she is frequently forced through circumstances to become an escape artist, a traveller in a perpetual state of homelessness. "Flight is Justine's salvation" (SW, 56), writes Carter. Sarah Bannock says (perhaps unfairly) that Fevvers's "'freedom' is a negative one, for she is always in flight in both senses of the word. She is both aspiring to, and running away from, the fiction that is femininity[211]).

<sup>69</sup> Michel Foucault "Language to Infinity" in Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell Up, 1977) 70.

existence.<sup>70</sup> Bronfen says that: “One of the most poignant paradoxes of the modern period is that death, as that which most threatens individuality, should also be its supreme confirmation. The elaboration of strategies to occult death call forth an equally elaborate staging of it”.<sup>71</sup> In Nights at the Circus the late nineteenth-century obsession with death becomes the focus of chapter seven, which tells the story of the tragically orphaned Mignon, a sort of Justine figure, in constant flight from abuse. Before Mignon joins the circus she is none other than a ghost impersonator: “personating the dead and posing for their photographs” (NC, 134). Herr M Mignon’s employer, who is (like Fevvers) “sincerely fascinated by the art and craft of illusion” (NC, 135). He entices relatives of recently dead young women and “conjures up” Mignon, who stands in as the young woman’s ghost, which Herr M then takes a photograph of, so that the deceased’s relatives may keep a memory of her. This is an occulting process connected with what Bronfen calls “the good death”(the death of a virtuous person; in this case, the virgin child).<sup>72</sup> Herr M sees his position as part bereavement counsellor: “He prided himself on knowledge of the human heart” (NC, 135). The irony of this is that the human heart changes and that the “occulting” of death takes place in a culturally specific moment, one which as Bronfen says was “a crucial period for the discovery of femininity”.<sup>73</sup> Chapter seven (part two) deals with the themes of femininity and death which continue to fascinate Carter. As Bronfen points out, “it is part of representation’s fetishistic quality that by offering a stable image it

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<sup>70</sup> Michel Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic (New York: Vintage, 1973) 155.

<sup>71</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen Over Her Dead Body (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995) 77.

<sup>72</sup> Bronfen 78.

<sup>73</sup> Bronfen 76.

confirms the producer or viewer's position even as its semantic encoding is that of the instability of the feminine or of death".<sup>74</sup> In this way, Herr M's profession, as confidence trickster, serves to highlight the "confidence trickery" at the heart of the act of representation itself. But it also a critique of woman's position within the representational process and the transcendence of the masculine subject that the equation of femininity and death enables. Furthermore, the slippage between this construction of femininity and "real" women is made clear. Mignon is literally a member of the living dead, in two senses of the word; in her daily job as "ghost", and in her nightly existence, where she fulfills Herr M's necrophiliacal and paedophile tendencies (as the "freaks" at Madame Schreck's fulfill the perverse desires of those who visit her cavern): "Herr M, a once-a-night, on-and-off-man, screwed Mignon with the absent-minded regularity with which he wound the grandfather clock, although never for quite so long" (NC, 134).<sup>75</sup> Her

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<sup>74</sup> Bronfen 102.

<sup>75</sup> The grandfather clock is always a symbol of oppression in Carter's fiction as it marks out Father time, what Kristeva calls "time of the line". The time in which Mignon is kept prisoner at Herr M's is in direct contrast to her time in Siberia where she is freed through love. Time in Wise Children is a major theme of the novel and, in the Chance household, marked by an old "Highland style" grandfather clock with antlers on the top. This clock resides in the front hall of the South London home which they inherit from Grandma Chance. A present from their father, it thus has great sentimental value: "His only gift and even then it came by accident. Great, tall, butch, horny mahogany thing, but it gives out the hours in a funny little falsetto ping and always the wrong hour, always out by one" (WC, 4). The clock's inaccuracy is due to a knock given it by Grandma Chance, once upon a time: "It was alright until Grandma fixed it. All she did was tap it and the weights dropped off. She always had that effect on gentlemen" (WC, 4). In this passage the grandfather clock, a patriarchal/phallic symbol, handed down from a stereotypical patriarch, is represented as emasculated. Indeed, Dora states at the beginning of her narrative: "We boast the only castrato grandfather clock in London" (WC, 4). The antlers which themselves are phallic (their branching points reminiscent of a family tree), become in the Chance's house simply something to hang hats upon: redundant.

The fantastic, grotesque females of Nights at the Circus and Wise Children challenge the concept of time as it is ordinarily conceived. Russo discusses the fear that women experience regarding what is termed "making a spectacle of themselves". This fear she believes to derive from a sort of "inadvertency and loss of boundaries". Recalling childhood shame and embarrassment at the sight of women making "a spectacle of themselves" she makes a connection between the female grotesque and this heightened visibility (which is paradoxically, un-sightly): "the possessors of large, aging and dimpled thighs displayed at the beach, overly rouged cheeks, of a voice shrill in laughter, or of a sliding bra strap-a loose, dingy bra strap especially-were at once caught out by fate and blameworthy". Russo continues to note that her impression that these women had done something wrong was connected to/with a sense of "wrong" timing. The sense of the grotesque is in

occupation reflects her socio-cultural position. Herr M, who like Fevvers is a great performer, also plays tricks with the specular economy, cashing in on the maxim "seeing is believing". But Mignon's murder as a woman and as an image is implied when Mignon first watches Herr M develop her photograph and she

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this way like a bad joke, it is to do with being out of time. Looking back she remembers feeling that these women had stepped into the limelight out of turn, "too young or too old, too early or too late". Russo notes that making a spectacle of oneself always appeared to be a "specifically feminine danger" and her description of these excessive women (spilling over the spatial-temporal boundaries allotted them) indicates the way in which the lives of women are especially governed and regulated by a phallic law (phallogentric time-space) which restrains and contains their bodies. (All quotes Russo, 53) Yet Wise Children and Nights at the Circus utilise the feminine grotesque as a means of rethinking temporality.

Dora opens with a breezy, brassy assertion of her bastard status: "Good morning! Let me introduce myself. My name is Dora Chance. Welcome to the wrong side of the tracks," (WC,1) and the clock's "wrong" timekeeping seems inherently linked to Dora and Nora's illegitimate status, to their wrong-sidedness. Illegitimacy is, as Kate Webb has pointed out, a staple feature of the Shakespearean comedy, indeed, the entire corpus of Shakespeare's work seems in many ways to revolve around issues of legitimacy and illegitimacy which are parodied in Wise Children. Couldn't bastardy be seen as a matter of bad-timing in the sense that being born out of wedlock means to be born "out of time", where time is governed and regulated through patriarchal institutions like marriage? Dora and Nora's weapon against the passing of time and the losses that time passing inevitably entails, is a sense of the comic aspects of existence and the humour that derives from this. As we have seen, in a world in which women are judged on their appearances and thus become invisible citizens when they reach a certain age, Nora and Dora protest by exceeding these temporal constraints and "dolling themselves up" with a vengeance. They do not lock up their outfits in a wardrobe as if to contain the past, but continue to "don some bits and bobs of former finery" (WC, 4) as a means of illustrating the way in which the past continues to exist in the present. By making themselves into the girls they were, they jumble with time as we know it. So too, Russo shows that Fevvers and Lizzie, as an intergenerational grotesque pair, challenge the commodification of generational difference (which is not to deny that generational differences exist). In this way the new is not immediately associated with youthfulness. She says: "As Fevvers and Lizzie together reconfigure "the pure child of the new century," the new becomes a possibility that already existed, a part of the aging body in process rather than property (like virginity) of a discrete and static place or identity" (Russo, 178-9).

The ridiculing of the clock's phallic status, along with its failure to keep to the right hour, also metaphorically undermines patrilinear historical time and male genealogies which is/are replaced by a matriarchal household, although the matriarch is not a biological but a social one. Could it perhaps be said that time in Wise Children is feminised, or at least a new space is created in the Chance household, due to what might be termed its untimeliness? In an essay "Women's Time", Kristeva uses the term monumental time to describe the way in which the feminist movement preys on and transforms "time of the line" and, in this way, the clock is perhaps a parody of London's own monument, Big Ben, which represents/stands for teleological, progressive time. 'Monumental' time, together with cyclical time, is akin to feminine time.

In Nights at the Circus Walser asks of Lizzie and Fevvers "... And just how had the two women pulled off that piece of sleight with the clocks?" (NC, 90) for during his interview with Fevvers he hears Big Ben chime three times. On returning home, he discovers his watch had stopped at midnight. Robert Erickson tells us that "Midwife, witch and bawd are all active in the 'heavy middle of the night'. By any estimate, the hour of midnight has always been a critical one. It is a time of transition, the hour of change from old day to new day, from old year to new" (Erickson, 40). Big Ben as keeper of patriarchal time is again sabotaged in Nights at the Circus. The scrambling of time is here highlighted as a subversive ploy by either Fevvers or Lizzie, or both women, and reflects strategies in Nights at the Circus, in which narrative voice shifts so often

gets a nasty shock, for earlier we read that Mignon's mother was murdered by her father (a butcher): "she tucked her underlip under her rather front teeth; she was troubled. For the face that swam out of the acid emerged to her out of her memory in the same way. 'Mother...' (NC, 138). This particular incident takes us back to the themes of The Magic Toyshop, discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, whereby the daughter and mother's identities merge (for women represent the death drives).

Despite the fact that Fevvers and Herr M are both experts of illusion, Fevvers suggests joyous transformations to Mignon and those around her, as well as to the reader, looking towards (and occasionally articulating in her being) a space and time which women might be freed from their associations with death and castration. Fevvers adopts Mignon, as Lizzie and the whores had adopted her, and introduces Mignon to the tiger-taming princess of Abyssynia with whom Mignon she falls in love. This lesbian affair, along with that of the Olga Alexandrovna and Vera Andreyevna does seem rather a belated recognition of female homosexuality and somewhat tokenistic on Carter's part. However, it works to redress the balance of the "main" trajectory of the novel: the heterosexual love affair between Walser and Fevvers, which forms a revisionary romance in which each must recast themselves in order to accept the other into their world picture.

Interestingly, Williams explains the "space" of Fevvers's body and Walser's enchantment in relation to fetishism, "the fetishist negates what he sees--he has to insert something into the gap so that he can believe it instead. Walser responds with increasing belief, maintaining his rational 'hesitation', so that what he sees is

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within the novel, especially in the third section, that chronological time--what Lizzie calls Father Time-- is lost and becomes meaningless.

eventually exactly what it is".<sup>76</sup> Triumphant over the absence/death in life (troped by the "absence" of the female genitalia in phallogentric culture) is always connected with making things present to sight. The dreaded "nothing to be seen" lies at the heart of the Victorian fear and occulting of death discussed above. However, Williams's reading of Walser's response to Fevvers sounds more like a reworking of the fetishistic scene than a straightforward repetition of it, whereby Carter utilises the instability of vision-as-representation and woman-as-representation, in order to suggest transformative possibilities to the reader; possibilities that lie beyond the fiction of the monstrous "nothing to be seen". When Walser looks into Fevvers eyes he feels himself upon a threshold, as with Morris and Ghislaine's scar, and they draw him in. But this time rather than being threatened with abjection/annihilation they are like Chinese boxes embodying an "infinite plurality of worlds" (NC, 30).<sup>77</sup> Fevvers's eyes represent a different way of looking at the world, mirroring the woman writer's purpose. Williams reads the novel primarily as a visual re-education. Seeing differently, seeing anew, is linked to the articulation of woman-as-question-mark in a feminist context:

The fantasy of the subject's origins is, then, strung out across Carter's work in a protracted moment of hesitation. Fact or fiction? --What is she?--Where does she come from? These are questions that Carter refuses to resolve so that they remain unanswered. Her stories repeatedly return to the possibility of using visual fantasy to break down identity, or to expose the fact that the self is never finished or complete--what she writes are a series of visual challenges to the subject.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> L.R. Williams 99.

<sup>77</sup> This is from a different version of *Nights at the Circus* (London: Picador, 1993).

<sup>78</sup> L.R. Williams 124.



Williams's analysis suggests that spectatorial and reading positions are not necessarily commensurate with gender, an idea that I have also shown to run throughout Carter's work.

### **Lizzie and Fevvers: Dialogic Hybrids**

Lizzie is important to a discussion of Nights at the Circus, for Fevvers's tale is not simply a monologue but a dialogue with her stepmother, who keeps interrupting her.<sup>79</sup> As Mary Russo points out: "As a couple Lizzie and Fevvers produce a real challenge to the male and heterosexual gaze of Walser who is confused both by their narrative mode and their apparent physical incompatibility which he can only articulate as a question of scale measured in height".<sup>80</sup> Indeed, their dialogue further prevents Walser from ever getting to the point he desires and testifies to the open-ended, expansive and heterogenous nature of feminism and feminist dialogue, for the issues raised between the two women are those which still concern feminists today.

Michael has also picked up on this aspect of Nights at the Circus, although she doesn't apply Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to explain their interconnections: "The feminism of Nights at the Circus is complex in that it brings together more than one strand of feminism, an engaged Marxist feminism and a subversive utopian feminism. Lizzie and her adopted daughter, Fevvers, serve, respectively,

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<sup>79</sup> Whereas Fevvers's story is interrupted by Lizzie, however, Dora interrupts herself. In Kate Webb's words: "Dora's a reader teaser, endlessly drawing attention to herself by postponing the moment of revelation ('but I don't propose to tell you, not now...') or prodding her reader into paying attention because 'Something unscripted is about to happen'". Kate Webb, "Seriously Funny: Wise Children," Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994) 279-307: 295. Webb says that Carter tried to illuminate the idea of the implied listener in language within her work. Dora "speaks to the reader as if she expected him or her to reply" 294.

<sup>80</sup> Mary Russo The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity (London: Routledge, 1995) 174.

as mouthpieces for each of these two feminisms".<sup>81</sup> Here, for instance, is

Fevvers's "Apollinairean" speech:

And once the old world has turned on its axle so that the new dawn can dawn, then, ah, then! all the women will have wings, the same as I.... The dolls' house doors will open, the brothels will spill forth their prisoners, the cages, gilded or otherwise, all over the world, in every land, will let forth their inmates singing together the dawn chorus of the new, the transformed. (NC, 285)

Paulina Palmer emphasises the passage's incompleteness which is effected by

Fevvers's formidable foster mother, Lizzie, who undermines it with the rejoinder:

"It's going to be more complicated than that.... you improve your analysis my girl

and then we'll discuss it" (NC, 285). Thus, Palmer recognises that : "While on one

hand, a reference to celebratory and utopian elements is introduced, on the other

hand, there is an equally strong emphasis on the analytical and the

'demythologising.'<sup>82</sup> which perhaps validates this view. Neither Lizzie's nor

Fevver's standpoints is mutually exclusive however, as Palmer's emphasis on the

unfinished nature of Fevver's utterance shows. This is because the deconstructive

impulse and utopian desires the novel articulates (and embodies) are not

dialectically opposed, but exist in relation to each other. And such contradictions

exist within the hybridic characters themselves who form dialogues with other

texts and representations.

As Bakhtin tells us, the novelistic hybrid is an artistically organised system for bringing different languages in contact with one another and Bakhtin was aware

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<sup>81</sup> Michael 492.

<sup>82</sup> Paulina Palmer, "From Coded Mannequin to Bird-Woman: Angela Carter's Magic Flight," Women Reading, Women Writing, ed. Sue Roe (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1985) 179-80.

of the pseudoscientific reductionary nature of dialectics. In his Notes 1970-71 he establishes the difference between a dialectical and a dialogical approach:

Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices) remove the intonations (emotional and individualising ones) carve out abstract concepts and judgements from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness- and that's how you get dialectics.<sup>83</sup>

Lizzie's voice in Nights At The Circus could be likened to the warning voice of Toril Moi in Sexual/Textual Politics, a Marxist feminist who speaks of the danger of the appropriation of imagination and the pleasure principle by some of the French psychoanalytic feminists, an appropriation which I invoked in the last chapter as a means of explaining the textual dynamics/poetics of The Bloody Chamber. Moi welcomes Marcuses's belief that, "reason and rationality need recapturing for the Utopian project".<sup>84</sup> A feminist such as Cixous (who fights against reason's logic as inherently phallogentric) is problematic for Moi. She believes her to be in danger of

playing directly into the very hands of the very patriarchal ideology she denounces. It is after all, patriarchy, not feminism that insists on labelling women as emotional, intuitive, and imaginative while jealously converting reason and reality into an exclusively male preserve.<sup>85</sup>

Lizzie's role as foster mother to Fevvers is also analogous in some ways to the role Simone de Beauvoir plays to the "new" French feminists. Whilst de Beauvoir has rejected psychoanalysis (the basis of the work of such feminists as Cixous, Irigary and Kristeva) she also remains the great

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<sup>83</sup> Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, "Introduction: Rethinking Bakhtin," Rethinking Bakhtin, Extensions and Challenges, ed. Morson and Emerson, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989) quoting Bakhtin from Notes 1970-7.1 30.

<sup>84</sup> Toril Moi, "Hélène Cixous: An Imaginary Utopia," Sexual/Textual Politics, (London and New York: Methuen 1985).

<sup>85</sup> Moi 123.

adopted mother figure for not only French feminists but feminists everywhere. As Moi says, the symbolic value of her support for the new women's movement (post-1968) was enormous.<sup>86</sup> As has already been mentioned in chapter three of this thesis, Beauvoir was the first feminist to explicitly stress the reduction of women into objects for men and their construction as man's Other: "Woman is defined and differentiated with reference to Man and he with reference to her; She is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, He is the Absolute-She is the Other".<sup>87</sup> These points are echoed in Lizzie's criticism of Fevvers's art which she sees as simply dependent upon the specular economy, the basis of metaphysics, in which the woman is an object of desire/exchange who mirrors what the man wants to see, rather than challenging or subverting it in any really radical way: "You've got to give pleasure of the eye or else you're good for nothing. For you it's always a symbolic exchange in the market place; you couldn't say you were engaged in productive labour now, could you girl?" (NC, 52 ).<sup>88</sup> Despite this, as work itself is produced , and revamping spectacle shows up and diverts this cultural production".<sup>89</sup> Fevvers actually challenges Lizzie's critique of Fevvers's body as a commodity fetish, for whereas in commodity production the value of the product is displaced from the labour that

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<sup>86</sup> Moi 98.

<sup>87</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction to The Second Sex," *New French Feminisms*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf 1981) 44.

<sup>88</sup> Strangely enough, Lizzie also echoes Irigaray here, where Irigaray marries Marxist analysis with feminist concerns, such as in her essay "Women on the Market" discussed in chapter three.

<sup>89</sup> Russo 177.

produced it, here Fevvers's work as aerialiste is tied in to the production of herself as a mysterious (and hence, valuable) object.

Like Beauvoir, Lizzie rejects any valorisation of utopian or the feminine. Her order to the escapee, "scrub the 'soul' from out of your discourse" (NC,239) is reminiscent of Beauvoir's materialist attack upon metaphysics in The Second Sex that one is not born a woman, one becomes one. It becomes clear that Lizzie is a member of the British Communist party, based in London, and when in Russia she sends back news of the struggle to her comrades. Beauvoir believed that the problems of women would resolve themselves automatically in the context of socialist/Marxist development and this is Lizzie's point too: "It's not the human 'soul' that must be forged on the anvil of history, but the anvil itself must be changed in order to change humanity" (NC, 239). Many commentators on the novel speak of Lizzie as tempering Fevvers's more fanciful nature, as if she were somehow in need of bringing down to earth, despite her earthy physicality.

Britzolakis, for instance, says that, "Fevvers has a revolutionary antitype in her foster mother Lizzie, who provides a severe Marxist and Foucaudian counterpoint and corrective to Fevver's dreams of having it all--freedom, heterosexual love and money"<sup>90</sup> and Hanson declares that: "*she* is the representative of history, balancing Fevvers's rhetorical flights with dry Marxist-historical analysis".<sup>91</sup> Hanson also picks up on the Foucaudian aspects of Lizzie's discourse. However, most critics tend to ignore Lizzie's other side, her own "internal" incongruities or inconsistencies. Although she is the "voice of reason" throughout, she also

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<sup>90</sup> Britzolakis 55.

<sup>91</sup> Hanson 64.

dabbles in the supernatural/otherworldly. Like Fevvers, she is a hybrid reflecting the impurity and contradictions of the genre out of which she is created.

Lizzie's insightful comments on the workings of capitalist machinery and the debasement of women into currency, available to those men who wield economic power make her not only a precursor of more recent feminisms, but also a relative of the canny composite midwife/witch/bawd figure who emerges in the literature of the late seventeenth-century.<sup>92</sup> She conducts a dialogical (interrogatory) relationship with these women, perhaps best exemplified by Moll Flanders's nurse, Mrs. Jewkes in Pamela, and Mother Sinclair in Clarissa. Defoe and Richardson construct these women as demonic presences who, like the "witches" discussed in the previous chapter, are linked with the devil himself, infecting young girls with their moral corruption and pushing them towards their "downfall".

Carter subverts the masculinist idea of the evil Procuress, the perverse image of "the midwife bawd who nurtures the female child up into the well-clothed whore whose whole being is laid up at the disposal of men"<sup>93</sup> through the picture of Ma Nelson's, a sort of female enclave, a thriving women's collective lodged in the heart of industrial nineteenth century London. Although both Ma Nelson and Lizzie are former bawds and managers of sexual liaisons like the Mother Midnight figures in Defoe and Richardson's novels, the brothel in Nights At The Circus is far from the sinister brothel scene that the predominantly male authors of the literature of prostitution depict. Neither are the whores at Ma Nelson's the worthless or condemnable creatures represented in such works; women stripped of their "interest" (their virginity), which delares them valueless.

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<sup>92</sup> Discussed in Robert A. Erikson, Mother Midnight: Birth, Sex, and Fate in Eighteenth Century Fiction (Defoe, Richardson and Sterne), (New York: AMS Press, 1986).

<sup>93</sup> Erikson 16

In a satire on the literary brothel the women at 'Ma Nelson's' capitalise on the sale of their bodies, saving up for a time when they might spend their time more fruitfully by extending their various skills (a different sexual economy perhaps?). In this sort of environment Lizzie cannot be a deceptive procuress-whore-witch. Fevvers her foster child is never unwittingly seduced by Lizzie or by Ma Nelson. She is integrated into a sharing community where her elders are her educators. Michael tells us that the brothel is a “surrogate carnival” which reinforces “the novel’s disruption of the accepted notion of prostitution”.<sup>94</sup> As Carter has said in her theoretical work, The Sadeian Woman:

The whore is despised by the hypocritical world because she has made a realistic assessment of her assets and does not have to rely on fraud to make a living. In an area of human relations where fraud is a regular practice between the sexes her honesty is regarded with a mocking wonder. She sells herself; but she is a fair tradesman and her explicit acceptance of contractual obligation implicit in all sexual relations mocks the fraud of the 'honest' woman who will give nothing at all in return for goods and money except the intangible and hence inaccessible perfume of her essence.<sup>95</sup>

Fevvers stresses: "we knew we only sold simulacra. No woman would turn her belly to the trade unless pricked by economic necessity, sir" (NC, 38) In this way the prostitutes are miming their positions as desired objects (as Fevvers poses as the winged Victory in the brothel parlour). They are performing a role and maintaining a distance from their objectification. What is more, the “honest whores” in "Ma Nelson's" form a kind of sisterhood. As Fevvers tells Walser: "Life within those walls was governed by a sweet and loving reason. I never saw

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<sup>94</sup> Michael 507.

<sup>95</sup> Angela Carter, The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise In Cultural History (London: Virago, 1992) 58.

a single blow exchanged between any of the sisterhood who reared me, nor heard a cross word or voice" (NC, 38). The girls educate themselves when not at work: Grace practises stenography, Esmerelda the flute. It is from the books in Ma Nelson's library that Fevvers gleans, "whatever small store of knowledge I possess, sir" (NC, 38). As Russo explains, Fevvers's way out of the conundrum of being sealed up in one's appearance is "in the company of other women".<sup>96</sup> However, Russo warns against too readily celebrating any of the places in the novel, or of the performances, for, "to the extent that value is contested in the production of images of women in this novel, it is contested socially. One body as production or performance leads to another, draws upon another, establishes hierarchies, complicities and dependencies between representations and between women. Conflict is everywhere".<sup>97</sup> In this way, Fevvers and Nights at the Circus also highlight the inherent difficulties of the carnivalesque as a theory of freedom and transgression, and although Cixous mentions the sufferings and anxieties of the body in her writings on corporeal and textual transgression, her concentration the body's joys tends to overlook the fact that these joys are frequently compromised by others. Fevvers's hybrid and ambiguous form does not necessarily liberate her from oppression, for there is the episode when Christian Rosencreutz tries to capture her liminality for his own ends, as does the Grand Duke later on, and she has to spend time working as an aberration in Madam Schreck's museum where her uniqueness is exploited. This is an example of the conflict Russo highlights:

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<sup>96</sup> Russo 169.

<sup>97</sup> Russo 166.



“Female figures such as Madame Schreck, ‘the scarecrow of desire’ organize and distribute images of other women for the market”.<sup>98</sup> Armitt writes that:

One particular strand of the dark side of carnival has recently flourished under the scrutiny of feminist theory. Intrinsicly concerned with the centrality of the body to subjectivity, sexuality and the politics of power, feminist literary critics have frequently argued a case for woman's existence as a monster under patriarchal law. Woman may be the body in society, but she is excluded or marginalized by the body of society, even as she employs such carnivalesque processes for her own revolutionary ends.<sup>99</sup>

The representation of Madame Schreck's museum of freaks, a gothic chamber where male clients visit women with strange and sinister fairy tale histories, surely highlights the dark carnival of woman-as-monster or freakish aberration. Armitt explains Allon White's belief that the carnivalesque as a positively transgressive world of collective politics must be seen as distinct from the grotesque as “a world of dark introspection”.<sup>100</sup> She writes: “According to White, the dangers of introspection revolve around the world of modern-day Gothic which tends to effect a metamorphosis upon the ‘public carnival of the day’, turning it instead into a ‘private “carnival of the night”” . The “museum of freaks” could not be a more apt meta-commentary on the gothic, as the gothic forms a “suffocating and claustrophobic space, imprisoned by its *unheimlich* secrets”<sup>101</sup> where the carnival turns in on itself, thus infecting the spirit of the carnival with “the emblems of alienated desire, paranoid fantasy and the will to power”.<sup>102</sup> Paulina Palmer also

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<sup>98</sup> Russo 166.

<sup>99</sup> Lucie Armitt, Theorising the Fantastic (London: Edward Arnold, 1996) 70.

<sup>100</sup> Armitt 70.

<sup>101</sup> Armitt 70.

<sup>102</sup> Armitt 70, quoting Allon White, “Pigs and Pierrots: the Politics of Transgression in Modern Fiction,” Raritan, Vol.2 (1981)51-70: 56.

gestures towards a dark side to carnival in the portrayal of the circus. Although it is populated with hybrids who, like Fevvers, dismantle binary high-low oppositions and the divide between the human and the bestial, such as Sybil, the beautiful talking pig and an ape professor who who is a mathematical whizzkid, the carnivalistic exuberance is marred by an undercurrent of violence: "Instead of regarding the beatings and the thrashings associated with carnivalistic mirth as manifestations of playful exuberance she uses them to represent the violence that is rife in male dominated culture".<sup>103</sup> The novel's title Nights at the Circus perhaps bodies forth the tension outlined by Armit in relation to White's work. The novel treads a fine line between the liberating excesses of the carnival and marginality which come together in the circus, and the dangers of the carnival in which excess turns in on itself, into something darker and more horrific, preying upon itself like a cancer.<sup>104</sup> If the novel is, like its heroine Fevvers, a grotesque body, then it demonstrates that, "rather than depending upon the grotesque body alone, it is the context of the imagery that supplies the important political insight".<sup>105</sup>

In this sense, the brothel ironically remains just about the safest place in the novel.<sup>106</sup> Fevvers tells us that, "a subtext of fertility underwrote the glittering sterility of the flesh" (NC, 38) although the fertility here is a female artistic

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<sup>103</sup> Palmer 183.

<sup>104</sup> Armit 70.

<sup>105</sup> Armit 70.

<sup>106</sup> Sarah Bannock would clearly disagree with this reading of the brothel which she can only appreciate for the possibilities of co-operative mothering it presents. She calls the brothel a "fools paradise" and believes that Ma Nelson's "post-enlightenment individualism" lacks insight: "Ma Nelson's partial sightedness, reflected by her window blinds, also suggests the danger of self-deception," "Auto/biographical Souvenirs in Nights at the Circus," The Infernal Desire Machines of Angela Carter, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (New York and London, 1997)198-213: 211.

creativity of the sort mentioned by Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa"<sup>107</sup> rather than linked to reproduction. The white witch or benign midwife figure is described in *Mother Midnight* as having, "a beneficial effect on the individual person and the community. She too has a strange power of speech, but to heal, not to hurt. She lives in trusting accord with the great birth-giving power of nature".<sup>108</sup> This figure is given a thorough "make-over" and demystified through Lizzie. Fevvers tells us "Now, when I call Liz a 'witch' you must take it with a pinch of salt because I'm a rational being and what's more, took in my rationality with her milk" (NC, 225). Lizzie, has the verbal and the witching powers of the *Mother Midnight* figures but her magic is fiercely active and vindictive rather than benign, employed out of love for Fevvers. When the Charivaris sabotage one of Fevvers's performances, for instance, she inflicts them with physical ailments:

In the future, if ever Lizzie so much as thinks of the Charivaris, one or other of the clan will suffer an undiagnosable twitch, the historic tribe who rope-dance before Nero, Charlemagne, the Borgias, Napoleon... the Charivaris will now enter along, slow eclipse. Finally, forced to emigrate, two millenia of circus art will peter out in a pizza concession on Mott street. (NC, 161)

Fevvers doesn't bother herself over Lizzies's dalliances with the supernatural: "How does she reconcile her politics with her hanky panky/ Don't ask me? Ask that family of anarchist bomb makers of hers" (NC, 225). Her meaning is left open. Lizzie as a rational Marxist witch is, like Fevvers, an oxymoron: a character who explodes certain myths perpetuated by patriarchal culture, illustrating

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<sup>107</sup> Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *New French Feminisms*, eds. Isabelle de Courtivron and Elaine Marks (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981) 245-265.

<sup>108</sup> Erickson 18.

Carter's point that, "there's a materiality to imaginative life and imaginative experience which must be taken quite seriously".<sup>109</sup> As Russo says, it is the possibilities that this novel offers that make it so exhilarating, and the inconclusive, excessive nature of the ongoing dialogue "filled with conflict and repetition--a difficult friendship and an improbable but necessary political alliance" means that: "There is always something left over, something as untimely as subjectivity itself, that forms the basis of a new plan, perhaps another flight".<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> "Angela Carter," Novelists in Interview, ed. John Haffenden (London: Methuen, 1985) 85.

<sup>110</sup> Russo 181.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the innovative textuality or poetics of Carter's fiction through a sustained analysis of the reworking of one of the most misogynistic representations in literature (and culture generally): the passive, castrated woman. The aim has been to demonstrate Carter's importance to feminist theory and feminist art by focusing on a prevalent motif in her oeuvre which has evaded detailed scrutiny until now, and the thesis is placed firmly in the arena of contemporary feminist debate to which Carter owed so much, and to which she is intrinsically important. I have traced the motif of the wound/womb in its different contexts within some of Carter's novels and stories, not just in order to illustrate her extraordinary versatility as a writer but, more importantly, to emphasise her primary concern with women, femininity, female desire and the cultural significance and potency of these. In fact, in Carter's work patriarchy is always secondary to the issue of what a woman is, and what it is to be a woman, especially a woman living in the late twentieth century.

Carter's work very boldly examines and deconstructs the myth of masculine origins whereby the woman comes second (is born second in time) and her threatening creative potential is overcome as she is labelled secondary to man and destined to follow him. As I have noted in the introduction, such creation narratives can be seen to construct a logic of woman's secondariness. However, Carter reinstates the power and creativity of women in dynamic fictions that challenge the supposed omnipotence of patriarchy and patriarchs. As an example, one might go so far as to say that Walser and Melchior in Nights at the Circus and Wise Children are decoys or red herrings. They may sometimes be

set up as the objects of the women characters' desire within the texts, but as I demonstrated in the last chapter, their primacy is intrinsically mocked and proven to be hollow. Ultimately, the women in Carter's texts need and want something else, whatever it may be, and it is something these men cannot provide. But, as Hélène Cixous says, "I believe that women don't know total despair, they know about despair that brings us back to hope".<sup>1</sup> This phrase aptly describes the optimism and survivalist tendencies of most of Carter's protagonists as well as a large number of readers' involvements with these protagonists, and with Carter's texts more generally.

What might be termed female ontology (and the whole complicated issue of female desire and its connection with the cultural construction of femininity) is of paramount significance in Carter's fiction and journalism. In an article on Shadow Dance, James Wood attributes much of Carter's increased popularity among undergraduates and graduates to her amenability to current theoretical scrutiny.<sup>2</sup> This is true to an extent, but I think her ever-growing popularity as an author has to do with something deeper than theory and perhaps more to do with lived experience—perhaps this is why she is particularly appealing to women. We cannot forget that so many of Carter's protagonists are adolescent girls, or, in the case of women like Fevvers and Dora and Nora, refer frequently to their adolescent days, for adolescence is, as I hope to have demonstrated in chapters three and five, an interesting liminal position in terms of femininity. Carter was ahead of her time in thinking about women and the potential transformative

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<sup>1</sup> Hélène Cixous, The Body and theText, eds. Helen Wilcox, Keith McWatters, Ann Thompson and Linda R. Williams 25.

<sup>2</sup> James Wood, "Bewitchment," London Review of Books (8<sup>th</sup> December 1994) 20-21: 21.

possibilities of the uncanny difference of femininity, of bisexuality, and of the female grotesque (which have become rich feminist study areas), all of which are major aspects of Shadow Dance and the rest of her corpus.<sup>3</sup>

The development of Carter's fictional work has been described in terms of a gradual transition via which she moves from implicit critiques of patriarchy in her early novels, out into picaresque fictions in which she can explore wider philosophical issues, and then on to carnivalesque reinventions of gender and sexual relationships in the later "celebratory works", Nights at the Circus and Wise Children. My thesis diverges from this interpretation by establishing the idea that, right from the beginning of her career as an author, Carter produced texts which were radically subversive and destabilising, rather than (simply) straightforward interpretations of patriarchy.

In the first chapter on Shadow Dance the thesis is introduced and developed via the uncanny figure of Ghislaine and Ghislaine's scar, which I read as a signifier with a dizzying multitude of signifieds. Although I have argued that the scar can, on one level, be read as the wound of castration (woman's bloody mark of sexual-difference-as-lack that predominates in male discourses on female sexuality), I have explained that, through an arch, ironic style, it also

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<sup>3</sup> Although, admittedly, Carter may be placed in a long, rich, fantastic tradition, and uncanny elements, in which a concern with sexuality and the unconscious can be said to characterise nearly all texts that call the "Real" into question, she does something quite unique with this particular literary heritage; something groundbreakingly different. For instance, in the first chapter, I have examined the way in which all of the characters in Shadow Dance appear to mirror each other in some way. This is a common feature of anti-realist writing where the boundaries between self and other frequently dissolve, but, as I demonstrated, Carter deliberately uses doubling in order to explore gender cross-identification and the frail boundaries of gender constructs/sexual identity, along with the active threat of the submerged feminine.

transmutes into something quite different throughout the novel. The proliferation or accumulation of meanings around the scar that are unearthed in (and which form the dynamics of) the opening chapter may be interpreted, perhaps, as a parodic critique of the way in which the female body has become, as Merja Makinen and Lorraine Gamman put it, “the final site of struggle over meaning,” in a postmodern culture where the female body becomes too often, “a metaphor at the cultural level of the sign, far removed from its relationship to biological reality”.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, I believe that the multiplication of implied meanings around the scar in many ways actually militates against the fixing of Ghislaine/woman as a hole or a nothing, the place of powerlessness that is bequeathed to woman in western discourses on femininity, and this is demonstrated through close textual analysis. This multiplication effects an overthrow of existing representations of women by drawing on the alterity that various psychoanalytic discourses on femininity (along with other patriarchal discourses) attempt to mask or deny.

In the second chapter of this thesis I have expanded upon the idea that Carter’s work shows patriarchy to be a frail construction, forever threatened by the marks of difference it attempts to banish from itself in its pursuit of power and transcendence over the Other. The chapter on Shadow Dance tended to focus less on the novel’s setting and more on the characters and the importance of their mutability and ambiguity in order to explore the concept that patriarchy remains in fear of the elements it rejects or abjects from itself. In chapter two the “places” or settings of the novels under discussion become more important

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<sup>4</sup> Merja Makinen and Lorraine Gamman, Female Fetishism: A New Look (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1994) 217.



to the thesis. This is because it is largely through these books' wounded topographies that the scarred female form gathers an iconoclastic force which results in the creation of Carter's later fairy tale characters and fantastic women. The Passion of New Eve and The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman are texts which not only examine, but body forth the spaces of the other or the feminine; the previously banished outside of history opening up beneath or erupting within the masculine cityscapes described by their unreliable male narrators. The chaotic New York of The Passion of New Eve differs from the city Doctor Hoffman transforms because, although the Doctor's city is described as having previously been a phallogentric construction, the world he replaces it with is still goverened by the Law of the Father. I have argued that the world emerging in The Passion of New Eve is ultimately far more precarious and speculative than the worlds of Hoffman (which appear to be determined, totalitarian and rigid), which makes it a more exciting and interesting work. However, despite this major difference, both novels incorporate, and then undermine, supposedly transgressive narrative forms.

In the case of The Passion of New Eve I have talked of the collapse of New York (whereby the excluded otherness of the city returns to disrupt and haunt it) as a process which is mirrored in Evelyn's haunting by Leilah. Evelyn both desires *and* fears Leilah and it is for this reason that he attempts to tame and conquer her. Evelyn's attempt to escape Leilah once he has had enough of her is no escape at all for, instead of finding him "self" and transcending the chaos that Leilah and the city represent to him, he is led to his grisly fate in Beulah and on into a series of unpleasant events.

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Both of these novels may be regarded as feminist revenge novels which (especially in the case of The Passion of New Eve) use feminist irony to great effect. As I point out, both Beulah in The Passion of New Eve and the peepshows in Hoffman are described as parodies of the male Imaginary, where the self and other are fantasised as merging in a nirvanic moment of non-being yearned after and frequently envisaged, described and embodied in the texts of male writers. In The Sadeian Woman Carter explains this desire for the return to the womb as an unfortunate fantasy subtending western culture, and one which must be done away with if any social change is to be effected. This is why she gives us Mother in The Passion of New Eve, whom I have described as a parody of the mythical, archetypal mother. Carter explodes the myth of a comfortable return to “the source” of being through Mother’s grotesque but amusing excessiveness and hyperbolic proclamations. The womb-like space, Beulah, which Mother inhabits and in which Evelyn becomes a woman, is unaccommodating and hostile (like the places and societies Desiderio visits in his search for Doctor Hoffman) because, as I have argued, Carter is deconstructing this space in order to prompt readers into thinking beyond the damaging and constrictive fiction of the mother as womb and tomb of the world.

Evelyn’s castration and creation as a woman at the hands of Mother forms another parody of the castrated, passive woman as well as highlighting the painful, female experience of the world; that of being split, a stranger or other to oneself. What The Passion of New Eve and, to a lesser extent Hoffman, show is that man cannot escape the representations he has constructed once they become too lifelike and frightening. These representations inevitably draw him back to

themselves in an uncanny, cyclical movement--the movement that underlies Carter's revisionary picaresque plots.

The trope of the mirror features centrally in Carter's fiction as her depiction of Leilah shows. Later on in her career, Carter's fiction increasingly comes to draw on the power of masquerade and role-playing so that the fact that women do have the choice to 'make themselves up' (as they go along) and to create different openings for themselves grows in importance in her novels. Such an idea is tentatively suggested at the beginning of The Passion of New Eve rather than openly celebrated, but it's made the main tenet of the "plot", as I have suggested is the case with Nights at the Circus and Wise Children in chapter five.

As early as The Magic Toyshop, however, Carter's interest in female narcissism is clear. Ideas and images which saturate the beginning of the novel continue to echo throughout The Magic Toyshop and, indeed, the idea of echoing is important here. Whereas existing criticism has mainly focused on the relationship between Melanie and Finn, my reading focuses on Melanie's mother and the difficulty of mother-daughter relationships. The sense of loss that weighs down these relationships due to women's lack of a positive genealogy under patriarchy is examined, along with mother-daughter confusion, which is knitted into the issue of subjectivity.

A modern day Gothic tale, The Magic Toyshop may also be regarded as a kind of ghost story, for the toyshop is obviously haunted by the ghost of Melanie's mother, who, I have argued, may be taken to represent Melanie's other self or her double and, like Ghislaine, Leilah, Mother and Albertina, Melanie's mother is always present in her absence. As is the case with the

preceding chapter, I also hope to have shown that the plot of The Magic Toyshop is deceptively linear because, although Melanie thinks that in moving away from home and into the toyshop she is going forward into the future, she actually journeys into a more intense relationship with her past.

This is a novel which again challenges a progressive concept of time, collapsing the boundaries between past, present and future, so that what we get is a sort of circular or spiralling plot. Another of the major themes of this chapter is the domestic space (in this case, the toyshop) as maternal body, which I have linked to my discussion of the Gothic and the dissolution of boundaries.

The theme of containment, so explicit in the toyshop, is foreshadowed earlier in the novel by the mirror scenes in Melanie's home and Melanie's gradual incarceration in negative representations of womanhood (which form a prolepsis to the puppet-like status she will take on in the toyshop) and to the fact that she will also be treated as a copy or representation of her mother. I have also strongly argued, however, that the dynamics of Carter's novels and stories are driven by the tenuous and complicated connection between feminine confinement in negative and deathly representations of womanhood and the possibility of breaking free from such images. This dichotomy is successfully explored via an adolescent protagonist because, on the one hand, female adolescence spells out imminent entrapment in a code which divorces the girl from her previous sense of self as she learns to inhabit the doubleness of womanhood (becoming subject and object of the gaze), whilst on the other hand it is a period of intense aspiration which is never again experienced after the 'fall' into adulthood.

The end of the third chapter suggests that the female body (with its links to the annihilating maternal position) and the legacy of the womb/wound need not be as viewed as so detrimental to feminine identity as The Magic Toyshop and some other fictions by women suggest. Instead, the subversive aspects of the submerged feminine remain an implicit but omnipresent threat to the patriarchal order of the toyshop. I have put forward the idea that Melanie is a significant “character” because she is at a vital crossroads. Melanie’s in-between, ambiguous state which is the main subject of the novel as I see it, made The Magic Toyshop a pertinent central chapter of the thesis, as this spirited adolescent heroine seems to embody the dichotomy of femininity (the oscillation between imprisonment and freedom) which all Carter’s texts deal with in some way.

Melanie’s youthful energy, adventurousness and self-belief also characterise some of the female protagonists in the stories of The Bloody Chamber and, as such, forms a natural bridge between chapters three and four. Melanie’s potential to be a free agent is developed in some of Carter’s later reworkings of fairy tales, many of her romantic visions and ideas about femininity at the start of The Magic Toyshop being the very things which are undermined in The Bloody Chamber.

Women’s story-telling capacity and story telling as a means of survival became the focus of chapter four, a chapter which examines the important part played by women in the creation and dissemination of fairy stories (and the importance of the fairy tale as a means of resistance and an expression of hope) in the days before they were recorded by bourgeois propagandists, as well as the

fluidity of the oral fairy tale form. These aspects, as well as the fluidity of the oral fairy tale form, I have argued, had always attracted Carter to them.

This chapter focuses specifically on the trilogy of wolf tales. “Little Red Riding Hood” is one of the best examples of a fairy tale whose original meanings were gradually eroded as the tale came to rationalise male dominance, casting the girl-protagonist as an object of desire. I was interested to see how Carter played with the motif of the wolf, and to show the ways in which she opened it up to a plurality of meanings, multiplying its significations and making it stand for unruly, polymorphous desires associated with femininity: all the aspects that sanitisers of the fairy tale denied.

The significance of the cloak and its blood red colour is also addressed. In “The Company of Wolves” Carter appears to be making the implicit explicit when she speaks of the girl protagonist as having just started menstruating, which led to an exploration of the socio-cultural significance of menstrual blood, its potential power and the abjecting or tabooing of menstrual blood in patriarchal society. These kinds of issues I examined in Shadow Dance, but I have tried to show in chapter four, especially in relation to “Wolf-Alice”, how woman’s blood is transformed in the wolf tales into a powerful metaphor for a specifically feminine power and strength, and the rupturing of constrictive binary oppositions.

The celebration of women’s repressed animalistic side takes place in “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf-Alice” and bloodletting/blood is associated in both of these tales with the transformation of sexual relations and with “the becoming” that an acceptance of our animal side may lead to. In this sense the blood that flows at the end of The Bloody Chamber may be read as different to

that which flows from the impaled victim in Bluebeard's Iron Maiden in the opening story.

Carter is a powerfully subversive writer whose texts always draw upon (and utilise) the radical, destabilising aspects of the cultural unconscious, which is closely linked to femininity, and, in this respect, it is perhaps no surprise that fairy tales not only provided Carter with a constant source of inspiration but that she eventually wrote her own versions. In a thesis preoccupied as much with form as content, the fairy tale form's potential for disruption and transformation is what links the discussion of The Bloody Chamber firmly to the overall argument of the thesis, which is that Carter's textual practice is a radical, innovative, demythologising one, prompting readers to look towards transforming the world we inhabit. Other chapters have described the journeys of Carter's protagonists after origins, and this chapter describes Carter's own journey after origins.

The idea of the mother's echo in or to the daughter, which is explored and described as something that is largely negative in chapter three, can perhaps be said to have been presented more positively in chapter four. Looking into the past uses of the fairy tale form it would seem that our foremothers also have cunning, interesting things to teach us about desire and survival, and the spirit in which they were told echoes in Carter's selection of tales where female sexuality is frequently shown as an actively disruptive state, breaking apart the negative female stereotypes that the best-known repressive literary versions have enforced upon us. In the stories of The Bloody Chamber, I have argued, Carter attempts to reintroduce the voices of the garrulous female story tellers alongside the more literary sound of the versions we know so well. The voices

that have been eroded and edited out over the centuries could be described as the return of the repressed.

A link was also forged between the feminist psychoanalytic concept of a buried female Imaginary characterised by plurality, non-linearity and fluid identity, and the oral form of the fairy tale (which was frequently controlled by women). I have argued that the repressed, open-ended oral origins of the European fairy tale may be linked in some way to the idea of this latent, buried underside of the Symbolic Order which always retains a power to transform. Although it is important to study fairy tales in their cultural context, it is not too far fetched to claim that the sound of the voices of those who told fairy tales in the past can reemerge in revisionary tales of the late twentieth century, especially if we take care to try and listen to them, ensuring, as Carter does, that fairy tales form a dialogue with the past and do not block it off, twist it to our own ends, or deny it.

The opening of chapter four has traced the socio-cultural history of the tales in some detail because it again illustrates the way in which the voices of the other have actually been silenced in the name of one class or group—in this case the bourgeois, white, male middle-class. This process simultaneously highlights an important element of this thesis as a whole: the silencing of the Other in the name of the One. Moreover, the reader can not fully appreciate the ironies of the stories I discuss unless they can understand them as meta-fairy-tales, tales about the history of fairy tales, tales which dramatise moments of historical and personal change or becoming and which open up vistas of possibility to their readers.



In the fifth chapter I have demonstrated the way in which the twins of Wise Children and Fevvers of Nights at the Circus both display the wound/womb as flamboyant mouths in their masquerades which links up with the novels' themes of self-fabrication and role-playing as acts of resistance and empowerment. The painted mouth in both works becomes a sign of defiance (an ironic repetition of the mark of castration) and I have expanded upon the concept of ironic repetition by showing Dora and Nora and Fevvers as playing upon the doubleness in feminine identity, taking it to transgressive extremes in acts of mimicry. The power of doubling as a subversive strategy has been explored firstly in relation to the idea of twins. Twins like Nora and Dora upset the order of representation by doubling it back on itself: they embody an undeniable difference in sameness thus disrupting the supposed uniqueness upon which this system depends. So too, Fevvers disturbs the system of representation because she is neither bird nor woman and I have shown the way in which her hybrid status and grotesque feminine form create an open-ended carnivalesque analogue for Nights at the Circus itself. The dialogic relationship between Fevvers and Lizzie (who are a double act) is also considered as a textual doubling strategy which testifies to the plurality of femininity, feminism and women's perspectives on the world, keeping the ambiguity that the very text embodies alive.

In this chapter I have also examined patriarchy as a construct, a theatrical confidence trick and something that is just as staged as femininity. The way in which both Wise Children and Nights at the Circus incorporate and subvert male fictions, undermining patrilinear history, the specular economy and patriarchal discourses through their narrative structures and strategies has been

highlighted and, although the books' darker, pessimistic elements are considered in some detail, the predominant tone of this chapter is an optimistic one, reflecting what I see to be the dominant mood of the novels themselves.

Throughout this thesis I have kept returning to the idea that the seemingly linear, progressive plots of Carter's texts can in fact be considered as more cyclical than they may initially appear, and I have ensured that this thesis avoids producing a linear, chronological appraisal of Carter's fictions which would be untrue to their spirited rejection of progressive time-of-the-line (in the Kristevan sense discussed in the last chapter). Indeed, Emma Tennant, observing the creative process, has noted:

Probably a lot of writers must rather hope to get to a stage where they see all the ideas and images and themes they've had earlier on, which have all been apparently disparate, and do belong in some way to some early part of life as everything must, in some way gathered together, and then come out in some magnificent book which is both serious and popular.<sup>5</sup>

What is important here is Tennant's suggested characterisation of the temporal development of a writer's work. Tennant implicitly shows that this development need not be taken as a criterion of success, but rather as an account of the maturing process, a process which becomes an inevitable framework within which such work is placed. She suggests that maturity in writing stems not from the refinement of meaning but from its *accumulation*. This is the approach the thesis has taken to Carter's work overall, describing her fiction as an excessive, uncontainable body of work, as an accretion of ideas that necessarily remains incomplete and open-ended. This loops back to the issue of female

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<sup>5</sup> Emma Tennant in an interview with Sue Roe, Women Reading, Women Writing, ed. Sue Roe (Hemel Hempstead, 1985) 23.

desire and its inconclusive, excessive nature, which is mirrored in the forms of Carter's texts, as well as their contents. The texts repeatedly pose that philosophical conundrum: what do women want?

Carter's novels are full of women who are dissatisfied, forlorn and missing something that is forever denied them. However, this is most definitely not the phallus. It is this dissatisfaction that forms the momentum of many of the texts for, although the characters never really find what they want, they never stop searching, and this is why the texts open out. This searching quality is perhaps something that is also shared by the readers of Carter's texts, especially women readers, who may identify with, and be drawn in alongside, this female questing and questioning.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Implicit in this thesis is the belief that all of Carter's fictions entice readers into difficult areas of the cultural unconscious. Readers are led on strange journeys into places that they may sometimes feel they do not wish to go. In fact, there is a sense in which the reader is often actually *coerced* into travelling with Carter's protagonists (and entering the curious rooms that are constantly cropping up on their journeying). I agree in this sense with James Wood, who writes that "Carter's coercion is more often formal than ideological", but whereas Wood sees this as a failing, attacking what he sees as the fictions' tendency to "exclude the contradictory, the gratuitous", I strongly believe that, on the contrary, the coercion leads one to face the contradictoriness or doubleness of being, along with the painful legacy of Enlightenment thinking. One traverses thresholds into tabooed areas, which can ultimately prove empowering. Perhaps, as in Kahane's assessment of Leona Sherman and Norman H. Holland's essay on gothic fiction (discussed in chapter three), Wood is uncomfortable with the gothic plot and, "concentrates on strategies for avoiding vulnerability to that environment... ." He describes Carter's first novel as a hated teacher, a book "meting out varied punishments" (although he patronisingly forgives the author on the basis of her sharp detail a couple of paragraphs later). Meanwhile, his own drive for mastery and transcendence does not falter for a moment, as he condemns *Shadow Dance* for its histrionic (hysterical?) texture, mistaking the tongue-in-cheek, self-conscious, ironic tone for overweening confidence in someone too young to really have it (and something definitely not on in a "woman writer"). See James Wood, "Bewitchment," *London Review of Books* (8<sup>th</sup> December 1994) 20-21.

One element that remains only partially developed in this thesis is the gendered aspect of reading I mention above. In chapter one I have examined Carol Clover's thinking on male spectatorship of the horror film which challenges Laura Mulvey's theory of the masculine gaze. I have applied this to Morris, the protagonist of *Shadow Dance* and, further on in the chapter, to the spectator/reader of the novel. I have not, however, made a distinction between male and female readers here, and have tended to marginalise feminist scholarship on female spectatorship and the gaze and female readership in favour of theories focusing on bisexuality. Female spectatorship was taken up again in chapter four in relation to Fevvers as an active gazer and confounder of the 'masculine gaze', but the whole issue of the way in which women look or see or read differently is implicit rather than explicit in this thesis, and, as such, remains a potential area for further investigation into Carter's work.

The issue of readership and the involvement of the reader in the creation of a text necessarily returns me to the sense of liberation strangely mixed with a certain anger and resistance that Carter's texts have on so many readers. Elaine Jordan describes the simultaneous reactions of attraction and repulsion to Carter's work beautifully when she writes:

The politics [of Carter's writing]... is in the attraction and the flinching, the recoil from what is horrible, produced by the vibrancy of the image and syntax as well as in larger structures. The aesthetic (a word which, like 'pathology' originally related to physical sensation, as Terry Eagleton points out in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*) works with, not against, the political, whether this is radical, liberal or conservative. Poetic language constantly pushes against the barrier between actuality and the arbitrariness of language, and poetics such as Carter's do self-consciously, while drawing necessarily on both conscious principles and unconscious obsessions.<sup>7</sup>

The symbol of the scar or the womb/wound that developed out of work on Ghislaine's scar offers a symbol of this split response, being the split or scarred woman subject, and this splitting is simultaneously highlighted as a culturally imposed state. In most of Carter's fictions the womb/wound forms an intense focal point for the exploration of the cultural construction of identity, as well as its breakdown. Moreover, although at the end of chapter one I have pointed out that Carter's work is markedly different from those more straightforwardly 'utopian' feminist writers (like Irigaray and Cixous) due to the fact that her representations of the female body never allow readers to escape or forget the monstrous inscriptions of pain and lack it has borne throughout time, I

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<sup>7</sup> Elaine Jordan, Afterword in *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter*, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (New York and London: Longman, 1997) 217-218.

eventually found that the metaphor of the scar as a liminal threshold opened up creative channels for me.

Although I am aware that each reader makes of Carter what they will, in this thesis the “scarred” texts, in their divergence from a rather straightjacketing chronological approach and an adoption of a thematic one, have helped to illustrate the way in which the fluid, open-ended forms of such works are intensely bound up with their subject matter. The integral link between the female body (and the history of its cultural representations) and the bodies of Carter’s texts has enabled me to develop a way of describing how they work to undo oppressive thought patterns. Touching on the dynamics of her fiction in an essay about writing and feminism, Carter declared that she wanted to “decolonise our language and basic habits of thought... transforming actual fictional forms to precipitate changes in the way that people think about themselves”;<sup>8</sup> indeed, this is her major achievement.

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<sup>8</sup> Angela Carter, “Notes from the Frontline,” *On Gender and Writing*, ed. Micheline Wandor (London: Pandora, 1989) 69-77.

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