

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

A

**“T’AIN’T NO SIN”: SEX AND DESIRE
IN THE FICTION OF ANGELA CARTER**

by

ANNA KATSAVOS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1997

UMI Number: 9720102

**Copyright 1997 by
Katsavos, Anna**

All rights reserved.

**UMI Microform 9720102
Copyright 1997, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.**

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

©1997

ANNA KATSAVOS

All rights reserved.

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 18, 1996
Date

Jane Marcus
Chair of Examining Committee

12/18/96
Date

[Signature]
Executive Officer

Professor Jane Marcus

Professor Rachel Brownstein

Professor David Gordon

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

“T’AIN’T NO SIN”: SEX AND DESIRE

IN THE FICTION OF ANGELA CARTER

by

ANNA KATSAVOS

Adviser: Professor Jane Marcus

Angela Carter (1940-1992), one of Britain’s most original and provocative contemporary writers, was a cultural subversive at once fascinated with and disturbed by the impact of popular culture on gender politics. Her work probes the manifestations of repressed, unconscious human fears and desires, treating issues of female sexuality, eroticism, and violence with a transgressive humor that stuns and unnerves.

In this study, I examine Carter’s ideas about language, literature, and gender politics as they are presented in her non-fiction, and I point to ideological as well as thematic connections that surface in her fiction. Juxtaposing Carter’s journalism with her novels and short stories, I trace the author’s development as a writer who moved from the mimetic, to the speculative, to the fairy tale genre, and

I argue that the mode of the fantastic was Carter's most effective vehicle of subversion.

It is my purpose to show that Carter's fiction is aimed directly at undermining traditional gender stereotypes, and that it protests the repression of female sexuality by debunking culturally-constructed ideologies, specifically myths about femininity, marriage, and motherhood. Carter's later fiction, in particular, redefines the sexual politics of desire as separate from romantic love and procreation, suggesting that sexual impulses are potentially dangerous and in no way gender-specific. In Carter's fictionalized universes, male as well as female characters can freely (even if sometimes violently) play out their desires.

This study positions Angela Carter as an important literary figure of the post-modern era who deserves recognition both for her innovative narrative strategies and for her representation of strong female characters whose smarts and sexuality are celebrated without restraint. Carter created a gallery of spirited women, young and old, who are lovable "bad girls"--prostitutes, circus performers, and music-hall dancers. Moreover, she appropriated a place in contemporary fiction wherein these wayward women can parley their feminine wiles into pleasure and profit.

PREFACE

Remembering Angela Carter

It happened that I was reading Wise Children the very week that Angela Carter died of lung cancer. Though my dealings with the author had been limited (a few letters, phone calls, and two personal meetings), my sense of loss was deep-felt. I read about Carter's death in The New York Times on February 19, 1992, three days after the fact. Staring for a while at the obituary photo of the author's smiling face, I recognized it as identical to the one on the book jacket of Wise Children, the novel which had just become Carter's swan song. Over the next few days, my every attempt to finish the book was thwarted by recollections of that crisp November morning in 1988 when I first had the pleasure of meeting Angela, as she insisted I call her, and chatting with her over breakfast.

We met in the lobby of a well-known New York hotel, where she introduced me to her young son, Alexander, just before he went off with his father to spend a few hours sightseeing in the big city. Their arrangements--to meet Angela at noon by the big clock in front of F.A.O. Schwarz--made me chuckle; recalling the clocks, magic, and toys in Carter's fiction, I thought that New York's own magic toyshop was, of course, the most fitting place to meet.

My interview with the author was, to my surprise, like visiting with an old friend. We talked about our sons; we sized-up the male company around us; and

we made one sexually-charged comment after another, each of us trying like comedians in the spotlight to get the last laugh. Not surprisingly, she won, hands down. I was having such fun that I nearly abandoned my prepared interview questions that Angela so graciously and patiently answered before we parted. We hugged, I thanked her, and she urged me to write to her if I had additional questions; I did, indeed, but many of them were to be left unanswered.¹

“Notes”

¹ The interview appeared in The Review of Contemporary Fiction, Fall 1974, pp.11-17. It is reprinted in its entirety and included in the Appendix of this study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have helped me see this project to completion. I wish to thank my adviser, Jane Marcus, and my supervisory committee, Rachel Brownstein and David Gordon, who over the years have been generous with their time and assistance; the Administration and Sabbatical Committee of Nassau Community College, for granting me funded leave from my teaching responsibilities to write; the staff and reference librarians at the Garden City Public Library, particularly Marty Bowe, who has been extremely helpful and patient with my continual research requests; the members of my Dissertation Workshop, Barbara Christen and Lisa Farrington, who for the past year and a half carefully and cheerfully critiqued draft after draft of this work; my colleagues and good friends Randy Amengual, Judith Hepworth, Wendy Amengual-Skladal, Michael Steinman, and Elizabeth Wheeler, whose scrupulous editing and proofreading of the final draft helped me refine the writing; Amy Amengual, whose technical expertise kept my computer happy and running. Finally, heartfelt thanks to my close friends and family members (my sister Mary, in particular) for years of encouragement and moral support, and to my son Ted, whose hugs and smiles throughout this endeavor have helped me to keep everything in its proper perspective.

'T'Ain't No Sin

Take a look at the girls while they're dancing
Notice the way that they're dressed
They wear silken clothes, without any hose
And nobody knows the rest.

If a gal wears x-ray dresses
And shows everything she owns
Ah, 't'ain't no sin, take off your skin
And dance around in your bones.

Lyrics by Edgar Leslie

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction:	“If You Can’t Win, Change the Rules of the Game”: Carter as Cultural Subversive	1
Chapter One:	Mixed Messages: Growing Up Female in the Fifties	10
Chapter Two:	Visitors in Their Own Flesh: Images of Women in Carter’s Early Novels	23
Chapter Three:	Becoming Radicalized in Japan: Learning What it Means to be a Woman	66
Chapter Four:	Synthetic Authenticity: The Essence of Gender in Carter’s Speculative Fiction	92
Chapter Five:	Eat Or And Be Eaten: Carter, Sade and the Politics of Pornography	135
Chapter Six:	“Doing It” With Wolves: Carter’s Retelling of Grim Tales	150
Chapter Seven:	The Language of Sisterhood: Carter and the Woman Writer	195
Chapter Eight:	It Ain’t No Sin: Celebrating Female Desire	203
Conclusion:	The Death-Defying Somersault of Love: Carter as Risk-Taker	226
Appendix:	An Interview with Angela Carter	229
Bibliography		241

INTRODUCTION

“If You Can’t Win, Change the Rules of the Game”:

Angela Carter as Cultural Subversive

Something that women know all about is how very difficult it is to enter an old game. What you have to do is to change the rules and make a new game.
Angela Carter, “An Interview with Angela Carter” (1988)

Angela Carter (1940-1992), one of Britain’s most original and provocative contemporary writers, was a cultural subversive who was at once fascinated and disturbed by the impact of popular culture on gender politics. A masterful and innovative storyteller, Carter disarmed her readers with word-spinning charms, all the while inciting a more careful examination of human social existence. Her work, which probes the manifestations of our repressed, unconscious fears and desires, treats issues of female sexuality, eroticism and violence with a transgressive humor that stuns and unnerves, leaving readers uncertain as to whether to laugh, scream, or cry.

Novelist, short story writer, journalist and scriptwriter, Carter during her lifetime was overlooked, especially in the United States. She received relatively little scholarly attention, most likely because she confounded critics by crossing and fusing genre boundaries with remarkable unpredictability and ease. Indeed, her fiction defies neat classification. Employing a pastiche of traditional literary forms, Carter artfully conflated romance with realism; she infused the picaresque

with the pornographic, the Gothic with the grotesque, and the fairy tale with the fantastic. Although Carter was noted most for her lush imaginative prose, the author's penchant for profane themes, her wicked wit and frequently irreverent tone, and her radical/leftist/feminist politics no doubt contributed to her wildly variable reception as a writer.

Interestingly, Carter's early novels (Shadow Dance (1965), The Magic Toyshop (1967), Several Perceptions (1968), and Love (1969/1971), written in the social realist tradition, were well received, and served to establish the author as a promising new writer.¹ During the next decade, however, as Carter moved from the mimetic to the speculative mode, and as her fiction began more forcefully to rebuke patriarchal assumptions about femininity and female sexuality, her reputation shifted. Following the publication of Heroes and Villains (1969/1971), The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman (1972), and The Passion of New Eve (1977), reviewers became increasingly alarmed that Carter's literary fireworks were getting a bit too explosive.² What's more, her 1978 feminist polemic on the ideology of pornography, The Sadeian Woman, and her eroticized fairy-tales collected in The Bloody Chamber (published that same year), baffled or annoyed both critics and feminists, and served further to alienate Carter from the inner circle of the literati.

It was not until the mid-eighties, when once again Carter shifted artistic gears, that the author's critical acclaim was revived. Carter's fanciful and comic

novel, Nights at the Circus (1984), winner of Britain's James Tait Black Memorial Prize, and her short story collection Saints and Strangers (1985), which was hailed in The New York Times Book Review as "one of the Best Books of 1986, served further to displace Carter from the position of literary outsider. Carter's last novel, Wise Children (1991), praised as her best, secured a firm place for the author in the modern British literary tradition, partly because she died "in mid-sentence, so to speak" (Carter was only fifty-one).³

Salman Rushdie, in his obituary tribute to Carter, eulogized her as "the most brilliant writer in England . . . a burlesque artist of genius and antic grace."⁴ More recently, in the introduction to Carter's posthumously published collected short stories, Burning Your Boats (1995), Rushdie acclaimed her as "the most individual, independent and idiosyncratic of writers . . . who has become the contemporary writer most studied at British universities" (xiv). Nonetheless, to date there have been no dissertations or full-length critical studies of Carter's *oeuvre* in the United States or abroad.⁵ Moreover, there has been very little recognition of Carter as a fiction writer who subverts culturally prescribed myths of femininity, female sexuality, and domesticity, particularly Western notions that romanticize marriage and sanctify motherhood. Most current scholarship is limited to book reviews (often brief), journal articles, or individual chapters that focus on specific works by Carter, with most attention paid to her more popular

novels, The Passion of New Eve and Nights at the Circus, or to selections from the short story collection, The Bloody Chamber.⁶

British scholar Lorna Sage, thus far has paid the most comprehensive attention to Carter and her work. Sage's monograph, Angela Carter (1994), is an expanded version of an article that first appeared in Granta's 1992 issue on biography. This brief study (59 pages), part of the Northcote House Writers and Their Work series, is similar to the essays found in reference sources, such as Contemporary Literary Criticism or Contemporary Authors; it offers an astute, concise evaluation of Carter, providing helpful biographical, as well as bibliographical, information. Its brevity, however, necessarily precludes a more definitive analysis of the author's work.

Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter (1994), a collection of articles compiled by Sage, offers the most complete critique of Carter's fiction currently available, although some novels are discussed only in passing. This is an invaluable compendium of scholarly work by academic and research writers, some of whom were Carter's friends and fellow writers. Among them are Margaret Atwood, Elaine Jordan, Marina Warner, and Hermione Lee. Collectively, the essays cover distinctive aspects of Carter's fiction, which is approached chronologically, and help contextualize the author within the British cultural and literary tradition. Although the anthology initiates a dialogue about

Carter that is long overdue, it does not present an extensive examination of Carter's accomplishments as a cultural theorist or as a subversive writer.

My study approaches Carter and her work from both these perspectives and responds directly to something Carter wrote in her 1983 essay, "Notes From the Front Line." She declared,

I try, when I write fiction, to think on my feet--to present a number of propositions in a variety of different ways, and to leave the reader to construct her own fiction for herself from the elements of my fictions. (Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode.) (69)

My aim has been to inspect those bottle shards so as to construct a Carter mosaic. Juxtaposing the author's non-fiction with her fiction, I point to ideological as well as thematic connections, and examine the sometimes "irreverent" games that Carter plays as a theorist of popular culture and a writer of subversive fiction. My study follows Carter's development as a writer who moves from the mimetic, to the speculative, to the fairy tale genre. I argue that the mode of the fantastic was the novelist's most effective vehicle of subversion. Furthermore, by scrutinizing

many of the author's ideas on language, literature, and gender politics, I explore what I consider to be the hallmarks of Carter's fertile imagination as they surface in her fiction.

My thesis is supported by Carter's notion of herself as a writer who was in the "demythologizing business."⁷ She was most interested in investigating how cultural assumptions (what she termed "social fictions," and what poet William Blake called "mind-forg'd manacles") regulate our lives. In her non-fiction, most notably in The Sadeian Woman: The Ideology of Pornography (1978), Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings (1982), and Expletives Deleted (1992), Carter examined the impact on women of popular cultural icons as they are represented in the writings of authors as diverse as Guillaume Apollinaire, the Marquis de Sade, D. H. Lawrence, Colette, and Linda Lovelace. Among the feminist issues that Carter tackled are: the ideology of pornography as an emblematic indicator of sexuality and power; the consequences faced by women that result from artificially constructed notions of femininity and motherhood; the power and politics of language (particularly the patriarchal bias of the English tongue and what Carter called "the secret language of sisterhood"); and the role of the woman writer as "the essential decolonializer of language."

Carter's fiction explores the complexity of human behavior and relationships, particularly as they are impacted by our unconscious sexual desires and fears. Most notably in her short story collection, The Bloody Chamber (1979),

and in her later novels, Nights at the Circus (1984) and Wise Children (1992), Carter strikes me as a postmodernist whose strategies of subversion (specifically her use of the fantastic) are aimed directly at undermining traditional gender politics and deconstructing culturally determined stereotypes about female sexuality (what Germaine Greer calls “the myth of the Eternal Feminine”).⁸ Most significantly, Carter has appropriated a place in contemporary fiction where characters (male as well as female) can freely, if sometimes violently, play out their desires.

As any thorough assessment of the author’s *oeuvre* will undoubtedly reveal, “changing the rules” is an activity that much preoccupied Angela Carter, who, it should be noted, was herself one hell of a gamester.

“Notes”

¹ Carter’s first novel, The Magic Toyshop, was awarded the 1967 John Llewellyn Rhys prize; her third, Several Perceptions, was honored with the 1968 Somerset Maugham Award.

² See, for example, John Phillipson’s review of Heroes and Villains, in Best Sellers, Vol. 30, No. 11, September 1, 1970, pp. 211-12; John Coleman’s review of Love, in The Observer, May 16, 1971, p. 33; Anita Van Vactor’s review of Love, in The Listener, Vol. 85, No. 2199, May 20, 1971, p. 656; Valentine Cunningham’s review of The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman, in The Listener, Vol. 87, No. 2252, May 25, 1972, p. 693; Paddy Beesley’s review of The Passion of New Eve, in New Statesman, Vol. 93, No. 2401, March 25, 1977, p. 407.

³ See Salman Rushdie's introduction to Burning Your Boats: The Collected Short Stories of Angela Carter, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995, xiv.

⁴ See Salman Rushdie's obituary tribute to Carter, The New York Times Book Review, March 8, 1992, p. 5.

⁵ Dissertations submitted between 1982-1993 that offer some discussion of Carter include: Barbara J. Green's From Self-Erasure to Self-Exposure: Spectacular Confessions and the Feminist Essay, University of Virginia, 1993; Elisabeth M. Mermann-Jozwiak's A New Cultural Politics: Women Writers and Postmodernism, The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1993; David M. Simpson's In the Name of Someone Other: Postmodern Performance, Feminist Utterance, and Cultural Terrorism in the Fictions of Angela Carter, University of Alberta-Canada, 1993; Mary C. Harper's Postmodern Figurations of Symbolic America: The Body Which No Longer Re-Cognizes Paradox, Bowling Green State University, 1992; Sally Keenan's From Myth to Memory: The Revisionary Writing of Angela Carter, Maxine Hong Kingston and Toni Morrison, University of Essex-United Kingdom, 1992; Kitti Carriker's Literary Automata: Lacanian and Figurative Approaches to the Self-Centered Miniature, University of Notre Dame, 1991; Helene Meyers' Femicidal Fears in Contemporary Fiction: Feminist Thought and the Female Gothic, Indiana University, 1991; Christopher R. Reibling's 'In the Stud Book and Everything': Femme Fatality and the Word in Twentieth Century Anglo-American Fiction, York University-Canada, 1991; Magali C. Michael's Feminism and the Postmodernist Impulse: Doris Lessing, Marge Piercy, Margaret Atwood, and Angela Carter, Emory University, 1990; Donna L. Camoesas' The Past Isn't Over, University of Denver, 1989; Joanne M. Gass' Penelope's Tapestry: The Weave of History and Fiction in John Barth's 'Letters' and Carlos Fuentes' 'Terra Nostra', University of California-Irvine, 1989; Jeanette E. Green's Literary Revisions of Traditional Folktales: Bowen, Carter, Hong Kingston, Morrison, Oates, Sexton, Welty, and Capote, The University of Texas at Austin, 1989; Sally Robinson's Engendering The Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction, University of Washington, 1989; Natalie M. Rosinsky's Feminist Theory in Women's Speculative Fiction, The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1982.

⁶ More than a dozen articles were collected as a memorial tribute to Angela Carter in the Fall 1994 issue of The Review of Contemporary Fiction. All are cited in the bibliography of this study.

⁷ See Angela Carter's "Notes From the Front Line," in Michelene Wandor's On Gender and Writing, London: Pandora Press, 1983, p. 71.

⁸ See Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970, p. 5. Greer charges that society defines all heterosexual contact in sadomasochistic terms, whereby "the masculine" represents power and "the feminine" represents submission. She furthermore asserts that such cultural assumptions about women have served to deny

expression of female sexuality by misrepresenting it as passivity, and to perpetuate the treatment of women as sex objects for the use and satisfaction of men. Additionally, Greer claims that such cultural myths serve to distort our concept of love by turning it into romanticized fantasies of family structure or repressed feelings of anger and hatred. Greer's insistence that "Sex must be rescued from the traffic between powerful and powerless, masterful and mastered, sexual and neutral, to become a form of communication between potent, gentle, tender people, which cannot be accomplished by denial of heterosexual contact" (8) lies at the heart of Carter's interpretation of the Marquis de Sade as feminist-friendly.

Carter explained in a 1988 interview with me that she defined myth "in the sense that Roland Barthes uses it in Mythologies--ideas, images, [and] stories that we tend to take on trust without thinking [about] what they really mean." See "An Interview with Angela Carter," The Review of Contemporary Fiction, Fall 1994, p.12. See also Roland Barthes' Mythologies. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Noonday Press, 1990.

CHAPTER ONE

Mixed Messages: Growing Up Female in the Fifties and Sixties

When I was eighteen, I [was] rigged out in all the atrocious sartorial splendor of the underground high-style of the late fifties, black-mesh stockings, spike-heeled shoes, bum-hugging skirt, jacket with a black fox collar.
Angela Carter, "The Mother Lode" (1976)

I grew up in the fifties--that is, I was twenty in 1960, and, by God, I deserved what happened later on. It was tough, in the fifties. Girls wore white gloves.
Angela Carter, "Truly, It Felt Like the Year One" (1988)

Angela Carter was already in her twenties when during the early years of the turbulent sixties some women had traded their white gloves for black leather--practically overnight. The signs of the times, however exciting, were dispatching mixed messages about femininity, and Carter was caught in the crossfire. Her journalism reveals that she was at ease neither with the domestic conservatism of the fifties nor with the sexual freedom of the sixties. She recalled her teenage years as a time of "tortuous repression" (YO 214), admitting that she was nearly thirty before she matured into feminism. She wrote in her 1983 essay, "Notes From the Front Line,"

I can date to . . . the summer of 1968, my own
questioning of the nature of my reality as a *woman*
[and how] that social fiction of my "femininity" was

created by means outside my control, and palmed off
on me as the real thing. (70)

Always the outsider looking in, Carter, from the start relished her position of estrangement, and used recurring themes of “the alienated youth and the bourgeois virgin” in her writing.¹ Certain autobiographical essays, including “The Mother Lode” (1976), “My Father’s House” (1976), “Sugar Daddy” (1983), and “Truly it Felt Like the Year One” (1988), provide a glimpse of the people and places that most affected Carter during her formative years.²

Born in 1940 in Eastbourne, England, Angela Carter was the over-protected daughter of middle-class parents, whom she described as “a peculiarly complex unit in which neither bulk[ed] larger than the other” (SD 9). Her father (Hugh Alexander) was a Scottish journalist, whose “professional detachment”(ML 16), and “un-English ability to live life . . . in the third person” (SD 7) the author very much admired and later learned herself. Her mother (Olive Farthing Stalker) was a would-be scholar who, Carter lamented, dropped out of school at fifteen to work as a salesclerk at Selfridges department store. It was her mother who introduced the young Angela “to the wonderful world of verbal transformation,” and who taught her that a joke needn’t be funny in order to give pleasure (ML 4-5), a valuable lesson, which, as revealed by the author’s penchant for pun and scatological raillery, Carter mastered well.

Practically at birth (Carter was born the week that Dunkirk fell), the infant Angela and her brother (twelve years her senior) were evacuated from London in order to escape the blitzes and what seemed then to be an imminent German invasion. They moved in with their maternal grandmother who lived in Wath-upon-Deane, a coal-mining village in south Yorkshire.

“Gran” was a working-class chambermaid, who during her girlhood marched in support of the miners’ strikes of the 1870s and in years to come displayed her “Votes For Women” badge prominently on her lapel. She was Carter’s first, and strongest, encounter with a hard-core feminist, one whom the author remembered as “the living embodiment of peasant matriarchy”(SD 6). Carter recalled that Gran “hated tears and whining to no purposes” (ML 11), and reared her charge as “a tough, arrogant and pragmatic Yorkshire child” (ML 4).

My maternal grandmother seemed to my infant self a woman of such physical and spiritual heaviness she might have been born with a greater gravity than most people. She came from a community where women rule the roost and she effortlessly imparted a sense of my sex’s ascendancy in the scheme of things; every word and gesture of hers displayed a natural dominance, a native savagery, and I am grateful for all that, now, although the core of steel was a bit

inconvenient when I was looking for boyfriends in the
 South in the late fifties, when girls were supposed to be
 as soft and as pink as a nursery. (ML 8-9)

Gran and her sister Sofia, who lived next door, both served as models for Carter's strong female characters. Like Gran, Sofie (as Carter affectionately called her) was a teacher whose "experience, natural aptitude, and . . . strength of character" (rather than formal schooling) qualified her to teach several generations of village children to read and write. It was from Sofie that the young Angela learned "the rudiments of perspective, and most of the alphabet before [she] was five" (ML 7).

Carter's tributes to her grandmother and her great aunt are important for several reasons. First, they validate for the author women's "natural dominance" and "native savagery" as qualities essential for survival. (Carter's no-nonsense upbringing serves to explain, as well, her intolerance for the pitifully passive characters of contemporary novelists, Edna O'Brien and Elizabeth Smart.)³ Second, Carter's matriarchal relatives presage characters like Fevvers, the high-flying *aerialiste* of Nights at the Circus (whose given name, incidentally, is Sofia); Lizzie, Fevvers' tell-it-as-she-sees-it mother-figure, who, like Carter's grandmother, articulates the phrase "tha bloody fool" by "making a broken diphthong out of the long 'o' . . . half-way between 'foo-ill' and 'foyle'";⁴ and Grandma Chance, the feisty old dame in Wise Children--all of them trademarks of Carter's later fiction.

Carter's description of her grandmother, while telling of the author's wit, also suggests Carter's early dabbling with magical realism and her inclination to delineate characters who are "bulky" or "larger-than-life" in more ways than one. In "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," one of the short stories in The Bloody Chamber collection, Carter writes "There is always a dignity about great bulk, an assertiveness, a quality of being more there than most of us are" (44). This is perhaps a tribute as well to her own father, whom Carter described as "a man of immense, nay, imposing physical presence" (SD 8).

It is telling that Carter throughout her fiction portrayed those characters she liked most as immense. Fevvers, for instance, has "a crimson maw the size . . . of a basking shark, taking in enough air to life a Montgolfier [air balloon]" (52), and Wise Children's lovable Uncle Peregrine is "the size of a polar bear . . . huge but dapper" (62). Carter's proclivity for largeness likely is rooted as well in the fact that she, like her father, was big-boned. From adolescence onward, Carter was uncomfortable with her size, managing at one point to transform herself from a "very fat, lonely girl" to a "ravaged anorexic."⁵

Carter's pubescent years were by all indications painful. She wrote, with humor and adult regret,

My adolescent rebellion was considerably hampered by
the fact that I could find nobody to rebel with. I now
recall this period with intense embarrassment, because

my parents' concern to protect me from predatory boys
 was only equaled by the enthusiasm with which the
 boys I did indeed occasionally meet protected
 themselves against me. (SD 9)

Such over-protectiveness was especially difficult for the teenaged Carter who was already struggling with her own femininity.

Part of the problem was Carter's relationship with her mother, which was at best one of "tolerant acceptance," with minimal emotional closeness resulting from "the chance juxtaposition of intimate strangers" (ML 12). In every way imaginable, the author's mother was the complete opposite of Carter's Yorkshire granny. Carter was disappointed that her mother, whom she considered attractive and intelligent, allowed herself to be "trapped by historic circumstances." Carter bemoaned that her mother failed to recognize how

her own vague discontent, manifested by sick
 headaches and complicated later on by genuine ill
 health, might have had something to do with being a
 "wife," a role for which she was in some respects ill-
 suited (SD 14)

That Carter considered her mother "trapped" by the demands of domesticity is strong evidence that the author was radicalized, at least to some degree, by her mother's complicity with prevailing patriarchal attitudes about women. In other

words, Carter believed that her mother was a victim not so much of an authoritarian husband but of her own interpretation of femininity. As critic Lorna Sage implies, Carter aimed her later-found feminism less at men than at the picture of the woman she didn't want to be--"the enemy within . . . the girl-wife."⁶

The already strained relationship between mother and daughter was complicated further during Carter's mid-teens when her mother became seriously ill. As the following passage (written more than twenty years after Olive Stalker's death) suggests, Carter struggled with her ambivalent feelings toward her mother well into adulthood.

[I]n spite of our later discords, our acrimonious squabbings, once she gave me a perennial and never-fading rose tree, the outlines of which, crystallized in the transforming well of memory, glitter as if with propensities she herself may not have been at all aware of, a present like part of herself she did not know about that she could still give away to me. (ML 19)

Still, despite Carter's posthumous valuation of her mother, when we comb through the writer's fiction, mothers are conspicuously absent.⁷ Maternal nurturing is ministered primarily by an older mentor, who, in addition to being a matriarch of sorts, is experienced in the ways of the world.

By the time Carter turned twenty, she was “hell-bent on getting married” (SD 10). Ironically, she opted to be a wife instead of a student, just as her mother had done. In 1960, although Carter had passed her university qualifying exams, she married Paul Carter--eager it seems to leave her parental home. For two years she apprenticed as a junior reporter for the Croydon Advertiser, after which time she and her husband left London and settled in Bristol, where Carter studied English and Medieval literature at Bristol University.

At the time, Carter lived as “a wide-eyed provincial beatnik” in a bohemian community where “everyday life took on the air of continuous improvisation.” It was a time, in Carter’s words, “of unrestrained and irreverent frivolity” (YO 212) when “all that was holy was in the process of being profaned.”⁸ Undoubtedly, the intellectual climate, the sexually provocative fashions, and the relaxed sexual mores of the day impacted Carter’s development as a writer and cultural theorist. Then in her early twenties, Carter was exposed to a public philosophical and social awareness that propelled the youth of that generation.

The sixties were the first, and may well turn out to be the only, time when we had an authentic intelligentsia in this country just like the ones in Europe and America--a full-blooded, enquiring rootless urban intelligentsia which didn’t define itself as a class by what its parents had done for a living . . . via ideas. It

was an unusual historic moment; it was very exciting
 Things were becoming accessible to me--ways of
 thinking, versions of the world, versions of history, of
 ways for societies to be. (YO 210-211)

The spirit of social protest and sexual permissiveness that marked the sixties was everywhere that Carter turned. England's Carnaby Street, then a hotbed of avant-garde clothes that had erotic appeal, provided rich material for her examination of the correlation between fashion and femininity. The revolutionary "fun clothes" of Mary Quant, which were aimed at making women--young and old--look like "precocious little girls," Carter saw as symbols of female liberation. Quant's styles (particularly the mini-skirt) reflected the confidence with which women were shedding the sophisticated, but stuffy, frills (yes, the white gloves) and heading for naughty thrills.⁹ In one of her early essays, "Notes for a Theory of Sixties Style" (1967), Carter postulated that

Clothes are so many things at once. Our social
 shells; the system of signals with which we broadcast
 our intentions; often the projections of our fantasy
 selves Clothes are our weapons, our challenges,
 our invisible insults.

And more. For we think our dress expresses
 ourselves but in fact it expresses our environment and,

like advertising, pop music, pulp fiction and second-feature films, it does so almost at a subliminal, emotionally charged, instinctual, non-intellectual level.

(85)

In Carter's fiction, clothes (or the lack thereof) are a means by which characters assume or abandon their identities, as is most evidently demonstrated by Fevvers, the highwire trickster in Nights at the Circus who allegedly sports real wings. Carter was convinced that "disguise entails duplicity," particularly for women. Consequently, if, as Carter's work suggests, clothes are "the system of signals with which we broadcast our intentions" and "our fantasy selves" (85), then Fevvers' feathers represent women's emancipation from the often-stiff forms of iconic sexuality imposed by vogue--rubber, leather, fishnets, and stiletto heels, for example. The idea of femininity as masquerade, which echoes Joan Riviere's theory of "womanliness as masquerade," is one that Carter "tried on" for a while.¹⁰ Masquerading one's femininity, particularly as a means of crossing gender boundaries, is a notion that Carter explored most notably in her novel, The Passion of New Eve (see Chapter 4).

For Carter, the sixties' decade was remembered ultimately as a time when relaxed sexual etiquette and effective birth control converted the puritanical notion of "sexual pleasure as sinful" to the more liberal idea of "sex as an expression of

is-ness” (YO 214). Carter saw the sixties as a time when the already convoluted relationships between men and women became more complex. She theorized that

Women tend to be raised with a monolithic notion of “maleness,” just as men are raised with the idea of a single and undifferentiated femininity. Stereotyping. *Real* men, especially when approached by women acting in ways they’re not supposed to act, can behave like fifteen-year-old girls in the photostory magazines.

(YO 214)

In her fiction, Carter to some degree explored the consequences of behavior that is not stereotypically “feminine” or “masculine,” most likely while struggling with similar issues in her own life.

Although Carter had written her first novel, Shadow Dance (1965) by the time she was twenty-five, and had authored three others by the end of the decade, by 1968 her marriage was just about over, as was (much to her regret) the sexual revolution. Almost twenty years later, Carter bemusedly lamented that by the time she was free to take advantage of it, “the sexual revolution [that] the papers were always going on about was more or less completed”(YO 213-214).

Carter’s estrangement from the sexual revolution parallels her early detachment from feminist activity in England during the late sixties. Then in her late twenties, Carter was no political activist during the time when British

feminists were beginning to front the Women's Liberation Movement. Nonetheless, the images of the women that the author depicted in her early novels, Shadow Dance (1965), The Magic Toyshop (1967), Several Perceptions (1968), and Love (1969/1971), affirm that Carter was determinedly critiquing the culture she was born to, if only from the sidelines.¹¹

“Notes”

¹ See John Mortimer's essay on Carter in In Character, New York: Penguin, 1984, p. 46.

² These works will be cited subsequently in the text as ML, FH, SD, and YO, respectively.

³ See Carter's letter to Sage in Angela Carter, Plymouth, United Kingdom: Northcote House, 1994, p. 32.

⁴ These words are almost verbatim those used by Carter in Nights at the Circus.

⁵ See John Mortimer's "In Character," p. 45, and Carter's "Sugar Daddy," p. 9.

⁶ See Lorna Sage's "Death of an Author," Granta 41 (1992), p. 238.

⁷ For a discussion of houses as mother symbols in Carter's fiction, see Lorna Sage's introduction to Flesh and the Mirror, London: Virago Press, 1994.

⁸ See Carter's "Notes From the Front Line," in Michelene Wandor's On Gender and Writing, London: Pandora Press, 1983, p. 70.

⁹ See John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman's Intimate Matters, New York: Harper and Row, 1988, p. 306.

¹⁰ See Joan Riviere's "Womanliness as Masquerade" in Formations of Fantasy. Eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan. London: Methuen, 1986, pp. 35-44.

¹¹ Love was written during the sixties but was not published until 1971.

CHAPTER TWO

Visitors in Their Own Flesh: Images of Women in Carter's Early Novels

When I look at the novels I wrote in my twenties, when I was a girl, I don't see a difference in the emotional content, or even in the basic themes; I recognize myself, asking questions, sometimes finding different answers than I would do now.
Angela Carter, "Notes From the Front Line" (1983)

Carter's early novels, Shadow Dance (1965), The Magic Toyshop (1967), Several Perceptions (1968), and Love (1969/1971), were written when the author was in her late twenties, married, and living in Bristol.¹ In these works, Carter had already begun her apprenticeship of demystifying the latent, often terrifying, content of repressed sexual fantasies. These novels became for Carter a literary canvas on which she abstractly projected her characters' unconscious, erotic fears and desires. By presenting female characters who remain "visitors in their own flesh," Carter was able to explore and explode socially constructed myths surrounding femininity, sexuality and family.

Carter's first novel, Shadow Dance (1966), written in the realist tradition, shows early signs of the author's fascination with femininity as a cultural construct debilitating to women.² This work explores the restrictive boundaries of marriage as well as the consequences of a powerful and threatening female sexuality that goes unchecked. Specifically, Carter's treatment of three female characters

(Ghislaine, Edna, and Emily) points to the physical and emotional abuse women face if they dare succumb to their sexual impulses.

The story begins with a description of Ghislaine, a beautiful but naive, young woman, who continually finds herself the victim of male violence. Before it was slashed with a knife, Ghislaine's face, with its yellow, milkmaid hair and big, brown eyes, gave her the appearance of "a young girl in a picture book, a soft and dewy young girl" (2). According to Carter, Ghislaine "used to look like the sort of young girl one cannot imagine sitting on the lavatory or shaving her armpits or picking her nose" (2). Her beauty, it is implied, reflects the idealized iconography of femininity, which, if ever achieved, is ephemeral at best. Ghislaine is real only as the objectified symbol of idealized male desire. She is the object of a male gaze that does not acknowledge the daily, ordinary existence of a person who just happens to be female.

Ghislaine serves Carter as a tool of indictment against a generation that ostensibly professed "free-love" but practiced patriarchal Puritanism. Ghislaine, who is a product of the sixties, is foolhardy to equate "the pill" with a license for "sexual pleasure." Having lost her virginity at thirteen, she talks casually and openly about sex, probing into people's sex lives and divulging the intimate details of her own. She does not realize, however, that by so doing she is violating every aspect of a traditional social decorum that dictates femininity and sexuality (read

as a sexually-active single female) are mutually exclusive ideas. Perhaps this is the reason that Ghislaine's beauty has been shattered before the novel even begins.

In the misogynist world that Ghislaine inhabits, where a beautiful woman generally is feared, a sexually liberated one, by definition, must be destroyed.³ Consequently, Ghislaine, who is as powerful as the "witch woman" and the "Medusa" to which she is compared by her assailant, must be annihilated.⁴ What Carter's narrative suggests is that once Ghislaine shatters the patriarchal icon of femininity that defines woman as beautiful but passive, she becomes susceptible to male violence. Furthermore, although Ghislaine embraces the sexually liberating principles of her generation, she is bound by the traditional values ascribed to femininity that she has inherited from her clergyman father. Ghislaine has the desire and the strength of will to be wicked, but her guilt and insecurity undermine her purposes.

Ghislaine's undoing comes at the insensitive hands of her lover, Honeybuzzard, and his alter-ego, Morris, both of them representing in different ways people who associate sex with morality. Business partners and best friends, these two men are at once attracted to and threatened by Ghislaine's beautiful body. That Ghislaine indiscriminately gives it away is ostensibly the reason that Honey and Morris feel compelled to "take her and teach her a lesson" (34). They claim that they rape and mutilate her because, "She was asking for trouble Running around . . . late at night, [with] nothing on under her mackintosh" (34).

The novel's plot, however, suggests otherwise--that Ghislaine is punished because she represents repressed sexual fantasies of male desire. Accordingly, Honey and Morris must neutralize Ghislaine's seductive powers before the "daft bitch" destroys the two of them. They brand Ghislaine's face, which (as Carter's description of the facial scar suggests) displaces the real source of Honey and Morris' contempt--Ghislaine's vagina.

The scar went all the way down her face, from the corner of her left eyebrow, down, down, down, past nose and mouth and chin until it disappeared below the collar of her shirt. The scar was all red and raw as if, at the slightest exertion, it might open and bleed

The scar drew her whole face sideways, and even in profile, with the hideous thing turned away, her face was horribly lop-sided, skin, features and all dragged away from the bone. (2-3)

Once she is terribly and permanently disfigured, Ghislaine becomes more of an object than she was before. Stripped of her seductive powers, she is transformed through male violence from a mighty Medusa to a wounded and harmless little girl. She becomes a curious attraction that simultaneously evokes pity and revulsion, thus serving as a cautionary admonition to other women against unbridled female sexuality and promiscuity.

Despite the fact that Ghislaine flaunts her sexuality without inhibition, she cannot cope with the alienation that her free life-style effects. Ghislaine's self-mutilation (she rubs handfuls of dirt into her festering wound) is a frantic manifestation of the emotional devastation that she feels after she is rejected by the men she has seduced--the same men, incidentally, who set out to obliterate her. Carter's message is indeed bleak--innocents like Ghislaine are doomed if they do not play by the patriarchal rules that define women as sexual objects to be used and then discarded.

Even more disturbing is Ghislaine's complicity in her own victimization. Despite the abuse that she endures, Ghislaine keeps returning to Honeybuzzard, who relishes the thought of her repeated and pitiful returns and his complete mastery over her.

She's coming back crawling to me! whispered Honey.

Oh, my God, ain't it a gas? . . . I could marry her for
that, almost -- but she's going to have to crawl much
farther than that for me, first; she'll have to crawl till
her knees are all bloody, poor little girl. (74)

Honeybuzzard thrives on the idea that Ghislaine desperately needs him, while Ghislaine's emotional dependence on male acceptance renders her the proverbial sacrificial lamb. When she returns to Honeybuzzard crying, "I've learned my lesson, I can't live without you, you are my master, do what you like with me"

(169), she gives him license to treat her like the puppet that he all along believed her to be. In the end, characteristically delighted that she always jumped when he pulled her strings, Honeybuzzard rapes Ghislaine on a life-size, plaster crucifix in the cellar of an abandoned house.

Naked, Ghislaine lay on her back with her hands
crossed on her breasts, so that her nipples poked
between her fingers like the muzzles of inquisitive
white mice. Her eyes were shut down with pennies,
two on each eyelid, and her mouth gaped open a little.

There were deep black fingermarks in her throat. (180)

Ghislaine is by necessity ultimately destroyed because she imprudently relinquished the “chastity-is-virtuous” myth to which the prevailing patriarchal society still ascribed. Without societal acceptance and validation, Ghislaine becomes meaningless and thereby easily eradicated.

Unlike Ghislaine, Morris’ wife, Edna, plays the socially prescribed game of femininity to the letter. Serving as the model “nest builder . . . home maker . . . [and] creator of warm coziness” (43), Edna is, at least by her society’s definition, a good girl who deserves to be married, essentially because her sexuality is not threatening. Her small, flat breasts, her “watery smile,” and her “beige embraces” define her as feminine and passive, not vixen-like. Like “St. Ursula, the virgin, smiling at her rapists,” Edna invites and for a long time tolerates mastery (122).

Only a few years older than Ghislaine, Edna, in contrast, is the product of a different era,

. . . when men were hard and top-hatted and masculine and ruthless and girls were gentle and meek and did a great deal of sewing and looked after the poor and laid their tender napes beneath a husband's booted foot, even if he brought home cabfuls of half-naked chorus girls and had them dance on the rich round mahogany dining-table (rosily reflecting great pearly hams and bums in its polished depths). Or, drunk to a frenzy raped the kitchen-maid before the morning assembly of servants and children and her black silk-dressed self (gathered for prayers). Or forced her to stitch, on shirts, her fingers to rags to pay his gambling debts.

(45)

Edna presumably believes that her marriage to Morris is her due reward for having embraced the traditional code of femininity. Her husband accordingly comments that his showing up at the altar was the kindest act he had ever shown toward Edna. With time, however, Edna's marriage to Morris (which parallels the Honeybuzzard-Ghislaine relationship), turns Edna into "a shadow of her former self" (125). Once married, she assumes the role of martyr; she pays little attention

to her own needs, underplays her sickness, and speaks always with a thin, sad voice. Dutifully, she puts her husband's desires first, even though she considers him an insensitive brute. She has faith in his work, endures his unpredictable moods, and almost expects the lovelessness he returns.

Edna thinks marriage is all about submission and procreation, and that

[h]usbands were a force of nature or an act of God,
like an earthquake or the dreaded consumption, to be
borne with, to be meekly acquiesced to, to be
impregnated by as frequently as Nature would allow.
It took the mindless persistence, the dogged imbecility
of the grey tides, to love a husband. (46)

Though Edna acquiesces to all of Morris' demands, she (like many of Carter's female characters) remains childless; she desperately wants to be a mother, but Morris cruelly refuses to comply. Faithfully and obediently, albeit infrequently, she inserts her diaphragm, a ritual that she practices (in the kitchen) reluctantly and with disgust. Edna, who not once has cried out during lovemaking, believes that sex, like husbands, is to be tolerated, not enjoyed. Despite the pain her husband causes her, Edna is incapable of violating her marriage vows; she keeps her promise to love, honor and obey Morris with a devotion that approaches saintliness.

Edna clings so zealously to her socially prescribed role as victim that she blames herself for the unsolicited sexual advances of one of Morris' friends. She thinks that "she must somehow have tempted him" (48). Edna's piety (which reflects the religious ethic that Carter was in the process of rejecting) is almost beyond what modern readers can understand. Furthermore, though Edna knows that it was Ghislaine who seduced Morris, she righteously offers to shelter the homeless girl, preaching "[t]hat is what Christians call Charity" (53). Such martyrdom, which in Morris' eyes renders Edna pathetic, is paradoxically the very thing--the only thing--that binds him to her. Although in his fantasies Morris desires the tempting Ghislaine, he can only deal with his martyr wife who can forgive the unforgivable.

Edna, it turns out, is neither as tolerant nor as compliant as she first appears to be. If Ghislaine is Carter's representation of a self-liberated woman, sexually, then Edna is the self-liberated woman, emotionally. Ghislaine, who from the start parades her sexuality and promiscuity openly, clings to an identity that is defined, and consequently destroyed, by the prevailing values of the patriarchal society in which she lives. By contrast, Edna, who initially embraces her society's prescribed code of femininity (read passivity) and who, as a result, suffers the consequences of an abusive husband, manages in the end to transfer her emotional attachment from Morris to Henry Glass, and thereby survive. Because Henry needs and welcomes her compassion, Edna at last finds comfort and pleasure in

loving him and sleeping with him “in unison . . . so trustingly, so small, so warm, so snug” (158).

The strongest, albeit minor, female character in this work is Emily, another of Honeybuzzard’s girlfriends. Emily is a girl with a well-made body, “at home in herself” (100). She is capable, self-sufficient, and above all pragmatic. She exhibits those character traits that Carter, in her later fiction, saw as necessary to the survival of her heroines. Unlike Edna, Emily knows from the start that emotional attachments need not be permanent.

Out of sight, out of mind, was Emily’s unconscious motto, and just as she had cheerfully thrown away the enormous wardrobe of her father, her first hero, filled with twenty years’ accumulation of stored memories and proofs of love, without a moment’s hesitation, in order to clear a space for Honeybuzzard, so she might, one day, throw away Honeybuzzard when she came upon something that seemed to her more pleasing, or, perhaps, more in need of a good home. (99)

Though Emily is a compassionate, charitable girl, her sense of detachment and independence empower her; she never apologizes for her actions or does anything against her will and better judgment. Emily knows that in the dangerous game of gender politics, the unwritten strategy is “to eat or be eaten.”⁵

Emily, an early example of Carter's "wise children," knows that physical relationships can be, and often times should be, divorced from emotional ones. She uses her body as a source of great pleasure and comfort but does not permit sentimentality to cloud her clear-headed thinking. When one night, for instance, Morris becomes hysterical, groaning uncontrollably because he believes he has helped Honey to kill an old woman, Emily is quick to go comfort him. She leaves Honey's bed and goes into the next room, where Morris is spending the night. She proceeds for a while to caress the agonizing Morris with her body, "as if it was quite natural that he, clothed, and she, nude, should be lying on the floor of his workroom in the middle of the night" (147). The next morning, however, Emily "dismissed him like a kindergarten teacher, sending him away with her work done" (161). Her compassion for Morris, which at first seemingly parallels Edna's feelings for Henry Glass, is different in one very significant way. Edna's "total human involvement" (161) with Henry becomes her moral justification for cheating on Morris. Conversely, Emily's feelings for Morris are motivated first by pity and then by pragmatism; once she starts feeling tired and sleepy, she dismisses him.

Interestingly, at the end of the novel, it is a similar sense of pragmatism that drives Emily to do more than just leave Honeybuzzard. Once Ghislaine reveals how horrible Honey can be, Emily guesses that it was he who mutilated the poor girl. Later, after Honey runs off with Ghislaine, Emily, pregnant with his child,

proceeds “burning . . . the bastard . . . all up” (166). She makes a pyre out of Honey’s possessions, but she remains cool and matter of fact in her decision to keep her baby. “In her mind, Honey by now had nothing to do with it” (182). She reasons, “It’s inside me, not inside him, isn’t it? . . . If it hadn’t been him, it would have been somebody else, sooner or later” (170). Emily even makes up her mind to find Honey and insist that he pay her way back to her parents’ home since, to her way of thinking, he abducted her from them. However, when she and Morris discover that Honey has killed Ghislaine, Emily calls the police, convinced that Honey is mentally unstable. Practical to the end, Emily tells Morris, “We must get things straight. It is only right. For my baby’s sake” (183).

In this novel, Emily turns out to be Carter’s no-nonsense woman. Social taboos about female sexuality do not circumscribe her behavior, nor is her autonomy compromised by popular myths of femininity and motherhood. She thinks and acts clearly and wisely, and unlike Ghislaine, she sees through the spurious rhetoric of female sexual liberation. Still, as resourceful and independent as Emily is, she is only a minor character; it is Honeybuzzard who dominates the novel until the very end.⁶ Nonetheless, Shadow Dance challenges culturally imposed taboos that restrict female sexual activity to procreation and that consequently pronounce any deviation from it obscene. Furthermore, the novel investigates the sexual violence to which women are subjected if they do not

conform to the dominant morality, and introduces a theme to which Carter would return again and again.

Carter's second novel, The Magic Toyshop (which was made into a film), reads like a Freudian fairy tale about Oedipal relationships. Bringing together symbols (such as puppets and toys) with elements of magic and psychoanalysis, it charts the maturation of a young woman grappling with pubescent anxieties about sexuality and marriage. Though not fully the sexually liberated woman of Carter's later novels, the heroine comes to realize that male sexuality is not as horrifying as she has imagined it to be. The author's funny, often biting, sarcasm serves to dispel notions of male sexuality as categorically aggressive, all-consuming and destructive.

The central character, Melanie, at fifteen, wants nothing more than to be married. Like most adolescents, she is at once envious and apprehensive of the idealized grown-up world about which she fantasizes. She says, "I wish I was forty and it was all over and I knew what was going to happen to me" (6). Believing as she does that sex and romance are integral parts of marriage, Melanie is simultaneously anxious about her changing body and fearful of remaining a virgin. Fueled by her youthful fantasies (which are accompanied by feelings of guilt), Melanie, behind closed doors, succumbs to her romantic and sexual impulses. She writhes and clasps her newly developed body, all the while conjuring up a phantom bridegroom. One dark night she even runs stark naked

into the garden. Frequently, she prays: "Please God, let me get married, or, let me have sex" (8). She wants, in Carter's words, "too much, too soon," and her penance is to feel guilt, pain, and humiliation. (Excess in Carter's fictionalized universe is like rich food, tempting but usually accompanied by physical discomfort.)

Melanie believes that the price of her new-found sexuality and, one assumes, the pleasure she derives from it, is nothing less than her own parents' death, which occurs immediately after Melanie tries on (and accidentally bloodies) her mother's wedding dress. (Like Ghislaine, from Shadow Dance, Melanie must pay for her sexual curiosity; however, because her "wickedness" is limited to reverie and speculation, her punishment is not as severe as is Ghislaine's.) Suddenly orphaned, and now more guilt-ridden than ever, Melanie and her two siblings must go to live with their disagreeable uncle, Philip Flower, and his mute wife, Margaret. Owner of a toyshop, Uncle Philip is a puppet-maker who literally and figuratively pulls the strings of those who reside in his house. It is in this environment that Melanie's idealized notions about marriage and sexuality are soon shattered.

Living with Uncle Philip and Aunt Margaret, Melanie realizes that marriage does not always provide the safety and security that she presumably enjoyed back home.

Uncle Philip never talked to his wife except to bark brusque commands. He gave her a necklace that choked her. He beat her younger brother. He chilled the air through which he moved. His towering, blank-eyed presence at the head of the table drew the savour from the good food [his wife] cooked. He suppressed the idea of laughter. (124)

Melanie also discovers that marriage brings with it no guarantee of love or motherhood. Aunt Margaret, though very maternal, (like most of Carter's female characters) remains childless against her will. She kisses Melanie good-night, "her mouth cool, dry and papery, her kiss inhibited, tight-lipped but somehow desperate, making an anguished plea for affection" (49). As young as she is, Melanie astutely perceives a sense of longing in her aunt.

Melanie's rather sudden initiation into the adult world effects an even more astonishing realization. She is shocked to see that marriage can silence and break a woman. Melanie is horrified to learn that her aunt's muteness is "a terrible affliction [that] came to her on her wedding day, like a curse" (37). Melanie witnesses first-hand that Margaret, described as a "black bird with a red crest and no song to sing" (42), resembles the stuffed birds in the gilt cage that morbidly decorates the corner of the kitchen. Carter, in a later passage, repeated the bird metaphor to emphasize Margaret's frailty, describing her as made of "[b]ird bones

and tissue paper, spun glass and straw” (138). It is noteworthy that Margaret’s passivity is precisely that which makes her attractive to Philip just as (in Shadow Dance) Edna’s martyrdom is what appeals to Morris.

Every Sunday Margaret wears her husband’s wedding gift to her--a silver necklace that snaps around her neck and reaches almost to her chin. On these occasions, Philip can be seen “gazing at her with expressionless satisfaction, apparently deriving a certain pleasure from her discomfort, or even finding that the sight of it improved his appetite” (113). As Melanie soon realizes, Margaret, frail and voiceless, is just the type of wife the brooding and oppressive puppet-master wants--or will tolerate.

Once Melanie assimilates the “new domestic geography” that surrounds her, she detects that, like Aunt Margaret, she is not a free agent. Acknowledging that marriage is neither as romantic nor as satisfying as she had expected, she comes to understand that she and her aunt are “poor women pensioners, planets round a male sun” (140). Uncle Philip does not allow Melanie to wear trousers or make-up; she is allowed to speak only when spoken to and required to concentrate on her domestic chores, to act like “a wind-up putting away doll, clinking through its programmed movements” (76). Carter’s description of Melanie as an automaton with no volition of her own warns women against a blind acceptance of culturally constructed myths about marriage and womanhood.

As a tenant in Uncle Philip's house (where Finn and Francie Jowel, Aunt Margaret's brothers, also live), Melanie is confronted as well by aspects of maleness that she had never before imagined. Melanie for the first time senses an unpleasant odor of "maleness," which her phantom groom in all likelihood did not possess.

Then there was silence and then Melanie began to smell the men. She was puzzled for some moments as to the source of the smell, so little did she expect the brothers would be so dirty. Crushed as she was close to them, their smell filled her nostrils until she almost choked with it. And also with horror, for she had never sat close to men who smelt before. A ferocious, unwashed, animal reek came from them both; in addition, Finn stank of paint and turps on top of the poverty-stricken, slum smell. And Francie's collar, she saw, was rimmed with dirt and his neck was filthy.

She could not see Finn's neck for the hair. (36)

It takes Melanie almost the entire rest of the novel before she accepts that men, as likely as not, give off a "ferocious, unwashed, animal reek." She finds that she is both repelled and attracted to the brothers' maleness, Finn's especially.

Melanie suddenly found it difficult to breathe It was as if he had put on the quality of maleness like a flamboyant cloak. He was a tawny lion poised for the kill--and was she the prey? She remembered the lover made up out of books and poems she had dreamed of all summer; he crumpled like the paper he was made of before this insolent, off-hand, terrifying maleness, filling the room with its reek. She hated it. But she could not take her eyes off him. (45)

Melanie's relationship with Finn starts to change once she realizes that her earlier romantic reveries were very far from realistic--another reminder from Carter that reality often dispels the fantasy. As Melanie matures, she learns to value Finn's kindness and genuine concern enough so as to overlook his discolored teeth and sandpappy cheeks. It is not, however, until the two are summoned to play Leda and the Swan in Uncle Philip's Christmas show that Melanie fully recognizes Finn's goodness.

The events leading to this holiday program represent important stepping stones in Melanie's sexual initiation. The young woman's initial physical attraction to Finn occurs during a rehearsal in his room. When Melanie accidentally stumbles into his arms, she is "seized with a nervous, unlocalized excitement" (149). Shuddering, she anticipates the ensuing moments, disregarding

his odor. Unconcerned (as she was earlier) with how Finn looks or smells, she wonders what he will do to her and whether or not he will be kind. She exhibits “a fear that was also a pleasure” (149) at what she had so often in the past imagined would happen next.

To Melanie’s disappointment, however, Finn unexpectedly bolts away from her, irritated with himself for enabling Uncle Philip to pull their strings as if they were his puppets. Finn later explains to Melanie that, “he [Philip] wanted me to fuck you” (151). As surprised as she is by Finn’s behavior and rationale, Melanie is jolted more by his use of the word “fuck.”

She had only read the word before, in cold aseptic print, never heard it spoken except in heat by rough farm-workers who did not realize she was walking by. She was deeply agitated. She had never connected the word with herself; her phantom bridegroom would never have fucked her. They would have made love. But Finn, she acknowledged with a sinking of her spirit, would have. She could tell by the way he ground out his cigarette on the floor. (152)

Dejected, Melanie comprehends the physical, even savage, nature of sex that contradicts her romanticized fantasies about it. She realizes, too, that she is as vulnerable as the cigarette butt that she sees Finn indifferently discard.

Nevertheless, it is Finn who helps Melanie reject her fairy tale world. When she says, "I want to be in love with you but I don't know how," he scolds her for "talking like a women's magazine" (155). He wisely explains that her sudden attraction to him is most likely the result of his physical proximity rather than of any emotional tie.

As the day of the performance approaches, Melanie is apprehensive about "giving herself to the swan" (162). When, however, she actually sees the goose [a life-size papier-mâché puppet], she recognizes the absurdity of her fears. Dumpy, homely, and eccentric, "It was nothing like the wild, phallic bird of her imaginings" (165). In the following passage, Carter undermines male sexuality and male aggression by making a farce out of Leda's/Melanie's rape. After Finn (who is maneuvering the swan puppet) attacks Melanie, she looks at him

as if he were a stranger in tartan wool shirt-sleeves and worn-out corduroy trousers and unshaven stubble. "He has nice ears," she thought, noticing them for the first time. They were small and elegantly shaped ears. She tried to recall where she had seen him before; his face was familiar. But it was too hard and she gave up. She looked round for her swan. It had been hauled away. It hung on its strings, pathetic now its motive

power was gone, waving about a little from side to side. (167)

Carter, no doubt, was smirking when she wrote this last sentence. The sexually loaded language renders Melanie's initiation more anti-climactic than frightening. Preoccupied with the physical details of Finn's ears rather than with her staged assault, Melanie feels less violated than she does detached; she wonders, wistfully, if there isn't "anything more" (168). For the rest of the story, Melanie is afforded several opportunities that enable her to explore this question further.

Later that night, for instance, Finn inadvertently reveals his true feelings for Melanie when he comes to her room asking to spend the night. He confesses that he has dismembered the swan puppet partly because it "rode" her, and partly because Uncle Philip "loved it so." His actions, however, though they may be motivated in part by his desire to avenge Melanie, are described by Carter in humorous rather than in heroic terms.

And the swan's neck refused to be chopped up; the axe bounced off it. It kept sticking itself out of my raincoat when I buttoned it up to hide it and it kept peering around while I was carrying it, along with all the bits of the swan and the spade as well. I had my arms full, I can tell you. It must have looked, to a

passer-by, as if I was indecently exposing myself,
when the swan's neck stuck out. (173)

Carter's description of the incident (which represents Finn's symbolic castration of Philip), serves to deflect any potential intimacy between Melanie and Finn. Furthermore, Finn's remark the following morning, when Melanie's baby sister awakens them with her crying, effects the same result. Finn shouts at Melanie, "For God's sake, will you shut up that child" (177). That moment foreshadows for Melanie what marriage to this man might have in store.

[T]here would always be pervasive squalor and dirt
and mess and shabbiness, always, forever and forever.
And babies crying and washing to be done and toast
burning all the rest of her life. And never any glamour
or romance or charm. Nothing fancy. Only mess and
babies with red hair. She revolted. (177)

Melanie's momentary daydream envisions a reality that is radically different from her earlier fantasies about marriage. Her prophetic trance is warning enough against any alliance that might resemble Aunt Margaret and Uncle Philip's relationship.

Melanie would prefer, instead, the kind of intimacy that Aunt Margaret shares with her brother Francie, who, as it turns out, is also her lover. At first shocked to learn of this incestuous relationship, Melanie comes to accept the

attachment for what it is -- nurturing, passionate, and truly loving -- and to see also that neither age nor kinship thwarts the illicit bond that exists between the two siblings. When she sees how Aunt Margaret softens in Francie's presence, Melanie comprehends the power of human need and desire. She also recognizes the transformative capabilities of satisfying such yearnings.

Melanie's initial apprehension at wholeheartedly accepting Margaret and Francie's incestuous relationship subsides the next day when Uncle Philip takes Melanie's younger brother, Jonathon, to a model-boat show. Melanie then has the chance to witness how Margaret comes to life when her husband is not around.

Aunt Margaret gradually softened amid the laughter.

The sun came out in her face. For the first time since Melanie had known her, she seemed to be examining the possibility of her own tomorrow, where she could come and go as she pleased and wear what clothes she wanted and maybe even part her locked lips and speak.

Or sing. (184)

With Philip absent, Margaret and the rest of the family are free to enjoy the simple pleasures of life--heartily eating, drinking, singing and dancing. Having let her red hair loose, Margaret now resembles "a happy bird flaunting new-grown plumage" (189). She is wearing Melanie's fancy dress and Confirmation pearls, presents bequeathed to her by her niece. Melanie, meanwhile, having given away

her childhood relics, starts to think and act more pragmatically. For starters, she defiantly puts on trousers. She also assumes a more assertive role in her budding relationship with Finn. She tells him, with emphatic confidence, that she is “not going to be rushed” (193), and, indeed, she remains a virgin throughout the story. Finn, likewise, seizes the opportunity presented by Philip’s absence to assume the role as head of the household. He smashes the ogre’s ceramic mug, sits in his seat, and dons one of his dress shirts, proclaiming with new-found pride, “I come of age today” (185). Francie, meanwhile, sits drinking his whisky and playing his fiddle.

Uncle Philip’s stifling authority, which for Carter represents the limitations of a traditionally patriarchal society, is destroyed at the end of the novel. When Philip returns home to find his wife in her brother’s passionate embrace, it is both noteworthy and remarkable that Margaret is the one who deals most effectively with the Uncle Philip’s rage. “Catastrophe,” we learn, “had freed her tongue” (197). Realizing that Finn’s unextinguished cigarette butt had started a fire, she warns the others to flee the burning house in which Philip remains fatally trapped. At this significant and heroic moment, Margaret discovers an inner strength that renders her so much larger than life that she lifts the rug right “off the floor in the gale she brought with her” (196). Carter’s remark--“Struck dumb on her wedding day, she found her old voice again the day she was freed” (197)--serves as both a commentary on and a warning against the tendency of marriage to silence women.

In the end, the two female characters in The Magic Toyshop emerge as central figures though they are not as fully developed as those who take over the pages of Carter's later works. The strength of this novel is that it reveals truths about the complexity of human emotions, particularly as they are expressed or repressed within the social institutions of marriage, family, and patriarchy.

In her next novel, Several Perceptions (1968), Carter returned the attention to a male protagonist. This time, as if to mock the flippancy with which some people embraced various causes of the sixties, Carter spotlighted the random wanderings of Joseph Harker, who coasts noncommittally through a decade remembered chiefly as one of protest.

Like Carter's first novel, Several Perceptions is not particularly feminist-friendly. Women do not figure prominently in the novel, but serve instead to reflect stereotypical images of women. Depicted as objects instead of subjects, they are referred to derisively throughout as "birds," "bitches," "whores," or "old cows." The men, accordingly, are always calculating ways to "screw" or "poke" them whenever their need arises. Nevertheless, though they remain peripheral to Joseph, three of Carter's female characters emerge as noteworthy prototypes. Charlotte, Anne Blossom, and Mrs. Boulder are representative of Carter's evolving tendency to portray women characters who are independent and unattached, and who, to a limited degree, escape male violence.

When the story begins, Joseph's ex-girlfriend, Charlotte, has already flown the coop--gone in search of "real people." A university student studying English literature, she has left her boyfriend behind because he squandered her money on pot and comic books, and mocked her academic interests. Though Charlotte is depicted as a sensible young woman who had just cause for leaving, Joseph regards her as a *femme fatale* who loved and then left him. The entire first chapter, in fact, is his recitation of the pain and suffering she inflicted upon him.

Like Ghislaine of Shadow Dance, Charlotte is the dangerous seductress, attractive but perilous. Charlotte's greatest hazard, however, lies not so much in her beauty or her promiscuity, as in her high-brow intellect. "All blond bone and hauteur" (26), Charlotte decides that she is too cerebral for Joseph, whose only creative thoughts are about new and bizarre methods of sexual intercourse. Her departure fuels Joseph's need to hurt her.

Distraught and haunted by her memory, Joseph subconsciously transforms the runaway Charlotte into an object that he can hate and blame for his misery. In his nightly dreams (which evoke Freudian castration fears), Joseph transforms Charlotte into a devouring monster.⁷ In place of her face he sees

a Gothic mask, huge eyeballs hooded with lids of
stone, cheekbones sharp as steel, lips of treacherous
vampire redness and a wet red mouth which was a
mantrap of ivory fangs. Witch woman. Incubus.

Haunter of battlefields after the carnage in the image
of a crow. . . His Madonna of the abattoir. (16)

His dreams, though, are not ample retribution for his suffering. Because Joseph has no means of physically hurting or destroying Charlotte (the way Honeybuzzard scarred his “witch woman,” Ghislaine), his troubled mind designs a different way to get back at his ex-lover. Determined to make Charlotte suffer remorse, Joseph takes one last look at her photograph, calls her a “bitch,” and sticks his head in the oven. After he bungles his suicide attempt, he can think of no other way to injure Charlotte except to debase and dismiss her. He imagines with utmost contempt that she is “no doubt in bed with some Jew or Negro” (45), a comment presumably intended to devalue further the already objectified *femme fatale*. Charlotte, then, pretty and self-assured, has no place in the fictional universe of Carter’s early work, which is still highly mimetic. As was Ghislaine, Charlotte had to be removed (by the author since not by Joseph) because Carter had yet to appropriate a secure place for strong, autonomous women.

Opposite Charlotte is the character of Anne Blossom. A tenant in Joseph’s building, she is the one who discovers the dolt after his suicide disaster. With her unsexy cough and her terrible limp, she is, we are told more than once, a perfectly ordinary young woman--anything but threatening. Contrary to what her surname suggests, Anne is not much of a blossom. She is compared to Little Orphan Annie, and her homeliness is relentlessly underscored with authorial reminders

that she is “nothing to write home about” (25), “no beauty” (39), and “the ugly Eve [whom Joseph] had seen in the garden” (48). Carter’s read of dominant cultural attitudes was that a woman could hardly be considered dangerous if she could not so much as attract a man’s attention.

We are left to assume that Anne Blossom’s offense is neither her beauty nor her social class, but her unwillingness, even if for very practical reasons, to accept her role as mother. Anne discloses that her fiancé had abandoned her before she could tell him that she was pregnant. We learn that after he had gone, she threw herself down a flight of stairs, hoping to effect a miscarriage, but succeeding only in injuring herself. Yet another of Carter’s characters who is defined as a function of her flesh, she is deemed to suffer. As is Ghislaine in Shadow Dance, Anne is judged according to the dominant culture’s traditional value system that equates indiscriminate sexual activity with immorality and shame. Carter’s understanding of such false freedom as dangerous is a useful reminder to us that “sexual liberation” means nothing unless everyone plays by the same new rules.

Anne has been raised on a tradition that preaches premarital sex as a punishable sin, and even if she does not like the idea, she cannot easily shake it. One carefree roll in the hay cannot erase a lifetime of Catholic indoctrination. Empathizing with a French girl who jumped off the Eiffel Tower because she was in the family-way, Anne asks, “Doesn’t it make you sick? Only Catholics could be that cruel to a woman. They’d look at her and think of Eve and say, ‘It serves you

right, you bitch, you've got to pay the price"" (105). It is no wonder then that for almost the entire novel Anne accepts her limp as a form of retribution, confessing to Joseph, "I thought they made me lame to punish me for giving myself away" (150).

Anne initially reasoned that since she sacrificed her virginity, she, like Eve, would have to atone for her sexual misconduct by giving up her illegitimate baby for adoption. Herself an orphan, Anne can only hope that her son will have what is often missing in Carter's fiction--the security of a nuclear family. Anne says longingly, "Not having a family oneself, see, one is always curious" (91). She admits that when she was younger, she would fantasize that her parents were royalty, famous film stars, or passionately reckless young lovers, and she hopes that her own son would "dream [her] into something lovely, something [she] never was" (107).⁸

Anne's relationship with Joseph, though peripheral to the plot, is significant to this discussion because it depicts a female character who grows stronger and more pragmatic as the novel progresses. As did Melanie, from The Magic Toyshop, Anne relinquishes whatever romantic notions about marriage that she may once have entertained. After she is abandoned, she concedes that she is not a fairy-tale princess, and after she spends some time with Joseph, she is absolutely certain that he is not the prince. She spurns his offer to spend the night at her place, retorting, almost indignantly, "That's the last thing I need" (105). On her

way to realizing that a man is no substitute for self-confidence and self-forgiveness, Anne foreshadows Carter's more self-assured heroines (found in the later fiction) who fully embrace the idea that sex "ain't no sin."⁹

Mrs. Boulder, likewise, is a prototype for the strong female characters of Carter's later novels. Prefiguring the matriarchal figures of Lizzie in Nights at the Circus and Grandma Chance in Wise Children, she is indeed "bolder" and older than the frail Anne Blossom.¹⁰ Known as "the neighborhood love machine" (24), she is the first prostitute in Carter's work to receive any significant attention. As a wise, practical, and kind-hearted woman, she serves as Carter's spokesperson for prostitution as an honest business, especially in light of the fact that as a single mother she resorts (unlike Anne Blossom) to this chosen work as means for raising her child. Additionally, Mrs. Boulder is Carter's symbol for the aging, but still sexually alive, woman. In the brilliant description that follows, this character is described as another in the gallery of Carter's women who are visitors in their own flesh.

[Mrs. Boulder] had a bright steeple of curls on top of her head; this fragile construction slid sideways as she drank during the course of an evening while the bright peach false face she assumed upon her natural features began to run with moisture until she looked like a pink stucco Venetian palazzo about to subside in a cascade

of mud and rubble into a canal. Only the eyes remained invariable in the disintegrating facade; her eyes were startling and forlorn, grey as rain, the eyes of a miserable young girl trapped (not knowing how) in a strange, aging, garish cage of flesh. (35)

Trapped though she is in an aging body, Mrs. Boulder emerges as a progressively liberal thinker. Her sense of motherhood reflects a modern outlook that evolves as central in Carter's final novel. To Joseph's question as to whether or not the concept of "Father" is hypothetical--a wishful thinking--Mrs. Boulder responds, "Father is only a word at the best of times but mother is a fact" (121), a phrase that Carter repeats almost verbatim in Wise Children.

More importantly, Mrs. Boulder expounds Carter's views about sex and sin, when she confesses her own history as a prostitute.

At first, oh, each time was a fresh violation. For years I felt degraded, I felt I was such a sinner I'd never be washed clean. But if death is the wages of sin, it's the wages of virtue, too. And I was making such a lot of money, you'd never believe it. And no tax either. And I thought, "Why am I a sinner? I am only doing a job of work and I'm not liar, like priests, for example, who tell those lies." But my family was always Catholic

and it's hard to lose a sense of guilt once it's been
 drummed into you. Once they've cast you for
 Magdalen, they'll never accept you as an honest
 businesswoman. (121)¹¹

At the end of the novel, Mrs. Boulder escapes with her black, West African beau, Toussaint, who was "at least six feet seven inches high and broad to suit" (137). Carter portrays this fine gentleman as larger than life, a compliment given to accent his generous spirit. Presumably, as his name suggests, he will help Mrs. Boulder confront her Catholic guilt with the same degree of enthusiasm with which L'Ouverture Toussaint resisted Napoleon's army.

Like The Magic Toyshop, Several Perceptions ends up attacking traditional notions of marriage and family. It works best as a novel of ideas that exposes paternity as a matter of semantics, and motherhood as an arduous but thankless job. At the heart of the work is Carter's conviction that it is terribly cruel and unfair that women for so long have had to suffer the consequences of unwanted pregnancy, as the circumstances of Anne Blossom and Mrs. Boulder illustrate. The closing scene presents a more sensitive (but less believable) portrait of Joseph. Presumably, he has come to recognize the unkind detachment with which he had previously given away his unneutered cat's litter. This time around, he tends lovingly to the feline's birthing needs, watching her, like a lover, "giving suck to five kittens all as white as snow and beautiful as stars" (154). Ultimately,

however, though the content and language of Carter's closing sentence evoke the satisfaction of a fairy-tale ending, the reader is not convinced.

Carter continued to undermine romanticized notions of love and marriage in subsequent novels. Carter's ironically entitled novel, Love (1969/1971), looks at the flimsy connections that hold people together in their often desperate search for attention.¹² Set against the 1960s' sensibility of anonymity, impermanence, and detachment, Love is the last of Carter's early realistic works. Generally regarded as her farewell to the decade, this novel probes the complex inter-relationships of three characters who serve more as metaphors than as individuals. Reminiscent of the bizarre ties that bind the characters of The Magic Toyshop, Love is the story of another sexual triangle comprised of the fragile, eighteen year-old Annabel; her hippie husband, Lee Collins; and his crazy, half-brother, Buzz. Annabel, Lee, and Buzz play out a grotesque scenario through which Carter exposes the most perverse aspects of human nature. (The names of Annabel and Lee, which allude to Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee," evoke the chilling tone of the poem and foreshadow the fate that is in store for Carter's own Annabel.)

Annabel, like Melanie (from The Magic Toyshop), is another of Carter's innocents who is initiated into the adult world of sexuality. However, unlike Melanie, who longs for her romantic adult life to begin, Annabel wants to live an ordinary (what she calls "bland") life. Having always felt uncomfortable with her middle-class upbringing, which smells of "soap and money," she finds herself

drawn by the ordinariness of the working-class crowd. We learn that Annabel is a “mad girl plastered in fear” (3) who cannot imagine that “sensuous human practice might shape the real world” (4). As a result, by the time Annabel first meets Lee, the reader has already surmised that she is readied for the kill.

Lee, who is likewise attracted to Annabel because she is very different from him, recognizes that she is “a thing that needed to be loved” (24). He is excited whenever he is with her, feeling “like a lone explorer in an unknown country without a map to guide him” (9).¹³ Only a few pages later, we are told that, “He felt a sense of unspoken contact with her, like that of two people from different countries who do not speak one another’s language thrust together in a third whose language neither understands” (17). Annabel and Lee are attracted to each other precisely because they remain strangers in their shared world. Both impersonate what they think is appropriately female and male--she gazing “at him with wonder, as if he might be magic, and he [looking] at her nervously, as if she might not be fully human” (34). When Lee makes love to Annabel for the first time, she is more curious than passionate. She wonders why anyone would want to “do this” to anyone else, but lackadaisically accepts her defloration as an inevitable part of the initiation process.

The castle of herself was clearly about to be invaded
and, though the idea of it surprised her, the actual
indifference of her response told her she would submit

indifferently and she thought: "Why not? Why not?"

(32-33)

Annabel accepts Lee's advances nonplused, perceiving Lee as "a golden lion too gentle to ever eat meat" (25). She is naively unaware that her passivity--her silence and enquiring eyes--is a turn on for Lee. Furthermore, having had no previous experience in this area, she must rely on the knowledge gleaned from magazines and films in order to inform her response.

She was half perplexed and half amused at the sight of his erection but somehow affronted by his general air of insouciance for she knew this was supposed to be an event of some significance for her. . . . She would have liked some instructions on how to behave for it is a hard thing to make love when one has few, if any, ideas of common practice. (33)

Before long, however, Annabel recognizes that Lee has become a necessary part of her existence, and she searches for ways to minimize his importance to her. She wants to reduce him to "not-being." She fantasizes about how she might totally engulf Lee

when he penetrated her, as if, drawing him through her hairy portals, he could be forever locked up inviolably inside her, reduced himself to the condition of an

embryo, and by dissolving in his own sperm, become himself his own child. So by impregnating her, he would cease to exist. (35)

Interestingly, Lee is as frightened of Annabel as she is of him. Both are innocent babes navigating through uncharted territory of gender role expectations, though Lee seems already to have figured out that his handsome looks can work to his advantage; he is quick to offer his “artificial smile” in lieu of commitment whenever he can get away with it.

Lee’s autonomy, however, is at best precarious, especially once Annabel strips him of his “savage detachment.” Having recognized that his sensitivity renders him vulnerable, Annabel realizes that she can debilitate Lee with guilt. When she discovers that he is being unfaithful to her, Annabel threatens that she will commit suicide. Before long, Lee begins to see himself as a “red-handed butcher to whom both women [Annabel and his mistress] seemed no more than curious meat” (53). However, once it is clear that Annabel’s sanity hinges on his fidelity, Lee’s sense of responsibility subsumes any natural desire for freedom and happiness that he may have. He resolves that he will love Annabel, and she, in turn, proceeds to take control of the relationship.

Never before had she felt the extent of her powers until that moment, when she resolved to be visible all the time and was rewarded by seeing him drawn towards

her whether he willed it or not, as if she were a
magnetic stone. (61)

Annabel insists that Lee have her name tattooed in Gothic script on his heart. Once branded with this bad conduct medal, Lee is transformed into an object belonging to Annabel. Moreover, his earlier guilt has now manifested as fear of his wife.

His guilt had devised its own punishment. He
acknowledged that she was far cleverer than he and
began to fear her a little for he could not alter her at all,
although she could change him in any way she pleased.
(71)

The ensuing events of the story hint at the fluidity of gender role expectations that Carter was interested in exploring. The essentialist ideas of femininity and masculinity, which Carter scrutinized at length in later works (see Chapter 5), are beginning, at this nascently transitional stage, to take root in the author's mind. Specifically, Carter was experimenting with notions of sexuality and power as they relate to gender.

Annabel is liberated by the author to act without censure or reprimand, but her freedom is restricted within the parameters of "madwoman" or "artist." She is allowed to imagine a different kind of world in which she is an agent rather than an object, but her control over Lee remains limited to her artist's canvas.

The world unshelled itself or she unshelled the world
and she found, beneath the crust of spiked armour, a
kernel of plasticine limply begging to be rendered into
forms. As she grew more confident this was so, she
drew a final picture of Lee as a unicorn whose horn
had been amputated. Her imagery was by no means
inscrutable. (77)

Annabel has little difficulty envisioning a reconstructed world in which she secures a more central position. Her painting of Lee as a unicorn, which she was able in a sense “to castrate,” rouses her to the causal relationship between form and meaning.¹⁴ And though she has no real control over her husband, Annabel proceeds to refashion a new image for herself.

Annabel’s first step is toward financial independence. She gets a job at a local ballroom as a waitress, puts on her work uniform, and appropriates Lee’s charming smile as her own, “leaving him with no benign expressions left for himself” (78). Annabel, we surmise, likes her new self.

In the vein of Jean Baudrillard’s “simulacra,” Annabel is able to make herself real by being genuinely “artificial,” an idea that Carter investigated in great detail in the novels and short stories that she wrote during the seventies (see Chapters 4 and 6).¹⁵ The essence of Annabel’s femininity rests in the artifice of her appearance. “[S]ince everything around her was artificial, she and her first,

carefully contrived, if tentative, reconstruction of herself as a public object passed for a genuine personality” (78). With her own-earned money, Annabel buys a white gown, dyes her hair, and paints her face. She re-creates herself and assumes a new (but to herself, foreign) identity; she becomes

a marvellous crystallization retaining nothing of the remembered woman but her form, for all the elements of which this new structure were composed had suffered a change, the eyes put out by zircons or spinels, the hair respun from threads of gold and the mouth enameled scarlet. No longer vulnerable flesh and blood, she was altered to inflexible material. (104)

Unfortunately, the new Annabel, contrary to what she may believe, is nothing more than flesh and blood. Perhaps the most pitiable of Carter’s female characters who in the early works are presented as visitors in their own flesh, Annabel soon finds herself involved with Lee’s brother, Buzz (whose name conjures thoughts of Honeybuzzard, the depraved character in Shadow Dance). When Buzz finally makes a move on Annabel, whatever suppressed erotic fantasies Annabel may have had for him are shattered by the reality of what actually takes place.

Buzz crouched between her feet and scrutinized as much as he could see of her perilous interior to find out if all was in order and there were no concealed fangs or

guillotines inside her to ruin him. Although he found no visual evidence, he remained too suspicious of her body to wish to meet her eyes so he caught hold of her shoulders and roughly pushed her down on her face. She was astonished; she felt herself handled as unceremoniously as a fish on a slab, reduced only to anonymous flesh, and she could do nothing to help herself for she knew she had connived in her own undoing. He thrust at her from behind and it was all over in a few seconds; he came as soon as he clumsily pushed his way into her and instantly withdrew, in a convulsive movement like a gigantic wince. . . . When they embraced each other's phantoms, each in his separate privacy had savoured the most refined of pleasures but, connoisseurs of unreality as they were, they could not bear the crude weight, the rank smell and the ripe taste of real flesh. It is always a dangerous experiment to act out a fantasy. . . . (94-95)

Shocked and confounded, Annabel returns home only to be met by Lee's mixed jealousy and rage. Without faltering, Annabel seduces Lee in what proves to be a mutual rape, which, as might be expected, the two participants interpret

differently. While Lee feels “nothing but the absence of feeling” (100), Annabel experiences “the remorseless logic of unreason where all vision is deranged, all action uncoordinated and all responses beyond prediction” (101).

The novel’s conclusion is bleak because the only thing about her life that Annabel has any real control over is its end. Managing one totally shocking transformation from “painted doll” into a “bedizened corpse” (112), Annabel gasses herself to infinite sleep. Love becomes “Annabel’s coffin” (as Carter described in the 1987 afterword) presumably because the only place for a woman in the kind of male-dominated world that the novel depicts is either the loony bin or the grave.

Ultimately, the female characters in Carter’s early novels are depicted not so much as individuals, but rather as representations of woman as icon. They inhabit a patriarchal world and exist only as the projections of men. Their internalized values reflect their basic allegiance to the domestic sphere, as well as to the universally accepted premise that woman is defined as a function of her body. Presented as visitors in their own flesh, these fictive women often are depicted as victims of sexual violence, emotional pain, and alienation. For young and old alike, sexuality is the curse for which they must suffer. It was not until her last novel, Wise Children, written more than 25 years after Shadow Dance, that Carter produced female characters who could shout about sex, “It ain’t no sin.”

“Notes”

¹ It is unclear whether Carter began Love while still in England or while living in Japan. In any case, the novel exhibits some of the influence of her Japanese experience.

² For a critique of this novel as part of the Carter's Bristol trilogy and as Carter's social commentary on the sixties, see Marc O'Day's essay, "Mutability is Having a Field Day": The Sixties Aura of Angela Carter's Bristol Trilogy," in Lorna Sage's, Flesh and the Mirror, London: Virago Press, 1994, pp. 24-58. See also the abstract of Fiona Murphy's "Serving Her Apprenticeship: Carter's Mastery of Her Art." Murphy's paper was presented in September 1994 at the University of York's conference on Carter, "Fireworks: Angela Carter and the Futures of Writing."

³ For a fine collection of essays on this topic, see Valerie M. Bentz and Philip E. F. Mayes' Women's Power and Roles as Portrayed in Visual Images of Women in Arts and the Media, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993.

⁴ According to Freud, the Medusa's head symbolizes castration anxiety. See Lecture XXIX on "Revision of Dream-Theory," in The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis. Translated and edited by James Starchey, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1966, pp. 471-94.

⁵ In Chapter 5 of this study (wherein I discuss Carter's politics of pornography), I suggest that the author's preferred view of human sexual relations is to eat and be eaten (with women and men alternately assuming the more exciting role of aggressor) rather than to eat or be eaten.

⁶ Apropos of this, the title of the American edition of this novel is Honeybuzzard.

⁷ Laurie Schneider Adams argues that "In literature and the visual arts, castration fear can be evoked by images of severed limbs or other detached body parts, such as an eye or a head, which have unconscious phallic meaning"(53). For further discussion see Art and Psychoanalysis, New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

⁸ See Freud's lecture on "Family Romances" in The Freud Reader, edited by Peter Gay, New York: W. W. Norton, 1989, pp. 297-300. Carter's attitude toward family changed once she visited Japan; she later became much more accepting of less traditional family structures.

⁹ In her last novel, Wise Children, Carter used the refrain, "It ain't no sin," to celebrate sex.

¹⁰ In a recent TLS review of Several Perceptions (reissued in 1995), the author (identified only as WE) writes that Mrs. Kyte, “a fallen star . . . mutely foreshadows the gin-slinging Chance twins in Wise Children. While this may be true, I contend that Dora and Nora are, in spirit, more closely related to Mrs. Boulder. See “Fiction in Brief,” TLS, 3 February 1995.

¹¹ Carter reiterated her assessment of prostitution as honest work in her novel Nights at the Circus, an idea discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8 of this study.

¹² Love was completed in 1969 but not published until 1971. It is interesting that this work, whose title suggests loyalty and affection, was written when Carter’s own marriage was falling apart. It was at that time, as well, that Carter ran away to Japan and discovered what she calls “the metaphysical concept of liberty,” a sentimentality that compels us to act against our desires. See Ronald Bell interview with the author, “Angela Carter, British, Novelist,” in The Japan Experience, New York: Weatherhill, 1973, pp. 23-35.

¹³ In her interview with Ronald Bell, Carter recalled an affair she had with a Japanese national, describing the adventure of cross-cultural, cross-racial relationships as “the kind of savage excitement an explorer feels in virgin land” (27).

¹⁴ See Julia Kristeva’s Revolution in Poetic Language, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, pp. 237-70.

¹⁵ See Jean Baudrillard’s “The Precession of Simulacra,” in Art After Modernism, edited by Brian Wallis, New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, pp. 253-82.

CHAPTER THREE

Becoming Radicalized in Japan: Learning What It Means to Be a Woman

In 1969, I was given some money to run away with, and did so. . . . In Japan, I learnt what it is to be a woman and became radicalized.

Angela Carter, Nothing Sacred (1982)

In 1969, Carter received the Somerset Maugham Travel Award--five hundred pounds that she used to escape from a marriage which by all indications was not especially a happy one.¹ The novelist used her prize-money as travel fare that took her to America and then Japan--the place where ultimately she learned what how it feels to be the "Other." Carter considered her stay in Japan a painful but enlightening experience that served to shape her female and political consciousness. For the first time in her life, she was regarded as a "coloured person" and "defined as a Caucasian before [she] was defined as a woman."²

During her two-year residence in Japan, Carter wrote a number of articles for the British magazine, New Society. These essays, later collected in, Nothing Sacred (1982), outline some of the author's ideas about femininity and family that were to become central in her later fiction. In an introductory remark to the essays that comprise the chapter entitled, "Oriental Romances," Carter declared that she wanted to experience living in a society that had never been tainted by Judaeo-Christian values. Although Carter, at twenty, had consciously rejected what she

considered “part of the equipment” that she grew up with, she acknowledged that she had retained some of her religious indoctrination on the subconscious level.³

While living in Japan, Carter experienced first hand the significance of being female in a country where repression operated in every sphere but the sexual, and where the destructive impulses of male sexuality were not restricted by social taboo. She disclosed that she was especially mystified by the society’s structure of interpersonal relationships between men and women. As Carter saw it, such a culture offered both sexes “a minimum of physical comfort and . . . a maximum of psychological discomfort” (Bell 27-28).

Carter was also greatly impacted by her constant sense of alienation and by the fact that she was viewed always as an outsider. As a Caucasian (or “coloured” as she describes herself in the 1970 essay “Tokyo Pastoral”), Carter was a stranger in a strange land, to wit, the “Other.”

He [a neighborhood youngster] glanced round and caught sight of me. He did not register shock but he vanished immediately. Then there was a silence and, shortly afterwards, a soft thunder of tiny footsteps. They groped round the windows, invisible, peering, and a rustle rose up, like the dry murmur of dead leaves in the wind, the rustle of innumerable small voices murmuring the word: ‘Gaijin, gaijin,

gaijin' (foreigner), in pure, repressed surprise. We spy
strangers. Asoka [which roughly translates as: "Well,
well, I never did"]. (32-33)

Carter's personal experience as outsider helped her better understand the position of Japanese women, and of women in general, as "Other." Nearly ten years after her experience in Japan, Carter recalled how agonizing it was for her to realize "that most people on this planet are *not* Caucasian and have no reason to either love or respect Caucasians."⁴

Because she was not fluent in Japanese, Carter was compelled to try to understand things simply by looking at them very, very carefully. What she called her "involuntary apprenticeship in the interpretation of signs," I see as an exercise that sensitized her to the importance of the latent content of image (28). As her essay "People as Pictures" (1970) reveals, Carter was already beginning to analyze cultural "signs," or what structuralists call "icons."⁵

Irezumi, the art of Japanese tattooing, very much fascinated Carter, who appreciated that the process "paints with pain upon a canvas of flesh" (33) and transforms its subject into a magnificent work of art. In her view, "*irezumi* bears the same relation to the floral heart on the forearm of a merchant seaman as does the Sistine Chapel to the graffiti on the lavatory wall" (33). Though the practice in the early seventies was already in decline, Carter saw examples of *irezumi* on men at beaches, construction sites, and public baths, where the tattoos were often

exhibited proudly as the “occupational badges” of carpenters, laborers, gangsters, and gamblers. Emblematic of the victim’s masochism and caste, the skin art, Carter speculated (with some irony?), may have been a form of investment or of life insurance. (Carter visited a museum in Tokyo devoted to the collection of such “skins” that were bought in the heyday of the practice when enthusiasts would commission the art right off a man’s back and wait for him to die.)

Carter also theorized that *irezumi* served the Japanese as a way of covering the naked body, since traditionally “the Japanese have always felt a lack of interest, verging on repugnance, at the naked human body” (35). Carter reasoned that

[A] man who has been comprehensively tattooed . . .
 can hardly be said to be naked, for he may never
 remove this most intimate and gaily coloured of
 garments. Stark he may be, but always decent, and
 therefore never ashamed. He will never look
 helplessly, defenselessly, indelicately, nude. *Irezumi*
 . . . provides the potentially menacing human form
 with an absolute disguise. In Japan, the essence is
 often the appearance” (35-36).

This relationship between the essence and appearance is an idea that much preoccupied Carter in the novels written subsequent to her Japanese experience. In

these works, particularly in Heroes and Villains (1969/1971) and The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (1972), tattooing often signals an overall transformation (see Chapter 4).

Like *irezumi*, the Japanese comics influenced the author's work in many ways. "Once More into the Mangle" (1971) is an essay about this art form, which Carter discovered was devoted to the "uncensored, raw subject-matter of dream" and "unabashed scatological humor." Undoubtedly, these comics appealed to the writer's penchant for the bawdy and irreverent as effective "escape valves" for repressed fears and desires (44). The Japanese comics offer readers explicit sexual advice, humorous cartoons, and glossy pin-ups, to boot. Prevailing acts of violence, mutilation, and death are targeted directly against women, especially against bar-hostesses and school girls. Carter described these picture strips as a "*vade mecum* to the latent content of life--pictorial lexicons of the most ferocious imagery of desire, violence and terror, erupting amid gouts of gore, red-hot from the unconscious" (39). Carter was shocked to find that these publications, which appeared to her to be aimed at crazed sex maniacs, were considered respectable reading material for the average Japanese male.

What is actually going on in the pictures often looks
rather odd to me because I cannot read Japanese.
When a translation is provided, it usually turns out to
be worse than I could have imagined. Why isn't this

girl fighting back during a gang rape? Because they
 forethoughtfully dislocated all her limbs, first. Why is
 this weeping old lady in bed with this wild-eyed boy?
 She is his mother; she has given herself to him as
 rough-and-ready therapy for his persistent voyeurism.
 Can this really, truly, be a close-up of a female orifice?
 Yes. It can. (41)

In addition to the horrific element presented in the pictorial content of the comic strips. Carter was introduced to the power of the so-called “marvelous” image that she incorporated into the surrealistic descriptions of her subsequent writing. In the samurai comics of Hachiro Tanaka, in particular, Carter encountered “[w]oman as a masochistic object” (42). The author identified the typical, baby-faced heroine in Tanaka’s strips as follows:

Formed only to suffer, she is subjected to every
 indignity. Forced to take part in group sex where it is
 hard to tell whose breast belongs to whom, her lush
 body unwillingly hired out to reptilian and obese old
 men, the eyes of a Tanaka woman leak tears, and her
 swollen lips perpetually shape a round ‘o’ of woe, until
 the inevitable denouement, where she is emphatically
 stuck through with a sword, or her decapitated but still

weeping head occupies one of his favorite freeze-frames. But, whichever way the women go, they all go through the mangle--unless they are very wicked indeed; when they obey the Sadeian law and live happily ever after. (42)

The “Sadeian law”--an appropriation of male power--is an idea that greatly absorbed Carter, who at the time was working on a study of the Marquis de Sade. The recurring themes of bondage and mutilation Carter interpreted as a deep-rooted fear in Japanese men of “the feminine principle.”⁶ Clearly, the concept that a victimized woman must figure out a way “to take control of the whip” (an idea which Carter developed in her 1978 treatise on pornography, The Sadeian Woman) was already beginning to take root (see Chapter 5).

These adult comics also unveiled to Carter the fact that the popular European formula of “happily ever after” was customarily repudiated by the Japanese.⁷ In Japan, Carter’s essay reveals, love is a tragic, fated passion. Everyone suffers, yet, heroically, everyone continues to love. Carter considered her affair with a Japanese national (with whom she lived for a year) as a happy but complicated relationship.

I learned more and more about the horror of being Japanese, of being a Japanese man, of the Procrustean bed of the traditional mores. But I was very happy

most of the time, though it was always a complicated, feverish kind of happiness, because it was the kind of savage excitement an explorer feels in virgin land. There was a dreadful confusion of expectations and I never knew what was going to happen next, because of the confusion. It was both an enriching and a devastating experience, and in many ways it was an affair with Japan itself. (Bell 27)

What she learned about Japanese men, whom as a race she found “very beautiful,” is that they could not cope with women as their equals.

In general, Japanese men seem to find women who cannot be easily categorized as either wives or mothers a great threat. And wives, to a very large extent, become mothers--mother substitutes. . . . And Japanese mothers indoctrinate their sons so well with the notion they are the lords of creation that they imbibe the notion of absolute male supremacy with their mother's milk. (Bell 29)

As much as Carter came to disdain the chauvinist attitude of Japanese men, she pitied “those poor, overmothered boy babies who get all that female repression and frustration worked out on them” and who “love and venerate their father figures so

much because they want to murder them” (Bell 29-30). Carter explored the consequences of both circumstances through the character of Jewel in Heroes and Villains (see Chapter 4).

Some years later, Carter discussed how she came to admire the Japanese acceptance of a family structure that differed radically from her own.

When I lived in Japan, I learned to admire their tolerant acceptance of the involuntary nature of family life. Love in the sense of passionate attachment has nothing to do with it; the Japanese even have a different verb to define the arbitrary affection that grows among these chance juxtapositions of intimate strangers.⁸

As she disclosed in her essay “Poor Butterfly” (1972), Carter learned much more about the “chance juxtaposition of intimate strangers” during her five-night stint as a bar-hostess at Butterfly (an exclusive club where Japanese businessmen could purchase the services of charming young women who would light their cigarettes, pour their drinks, and laugh at their jokes.) The essay begins by relating two episodes that in Carter’s estimation accurately reflected the country’s general attitude toward women. We are told that when a class of Japanese law students were asked to identify the one quality required in a wife, one of them seriously replied, “Slavery. I can get everything else I need from bar-hostesses” (44).

Several years later, Carter herself made a similar observation when describing the attitude Japanese men have toward women.

Japanese men often treat women who can't be classified as mother or surrogate mother as ambulant sexual orifices and regard any manifestation of intellectual activity or even proper female pride in a woman with open amazement and ferocious derision, as if such a thing were a threat to the very fabric of the world. So they want to relegate women to two simple positions--on their backs, or at the sink--so they [the men] can feel safe. (Bell 29)

The essay recounts as well a visit that Carter made to a local festival's shooting gallery, where the players, hoping to win cuddly stuffed dolls, aimed their air-guns at china statuettes of naked women. Contemplating this scene, which she likely observed with mixed amusement and horror, Carter commented, "This seemed to me a fitting parable of the battle of the sexes in Japan. True femininity is denied an expression and women, in general, have the choice of becoming either slaves or toys" (45). Then thirty-two, the writer marked her comprehension of such gender politics as an "epiphanic revelation" (45). It was an insight that subsequently informed all of Carter's writing.

As Carter was soon to experience first hand, bar-hostesses did, indeed, provide Japanese men with that which they would not dare to ask for from their wives--“an evening of innocent fun, watered whisky and the company of complaisant young women trained in the art of decorously lewd conversation” (46). She came to understand that the men who frequented Butterfly and other such clubs were all so hungry for attention that they didn’t mind the impersonal nature of the exchange. Carter also detected that the requirements for the ideal hostess are pretty much universal; she jokingly suggested that if the country ever needed a boost in its economy, it could construct and mass-produce “computerized playmates” equipped with the following features:

a large pair of breasts, with which to comfort and delight the clients; one dexterous, well-manicured hand for pouring their drinks, lighting their cigarettes and popping forkfuls of food into their mouths; a concealed tape-recording of cheerful laughter, to sustain the illusion that the girls themselves are having a good time; and a single, enormous, very sensitive ear for the clients to talk at. (46)

Treated as non-persons who are touched and fondled openly, Japanese bar-hostesses were paid to reciprocate the petting so that customers and hostesses alike became “interchangeable commodities” (47). Rather unsure, at first, as to which

sex was being exploited most, Carter concluded that the Japanese hostess was most valued as “a masturbatory device for gentlemen” (50).⁹

Carter left Japan in 1972 but returned two years later for a brief holiday. During her second visit, she attended a carnival, just outside the city of Nagoya, which she described in her essay “Fertility Festival”(1974). The highlight of this annual jubilee--which celebrates the wedding of two Japanese mythic gods--is the procession of a wooden phallus of immense proportion from the male shrine to the nearby female temple, where a rock that is shaped like the female orifice is housed. As Carter’s language humorously describes, the climactic moment sends the crowd into a frenzy.

Now. Ah! Cheers and lewd cries. The crowd jumps up and down and climbs over itself to fire off its cameras in the direction of the Mighty Cock, as, serene, radiant, triumphant, an explicit glory of varnished wood, golden brown in color, it sails over their heads. Good heavens, it is eight feet long. Nine feet long. Ten feet long? Immensely long! In a palanquin borne by jovial, obscene ancients, laughing and showing their teeth. The round tip and the immense superstructure of the Mighty Cock emerges from the white curtains of the palanquin. And the

ancients shift it this way and that way, so that it seems

to move about according to a life of its own. (56)

Carter recreated similar rituals of “the Mighty Cock” in The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman (1972) and The Passion of New Eve (1977), works which challenge phallocentric values (see Chapter 4).

Interestingly, as a result of her experiences in Japan, Carter found a new voice with which to speak out against the sexual objectification of women. Her fiction suddenly reflected an unprecedented sensitivity to feminist issues. Many of the short stories collected in Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces (1974), some of which have an autobiographical quality, examine the subordinate position of women in Japanese society. Three of these stories, “A Souvenir of Japan,” “The Smile of Winter,” and “Flesh and the Mirror,” resonate with Carter’s misgivings about a culture that the author experienced as blatantly hostile towards women.

“A Souvenir of Japan,” the first of this semi-confessional trilogy, depicts the relationship between a foreigner (presumably Carter) and her younger, Japanese lover. The narrator explains that by having taken her to see the fireworks, her partner believes that he has satisfied his obligation toward her for the evening and that consequently he is free to roam the streets in search of adventure for the remainder of the night. The young woman’s musing delineates clearly the position of the wife in Japanese society.

[H]is duty by me was done. He had taken me out for the evening and now he wanted to be rid of me. Or so I saw it. The word for wife, *okusan*, means the person who occupies the inner room and rarely, if ever, comes out of it. Since I often appeared to be his wife, I was frequently subjected to this treatment, though I fought against it bitterly. (3-4)

Fighting, however, does the protagonist no good in a place that proclaims itself a man's country with an annual celebration of "Boys' Day." When the narrator first arrives in Tokyo, she is welcomed by cloth carps fluttering from the garden poles of families fortunate enough to have borne sons. She thinks, "At least they do not disguise the situation. At least one knows where one is. Our [female] polarity was publicly acknowledged and socially sanctioned" (7). Even the textbooks, the narrator tells us, blatantly perpetuate Japanese patriarchy.

I once found in a textbook a sentence which, when translated, read: "In a society where men dominate, they value women only as the object of men's passions." If the only conjunction possible to us was that of the death-defying somersault of love, it is, perhaps, a better thing to be valued only as an object of passion than never to be valued at all. I had never been

so absolutely the mysterious other. I had become a kind of phoenix, a fabulous beast; I was an outlandish jewel. He found me, I think, inexpressibly exotic. But I often felt like a female impersonator in Japan. (7-8)

The narrator's last comment points to some of the insecurity and low self-image with which Carter herself was grappling at the time.¹⁰ The above-cited passage, like the one below, discloses how disconcerting it was for the author to feel so different and so much the outsider.

In the department store there was a rack of dresses labeled: "For Young and Cute Girls Only." When I looked at them, I felt as gross as Glumdalclitch [one of the giants from Jonathan Swifts' Gulliver's Travels]. I wore men's sandals because they were the only kind that fitted me and, even so, I had to take the largest size. My pink cheeks, blue eyes and blatant yellow hair made of me, in the visual orchestration of this city in which all heads were dark, eyes brown and skin monotone, an instrument which played upon an alien scale. In a sober harmony of subtle plucked instruments and wistful flutes, I blared. (8)

Carter, in her later fiction, reworked this idea of the stranger through her use of the grotesque. By means of exaggeration, she began to reposition the outsider to a more central location of increased visibility and significance. This is especially true of Fevvers, the allegedly winged *aerialiste* from Nights at the Circus (see Chapter 8).

In the story “Souvenir of Japan,” however, it is similarity, not “Otherness,” that draws the narrator to her Japanese lover.¹¹ The young man’s allure stems more from her desire (unconscious though it might be) to attach herself to someone whose “passive cruel sweetness” evokes “the repressed masochism” with which she has for so long identified (6). Her need to be loved is almost desperate. We suspect that, as do some of the adolescent heroines of Carter’s early novels, this young woman has fantasized about a lover for so long that she now feels compelled to convince us, as well as herself, that this time he actually exists. The foreigner concedes, “At times, I thought I was inventing him as I went along . . . so you will have to take my word for it that we existed” (9). So afraid is she of losing him that she would prefer to possess him as a specimen rather than enjoy him, even if temporarily, as a real person. She says, “I should have liked to have him embalmed and been able to keep him beside me in a glass coffin, so that I could watch him all the time and he would not have been able to get away from me” (7). (As we will see in the next chapter, Carter repeated these words, almost verbatim,

in Heroes and Villains, when Marianne describes her synchronous attraction/repulsion to Jewel.)

As this story approaches its end, the narrator realizes that what there is between her and her lover is more the idea of love rather than the essence of emotion. She asks herself, “[At what point] does a pretense of feeling, maintained with absolute conviction, become authentic?” (11). Ultimately, the narrator accepts that she, too, is being “loved” not for herself but as the embodiment of something that her partner fabricates out of his own need. Just as all along she has valued him as a necessary romantic ideal, so he has reduced her to an “object of passion” that he believed would inevitably cause him pain” (12). Not surprisingly, such a relationship is fragile, at best. The story closes with the following paragraph:

His contagious conviction that our love was unique and desperate infected me with an anxious sickness; soon we would learn to treat one another with the circumspect tenderness of comrades who are amputees, for we were surrounded by the most moving images of evanescence, fireworks, morning glories, the old, children. But the most moving of these images were the intangible reflections of ourselves we saw in one another’s eyes, reflections of nothing but appearances,

in a city dedicated to seeming, and, try as we might to possess the essence of each other's otherness, we would inevitably fail. (13)

This notion that the appearance of something is often mistaken for that which it represents, especially with respect to the essence of femininity, is an idea that Carter probed further in her next series of novels (see Chapter 4).

The idea of otherness still haunted Carter in the second, lyrical piece set in Japan, entitled "The Smile of Winter." The narrator (presumably the same nameless woman of the previous story) has gone off to the coast in order to wallow in loneliness. Again the outsider, she is acutely self-conscious about her difference. She is disquieted that the children giggle when they see her because she is "white and pink while they themselves are such a serviceable, unanimous beige" (42). She embraces her melancholia for most of the narrative, during which she romanticizes her role as the rejected lover.

This is, after all, the season of abandonment, of the suspension of vitality, a long cessation of vigor in which we must cultivate our stoicism. Everything has put on the desolate smile of winter. Outside my shabby front door, I have a canal, like Mariana [also deserted by her lover] in a moated grange; beyond the

skulking pines at the back, there is only the ocean. The
winter moon pierces my heart. I weep. (44)

Her loneliness is exacerbated by her feeling of inadequacy as a woman. She notices the “raucously silent, and well-muscled, intimidating [Japanese] women” who tend to the drying fish that will be sold for soup flavoring, and tries to reconcile what she imagines the essence of femininity to be with her own femininity (or lack thereof), and with the femininity of the Japanese women whom she observes.

The cruel wind burns port-wine whorls on their dour,
inexpressive faces They are truculent and
aggressive. They stare at me with open curiosity
tinged with hostility They make me feel that
either I or they are deficient in femininity and I
suppose it must be I since most of them hump about an
organic lump of baby on their backs, inside their coats.
(46-47)

The traditionally prescribed essence of femininity--a sweet, seductive passivity--is absent in the physically strong and hard-working women whom the narrator regards, and with whom she in part identifies. Nonetheless, she concludes that they are more feminine than she is because they are mothers. Some years later, Carter theorized about the relationship of motherhood and femininity, claiming

that the one has very little to do with the other (see Chapter 5). In this story, however, Carter's narrator, convinced that she is unfeminine, sustains "the smile of winter" that she gladly wears.

"Flesh and the Mirror" is perhaps the most revealing of Carter's Japanese stories because it marks a significant moral shift in the author's attitude toward herself as an individual and, more specifically, as a woman. This work, also of the early seventies, celebrates carnal pleasure in a way that is unprecedented in Carter's earlier fiction. For the first time, Carter was writing about sexuality as being divorced from the guilt and sinfulness that traditionally were yoked to a Christian sensibility about sex.

The narrator of this short story, once again, is presumably Carter herself. The flashback account starts out in the first person with the narrator assuming the starring role in her own woeful drama. Having just returned to Japan after a visit home to England, she feels forlorn because her lover is not at the airport to meet her. Devastated by the possibility of having been forsaken, she takes a train to Tokyo, all the while relishing the "unpleasure" of her situation, and "sure that *that* was real life" (67).

As the heroine of her own romantic imaginings, the narrator retrospectively confesses that until the time of the incident which she is recounting, she had "never experienced experience *as* experience." Consequently, "living [had] never lived up to the expectations [she] had of it" (69). Throughout her life, the narrator

tells us that she “eyed the most marvelous adventures with the bored eye of the agent with the cigar watching another audition . . . [tapping] out the ash and [asking] of events: ‘What else can you do?’” (70). One encounter, in particular, precipitated for her a new outlook on life and a new understanding of herself.

Four pages into this eleven-page account, the narrator, who all along has been “pulling the strings of [her] own puppet,” switches gears and speaks from a more detached vantage point. She shifts from a first person perspective and assumes an outsider’s position, thereby observing herself from the third person. This shift from the first to third person suggests an ablution of emotional involvement that allows the “I” to observe the “she” without making a moral judgment. As her superego is cast away, the liberated “she” is free to live life as it comes, not according to her expectations of it. We learn that the narrator, dejected, goes off with a stranger to a hotel room, where she comes to contemplate her self’s relationship to her body.

The mirror [on the ceiling] annihilated time, place and person; at the consecration of this house, the mirror had been dedicated to the reflection of chance embraces. Therefore it treated flesh in an exemplary fashion, with charity and indifference.

The mirror distilled the essence of all the encounters of strangers whose perceptions of one

another existed only in the medium of the chance embrace, the accidental. During the durationless time we spent making love, we were not ourselves, whoever that might have been, but in some sense the ghosts of ourselves. But the selves we were not, the selves of our own habitual perceptions of ourselves, had a far more insubstantial substance than the reflections we were. The magic mirror presented me with a hitherto unconsidered notion of myself as I. Without any intention of mine, I had been defined by the action reflected in the mirror. I beset me. I was the subject of the sentence written on the mirror. I was not watching it. There was nothing whatsoever beyond the surface of the glass. Nothing kept me from the fact, the act; I had been precipitated into knowledge of the real conditions of living. (71)

This crucial passage signifies an acceptance in Carter's writing of woman as a sexual being.¹² Initially, the narrator-self of the story (Carter) cannot come to terms with herself as a woman who has physical, as well as emotional, needs and desires. Her immediate response is that she is acting out of character in the life she had previously watched herself perform.

Women and mirrors are in complicity with one another to evade the action I/she performs that she/I cannot watch, the action with which I break out of the mirror, with which I assume my appearance. But *this* mirror refused to conspire with me; it was like the first mirror I'd ever seen. It reflected the embrace beneath it without the least guile. All it showed was inevitable.

But I myself could never have dreamed it. (71)

The mirror is a particularly significant device for Carter, especially since mirrors are not in complicity with the lives we watch ourselves living/performing. Though the reflected image of the two lovers is an objective projection of two people coupling, the narrator cannot help but invest the image with a personal interpretation; what she sees reflected is her act of infidelity, which she cannot easily dismiss. She hurries off to find her lover, whom, she later realizes, she loved more for what he represented in her personal mythology than for who he really was. Toward the end of the story, she admits:

So I suppose I do not know how he really looked and, in fact, I suppose I shall never know, now, for he was plainly an object created in the mode of fantasy. His image was already present somewhere in my head and I was seeking to discover it in actuality, looking at

every face I met in case it was the right face--that is, the face which corresponded to my notion of the unseen face of the one I should love, a face created parthenogenetically by the rage to love which consumed me. So his self, and, by his self, I mean the thing he was to himself, was quite unknown to me. I created him solely in relation to myself, like a work of romantic art, an object corresponding to the ghost inside me. (74-75)

Caught up in her own romantic ideal of being in love (which does include recreational sex), this narrator has been programmed to respond according to only one script. In spite of the pleasure that she experiences during her impromptu liaison, she knows that under such circumstances the prescribed response is guilt.

I had felt nothing but pleasure when the young man who picked me up inserted his sex inside me in the blue-movie bedroom. I only grew guilty later, when I realized I had not felt in the least guilty at the time. And was I in character when I felt guilty or in character when I did not? I was perplexed. I no longer understood the logic of my own performance. My script had been scrambled behind my back. The

cameraman was drunk. The director had a *crise de nerfs* and had been taken away to a sanitarium. And my co-star had picked himself up off the operating table and painfully cobbled himself together again according to his own design! (75)

The above passage is an early example of Carter's jab at predetermined notions about the way women and men ought to behave, especially with regard to their sexuality. It is noteworthy, however, that though the author had begun to challenge certain sexual taboos, at this point in her writing it is only the male who is truly liberated to rewrite his own script. Although the female narrator recognizes that she is to a large extent defined by her flesh, her actions ultimately continue to be restricted by her own preconceived and artificial notions of femininity. In the closing lines of the story, the narrator says, "The most difficult performance in the world is acting naturally, isn't it? Everything else is artful" (77). This question and its answer came to preoccupy Carter in the fiction that she wrote after her experience in Japan.

"Notes"

¹ The author's marriage to Paul Carter lasted for 12 years, from 1960 to 1972.

² See Angela Carter's "Notes From the Front Line," in Michelene Wandor's On Gender and Writing, London: Pandora Press, p. 72.

³ See Carter's interview with Ronald Bell in The Japanese Experience, New York: Weatherhill, 1973, pp. 23-35.

⁴ "Notes From the Front Line," p. 72.

⁵ See Carter's essay on J. G. Ballard in Expletives Deleted, London: Chatto and Windus, 1992, pp. 44-50. See also Jonathan D. Culler's Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975.

⁶ Bell, p. 29.

⁷ Carter repeats this idea in her short story "A Souvenir of Japan," in Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces, London: Quartet Books, 1974, pp. 1-11.

⁸ This sense of tolerance--of making the most of what life brings--is something that the author resolutely embraces in her last work, Wise Children (see Chapter 7). See also Carter's "The Mother Lode" in Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings, London: Virago, 1982, p. 12.

⁹ Carter no doubt would have been amused to read about a new club in Tokyo where women can now purchase the same services. See article in The New York Times, entitled "Clubs Where, for a Price, Japanese Men Are Nice to Women," September 8, 1996, p. 49.

¹⁰ See Carter's "Sugar Daddy" in Ursula Owen's Fathers: Reflections by Daughters, New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, pp. 6-16.

¹¹ See Angela Carter's interview with Lorna Sage, "Savage Sideshow," The New Review 4/39-40 (July 1977): 51-7. See also Sage's Angela Carter, Plymouth, United Kingdom: Northcote House Publishers, 1994, and Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter, London: Virago Press, 1994.

¹² For a different reading of this story see Sage's Flesh and the Mirror, pp. 8-9.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Synthetic Authenticity”: The Essence of Gender in Carter’s Speculative Fiction

If a thing is sufficiently artificial, it becomes absolutely equivalent to the genuine.
Angela Carter, Heroes and Villains (1969)

The notion of a universality of female experience is a clever confidence trick
Angela Carter, The Sadeian Woman (1978)

Angela Carter left Japan in 1972, having lived for over two years in a country where she witnessed explicit hostility toward women. Consequently, when she returned home to England, she noticed with sharpened vision the covert misogyny of Western culture. Not surprisingly, she felt like a foreigner once again. She wrote, “I found myself in a new country. It was like waking up; it was a rude awakening.”¹

The novels that Carter wrote after her experience in Japan, Heroes and Villains (1969/1971), The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman (1972), and The Passion of New Eve (1977), illustrate the author’s attempt to look at and imagine the world differently. They also indicate that during this transitional period of the seventies, Carter’s method of investigation was changing. In these works Carter was experimenting with varying degrees of speculative writing--what she had defined as “the fiction of asking ‘what if?’”² Carter explained that she

desired “some new [artistic] form, which [would] approximate more closely to the actual real circumstances of our lives.”³

During her 1988 visit to the United States, Carter spoke with me about the influence that British writers of speculative fiction, J. G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock, had on her work, emphasizing the relationship between speculation and human behavior.

[T]hey were writing about ideas, and that was basically what I was trying to do. . . . Speculative fiction [is] the fiction of speculation, the fiction of asking “what if?” It's a system of continuing inquiry. In a way, all fiction starts off with “what if,” but some “what ifs” are more specific. . . . If you were half way good at writing fiction, you'd end up asking yourself and asking the reader actually much more complicated questions about what we expect from human relationships and what we expect from gender. (14)

In her own speculative fiction, Carter found a suitable means by which to explore the impact of culturally prescribed notions of gender by blending elements of the speculative with those of the fairy tale and the Gothic. The author spelled out her fascination with the fairy tale genre in the afterword to her short story collection, Fireworks, writing that the tale

interprets everyday experience through a system of imagery derived from subterranean areas behind everyday experience, and therefore the tale cannot betray its readers into a false knowledge of everyday experience. (133)

For reasons similar to the ones cited above, Carter was attracted to the Gothic tradition because of the form's tendency to move away from the traditional value systems associated with social institutions. As she further explained,

[The Gothic tradition] deals entirely with the profane. Its great themes are incest and cannibalism. Character and events are exaggerated beyond reality, to become symbols, ideas, passions. Its style will tend to be ornate, unnatural--and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the word as fact. Its only humor is black humor. It retains a singular moral function--that of provoking unease. (133)

With Heroes and Villains, Carter indeed provoked unease by presenting an apocalyptic vision of the world. Using elements of the fantastic and the surreal that allow for a restructuring of social systems, she set up a situation that examines the possibilities of a civilization not bound by an inherited social order. In Heroes and Villains, she scrutinized the institutions of marriage and

motherhood, and exposed myths surrounding womanhood and femininity as nothing more than culturally constructed rhetoric.

Departing from the more realistic conventions of her earlier works, Carter began to depict a speculative situation that, as the title suggests, insists upon a symbolic reading of the characters.⁴ Set in a post-Armageddon world, the novel presents two domains: the steel and concrete villages of the Professors (the Heroes) and the surrounding jungles of the tribal Barbarians (the Villains). We are told at the outset that “words had ceased to describe facts and now only stood for ideas or memories” (7). The hidden question posed by the author, however, is whether or not these labels are at all appropriate.

Heroes and Villains is the story of Marianne, who (as did Annabel in Love) must navigate through life making up the rules as she goes along. The daughter of a history professor, Marianne is introduced as follows: “Marianne had sharp, cold eyes and she was spiteful but her father loved her” (1). Delineated as a willful young woman, Marianne readily challenges or rejects ideas that she finds disagreeable. She pays little heed, for example, to her nurse’s cautionary tales about the dark-skinned Barbarians. Warned that she would be eaten by these same savages if she misbehaved, Marianne rebuts that even if she were to meet them face to face, she would “be too tough for them”(2).⁵ Secretly, however, she longs for just such a confrontation, if only to dispel her boredom, which in Carter’s fictional world signals both the need and desire to act out.

Marianne's first adventure occurs when, at six years old, she is punished for misbehaving and locked in a tower, as was the fairy tale character Rapunzel. While confined, Marianne witnesses her brother's violent slaughter by the neighboring tribe of Barbarians, who make a surprise attack on her village. From that day forward, she is haunted by recollections of this morbid scene and by the image of the handsome, if villainous, "barbarian" who murdered her brother. Marianne's attraction to and fear of this brute articulates Carter's fascination with the outsider--the attractive, sometimes dangerous, power of the unknown, the unusual, and the foreign.

By the time she turns sixteen, Marianne recognizes that she craves adventure and, more importantly, that she is fully prepared to go after it herself. She rejects her father's rational advice that, even if must compromise and "take the leavings" (11), she should marry one of the Professor's sons. She, however, sees no reason for such action, especially since she believes that marriage will only perpetuate her ennui.

"I don't want to marry," she said. "I don't see the point. I could maybe marry a stranger, someone from outside, but nobody here. Everybody here is so terribly boring, Father." (11)

This Carter girl wants excitement. As curious as Alice in Wonderland, and as eager as Little Red Riding Hood, Marianne ventures off into the woods to get a

glimpse of the Barbarians. Returning home, she learns that her father has been killed (Marianne's nurse kills him during a fit of senile frenzy) and that she must go and live with kin (as did Melanie in The Magic Toyshop). Faithful to the formulaic conventions of the fairy-tale form, Carter made sure to sever Marianne's enduring parental ties in order to facilitate the young heroine's initiation into adulthood. (The mother, we are told earlier, died while giving birth to Marianne's brother.)

Marianne, unlike Melanie, is an active agent of her own destiny. Longing for the sort of adventure that is typical only for young men of her community, Marianne initiates action instead of waiting for things to happen to her. For starters, she chops off her hair, thereby deliberately disposing one of the traditional signifiers of femininity and in a sense anticipating her impending sexual maturity. (In fairy tales, maidenhair often symbolizes virginity, as in the case of Rapunzel--whom in some ways Marianne resembles).⁶ Next, she decides to protect Jewel--the Barbarian who is accidentally left behind after a subsequent tribal attack on her village--by hiding him from the Professors. Feeling extremely alienated from her own clan, Marianne is initially propelled by her desire to fraternize with the enemy, though it is clear that she finds her ward at once attractive and repulsive. "There was nothing but custom to keep her in her village and nothing she wanted to take away with her" (18)--except, of course, her new-found sense of independence. Marianne runs away with Jewel, forewarning him that she is

leaving her village of her own free will and, more significantly, assuring him that she will survive under any circumstances. Filled with hopeful anticipation as well as fear of the unknown, Marianne travels to a new landscape that propounds a potentially new social order with different values and rules.

Marianne learns her first lesson from Mrs. Green, Jewel's foster mother. Mrs. Green (who precurses the character of Lizzie in Nights at the Circus) serves as the wise, maternal voice of experience. She feels protective of Marianne, perhaps because she too ran off with a Barbarian horseman in order to escape her own unpleasant, domestic circumstances. Accordingly, she demands that Jewel, whenever in the girl's presence, control his foul mouth and restrain his wandering hands. Marianne, as intruder, at once becomes a fearsome icon for Jewel's brothers, whom Mrs. Green calls "the wild boys." Marianne symbolizes the threatening powers of female sexuality, as well as the fear and indignation that, within the Freudian context of castration anxiety, men theoretically feel toward woman's life-giving capacity.⁷ When Jewel tells her that his siblings believe that "Professor women sprout sharp teeth in their private parts, to bite off the genitalia of young men"(49), Marianne recognizes her precarious situation and runs off into the forest. Jewel, then, must find, rape, and claim Marianne as his own in order to confirm his dominance over her and over women in general.

Carter's description of the rape (which describes the sexual act as one of violation rather than of pleasure) explodes any romantic expectations that Marianne may have had about a woman's loss of virginity.

Feeling between her legs to ascertain the entrance,
 [Jewel] thrust his fingers into the wet hole so roughly
 she knew what the pain would be like; it was scalding,
 she felt split to the core but she did not make a single
 sound for her only strength was her impassivity and
 she never closed her cold eyes Taken by force, the
 last shreds of interior flesh gave; he intended a
 violation and effected one; a tower collapsed upon her.

(55)

The focus of Marianne's sexual initiation ends up being "pain," "fear," and "flesh"--the stuff of human suffering, and the stuff, at least in Carter's fictional universes, that simultaneously gives life to her characters.

As incensed as Marianne is by Jewel's act of violence against her, she is further enraged when she learns that tribal custom dictates that she marry her attacker. The fact that she will then become "Queen of the midden," [a dunghill or kitchen refuse heap] (61), does not console her.⁸ Marianne's alternative, which she wisely rejects, is to burn at the stake. Spurred more by anger than by fear, Marianne decides that rather than be a "mute, furious doll which allowed itself to

be totally engulfed" (69), she would rely on her wits to make the best of her circumstances. When on her wedding night Jewel announces that he is too drunk to bed her, Marianne retorts, "One must be thankful for small mercies," making her husband laugh "with apparent genuine delight" (81) at her candid sarcasm.

This moment of honest communication, accompanied by Jewel's validation of his wife's intellect and wit, alters Marianne's feelings for her husband. Marianne suddenly finds herself attracted to Jewel, although she is not quite certain whether it is because of his unexpected acknowledgment of her as a thinking individual or simply because she has caught sight of his beautiful, naked body. The tables now turned, Jewel finds himself the object of his wife's desire, as she moves closer "to the magic source of attraction constituted by his brown flesh"(83). The language used by Carter to describe the couple's ensuing love-making differs radically from that used to describe Marianne's earlier rape.

Perhaps he was trying to make friends with her or perhaps he was trying to learn her. There was no pain this time. The mysterious glide of planes of flesh within her bore no relation to anything she had heard, read or experienced. She never expected such extreme intimations of pleasure or despair. If he was surprised at her response, he kept it to himself but when he withdrew he remained lying across her, covering her,

still fixing her with this same, assessing regard as
 though he were trying to see the web of tissue and
 muscle behind her eyes, or even more of her interior
 than that. (83)

Carter's language here is softer and more poetic, indicative of the change in mood that has taken place in the relationship. Subsequently, Jewel announces to his foster mother that Marianne will "do what she wants" (85), a concession that does not come easily for this new husband but one which attests to Marianne's considerable powers of persuasion.

Meanwhile, the tribe's attitude toward Marianne shifts immediately after she marries Jewel. As his wife, Marianne is no longer a threat because, "marriage had secularized her. She was still a stranger and hence fearful [sic], but now she was specifically Jewel's responsibility and evidently they trusted him to control her dubious magics" (87). Marianne, possibly because she fears Jewel's potential hold on her, learns to protect herself against her husband's mastery by denying him any existence beyond that of sexual object. For Jewel, though, sexual pleasure is ancillary to procreation, since only a son will ensure his status within his tribe's patriarchal system. He ostensibly claims that without a male heir, his position as the future leader of the tribe is jeopardized; but, when pressed, he admits (with some arrogance) that it is the satisfaction of "shoving a little [Jewel] up" his wife that motivates him.

Marianne, as a result, finds that she must constantly renegotiate her position in an environment where she is not welcome. As fearful of Jewel and his clan as they are of her, Marianne assumes different roles, vacillating between hunter and prey, in order to determine which suits her best. She says of her predicament,

When I was a little girl, we played at heroes and
villains but now I don't know which is which any
more, nor who is who, what can I trust if not
appearances. Because nobody can teach me which is
which nor who is who because my father is dead. (125)

This is precisely Carter's point. Without her father, a metaphor of Marianne's inherited patriarchal world, the heroine must make up her own rules as she goes along. Marianne glides in and out of different roles traditionally ascribed to a wife, trying to determine whether her relationship with her husband is based on practical need or physical desire.

Marianne's many roles include that of helper, lover, autonomous individual, devoted spouse, and harridan. As Jewel's helpmate, for example, she assists in divesting the village shaman, Donnaly, of all his mythic powers by burning the doctor's books, drugs, and amulets. As a lover, Marianne craves the erotic ecstasy that sex with Jewel provides, though she threatens Jewel with desertion if he repeats his violent act toward her. As a loving wife, Marianne instinctively rushes to his aid and saves him from drowning, but she scolds him, like a nagging shrew,

when he gets drunk. Marianne concludes that human relations are nothing if not complex, and that interactions with other persons change the individuals who are involved in significant ways.

Marianne experiences a confusion between need and desire that consumes her.

If it was only that she desired him, then it became a simple situation which she could perfectly resolve while continuing to despise him. But if he was necessary to her, that constituted a wholly other situation which raised a constellation of miserable possibilities each one indicating that, willy nilly, she would be changed. (134)

Ultimately, Marianne does not have to choose between autonomy and dependency, between desire and need. Carter has let her off the hook, arranging for Jewel to go off in pursuit of power.

In the story's final scene, Marianne is presented with greatly increased self-assurance and power. The protagonist is significantly (but ironically) situated in the kitchen. Though stirring a pot of stew, Marianne, who is also pregnant with Jewel's child, hardly represents the idealized icon of domesticity. Evoking more the image of a witch and her cauldron, Marianne in the end is depicted as a woman who must be reckoned with, if not altogether feared. When circumstances put her

at the mercy of her husband's brothers (Jewel, we learn, is killed in his pursuit of power), Marianne is determined to persevere. She warns, "[t]hey won't get rid of me as easily as that. I shall stay here and frighten them so much they'll do every single thing I say . . . I'll be the tiger lady and rule them with a rod of iron" (150). The novel ends with an interesting twist of traditional gender role expectations as Marianne assumes the powerful role of aggressor that is necessary to her survival.

Carter's conclusion suggests that the concepts of heroes and villains are abstract ideas similar to the constructs of femininity and masculinity. Using parody and exaggeration, Carter set out in Heroes and Villains to assault accepted ideologies of gender politics. By stretching human relationships almost to the point of the grotesque, Carter resisted the concept of moral valuations as universal. Furthermore, she dismantled received gender stereotypes by exposing them as empty rhetoric.

The author continued her investigation of cultural mythology in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (1972). Lengthy and overwritten (sounding much a literary psychedelic trip), the plot runs amok, and many of the passages turn out to be prosaic speculations on language and dream theory.⁹ The novel is important, nevertheless, because it exemplifies Carter's experimentation with different literary forms, chiefly magic realism. The work is also a continuation of the author's exploration of what she called the "artificiality" of gender. Two characters, in particular, Desiderio and Albertina, pave the way for

the creation of the “New Eve” in Carter’s subsequent novel, The Passion of New Eve.

As the story begins, the central character Desiderio (the desirable one) recounts the picaresque adventures of his youth when his city had become “a timeless place outside the world of reason” (36). Then twenty-four, Desiderio had found himself trapped in a world of “actualized desire” (11), where nothing was as it seemed. Now, fifty years later, he is recalling the Reality War that took place between the diabolical Dr. Hoffman, who caused a “phantasmagoric redefinition” (18) of their city by transforming it into a world of objectified desire, and the Minister of Determination, who tried desperately to restore reason and “statis” (perfection and propriety) to the town.

Desiderio tells us that as secretary to the Minister of Determination, he was commissioned to assassinate Dr. Hoffman by posing as the Inspector of Veracity. Hoffman, who believed that “all the objects are emanations of a single desire” (14), had invented a cancer-causing virus of the mind that made the cells of the imagination run wild. Using enormous generators that produce illusions, he figured out how to modify “the nature of reality” and make things appear as they were not (17). Desiderio recalls how one day “the shadows began to fall subtly awry and a curious sense of strangeness invaded everything” (15) as street lamps blossomed into flowers, hats transformed into heads, rivers ran backwards, and animals jumped out off a painted canvas. Desiderio, himself, attests to the bizarre

occurrence during a performance of Mozart's The Magic Flute, when members in the audience metamorphosed into peacocks.

Desiderio's adventurous quest for Hoffman was for Carter an effective framework by which the author was able to examine various cultural myths about family and gender. Every juncture of the character's journey brings him face to face with different societies and their respective value systems. Most significant among the individuals that Desiderio meets is Dr. Hoffman's daughter, Albertina, with whom he becomes infatuated. Albertina, who assumes different disguises throughout the story, crosses gender boundaries with frequency and ease. Her "synthetically authentic" transformations reflect the author's probing examination of the essence of gender and the question of erotic pleasure.¹⁰

The structure of the journey is also a useful vehicle for Desiderio's edification as he proceeds to witness how images of female sexuality usually tend to be pornographic or violent. His first stop on this sojourn is a boardwalk peep-show whose purpose "is to demonstrate the difference between saying and showing. Signs speak. Pictures show" (47). Carter's aim was to "show" Desiderio (and thereby the reader) how culture deconstructs "woman," reducing her to individual body parts that are significant only as objects of sexual pleasure or consumption. Desiderio's entrance into the peepshow exhibit, which is described below, marks the beginning of his "feminization."

The legs of a woman, opening and closing as if to admit a lover, formed a curvilinear triumphal arch. The feet were decorated with spike-heeled, black leather pumps. This anatomical section, composed of pinkish wax dimpled at the knee, did not admit the possibility of the existence of a torso. A bristling pubic growth rose to form a kind of coat of arms above the circular proscenium it contained at either side but, although the hairs had been inserted one by one in order to achieve the maximal degree of verisimilitude, the overall effect was one of stunning artifice. (44)

Desiderio moves through the rest of the exhibit, viewing miscellaneous pornographic images. He sees two female breasts in a cut-glass dessert dish being served up as two scoops of vanilla ice-cream, each topped with a single red cherry. Even more graphic is the headless body of a mutilated woman lying in a pool of blood, her right breast torn open to reveal two pieces of sirloin and her belly continuously being stabbed by a spring-activated knife. At the next station a head (presumably belonging to the victim of previous tableau) is suspended in midair; its eyes are closed, and blood is dripping into an unseen bucket. These images of dismembered female body parts invite penetration, consumption, destruction--the absolute annihilation of the female sexual being. By contrast, the

exhibit's sole image of male sexuality--a candle in the shape of an enormous penis in a state of tumescence--celebrates power and control. Even the name of the display, "The Key to the City," suggests the advantages of having such an appendage. At this point in his journey Desiderio is forced to see that without meaningful communication (dare I say love?) the wax figures of the last exhibit (wherein man and woman are engaged in nonstop sexual coupling) are "not so much erotic as pathetic, poor palmers of desire who never bulged as much as an inch on their endless pilgrimage" (46). The protagonist's training, however, is far from complete.

Desiderio's next meaningful adventure is foreshadowed by the poster advertising an all-new peep-show. Again the viewer, like Desiderio, is invited "to see." The poster clamors for the audience's attention by proclaiming: SEE A YOUNG GIRL'S MOST SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE IN LIFELIKE COLOURS. The different stations of the exhibit read as follows: HUSH! SHE IS SLEEPING!; I COME!; A KISS CAN WAKE HER; and DEATH AND THE MAIDEN. The previous night, we learn, Desiderio himself had become the object of a young woman's sexual desires while he was a guest at the home of Mendoza (a possible link to the evil Dr. Hoffman). Mendoza's daughter, Mary Anne, sleepwalked into Desiderio's room uninvited, carrying (most symbolically) a rose that pricked the confused, but instantly excited, guest. Desiderio at once proceeded to "penetrate her sighing flesh" in what was for him "a dream in actuality" (56).

The next day his dream turns into a nightmare when he discovers that Mary Anne's unconscious body has washed up on the nearby shore; his efforts to revive her shocked him into a horrifying realization.

I crouched over the sea-gone wet doll in an attitude I knew to be a cruel parody of my own the previous night, my lips pressed to her mouth, and it came to me there was hardly any difference between what I did now and what I had done then, for her sleep had been her death. (61)

Though Desiderio does contemplate the extent of his culpability in the girl's death, he does not yet fully understand the implications of his previous night's encounter until much later in the novel. At this point, determined to avoid criminal charges that included having sex with a minor, drowning, and practicing necrophily, Desiderio runs. He evades Hoffman's Determination Police, first by hiding in the chimney of the Mayor's office, and then by riding to freedom on a stolen bicycle.

Desiderio is aided in his escape by an Indian bargemaster, Noa-Kurai, who takes him aboard his boat to live among the river people of an Amerindian tribe. While living with them, Desiderio learns another lesson regarding the objectification of women. He realizes that the tribal women all move in the same, stereotypical way, "like benign automata, so what with that and their musical box speech, it was quite possible to feel they were not fully human" (73). In fact, it

takes Desiderio quite some time before he can distinguish the individual faces of the women who were heavily made up like “pierrots in a masquerade” (76). This experience aids Desiderio’s awareness of how gender-specific behavior had been assigned arbitrarily by the likes of “hawk-nosed elders who handled traditional lore” (70), those of a culture whose social system perpetuated sovereignty and prosperity for males, dependence and suffering for females.

Desiderio also finds out that in this society the father makes all the decisions and the son-in-law inherits the wife’s fortune. Much to his surprise, as soon as he voices his attraction for Noa-Kurai’s eldest daughter Aoi, Desiderio finds himself immediately betrothed to the nubile nine-year old, who (he is rather shocked to discover) has been well schooled in the ways of pleasing a man. Each night after their engagement, Aoi goes to him speaking words that she has memorized as if from a script. Desiderio observed that

she was rather more solemn than usual but still she seemed to have studied every word and movement from a book of manners. Mama must have taught her everything. When I climbed into bed beside her, she snuggled very prettily in my arms, reached down for my penis in a very businesslike way and began to stroke it with considerable dexterity. (83)

One evening, having dared to examine her “diminutive slit,” Desiderio is astonished to discover that “her clitoris was as long as [his] little finger” (84). His surprise is assuaged by Mama, Aoi’s grandmother, who, attempting to validate the tribal practice, invites him to inspect her own long projection. Mama explains that it

was the custom for mothers of young girls to manipulate their daughters’ private parts for a regulation hour a day from babyhood upwards, coaxing the sensitive little projection until it attained lengths the river people considered both aesthetically and sexually desirable. (84)

At first, Desiderio cannot believe his good fortune. After a short while, however, his compulsory trysts with Mama (every morning in the galley) make Desiderio “feels like a love slave” (85). Disturbed as he is by the signification of himself as sex object, he makes yet another run for it; he suspects that as a “feared, mysterious dweller . . . who owned the most precious, most arcane knowledge they could only gain for themselves by desperate measures” he will inevitably end up as the river peoples’ next meal (91).

Desiderio assumes a new identity as the nephew and assistant to the peep-show proprietor (who, he discovers, is Hoffman’s affiliate) and later travels with the old man from one fairground to another to exhibit their display. They

fraternize with the carnival grotesques whose physical deformities are for Carter a means of exploring the idea of “otherness” with which, both as writer and individual, she had been much preoccupied.¹¹

One of the freaks that Desiderio encounters is Madame la Barbe, another Carter character who uses her body as commodity. The following paragraph draws the parallel between the experience of this Bearded lady and that of a prostitute, since both earn their livelihood as objects of the male gaze.

[Madame la Barbe] exposed her difference to make her living and had done so for thirty years, yet each time the gawking peasants came into her booth as she posed for them in white satin and artificial orange blossom, the Bearded Bride felt all the pangs of defloration although, of course, she was a virgin. “Each time,” she said in her prettily broken accent, “a fresh violation.

One is penetrated by their eyes.” (106)

A few pages later (perhaps in what was Carter’s attempt to counteract Madame la Barbe’s pitiable circumstances), another female grotesque is delineated from a different perspective. The ferocious Mamie Buckskin, who boasts both feminine and masculine characteristics, is described as follows:

Her rifles were fire-spitting extensions of her arms and her tongue also spat fire. She always dressed herself in

fringed leather garments of the pioneers of the old West yet her abundant yellow hair was always curled and swept up in the monumental style of the saloon belle while a very feminine locket containing a picture of her dead, alcoholic mother always bounced between her lavish breasts. She was a paradox--a fully phallic female with the bosom of a nursing mother and a gun, death-dealing erectile tissue, perpetually at her thigh. She was twenty-eight years old and as impervious as if shellacked. (108)

Carter's description of Mamie Buckskin as a "paradox" problematizes essentialist notions of gender by demonstrating the fluidity with which Carter was able to construct and deconstruct "fixed" gender roles. Additionally, through the character of Mamie Buckskin, who lovingly oils and fingers each one of her fifty antique pistols, rifles, and revolvers, Carter succeeded in appropriating for women the power usually associated with these phallic weapons.¹²

Desiderio, one step further along on his journey of re-education, at the end of the chapter, is raped by the Moroccan Acrobats of Desire. This episode serves as his moment of climax, so to speak, though for him the experience was anything but pleasurable.

The pain was terrible. I was most intimately ravaged I do not know how many times. I wept, I bled, slobbered and pleaded but nothing would appease a rapacity as remorseless and indifferent as the storm which raged outside and now reached a nightmarish hurricane They were inexhaustible fountains of desire and I soon ceased to be conscious of my body, only of the sensation of an arsenal of swords piercing sequentially that most private and unmentionable of apertures. (117)

Had the speaker not been identified, the reader could easily construe the above passage as being told by a woman who had just been gang raped. Desiderio's experience, which parodies the condition of many women, is a prerequisite to his growth. In other words, having been "fucked," Desiderio is more capable of understanding the consequences of reducing women to nothing more than objects of male desire.

As the novel progresses, we are introduced to Albertina, who will serve as the guide for Desiderio's coming adventures. Albertina is disguised as Lafleur, a driver for the Count, the character whom Desiderio confronts next. The Count, who parodies the Marquis de Sade, is described as "excessively vulgar in every respect" (123). He outwardly condemns everything except the "death-defying

double somersault of love" (124), Carter's metaphor for "risk taking."¹³ He boasts of a ferocious desire that, in essence, defines his existence.

I have devoted my life to the humiliation and exaltation of the flesh. I am an artist; my material is the flesh; my medium is destruction; and my inspiration is nature I always exist in a state of dreadful tension. My crises render me utterly bestial and in that state I am infinitely superior to man, as the tiger, who preys on man if he has any sense, is superior. My anguish is the price of my exaltation.

(126)

The tiger, the author's emblem for the Count's desires, evokes the bestial but holy nature of William Blake's "tyger," which lies in each of us and which Carter believed we must acknowledge.

Desiderio's next fiasco in the House of Anonymity allows him to become just that--anonymous. It is at this establishment, which is a house of prostitution, where the Count and Desiderio experience the erotic pleasures of the Bestial Room, where the ladies of the night are kept in cages. Observing that these women resemble "wax mannequins of love" that stand as still as statues (131), Desiderio is further sensitized to the consequences of reducing women to the function of their flesh. Each of the prostitutes

was as circumscribed as a figure in rhetoric and you could not imagine they had names, for they had been reduced by the rigorous discipline of their vocation to the undifferentiated essence of the idea of the female. This ideational femaleness took amazingly different shapes though its nature was not that of Woman; when I examined them more closely, I saw that none of them were any longer, or might never have been, woman. All, without exception, passed beyond or did not enter the realm of simple humanity. They were sinister, abominable, inverted mutations, part clockwork, part vegetable, part brute. (132)

When he notices that one of the women is torn and bleeding, he experiences the “most dramatic revelation of the nature of meat” that he had ever seen (133). Desiderio’s epiphany continues as the trio flees from the brothel, which has been set on fire by the Count’s twin brother.

A hurricane quite literally sweeps Desiderio and his two travel companions to the shores of Africa where they are greeted by a tribe of Amazon women. These women are “elderly and steatopygous . . . the shapes of ripe pears bursting with juice, and their wrinkled dugs [breasts] swung loosely back and forth” (156). Their chieftain turns out to be none other than the Count’s pyromaniac twin. He

specifies to the three visitors the advantages of having an army comprised exclusively of “the gentler sex.”

Gentlemen, if you rid your hearts of prejudice and examine the bases of the traditional notions of the figure of the female, you will find you have founded them all on the remote figure you thought you glimpsed, once, in your earlier childhood, bending over you with an offering of warm, sugared milk, crooning a soft lullaby while, by her hallowed presence she kept away the snakes that writhed beneath the bed. Tear this notion of the mother from your hearts. Vengeful as nature herself, she loves her children only in order to devour them better and if she herself rips her own veils of self-deceit, Mother perceives in herself untold abysses of cruelty as subtle as it is refined. Not one of my callipygian soldiery but has not earned her rank by devouring alive, first gnawing limb from limb and sucking the marrow from its bones, her first-born child. So she earns her colours. To a woman, they are absolutely ruthless. They have passed far beyond all human feeling. (160)

This passage is key to our understanding of Carter's analysis of the Marquis de Sade's writing as functioning "in the service of women." The idea that motherhood is a description of a physical act as opposed to a romantic ideal is one that Carter developed in great detail in her polemic The Sadeian Woman (1978), which is discussed in the following chapter.

As Desiderio's story approaches its conclusion, Desiderio and his beloved Albertina travel to the Land of Nebulous Time, where they meet tattooed centaurs who preach many of the religious tenets that Carter had by now rejected in her own life. Targeted against the Judaeo-Christian principles with which the author was indoctrinated, Carter's profane and irreverent language reminds us that "nothing is sacred."¹⁴

They prized fidelity above all other virtues. An unfaithful wife was flayed alive and her hide given to her husband to cover his next marriage bed, a mute deterrent to his new bride to keep from straying, while her lover was castrated and forced to eat his own penis, uncooked. (174)

In a subsequent scene that juxtaposes sensations of pleasure with pain, the centaurs gang-rape Albertina while they lick Desiderio into ecstasy (180). Albertina's reaction to the incident unwittingly reveals to Desiderio that "the beasts were still only emanations of her own desire, dredged up and objectively reified from the

dark abysses of the unconscious” (186). Regretfully, he acknowledges Albertina’s complicity in her father’s machinations to destroy the city. Desiderio, in describing his profound disillusionment, is near to recognizing that sometimes the fantasy is more pleasurable than the reality.

Even if it is the dream made flesh, the real, once it becomes real, can be no more than real. While I did not know her, I thought she was sublime; when I knew her, I loved her. But, even as I pared my dessert persimmon with the silver knife provided, I was already wondering whether the fleshly possession of Albertina would not be the greatest disillusionment of all. (201)

In the end, Desiderio realizes that the desire “generated by four legs in bed” is “the greatest source of radiant energy in the entire universe!” (203). This idea--that sexual relations between individuals are intended to be pleasurable instead of painful--captures the spirit of Carter’s final, and most celebratory, novel, Wise Children (see Chapter 8). At the time that Doctor Hoffman was written, however, Carter was delivering a different message.

Desiderio, given “the casting vote between a barren yet harmonious calm and a fertile yet cacophonous tempest” (207), ultimately chooses a lifetime of contentment over a single night of ecstasy. He is confident that his decision will

render everybody (except himself of course) relatively happy. The novel ends with Desiderio, “the check, the impulse of restraint” (221), killing Albertina, only to be haunted by the very desires that he killed. Ultimately, Carter sacrificed unity of plot and theme for the opportunity to theorize about culture and tradition. The novel ends up being a pastiche of ideas--linguistic, religious, and myth assumptions--which the author tenuously links through Desiderio’s otherwise unrelated adventures.

Five years after The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman, Carter wrote The Passion of New Eve (1977), wherein she took a more radical approach to the “feminization” of a phallocentric character. The author considered this last segment of her speculative trilogy to be an anti-mythic novel that she conceived “as a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity.”¹⁵ This is the story of Evelyn, the male narrator who is obsessed with Tristessa, the beautiful, but “artificially constructed” queen of celluloid. By means of these two characters Carter was able to stretch the boundaries of gender to unprecedented limits.

Evelyn’s adventures begin when he leaves his English hometown in order to take a teaching position in America. He arrives in New York to find the city plastered with posters bearing the insignia of the angry women (bared teeth in the female circle). Set against a historical background that echoes the unrest surrounding the Civil Rights and Feminists movements of the seventies, Evelyn’s story begins with an encounter between the protagonist and a young woman named

Leilah. Evelyn, an academic, hooks up with Leilah, a beautiful, “softly-black,” seventeen-year-old, nude-model and dancer. Evelyn is both appalled and enchanted by this “ghetto nymph,” who holds him in the grips of savage desire. Every night Leilah “systematically carnalise[s]” herself and becomes “dressed meat” (31). During their Sadistic games of sexual bondage, Leilah embodies “the awful delicacy of those china ornaments that invite you to smash them, because they are so fragile” (31). Soon, however, Evelyn grows bored with his new toy, and Leilah becomes “only an irritation of the flesh, an itch that must be scratched; a response, not a pleasure. The sickness ran its course and [Evelyn] was left only with the habit of her sensuality, an addiction of which [he] was half ashamed” (31). He, in exchange, gives her “nothing but an ingot of alchemical gold, and a baby. and mutilation, and sterility” (31). He admits that as soon as he found out that Leilah was carrying his child, all remaining desire for her vanishes.

Although Leilah would like Evelyn to marry her, he refuses and insists that she have an abortion. Initially she curses him, but soon she becomes “as limp, passive and obedient as [he] could wish” (34). Enraged by his own irresponsibility, Evelyn decidedly (albeit guiltily) abandons Leilah, rationalizing that she has deliberately seduced him in order to trap him into marriage. His guilt is somewhat assuaged by the fact that Leilah’s mother was coming.¹⁶ As Evelyn reveals, despite his abusive behavior toward Leilah, he is not without scars.

[H]er 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, I might die of it. (37-38)

Feeling that Leilah has in some way contaminated him, Evelyn heads for the desert where he hopes to find himself. He drives from New York across the country into Colorado. He finds himself, literally and figuratively, in a new landscape, “without map or guide or compass,” but it is “a landscape that matches the landscape of [his] heart” (41). This new geography is a metaphor for the new identity that he assumes. (As does Desiderio from the previous novel, Evelyn serves as a precursor to Jack Walser, the character in Nights at the Circus who after a bout with amnesia discovers his more feminine side by assuming different identities, see Chapter 8.)

In the desert, Evelyn is seized by a masked captor who takes him to the underground land of Beulah, a matriarchal community controlled by Mother. Beulah is a “profane place” (49), where one need not abide by culturally prescribed (sacred) rules. In this irreverent land, above all else “myth is a made thing, not a found thing.” (56). It is the fictional place that enabled the author to

desecrate the idealized notions of motherhood that she theorized about in The Sadeian Woman, (a non-fiction work which she was working on at the time, see Chapter 5).

Carter's representation of Mother challenges cultural assumptions about motherhood. By delineating Mother as "the hand-carved figurehead of her own, self-constructed theology" (58), Carter was proclaiming that Mother is powerful because she is self-made.

Mother has made herself into an incarnated deity; she has quite transformed her flesh, she has undergone a painful metamorphosis of the entire body and become the abstraction of a natural principle. (49)

A few pages later, the point is reiterated.

And she had made herself! Yes, made herself! She was her own mythological artifact; she had reconstructed her flesh painfully, with knives and with needles, into a transcendental form as an emblem, as an example, and flung a patchwork quilt stitched from her daughters' breasts over the cathedral of her interior, the cave within the cave. (60)

Evelyn's reconditioning happens at a much faster pace and to a more radical degree than did Desiderio's. The terms that Carter used to describe

Mother--“the Great Parricide” and “the Grand Emasculator”--hint at the kind of education that Evelyn is in for. Both he and the reader sense that the ideology of masculinity is in the process of being deconstructed, especially after Evelyn notices the monument that sits at the entrance of Beulah.

It was a pompous structure, chipped out of granite dragged from god knows where, it was twenty or thirty feet tall. It cast an infinitely elongated shadow in the direction of the night; upon a classic pediment, it represented a stone cock with testicles, all complete, in a state of massive tumescence. But the cock was broken off clean in the middle; upon the fractured surface, a vulture with the look of a hanging judge perched and, as I thought, winked at me most horribly. The top half of the cock, ten feet of it, lay in the sand at my feet but it did not look as if it had fallen accidentally. (47-48)

Carter’s description of the Ozymandias-like statue echoes her account of the fertility festival that so astonished the author on her second visit to Japan in 1974 (see Chapter 3).

Though he knows that he is virtually helpless, Evelyn calls out (ironically) for his own mother, only to be scorned by the laughter of the one-breasted women

of this matriarchal community. We learn that as part of an experiment that Mother is conducting, “Evelyn” is to be transformed surgically into “Eve,” an operation intended to teach the character his first lesson about gender identity. Evelyn also learns that although he will be transformed into a woman made of “real” flesh and blood, his femininity will not be “natural.”

Evelyn’s manhood is further undermined both by Mother’s physicality and fecundity. Mother, the personification of “self-fulfilling fertility” (59), is described as a sow that is breasted with two tiers of nipples so that she can suckle four babies at once--an image which Carter repeated when describing one of the female freaks in Nights at the Circus. Moreover, the author’s description of Mother as a massive woman (six and a half feet tall) with gigantic limbs and ponderous feet renders the woman ideally suited as the vehicle of Evelyn’s obliteration. As he himself admits,

Before this overwhelming woman, the instrument that dangled from my belly was useless. It was nothing but a decorative appendage attached there in a spirit of frivolity by the nature whose terrestrial representative she had, of her own free will, become. (60)

Evelyn is raped by Mother in what turns out to be his last sexual experience “as a man” (though he confesses that when Mother’s thighs grasped him with the vigor

of the female mantis, he felt only engulfment). Evelyn's rape is Mother's (and by extension, Carter's) way of punishing him for his past abuses.

Mother chastises Evelyn for having mistreated women with his "delicate instrument that should have been used for nothing but pleasure" (66); she ultimately castrates him, physically and emotionally, referring to his genitals as a "lovely toy for a young girl"(66). Evelyn, now Eve, must wait for her womb to be impregnated with his own sperm. As preparation for his/her new role as a mother, Eve is subjected to a rigorous program of cultural indoctrination targeted at helping her adjust to her newly assigned femininity.

Eve is exposed to images of the Virgin with Child, which are intended to glorify the prospect of motherhood; images of animals with their young ones, intended to instill the maternal instinct; and vaginal images, such as sea anemones opening and closing, caves, and the moon, each meant to celebrate female sexuality. Additionally, Eve is injected with female hormones while hour after hour she is schooled in misogynist practices (such as female circumcision, footbinding, and *suttee* [widow-burning]) that his old gender performed on his new gender. The first time Eve menstruates, she experiences a crippling pain that is emblematic of her new function. In the end, Evelyn's transformation into Eve is so complete that her new self becomes (ironically) everything her old self could have hoped for. Evelyn muses

I was the object of all the unfocused desires that had ever existed in my own head. I had become my own masturbatory fantasy. And--how can I put it--the cock in my head, still, twitched at the sight of myself. (75)

As Mother's experiment nears its conclusion, Eve is fated to become the first creation to be able to seed and fruit herself, in other words, the first totally self-sufficient being.

Eve's sense of ever having been a man begins to fade, and she becomes a creature without memory. The new Eve is, we soon discover, "an amnesiac, a stranger in the world as she was in her own body--but it wasn't that she'd forgotten everything, no. Rather, she had nothing to remember" (78). The night before Eve's planned impregnation, however, the frightened girl escapes into the desert, only to be captured this time by a different group of women.

Eve falls prisoner to the harem of the one-eyed, one-legged poet, Zero, another of Carter's Sadeian figures who is characteristically sexually perverse. Zero, like Mother, hopes to generate a new breed of Americans which, of course, he will spawn. When he first rapes Eve, he boasts that she should, "Consider the sacred fluid imparted by my member as the balm of Gilead or one true restorative" (92). The problem, however, is that he is infertile. It seems Tristessa, (the "diva of camp" with whom the old Evelyn has all along been infatuated) has "magicked the

genius out of [his] jissom” (91). Tristessa, we are told, destroyed his potency when she “blasted his seed because he was Masculinity incarnate” (104).

After Zero rapes Eve a second time, he declares her his eighth wife, by which act Eve becomes Mrs. Zero and loses all other identity. Once Eve is initiated into Zero’s harem, she observes that although her husband demanded absolute subservience from his wives, they gave in to him freely. As a warning against women’s complicity in their own victimization, we are reminded that Zero’s “myth depended on their conviction; a god-head, however shabby, needs believers to maintain his credibility” (99).

Eve, who in the end spends three months as one of Zero’s possessions, explains how difficult that period was.

It was as savage an apprenticeship in womanhood as could have been devised for me and, if Mother had selected me, however arbitrarily, to atone for the sins of my first sex vis-à-vis my second sex via my sex itself, I would say that, by the time the chaste and delirious spring awakened all manner of plants that love dry places from the sand and began to warm the nights a little, I had become almost the thing I was. The mediation of Zero turned me into a woman. More.

His peremptory prick turned me into a savage woman.

(107)

Once Eve (as an instrument of Zero's sexual pleasure) suffers physical pain, she realizes that "a man or a woman [can be] naturally vicious or naturally virtuous" depending, not on gender, but on one's circumstances.¹⁷ In the end, it is her anger that keeps her alive.

Eve unwittingly is compelled to be part of Zero's attack on Tristessa's hideout. In what echoes the final scene of The Wizard of Oz (a story much-loved by Carter), Zero and his wives discover that the mastermind who controls the diva's glass fortress is none other than "a tiny Oriental in a swing chair at a control panel, crouching over a wheel that looks like the driving wheel of a car" (115). The intruders also find a collection of waxworks of Hollywood's dead legends (James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Jean Harlow, Valentino), whose life-like simulated corpses (eyelashes included) make up the Hall of the Immortals. On a nearby bier is Tristessa--Carter's personification of sad love-- looking like "a sleeping beauty who could never die since she had never lived" (119). Tristessa (as fraud), who would live as long as there was "persistence of vision" and spools of celluloid to project her image, is the epitome of "all the desolation of America, or of more than that--of all estrangement, our loneliness, our abandonment . . . Our Lady of the Sorrows. . . [whose suffering on the big screen] had achieved a more perfect degree of authenticity that any she might have undergone in real life" (121-122).

Once Eve views the chatelaine, she realizes that Tristessa's Hollywood image has been manipulated by the media in the same manner that her own femininity has been synthetically constructed. She understands that, "I, she, we are outside history. We are beings without a history, we are mysteriously twinned by our synthetic life" (125). Eve's most significant moment of epiphany occurs when Zero strips the lady naked to reveal that the unexpected source of Tristessa's sorrow is the "rude, red-purple insignia of maleness"(128). Once Eve sets eyes on Tristessa's male appendage, she fully understands the extent to which this film queen was manufactured by the men of Hollywood.

That was why he had been the perfect man's woman!

He had made himself the shrine of his own desires, had made himself the only woman he could have loved! If a woman is indeed beautiful only in so far as she incarnates most completely the secret aspirations of man, no wonder Tristessa had been able to become the most beautiful woman in the world, an unbegotten woman who made no concessions to humanity. (129)

Eve suddenly realizes what Tristessa has known all along: "Once the essence was achieved, the appearance could take care of itself" (141). Though biology had precluded for Tristessa the authentic experience of being a woman, as a female impersonator he/she was able to exist as the much desired icon of femininity--

despite his later recognition that “the notion of a woman’s being . . . is negativity. Passivity, the absence of being. To be everything and nothing” (137). In the double-drag, double-wedding that Zero orchestrates, Eve (Evelyn) is the groom who is to marry Tristessa (the man now dressed as a woman).

As the novel comes to a close, Eve experiences real pleasure in her sexual awakening as a female. As Carter’s “man-made masterpiece of skin and bone”(146), the new Eve no longer feels like a visitor in her own flesh. She understands, instead, that flesh can be “a function of enchantment” (148). She learns the most valuable of lesson of all--that masculinity and femininity are masks we choose to wear. As Eve eventually recognizes, masculine and feminine are correlatives

which involve one another. I am sure of that -- the quality and its negation are locked in necessity. But what the nature of masculine and the nature of feminine might be, whether they involve male and female, if they have anything to do with Tristessa’s so long neglected apparatus or my own factory fresh incision and engine-turned breasts, that I do not know. Though I have been both man and woman, still I do not know the answer to these questions. Still they bewilder me. (150)

Significantly, Carter chose not to end the novel at this point. Perhaps the author's intention to do so was to show that the dismantling of the artificial constructs of our gender identities is not so very easy as all that. Or, perhaps it is that Carter was not yet as comfortable with happy endings as she was in Wise Children.

The story continues as Tristessa and Eve, in the middle of their lovemaking, are captured by an army of adolescents who wear iron crucifixes around their necks. (Carter, it seems, was still struggling with symbols of Christian morality, especially one that postulates the sinfulness of sex.) The gang's leader, the Colonel, kills Tristessa, and Eve attempts a final escape. Ironically, she ends up right back where she started from, arriving first within the midst of Mother's army, and next into the arms Leilah (who turns out to be Mother's daughter.) Eve is forced to confront the all-consuming Mother-figure whom she managed to escape pages ago. We are not terribly surprised that the result of this confrontation turns out not to be such a big deal. After all, as we have seen and heard before in the author's work, "Mother," like "Father," is very often just a figure of speech. Ultimately, this New Eve, unlike her Biblical counterpart, triumphs as the metaphorical progenitor of a generation of Carter libertines.

The seventies turned out in the end to be an important period of experimentation for Carter. By stretching the limits of formal conventions in her novels of speculation, the author had facilitated her transition to the fairy tale genre. By the time Carter wrote the short stories of The Bloody Chamber, she was

well on her way toward the fictional appropriation of a landscape wherein female sexuality and desire could be expressed without harm or restraint.

“Notes”

¹ See Angela Carter’s Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces, London: Quartet Books, 1974, p. 133.

² See Carter’s interview with Kerry Goldsworthy, meanjin 44.1 (1985): 4-13. See also Katsavos’ “Interview with Angela Carter,” The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 11-17.

³ This is an idea that Carter explored further with respect to J. G. Ballard’s Empire of the Sun, which she had reviewed that same year in 1984 in Time Out. The review was reprinted in Carter’s Expletives Deleted, London: Chatto and Windus, 1992, pp. 44-50. In her review, Carter hailed Ballard as “the great chronicler of the new, technological Britain.” Realizing that “British society seriously overstretched the traditional resources of British naturalistic fiction,” Ballard desired a revolutionary fiction of the imagination that tapped into the domain of the unconscious--what Carter called “inner space.” He turned to “speculative fiction,” a new form of literature that imbued traditional science fiction with elements of surrealism, a form that Carter, too, was very much drawn to.

⁴ As one of the novel’s epigraphs suggests, Carter was much influenced by the structure and content of Jean-Luc Goddard’s film Alphaville. The epigraph reads, “There are times when reality becomes too complex for Oral Communication. But legend gives it a form by which it pervades the whole world.”

⁵ In spirit, at least, Marianne presages Nights at the Circus’ Fevvers, the first of Carter’s “New Women.” “New Woman” is a term that Carter appropriates from French poet, Apollinaire.

⁶ See Marina Warner’s discussion of hair in fairy tales, From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers, New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1995, pp. 374-6.

⁷ See Sigmund Freud’s essays on “Anxiety and Instinctual Life” (Lecture XXXII) and “Femininity” (Lecture XXXIII) in The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis. Trans. and ed. by James Starchey, New York: W. W. Norton, 1996.

⁸ The title, “Queen of the midden” (at once an honor and an insult depending on which of the two nouns one chooses to emphasize--queen or midden) is an example of the kind

of “consolatory nonsense”—rhetoric that, according to Carter, is used falsely to idolize women. See Carter’s The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History, London: Virago, 1979, p. 5.

⁹ This work was published in the United States as War of Dreams (1973).

¹⁰ See Joan Riviere’s “Womanliness as Masquerade” in Victor Burgin’s Formations of Fantasy, London: Methuen, 1986, pp. 35-44.

¹¹ Carter’s self-reflexive description of the circus world evokes a Bakhtinian sense of the carnivalesque that in Nights at the Circus becomes a central motif for “otherness.” The “freaks” Desiderio encounters presage the gallery of persons that Jack Walser meets in his similarly picaresque adventures with Colonel Kearney’s circus; See Chapter 8 of this study.

¹² Madame Buckskin also prefigures the pistol-toting mother in Carter’s short story “The Bloody Chamber,” which is discussed in detail in Chapter 6 of this study.

¹³ See Carter’s interview with Katsavos, wherein Carter explained the significance of “the death-defying somersault of love.”

¹⁴ The reference here is to Carter’s collection of journalism, Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings, London: Virago, 1982.

¹⁵ See Carter’s “Notes From the Front Line” in Michelene Wandor’s On Gender and Writing, London: Pandora Press, 1983, p. 71.

¹⁶ Leilah’s mother, who turns out to be Mother (with a capital M), is another of Carter’s mother-figures to come to her daughter’s rescue. See also my discussion of “The Bloody Chamber” in Chapter 6 of this study.

¹⁷ Carter, The Sadeian Woman, p. 128.

CHAPTER FIVE

Eat Or And Be Eaten: Carter, Sade, and the Politics of Pornography

The shocking tragedy of mortality itself [is] that all flesh may be transformed, at any moment, to meat. . . . The strong abuse, exploit, and meatify the weak, says Sade. They must and will devour their natural prey. The primal condition of man cannot be modified in any way; it is, eat or be eaten.

Angela Carter, The Sadeian Woman (1978)

In the mid-seventies, while Carter headed into middle age, England was edging gradually from “social welfarism” to “market-individualism.”¹ Margaret Thatcher, meanwhile, was soaring across class lines, rising in status from a bourgeois woman of humble beginnings to become a privileged *lady* with political clout. Although she had infiltrated a predominantly male domain, Thatcher’s Conservative politics (especially her traditionalist notion of womanhood) alienated her from British feminists. As they quipped, she was the “best man” for the job.²

The women’s liberation movement in England, which during this period grew steadily (albeit quietly, when compared to the protest demonstrations that were then taking place in the United States and Europe), put many of its mobilizing efforts behind the country’s new Left. As a result, women’s activism (like participation in peace and labor marches) was identified as having socialist, rather than feminist, goals. Primarily, it was on the theoretical front where feminists gained recognition. The age old debate about femininity as inborn or learned continued as one of the foremost issues being debated. Traditionally,

feminists had attacked Freud and psychoanalysis as dangerous to their aims.³ In 1974, however, Marxist feminist Juliet Mitchell, in her landmark study Psychoanalysis and Feminism, defended Freud's non-essentialist theory of a sexed identity as a way of explaining the position of women in a patriarchal society. Hers was the same argument that Carter posed in appropriating the Marquis de Sade as feminist friendly.⁴

Although linking "Sade" with "feminist" is an apparent oxymoron, Carter's work, The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography (1978), is indeed a feminist tract that claims de Sade as an ally of the women's movement.⁵ Carter's thesis is that Sade's work "is of particular significance to women because of his refusal to see female sexuality in relation to its reproductive function" (1). Like Greer, Carter contended that traditionally female sexual desires have been ignored because women were defined solely as childbearers and nurturers. Carter scrutinized culturally determined myths about female sexuality, femininity, and motherhood, arguing that Sade put pornography in the service of women because he exposed such myths for what they really are--"consolatory nonsense" (Carter's term) used to justify and continue women's subservient and acquiescent position in society.

This work discusses the degree to which such myths have shaped our idealized notions of gender identity, sexuality, marriage, and motherhood, and how language serves to promote or challenge such myths. The perpetuation of

“cultural myths”--the prevailing images of femininity to which most women aspire--is, according to Carter, debilitating for women and men alike. Carter considered all female iconography, “from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother [to be] consolatory nonsenses”(5). Focusing particularly on the relationship between sexuality and power as depicted most forcefully (albeit disturbingly) in pornography, Carter maintained that such

sexual relations between men and women always
render explicit the nature of social relations in the
society in which they take place and, if described
explicitly, will form a critique of those relations, even
if that is not and never has been the intention of the
pornographer. (20)

Carter believed that the sexual acts that are depicted in pornography are representative of the cruelties people often inflict upon one another. The pervading themes of pornography--domination, control, humiliation, mutilation, and possession--reflect on an unconscious level the social reality that exists between the sexes. In other words, the erotic violence that is inherent in pornography is an emblematic truth of male dominance and female acquiescence in society.

Carter's point is that by denying or ignoring the social context in which such sexual activity takes place, “pornography reinforces the false universals of sexual archetypes” (16).⁶ Consequently, pornographic subjects are reduced to

instruments of pure function, and women in particular become commodities. Whatever its surface falsity, argued Carter, pornography reveals sexual reality as it exists on an unconscious level--a reality that is often very unpleasant indeed. Most dangerous to women is pornography's projection of a "compensatory but spurious female dominance" (20) which in actuality is entirely "stripped of the idea of free exchange" (141). It is such reasoning that prompted Carter to claim Sade as an "unconscious ally" for women since in her eyes his work reflects the "emblematic truth" of sexual politics and erotic violence (22).

Almost ten years after she had written The Sadeian Woman, I asked Carter to elaborate on the label "moral pornographer" that she had assigned to Sade (and which has since been used to identify Carter). The author explained that

One of the things about Sade is that he did know he was a pervert. Most people in the pornography business are under the impression that they're normal, and he knew perfectly well he was a pervert, and I think that he was upset about it. Most perverts are very, very proselytizing. He proselytizes a little bit for his perversion, and suddenly he realizes he's doing something dreadful.⁷

Carter described Sade as a "moral pornographer" because he used pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes, and thereby demystified the flesh.

Carter argued that Sade's writing reflects an inherent acceptance of a world of absolute sexual license for all the genders and projects a model of the way such a world might work (19). Carter claimed that it was Sade's understanding of sexuality as genderless, and potentially empowering, that made the Marquis feminist-friendly.

Both Sade and Carter concluded that femininity is determined not by biology but by the relations of power and politics. For Sade, as for Carter, "... the whip hand is always the hand with the real political power and the victim is a person who has little or no power at all, or has had it stripped from him" (24). This theory, which totally disregards biological gender, equates "maleness" with "tyranny" and "femaleness" with "martyrdom." It follows then that in Sade's game of gender politics, the operative strategy must be "eat **or** be eaten." As Carter played it, however, one partner's pleasure need not be the other partner's extinction. And as the characters in her later fiction demonstrate, it's much more fun to "to eat **and** be eaten."

Carter suggested that even though Sade portrays his fictionalized women as either "passive sex objects" or "dominant tyrants" (identities that respectively define Sade's title characters in Justine and Juliette), he recognized that women are sexual beings and claimed for them the same sexual freedoms enjoyed by men. Carter argued that Sade's Justine represents the idealization of femininity as the perfect woman who is obedient and "always at the mercy of her master because

that is the nature of her own definition of goodness” (55). The following passage explains how Justine serves as a reminder to us that

in a world where women are commodities, a woman who refuses to sell herself will have the thing she refuses to sell taken away from her by force. The piety, the gentleness, the honesty, the sensitivity, all the qualities she has learned to admire in herself, are invitations to violence; all her life, she has been groomed for the slaughterhouse. And though she is virtuous, she does not know how to do good. (55)

Worst of all, Carter argued, Justine has been deluded by a cultural conspiracy into believing that her very existence is in itself sufficient contribution to the world. As a result, “Woman” (as the “Ideal”) projects the “the enigmatic image of irresistibility and powerlessness [and is] forever trapped in impotence” (71). Carter considered Justine the prototype for women of past centuries who did not have, because they were not given, the necessary tools with which to remake the world for themselves, and who, with no status or place in the world, were destined to become victims of suffering and self-pity.

As Carter saw it, Justine is as obscene as she is beautiful because she erroneously believes that her beauty and passivity will do her some good. Carter maintained that such idealized attributes serve instead to endow women with

an artificial ascendancy over a world that allots them love and admiration to precisely the extent a beautiful, young and innocent woman is deprived of the ability to act in the world. She is compensated for her defenselessness by a convention of respect which is largely false. Herself mystified by herself . . . she has no notion at all of who she is except in fantasy. To the extent that she has been made holy and thinks of herself as such, so she is capable of being desecrated.

(73)

As I have argued in Chapter 2, the female characters in Carter's early novels (most notably Ghislaine in Shadow Dance and Annabel in Love) serve as clear examples of how such an unrealistic sense of self renders one vulnerable to victimization. For the most part, however, characters like Justine, "whose scars glorify the sex that wounded them," are better sought for in the works of Jean Rhys and Edna O'Brien, not of Carter.⁸

At the opposite end of the Sadeian spectrum lies Juliette, the libertine who operates by virtue of self-reliance and self-help (101). She has a looking-out-for-number-one attitude which Carter admired and which the author appropriated more and more in her fiction of the late seventies onward. Carter described Juliette as a worldly, bright, meretricious woman who plays to win. Juliette's sexual affairs are

engaged in either for profit or for fun; and unlike Justine's, "her femininity is part of the armory of self-interest" (102).

Carter's view of Justine echoed that of the turn of the century French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire, who described Justine as symbolic of Woman as she had been thus far defined --"enslaved, miserable and less than human." Carter did not agree, however, with Apollinaire's assessment of Juliette as the advent of "a figure of whom minds have as yet no conception, who is rising out of mankind, who will have wings and who will renew the world" (79). This description points more directly to Carter's creation of Fevvers than to her interpretation of Sade's Juliette. Carter's view was that Juliette is less than the ideal model for contemporary women because she is the complete antithesis of Justine.

Seventy years ago today, Apollinaire could equate Juliette with the New Woman; it is not so easy to do so today, although Juliette remains a model for women, in some ways. She is rationality personified and leaves no single cell of her brain unused. She will never obey the fallacious prompting of her heart. Her mind functions like a computer programmed to produce two results for herself--financial profit and libidinal gratification. By the use of her reason, an intellectual apparatus women themselves are still inclined to

undervalue, she rids herself of some of the more
crippling aspects of femininity; but she is a New
Woman in the mode of irony. (79)

Carter's point is that, although by comparison to Justine's submissiveness Juliette's aggressiveness seems the better option, neither type of behavior serves as a positive model of women. Because neither Justine nor Juliette is capable of synthesizing reason and emotion, Carter argued, both characters in the end are left without hope--a condition that Carter's own Fevvers (and later, Dora and Nora Chance from Wise Children) subvert by means of using their heads and their hearts to their advantage. This is not to suggest, however, that Carter condemned all aspects of Juliette.

What Carter most applauded about Juliette is the way she cheats the patriarchal system by denying it the "use-value" of her womb without compromising her sexuality (106). By seeking a complete divorce between female sexuality and reproduction, Sade (in Juliette) emphatically denied any significance to the activity of the physical mother beyond the fact of the ripening of the embryo in her body. Carter insisted that the idealization of the maternal (what she termed "maternal superiority") "is one of the most damaging of all consolatory fictions" (106), and argued that by secularizing women, Sade liberated them to be no more or less than human, sexual beings--Sade's greatest contribution, especially to feminist thinking.

To deny the bankrupt enchantments of the womb is to pare a good deal of the fraudulent magic from the idea of women, to reveal us as we are, simple creatures of flesh and blood whose expectations deviate from biological necessity sufficiently to force us to abandon, perhaps regretfully, perhaps with relief, the deluded priestesshood of a holy reproductive function. This demystification extends to the biological iconography of women. (109-110)

Ultimately, although the Sadeian woman, “subverts only her own socially conditioned role in the world of god, the king and the law, [she] does not subvert her society” (133). The Sadeian Woman, therefore, when she is losing at whatever game she is playing, cleverly changes the rules; she wisely appropriates sanctioned male behavior in order “to win.” Carter credited Sade with debunking female iconography that has been traditionally debilitating to women and for liberating them to play like men.

While Carter was working on The Sadeian Woman, she was also writing essays for New Society. The author considered these essays as being “done from an angle of committed feminism” (118). In these articles Carter examined the polarized images of women who are, in the author’s opinion, either victimized by

the traditional sexual iconography (as in the case of Linda Lovelace) or clever enough to subvert it (as in the case of Wedekind's Lulu).

Carter's essay "Lovely Linda"(1974), which is a book review of Linda Lovelace's autobiography Inside Linda Lovelace, argues that the subject's fame as the star of Deep Throat was fed to a great degree by the demands of a society that feasts on vicarious sexual gratification. Though she presents herself as the archetypal swinger, Lovelace is, in Carter's eyes, the product of a so-called "permissive" society "that utilizes limited libidinal gratification as a soporific in a time of potential social disruption" (147). Very much bothered by a society that denies women's sexual autonomy, Carter was disturbed, to an even greater extent, by the illusory sense of freedom that the "queen of porn" promulgates. By preaching "sexual freedom divorced from social or spiritual emancipation" (147), Lovelace merely blinds us to the true nature of freedom itself. For Carter, Lovelace is anything but liberated.

The essay entitled, "*Femmes Fatales*" (1978), suggests that it is because *femmes fatales* serve as objects of desire that they must be punished or even destroyed.

Desire does not so much transcend its object as ignore
it completely in favor of a fantastic recreation of it.
Which is the process by which the *femme* gets credited
with fatality. Because she is perceived not as herself

but as the projection of those libidinous cravings
 which, since they are forbidden, must always prove
 fatal. (120)

Using as her example Frank Wedekind's sexually voracious heroine, Lulu, Carter pointed out that the character must pay a price for expressing an unrepressed desire in a society that distorts female sexuality. "The significance of [Lulu as] the *femme fatale* lies not in her gender but in her freedom" (123), for she lives her life in such a way that her freedom reveals to others their lack of liberty.

Written the same year as "*Femme Fatales*," the essay "Japanese Erotica" (1978) is useful because it presents Carter's ideas about the relationship between film and fiction, especially with respect to the means by which the artist/author achieves the viewer's/reader's willing suspension of disbelief. Carter explained that all cinematic genres, especially pornographic films, depend on some kind of special photographic technique to persuade the audience to suspend its disbelief.

The audience must be persuaded by a variety of means
 . . . from asking themselves whether the couple they
 are watching are actually screwing. Because, if you
 start wondering whether the actors . . . are indeed
 getting it on in the studio, then the illusion of reality is
 broken at once. And once the illusion is gone, the

whole thing flies out of the artistic control of the director.

Upon the beautiful image of the privacy of the lovers, the busy, populous, brightly-lit image of the film-studio superimposes itself. We are no longer eavesdropping on the activity of desire; we are watching, instead, an elaborate mimetic paraphrase of desire, the appearance of realism which is, per se, unreal. And even if they are doing it, we are not watching them do it. We are watching the people they are pretending to be do it; that is part of the bargain we made with the nature of the reality when we entered the cinema. But now everything you see is false; it all means something other than the spectacle before us, but the genre itself denies you access to that meaning!

(132)

Carter's point applies, of course, to fiction as well. Indeed, readers of her later works, particularly of Wise Children, must put up with a postmodern author/narrator whose voice interjects periodically to remind us that we are reading a fictional account of events. Very much like a film director, the author/narrator

assures us that what we are reading is real, simultaneously consoling us that, "it isn't really real, it is a show, a play, an invention" (134).

Many of the feminist ideas that had preoccupied Carter in her non-fiction started to surface in the fiction that she wrote during the late seventies. Moving from the novel to the short story genre, she employed the unrealistic mode of the fairy tale form as a vehicle that liberated her female characters to play according to Carter's own version of the Sadeian law.

"Notes"

¹ For a more detailed discussion of the Women's Liberation Movement in England see Terry Lovell's British Feminist Thought: A Reader, Oxford, Great Britain: Basil Blackwell, 1990, and Harold Smith's British Feminism in the Twentieth Century, Amherst: The University of Amherst Press, 1990.

² See also Carter's essay on Thatcher, "Masochism for the Masses," New Statesmen 3 June 1983, pp. 8-10.

³ See, for example, Kate Millet's Sexual Politics, New York: Avon Books, 1971; and Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch, London: Mac Gibbon and Kee, 1970.

⁴ Carter, in fact, cites as a source Juliet Mitchell's Psychoanalysis and Feminism, New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.

⁵ For a contrasting opinion, see Andrea Dworkin's Pornography: Men Possessing Women. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979, pp. 84-5. Dworkin considered Carter's text "a pseudofeminist literary essay."

⁶ See Claude Lévi-Strauss' The Raw and the Cooked, translated by John Weightman, London: Jonathan Cape, 1970.

⁷ See "An Interview with Angela Carter," in The Review of Contemporary Fiction, Fall 1994, p.16.

⁸ See Carter's discussion of these writers in Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings, London: Virago Press, 1982, p. 162.

CHAPTER SIX

“Doing It” With Wolves: Carter’s Retelling of Grim Tales

The tale does not log everyday experience It interprets everyday experience through a system of imagery derived from subterranean areas behind everyday experience, and therefore the tale cannot betray its readers into a false knowledge of everyday experience.

Angela Carter, Fireworks, Afterword (1974)

In her study of fairy tales and their tellers, From the Beast to the Blonde, British cultural historian Marina Warner writes that the fairy tales are characterized by “pleasure in the fantastic, curiosity about the real” (xx). It is no wonder then that Angela Carter found a niche in the world of fairy tale. Rooted in the social, legal, and economic history of marriage and the family, fairy tales shed light onto the deepest emotions of the human psyche--fear and desire. Using the built-in conventions of the genre that uses magic to turn things topsy-turvy, Carter delineated marvelous, impossible situations that paradoxically reflect human reality. Her intention was to “remake the world in the image of desire” (xvi).¹ As both a creator and an editor of fairy tales, she undermined what has been culturally prescribed as appropriate female and male behavior, thereby charting new possibilities for women with respect to female sexuality, erotic love, and marriage. What Carter ultimately recognized is that the outcome of “doing it” with wolves depends on how one plays the game. As she saw it, satisfying sexual relationships

between individuals are the results not of the Sadeian law to “eat or be eaten” but of her own more gratifying pronouncement to “eat *and* be eaten.”²

Carter’s fascination with the fairy tale genre is revealed both in her fiction and her non-fiction. In 1982, in a collection entitled Sleeping Beauty and Other Favourite Tales, Carter translated the stories of Charles Perrault and Madame Leprince de Beaumont. These tales, first recorded by Perrault in 1729 as Histoires ou contes du temps passe, evolved from an oral folklore tradition that for generations relied on colorful narratives to entertain and instruct the illiterate and impoverished masses. Nurses, nannies, and old wives (whom Warner sees as surrogate mother figures) had all along depended on colorful, oral folk tales to amuse, educate, and frighten their young charges into good behavior. By the time Perrault had transcribed his tales, however, the fairy tale had already evolved into a highly developed literary form.

Perrault’s own contribution to the genre was the “hatching” of the archetypal female storyteller, Mother Goose, through whom he introduced the formal convention of the moral. Because the tales were intended as vehicles of instruction, it became common practice to remove coarse and offensive expressions (such as references to sexual and excremental functions) in order to make the tales more suitable for the nursery crowd. Consequently, the old wives’ narratives had been adapted, “had been taken out of [their] mouths” as Carter has written, and cultivated so as to provide models of appropriate behavior for young

girls and boys of the upper classes.³ Carter lamented the gradual domestication of an oral tradition that for centuries had provided “the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labour created our world.”⁴

Herself a Mother Goose of sorts, Carter preferred a sharp tongue. In her retelling of these tales, as well as in her choice of edited stories, Carter successfully subverted the derisive label of the female narrator as a gabby chatterbox whose tale was considered worthless, untrue, trivial prattle. For Carter, old wives’ tales reveal a great deal about class and gender because they are rooted in the social, legal, and economic history of marriage and the family.

In her brief afterword to Sleeping Beauty and Other Favourite Tales, Carter discussed the relationship between the teller and the tale, underscoring the fact that every age recreates fairy tales to reflect its own historical and cultural context. In her introduction to The Virago Book of Fairy Tales, Carter defined fairy tales as “stories without known originators that can be remade again and again by every person who tells them” (ix).⁵ Carter thought fairy tales to be stories put together with bits and pieces of past stories, garnished, trimmed, or adjusted by the storyteller in much the same way, for example, that a cook modifies a given recipe. Carter believed that the raconteur, like the cook, tailors her creations to suit personal fancy and satisfy audience appetite.

Ours is a highly individualized culture, with a great faith in the work of art as a unique one-off, and the artist as an original, a godlike and inspired creator of unique one-offs. But fairy tales are not like that, nor are their makers. Who first invented meatballs? In what country? Is there a definitive recipe for potato soup? Think in terms of the domestic arts. 'This is how I make potato soup.' (x)

Carter's analogy emphasizes the influence that the teller has on the tale, reversing, in a way, D. H. Lawrence's dictum to trust not the teller but the tale.⁶ In her fiction, Carter reclaimed a seldom-heard female voice of reason and creativity. As did Carter, Warner believes that these stories constitute a patchwork of practical advice that has been passed down from one generation of women to the next. Through their work, Carter and Warner validated age old female wisdom and appropriated the fairy tale as a female genre.

Carter explained that she was drawn to the fairy tale genre because of its purposeful lack of verisimilitude. She believed that the fairy tale's "once upon a time" formulaic structure allows the reader to recognize certain truths without having to acknowledge, possibly with some discomfort, the validity of these truths, vis-à-vis the reader's own life. Like other "female forms of romance," such as the modern soap opera, the fairy tale structure is based on fantasy and wish-

fulfillment.⁷ Its narrative is driven by the question “What happens next?” and involves characters who are extremely wealthy or miserably impoverished; who experience excessive good or ill fortune; and, who are clever or stupid, beautiful or ugly. Also, the fairy tale, like the soap opera, invents situations, such as family feuds, voyages, accidental as well as calculated violence, and death, for the sake of the art form. Whether they reflect domestic realism or magical romance, fairy tales and soap operas alike center on family dramas; both forms are structured around male-female relationships that strive for union and continuance. In the fairy tale, marriage and family become Utopian goals that provide what Carter described as “heroic optimism”--a promise that “one day, we might be happy, even if it won’t last” (xviii).

Carter clarified that her primary goal when assembling the international tales found in The Virago Book of Fairy Tales was not to show that women have much in common, but to demonstrate the diversity of female response to the common predicament of being alive as females. Carter’s chapter titles--*Brave, Bold and Wilful; Clever Women, Resourceful Girls and Desperate Stratagems; Good Girls and Where it Gets Them*--reveal the author’s attraction to the quick-witted heroine for whom survival is achieved by clear thinking, not passive subordination. The single common thread that binds Carter’s collection is a female protagonist, who, whether she is clever or silly, brave or cruel, is “center stage” and larger than life.

Carter's preference for stories with female protagonists stemmed from her "wish to validate [her] claim to a fair share of the future by staking [her] claim to [her] share of the past" (xvi). Carter closed her introductory remarks with the reminder that the collected stories in The Virago Book of Fairy Tales are rooted in a pre-industrialized past when theories of human nature were still "unreconstructed." This was a time when "only the intervention of the supernatural [could have changed] the relations of women to men and above all, of women to their own fertility." Carter recognized the burdens of an inherited past that was inimical to women, and offered these stories "in a valedictory spirit, as a reminder of how wise, clever, perceptive, occasionally lyrical, eccentric, sometimes down-right crazy our great-grandmothers were, and their great-grandmothers" (xxii).⁸

Carter's fascination with the fairy tale form continued until her last days. Working from her hospital bed on The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales (which in 1993 was published posthumously in England, and also in the United States as Strange Things Sometimes Still Happen), she was determined to bequeath something to "the girls" [the women of future generations].⁹ Like its predecessor, this volume features the quick-witted women found in popular tales from around the world. More specifically, the collection includes "recently collected oral tales, in which women's cunning, trickery and ribaldry gets [sic] the better of men, and overturns [sic] both worldly and magical authority" (Uglow 22). The tales

examine some of Carter's favorite themes, including erotic violence and the feral nature of women. As Warner points out in the introduction to this collection, Carter "turns topsy-turvy some cautionary folk tales and shakes out the fear and dislike of women [that the tales] once expressed [in order] to create a new set of values, about strong, outspoken, zestful, sexual women who can't be kept down" (x). Warner's description accurately captures the essence of the Carter heroine as one who never cries over spilt milk.

We meet a number of such heroines in Carter's The Bloody Chamber (1979), a collection of revised variations of the traditional fairy tales, such as "Beauty and the Beast," "Snow White," and "Little Red Riding Hood." Carter unabashedly injected her own radical reworking of the tales with a double shot of the erotic and the pornographic. These adult tales, often distorted versions of the classical originals, focus on the perversely human attraction to that which is most feared. Through Carter's reimagined heroines, we comprehend the power of female sexuality and desire, and come to understand, as they do, that transgression provides the excitement and the thrills. Fulfilling the charge of feminist theorists Gilbert and Gubar for woman writers to speak from a female perspective, Carter with this collection shattered "the mirror that has so long reflected what every woman was supposed to be" (76).¹⁰ By metaphorically going through the looking glass, Carter definitely and purposefully writing "in the service of women."¹¹ She

also provided in the subtext of her fairy tales such valuable lessons as how to survive the rule of patriarchy and how to have fun doing it.

“The Bloody Chamber,” the title story of this collection, is a retelling of the Bluebeard tale. In the original Perrault tale, the title character is portrayed as a man with an offensive blue beard who must buy himself a wife because no one will have him any other way. The young woman who agrees to marry him (and who significantly remains nameless) is so enraptured by his riches that she “began to think that the beard of the master of the house was not so very blue, after all” (Sleeping Beauty 34). Carter later identified this shift in the character’s perception as the human potentiality for corruption. Another underlying theme of the tale is the all-consuming power of desire for either knowledge or for pleasure that tempts one to venture into forbidden territory.

Carter’s version of this tale is yet another of the coming of age stories in which a young maiden is initiated into the world of adult sexuality while learning about the restrictions of marriage. The narrator is the Marquis’ fourth and latest wife who, unlike the female characters of the traditional fairy tale, is given a voice. Through the wife, Carter articulated the sense of separation and loss that a young woman often experiences when she leaves her familial home (particularly one in which there is a strong and positive maternal bond) for that of a spouse. The newly wedded bride, however, intuitively senses her impending loss. “And, in the midst of my bridal triumph, I felt a pang of loss as if, when he put the gold band on

my finger, I had, in some way, ceased to be her child in becoming his wife" (7). This young woman of seventeen, seduced by the virility of her bestial pursuer -- particularly by his kisses with tongue and teeth, his raspy breath, the leonine shape of his head, and his dark and silver mane--pays little attention to her wise mother's pleas not to rush into marriage. (The mother, by the way, is an incredibly competent woman who nursed a village through the plague, single-handedly shot a man-eating tiger, and fought off a junkful of Chinese pirates.)

Eager to marry the richest man in France, to move into his renowned castle, and to bear an heir (like Melanie in The Magic Toyshop), the young orphan is easily wooed by the widowed Marquis (de Sade perhaps?), who is the embodiment of sexual perversion and male destructive power.¹² He buys her an expensive trousseau and showers her with lavish wedding presents. Included among the gifts are a fire-opal ring and a choker of rubies, two inches wide, that makes her neck look like "an extraordinarily precious slit throat." The necklace is reminiscent of Aunt Margaret's (from The Magic Toyshop) silver choker, which also was a wedding gift emblematic of woman's lack of freedom and her status as an object to be collared.¹³ The choker is at once a symbol of beauty (perhaps love) and, as its name suggests, suffocation.

As innocent as the bride-to-be might seem, however, she is keen enough to sense within herself "a potentiality for corruption" (11). Like Olga Broumas' "woman co-opted by promises," she recognizes that, in a sense, she has been

bought.¹⁴ She is as much in love with her wardrobe from Poiret and Worth (ermine and sable galore), as she is seduced by her husband's male scent of leather and spices. Still, once she is shown to her very own turret suite, the grandeur of the castle is enough compensation. What she does not understand initially is that the trade-off is rather costly.

Like many of Carter's initiates, this heroine must come to the realization that she is made of flesh and that her body is her most valuable commodity. If she is to survive, she must recognize her buying power as an object before she can use it to her advantage. In this story, awareness comes about when the narrator first observes the carnal lust in her soon-to-be husband's eyes.

I saw him watching me in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts on the slab. I'd never seen, or else had never acknowledged, that regard of his before, the sheer carnal avarice of it (11)

With that newly acquired understanding, she soon abandons the promise of domestic warmth and security, realizing "Into marriage, into exile; I sensed it, I knew it--that, henceforth, I would always be lonely" (12).

The new bride is greeted by the image of Saint Cecilia at her celestial organ, the subject of an early Flemish painting (another wedding gift) that adorns

the wall of her room. Seeing the virginal innocence reflected on the prim face of the painted saint, the young woman thinks, “I saw myself as I could have wished to be” (14). But the mirrors surrounding her reflect a different reality. They project multiple images of herself--a whole harem, in fact, as her husband is quick to point out. Soon, the new bride’s role is about to shift to the role of wife.

The honeymoon night resembles a ritualistic disrobing at a brothel, with the woman being treated as an object to be groped, fondled, tasted, enjoyed.

He stripped me, gourmand that he was, as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke. . . . And when nothing but my scarlet, palpitating core remained, I saw, in the mirror, the living image of an etching by Rops [nineteenth century Belgian graphic artist] . . . the child with her sticklike limbs, naked but for her button boots, her gloves, shielding her face with her hand as though her face were the last repository of her modesty; and the old monocled lecher who examined her, limb by limb. He in his London tailoring; she, bare as a lamb chop. (15)

Though the newlywed feels repugnance toward her husband’s physicality, she is simultaneously aroused by the thought of “doing it” for the first time. The couple’s bedroom activity is interrupted, however, by “the beast’s” decision (without much

explanation) to take off on business. Assuring his bride that anticipation is part of the pleasure, the Marquis departs to tend to his companies and his estates.

Disgruntled, bored, and curious, the abandoned wife browses through her husband's pornographic library. When she discovers a 1748 edition of the obscene text, The Adventures of Eulalie at the Harem of the Grand Turk, she prophetically reads what is in store for her.

[T]he girl with tears hanging on her cheeks like stuck pearls, her cunt a split fig below the great globes of her buttocks on which the knotted tails of the cat were about to descend, while a man in a black mask fingered with his free hand his prick, that curved upwards like the scimitar he held. The picture had a caption: 'Reproof of curiosity'. (16-17)

The husband catches his wife reading this text and is excited by her transgression. He proceeds to take care of his unfinished marital business, as the multiple bedroom mirrors reflect images of a dozen husbands impaling a dozen brides. His mission accomplished, the husband sets off for a six-week business trip. Before he departs, the Marquis gives his wife the keys to his castle, confident that the "child [he's] bought with a handful of coloured stones and the pelts of dead beasts won't run away" (18). He does, however, make two demands. His wife is not to remove the choker which he has given her from around her neck, nor is she to set foot in

“his enfer.” This he explains is his private study, a place where he can go “on those infrequent yet inevitable occasions when the yoke of marriage seems to weigh too heavily on [his] shoulders” (21). (Carter’s use of the word “yoke” calls attention to the wife’s choker--both of which serve as symbols of suffocation.)

Abandoned on her wedding night, left at once longing for and disgusted by her husband, the narrator finds pleasure (and relief) at the keys of her newly-tuned piano.¹⁵ Soon bored, she remembers the keys to the castle of which she is both mistress and prisoner. She sets her mind to unearthing her husband’s true nature and begins to search the locked rooms for clues to his heart. What she discovers is the torture chamber where her predecessors were loved to death.

Carter’s description of what the horrified wife observes recalls the final scene in Shadow Dance, when Morris and Emily discover Ghislaine’s mutilated body (see Chapter 2).

[A]t the center of the room lay a catafalque, a doomed
ominous bier of Renaissance workmanship,
surrounded by long white candles

The opera singer [the Marquis’ last wife] lay,
quite naked, under a thin sheet of very rare and
precious linen, such as the princes of Italy used to
shroud those whom they had poisoned. . . . she was
cool, he had embalmed her. On her throat I could see

the blue imprint of his strangler's fingers. The cool,
sad flame of the candles flickered on her white, closed
eyelids. The worst thing was, the dead lips smiled.

(28)

The terrified wife is even more horrified to discover two other victims in the bloody chamber. Realizing that she will probably be next, she tries to telephone her mother, but, of course, the line is as dead as the ex-wives.

The Marquis returns unexpectedly and demands his ring of keys. Because she has accidentally lost the "bloody" key to the bloody chamber, the wife tries to buy herself some time by enticing her husband.

I forced myself to be seductive. I saw myself, pale,
pliant as a plant that begs to be trampled underfoot, a
dozen vulnerable, appealing girls reflected in as many
mirrors, and I saw how he almost failed to resist me.

If he had come to me in bed, I would have strangled
him. (35)

Though ready to strangle him if she must, the wife is overcome by a sense of "terrified pity" for the monster who appears to her to be in absolute despair. In a perverse way, his hopelessness and loneliness excite her. She feels compassion for "this man who lived in such strange, secret places" (35) and she reasons that if she loved him enough to marry him, she should be prepared to die for him.

The Marquis tells her to prepare for death, much like Othello summoned Desdemona to pray before he strangled her. As she awaits her impending decapitation, the wife is comforted (although not helped) by the live-in piano tuner whose intentions prove stronger than his survival skills. The avenging angel of this fairy tale turns out to be neither a prince, nor, as in the original tale, a brother; it is instead the young bride's mother who arrives on horseback. Carter used her favorite "puppeteer" and "doll" metaphors to describe the Marquis' reaction when the mother barges into the castle.

The puppet master, open-mouthed, wide-eyed,
 impotent at the last, saw his dolls break free of their
 strings, abandon the rituals he had ordained for them
 since time began and start to live for themselves

You never saw such a wild thing as my mother, her hat
 seized by the winds and blown out to sea so that her
 white mane, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh,
 her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reins
 of the rearing horse while the other clasped my father's
 service revolver and, behind her, the breakers of the
 savage, indifferent sea, like the witnesses of a furious
 justice. And my husband stood stock-still, as if she
 had been Medusa, the sword still raised over his head

as in those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you
see in glass cases at fairs. (40-41)

The mother kills the Marquis, an action that undermines gender stereotypes of masculine brawn and feminine frailty. By rendering the Marquis lifeless, Carter, has thus invested the mother with agency and logic. “Maternal telepathy,” she writes, was what saved the day.¹⁶ Like most fairy tales, this one ends happily. The merry widow marries the blind piano-tuner and they live blissfully thereafter, sharing their castle (now a music school as well as a school for the blind) with the mother. It is interesting that though the mother figure is absent in most of Carter’s fiction, the ending of this story reaffirms and valorizes the bond between mother and daughter.¹⁷

Following the title story of The Bloody Chamber are “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” and “The Tiger’s Bride,” Carter’s two versions of the “Beauty and the Beast” tale. Each one has its own interesting twist, especially with respect to marriage (to which both titles allude). The original plot of the beauty and the beast tale evokes and parodies the custom of marrying off very young daughters (beauties) to complete strangers (beasts), a practice that perpetuated male authority and female silence.¹⁸

Carter’s treatment of the tale is, as Ellen Cronan Rose observes, “a critique of the ideal of adult womanhood sanctioned by patriarchy” (222), serving also to dispel prejudices against female and male sexuality. Carter’s “heroic optimism,”

which points to a celebration of human sympathy and sexual desire as a way to meaningful communication between the sexes, subverts the ideas that female passion is dangerous and that the masculine, lustful appetite is categorically bestial and transgressive.

In “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” Beauty asks her bankrupt father to buy her a rose. As in the original version of the tale, the father steals a rose from the Beast, who turns out to be the kind, though unidentified, host. As punishment, the thief is summoned to bring his daughter, Beauty, to dinner. When Beauty sees the Beast, she instinctually shudders with fear at his ghastly appearance, but she is also moved by the sadness in his eyes. Like the young woman in the Bluebeard tale who was moved by the desperation of the Marquis, Beauty responds to the loneliness of the Beast. As she had surmised, “he disliked the presence of servants because . . . a constant human presence would remind him too bitterly of his otherness” (45). Although the difference between the Beast and herself is almost intolerable, Beauty is intrigued by the Beast’s large talons.

[W]hen she saw the great paws lying on the arm of his
chair, she thought: they are the death of any tender
herbivore. And such a one she felt herself to be, Miss
Lamb, spotless, sacrificial. (45)

Beauty, like the rest of Carter’s innocent females, is simultaneously attracted to, and fearful of, male physicality. When the Beast asks her to stay with him while

her father returns to his home, Beauty knows that her own flesh is the price that must be paid in exchange for her father's well-being. She agrees to stay, of course, though part of the reason she stays has much to do with "the hint of shyness, of fear, of refusal" (45) that she discerns in the Beast's eyes.

Soon bored with her imprisonment, Beauty attempts to engage in small talk with her host. To her surprise, he seems as much in awe of her as she is frightened of him. He strikes up a friendship founded on his genuine interest in her family affairs, and soon the two are chattering away as if they had been life-long companions. Against all her expectations, Beauty realizes that she is happy when she is with her hirsute friend, though she cannot bring herself to touch him. Still, when her father regains his lost fortune, she is quick to leave the Beast behind, with only a promise to return as consolation.

As another of Carter's adolescents, Beauty must be initiated into adulthood through a series of events that are both painful and self-revealing. Preoccupied at first with her new and extravagant life-style, she forgets her vow to the Beast. When she learns that he is dying for love of her, she hastily returns to his deathbed. As in the original tale, Beauty confesses her love for the Beast, and in a familiarly comic Carteresque style, she flings "herself upon him, so that the iron bedstead groan[s]" (50). No longer shy or frightened of what lay in this bed, Beauty showers the Beast, who is magically transformed into Mr. Lyon, with kisses. In typical fairy-tale fashion, Mr. and Mrs. Lyon then walk happily into their garden.

And though Carter did invest the heroine with some understanding of her newly awakened sexual appetite, the author did little to change the plot of the original version of this tale. As Mrs. Lyon, Beauty, has no identity of her own other than as an appendage to the Beast. As Ellen Cronan Rose indicates, Beauty has simply changed masters (223).

In "The Tiger's Bride," however, Carter reinvented a more assertive Beauty who rejects patriarchal protection in favor of sexual satisfaction. Equally significant is the fact that, unlike the omniscient narrative voice of "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," the storyteller of "The Tiger's Bride" is Beauty herself. Carter, in making Beauty the narrator of her own story, this time invested her with the authority to rewrite the patriarchal script and thereby to "shuck off" those prescribed ideological constructs that she might find ill-fitting and oppressive. By granting Beauty a voice, Carter has overthrown female silence and obedience as exalted feminine virtues. Beauty tells us from the start that her father lost her to the Beast in cards, while she "watched with the furious cynicism peculiar to women whom circumstances force mutely to witness folly" (52). Yet the very fact that she is telling us her story is Carter's testament against female voicelessness. As Warner points out in her critique of the Walt Disney film, The Little Mermaid, "It is voice, in the last analysis, that is more powerful than beauty--or even goodness" (404).

Another difference between Carter's two versions that is immediately obvious is Beauty's relationship with her father. This Beauty, unlike the character of the previous tale, is not one to risk her life for her father since he, it is clear, has little regard for her. He is too busy gambling and whoring to pay any attention to her needs. It is the Beast, Milord, who pays notice to Beauty, himself giving her the white rose of the fairy tale. She, too, is attracted to the creature who "wears a mask with a man's face painted most beautifully on it . . . but one with too much formal symmetry of feature to be entirely human" (53). It is, we learn, a too-perfect face. Milord's looks, consequently, are offset by his speech impediment, which requires his valet to interpret for him "as if his master were the clumsy doll and he the ventriloquist" (54).

As Milord's prize, Beauty must move into the Beast's palazzo. She is picked up the following morning by the valet, who delivers to her a bouquet of white roses, a gift which she is too irritated to appreciate. Carter's musing--"as if a gift of flowers would reconcile a woman to any humiliation" (55)--serves to strike out at the conventions of the courting game. In this tale the roses signify the important moment of the daughter's separation from her father; symbolically, Beauty pricks her finger on the stem of one of the roses that she gives to her crying father. The farewell scene between daughter and father brings out in Beauty a quality that in Carter's fiction usually suggests survival. "My spite," Beauty tells

us, “was sharp as broken glass” (55). Like her counterpart in the original tale, Beauty knows that a grudge will do her more good than tears might.

During her ride to Milord’s residence, Beauty wonders about the “beastliness” of her host. With delighted terror she wonders if he will be anything like the tiger-man of the old wives’ tales that she heard as a child. Now on her own, she assures herself that she must rely on her common sense to figure out how to make a way for herself in the world. She muses

I knew well enough the reason for the trepidation I
cosily titillated with superstitious marvels of my
childhood on the day my childhood ended. For now
my own skin was my sole capital in the world and
today I’d make my first investment. (56)

Beauty comes to appreciate the value of her flesh as a commodity, realizing that it is how one invests that determines net gain.

When Beauty is told that her host’s one desire is to see her naked, her response is one of incredulity. She says, “I could scarcely believe my ears. I let out a raucous guffaw; no young lady laughs like that! my old nurse used to remonstrate. But I did. And do” (58).¹⁹ Beauty’s confident laughter, a sign of her self-assurance, ultimately gives her the leverage she needs to survive. She decides to comply, but she tells the valet that she will do so on her own (financial!) terms. With a business-like demeanor, she outlines her conditions, indirectly informing

the Beast that though she may be bought, she will make sure that she will not be enjoyed. She strips all the pleasure of the Beast's fantasy by consenting to do as he asks but not in the manner that he expects. She tells him,

You may put me in a windowless room, sir, and I promise you I will pull my skirt up to my waist, ready for you. But there must be a sheet over my face, to hide it; though the sheet must be laid over me so lightly that it will not choke me. So I shall be covered completely from the waist upwards, and no lights. There you can visit me once, sir, and only the once. After that I must be driven directly to the city and deposited in the public square, in front of the church. If you wish to give me money, then I should be pleased to receive it. But I must stress that you should give me only the same amount of money that you would give to any other woman in such circumstances. However, if you choose not to give me a present, then that is your right. (59)

Beauty's compliance negates the pleasure of transgression; it also shames Milord to tears. Beauty is locked in her bedchamber to await the Beast's decision.

When the Beast reiterates his request, explaining further that he desires “[t]he sight of a young lady’s skin that no man has seen before” (61), Beauty regrets that she has remained a virgin. “That he should want so little was the reason why I could not give it” (61), she reasons. She is upset by the fact that he has accepted her proposal and, as such, has not been frustrated by her stipulations. His obsession for something that any unviolated female could provide disempowers Beauty as a unique individual. Sadly understanding that her situation parallels that of the robot maidservant that has been taking care of her, she thinks

I was a young girl, a virgin, and therefore men denied me rationality just as they denied it to all those who were not exactly like themselves, in all their unreason I certainly meditated on the nature of my own state, how I had been bought and sold, passed from hand to hand. That clockwork girl who powdered my cheeks for me; had I not been allotted only the same kind of imitative life amongst men that the doll-maker had given her? (63)

Beauty, in the process of discovering the animal nature of her sexuality, regrets that the Beast desires the idea of the innocent female virgin, rather than Beauty as she exists. Thus, she changes her mind and firmly refuses to expose herself to him.

Rejected yet again, Milord negotiates a new deal. He proposes that since Beauty will not let him see her unclothed, she must then prepare herself to see him naked. Agreeing, Beauty reciprocates (much to the reader's surprise) once the Beast has himself disrobed. She is moved by his apparent discomfort, which she reads as fear of yet another rejection. Seeing the Beast stripped of his human appearance marks the moment of Beauty's sexual awakening and transformation. Choosing the pleasures of the flesh over the rule of her father (to whom she is now free to return), Beauty decides to stay with the Beast and send home the wind-up doll to perform the duties of a daughter. She is, however, unaccustomed to the thought of her own nakedness since her religion deemed it unnatural. As if symbolically flaying her inherited notions of sexuality, she begins to peel off her clothes.

I felt as much atrocious pain as if I was stripping off
 my own underpelt and the smiling girl [the mechanical
 maid] stood poised in the oblivion of her balked
 simulation of life, watching me peel down to the cold,
 white meat of contract and, if she did not see me, then
 so much more like the market place, where the eyes
 that watch you take no account of your existence. (66)

As this passage suggests, it is difficult to shed the inherited notions that prescribe our expected behavior. Though with admitted difficulty and pain, Beauty discards

the idea that female flesh is a commodity, and redefines her body as a wellspring of pleasure.

In the closing scene, Beauty willingly approaches the Beast, bringing with her the possibility of a new “peaceable kingdom in which his appetite need not be [her] extinction” (67). This idea is central to Carter’s notion of “heroic optimism,” especially with regard to gender politics and sexuality. As novelist Margaret Atwood notes,

It is Carter’s contention that a certain amount of tigerishness may be necessary if women are to achieve an independent as opposed to a dependent existence; if they are to avoid--at the extreme end of passivity--becoming meat. They need, in their own self-interest, to assimilate at least some of [Sade’s] Juliette’s will-to-power.²⁰

In the end, The Beast ever-so-gently licks off “skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world” (67) that have prevented Beauty from being a sexually satisfied, adult woman. Transformed into the Beast’s animal form, Beauty is to some degree Carter’s fairy tale version of Sade’s Juliette. As Warner observes, the Beauties in Carter’s fiction “choose to play with the Beast precisely because his animal nature excites them and gives their desires license” (308).

The next fairy tale in this collection, "Puss-in-Boots," offers a retelling of the original story that well-exemplifies the author's penchant for bawdy, slapstick, and farcical comedy. She considered this her most "out and out funny" story.²¹ The tale is indeed light in tone. Narrated by a cat named Figaro, who is the title character, the tale is about the escapades of dandy who engages the valet-services (and sometimes pandering assistance) of the celebrated tom cat.

At first, all goes well as the rakish master gets into the beds of harlots, wives, daughters, country girls, and chambermaids aplenty. However, when he falls head over heels in love with the wife of Signor Panteleone--a proverbial princess who is locked in a tower and guarded by an old hag--his real adventure begins.

Figaro is convinced that "[i]t is the hazard of it that draws him" (71). Worried about his master's well-being (as well as his own, of course), he plots to get the rascal into the lady's bedchamber, knowing full well that "love is desire sustained by unfulfillment" (72). Puss' accomplice and paramour is none other than the lady's own tabby. First off, he advises his master to "[s]peak from the heart" (73) in order to convince the lonely wife that her body is the only thing that will save his life. Madame Panteleone, who is married to a miserly and impotent old man, is a sensible (and we guess frustrated) girl. Like many of Carter's women, she is probably tired of being treated like meat (her husband slaps her hide and flanks and cries out "[w]hat a bargain"). Understandably, she takes action

immediately after she receives a letter from her new suitor. At once responsive and uncompromising, she determines to return his affections, provided he is not too old or too ugly. She is another of Carter's female characters who makes her own rules and sets her own standards.

Figaro's machinations (included among them the "death-defying triple somersault--another favorite Carter metaphor that suggests daring and risk taking) enable the two lovers to catch a glimpse of each other. It is Tabby's clever rat-catching scheme, however, that ultimately brings all interested parties together. As the two humans enjoy their first encounter, Puss muses on the absurd prudishness with which the two approach each other.

Accustomed as I am to the splendid, feline nakedness
of my kind, that offers no concealment of that soul
made manifest in the flesh of lovers, I am always a
little moved by the poignant reticence with which
humanity shyly hesitates to divest itself of its clutter of
concealing rags in the presence of desire. (78)

Puss observes with amusement "the saraband of Eros," as the lady in waiting makes the first move and then plays hard to get. He is quick to size up the situation as he astutely observes the desire on the eager lady's face. He thinks, "Does she, that wise, grave personage in the *negligée*, think you've staged this grand charade merely in order to kiss her hand?" (78). This woman, unlike the

uninitiated innocents in Carter's earlier novels, knows "the sweet music" of her body.

The comic and whimsical description of what follows is a celebration of physical love that we have not yet seen in Carter's fiction.

His hand, then, trembling, upon her bosom; hers, initially more hesitant, sequentially more purposeful, upon his breeches. Then their strange trance breaks; that sentimental hawing done, I never saw two fall to it with such appetite. As if the whirlwind got into their fingers, they strip each other bare in a twinkling and she falls back on the bed, shows him the target, he displays the dart, scores an instant bullseye. Bravo! Never can that old bed have shook with such a storm before. And their sweet, choked mutterings, poor things: 'I never . . .' 'My darling . . .' 'More . . .' And etc. etc. Enough to melt the thorniest heart. (78)

According to Carter, the above passage, which goes on for another paragraph until the "passionate young woman . . . comes off in fine style. (Full marks, Master.)," had to be censored when aired on British radio. The author spoke with great delight about how the producers had to eliminate "about half a spool of bed springs."²² The tale continues with more of Carter's bawdy humor. "Haven't I

just now blocked the great hole?" asks the disguised rat-catcher of the intruding old hag," (79), who then pays Puss and his master handsomely for a job well done.

The story ends happily, of course, with the accidental but farcical death of Signor "Pantaloon," as Puss calls him. The two couples--the master and his new wife, and Puss and Tabby--set up house in the old man's castle, to which the merry widow now holds the keys.

The next tale, "The Erl King," has much darker overtones and can be read as a disturbing story that blends elements of eros and death. It is the first person narrative of a young girl who travels into the woods--Carter's symbolic representation for the journey to maturity. Lured by the magic light of the forest, the bewildered young woman feels "a haunting sense of the imminent cessation of being" (84). She knows that "once you are inside it, you must stay there until it lets you out again for there is no clue to guide you through to perfect safety" (84). She knows, too, that she must learn to navigate through the tangles of her imminent sexuality and adulthood. Her "girlish and delicious loneliness" (85) propel her into the arms of the Erl-King, whose green eyes "can eat you" (86). And eat her they do.

It is as if the deep-seeded yet untapped desires of this nubile female have imagined the Erl-King into existence. He is necessary to her sexual awakening. "He is the tender butcher who showed me how the price of flesh is love; skin the rabbit, he says! Off come all my clothes" (87). The young woman is at once

consoled and devastated by his touch, afraid that she will lose herself to carnal pleasure. She knows that “[h]e could thrust me into the seed-bed of next year’s generation and I would have to wait until he whistled me up from my darkness before I could come back again” (88). Her fear of losing her volition and her identity is revealed in the following passage.

Your green eye is a reducing chamber. If I look into it long enough, I will become as small as my own reflection, I will diminish to a point and vanish. I will be drawn down into that black whirlpool and be consumed by you. I shall become so small you can keep me in one of your osier cages and mock my loss of liberty. I have seen the cage you are weaving for me; it is a very pretty one and I shall sit, hereafter, in my cage among the other singing birds but I--I shall be dumb, from spite. (90)

Carter’s passage, which alludes to many of the images in Alice in Wonderland, summarizes the situation of women in general. As Carter saw things, women are romanced and wooed until they succumb to their (often repressed) sexual desires. Once the initial passion of a relationship wanes (usually after marriage), women become trapped like the caged birds.

This heroine, not surprisingly, has no desire “to join the whistling congregation kept in [the Erl-King’s] cages although he looked after them very affectionately” (90). She knows from the start that this kind of relationship will do her grievous harm. The Erl-King, however, is not portrayed as blameworthy; in fact, he is depicted as a kind provider who, like most people, innocently plays out his role. The narrator admits that “in his innocence [the Erl-King] never knew he might be the death of me” (90). As the story ends, the young woman is no longer passive object. She assumes the role of seductress, enticing the Erl-King to lay his head on her lap so that she will no longer be under the spell of his green eyes. Her intention is to strangle the Erl-King with his own hair--an interesting twist by Carter on Robert Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover” (a dramatic monologue in which the male narrator strangles his lover with her hair so that he might have her eternally where he wants her--in his arms).

Carter’s “murderer,” however, acts not only out of selfish interests, but for all of the women who have preceded her. Her plan is to “open all the cages and let the birds free; they will change back into young girls, every one, each with the crimson imprint of his love-bite on their throats” (91). This done, the narrator will string the Erl-King’s fiddle with his own hair; she is confident that, of its own accord, the bow will dance over the new strings of the instrument, making it cry out “[m]other, mother, you have murdered me” (91). This turn of events

undermines the seductive force of male sexuality and also accuses mothers for “selling” their daughters through arranged marriages.

The mother’s complicity in the undoing of the daughter is also central in “The Snow Child,” Carter’s reworking of “Snow White.” The young girl, a manifestation of the Count’s desire, is every man’s fantasy virgin-child. She has “white skin, red mouth, black hair and [is] stark naked” (92). The Countess, of course, hates her and tries to get rid of her. She demands that the Snow Child pick her a rose, which the young girl does. The young girl pricks her finger on the thorn and falls to the ground bleeding. The Count dismounts his horse and mounts the girl—all of this while the Countess is watching. The girl melts, leaving nothing behind but a bloodstained feather. The Count gives his wife the discarded rose, which then (magically) bites her.

This very short story (not even two pages) attacks the idea of the sometimes destructive nature of male sexual fantasies. It also portrays women as the agents of violence and suffering, evoking stereotypes of evil stepmothers, ugly sisters, and wicked witches. The Snow Child is Carter’s representation of the classic Oedipal child who arouses her father’s desire and thereby invokes her mother’s hatred. When the female child tries to usurp the mother, the mother must destroy her.

The story of “The Lady of the House of Love,” with its echoes of “Jack and the Beanstalk” and “Sleeping Beauty,” asks the question, “Can a bird sing

only the song it knows or can it learn a new song?"²³ The story concerns a queen of the vampires, a very beautiful young woman with a seductively caressing voice.

She is so beautiful she is unnatural; her beauty is an abnormality, a deformity, for none of her features exhibit any of those touching imperfections that reconcile us to the imperfection of the human condition. Her beauty is a symptom of her disorder, of her soullessness. (94)

During the day, dressed in her blood-stained *negligée* and wearing dark glasses that protect her from the reflection of mirrors, she stays in a coffin. In the evening, she puts on her mother's wedding dress and, beautiful and ghastly, she becomes the queen of night. During the dark hours, she is transformed into a four-footed creature and goes in search of her prey. Though she is indeed a queen of terror, she recognizes and abhors her predatory role. When she inhabits the form of a woman, she must have men--and she must eat them in order to stay alive. As Warner points out, "In myth and fairy tale, the metaphor of devouring often stands in for sex . . . the woman's fears do not focus on the act itself, but on its consequences, which are also often spoken of in images of eating" (259-260).

Always ravenous, the vampire marks a young English bicyclist as her first victim. She is attracted most my his

special quality of virginity, most and least ambiguous of states: ignorance, yet at the same time, power in potentia, and, furthermore, unknowingness, which is not the same as ignorance. He is more than he knows.

(97)

With a reversal of courtship rules, the young man (who traditionally is the hunter) thus becomes the prey. The Countess, like the proverbial princess of the fairy tales, has been waiting patiently for her bridegroom to arrive; but unlike the passive princess, she will ensnare her innocent prey because without him she cannot survive. She knows of only one kind of consummation--destruction.

The rational Englishman is sustained only by his fundamental disbelief in what he sees before him--a beautiful young woman who has "the fangs and talons of a beast of prey" (104).

[H]e would have said, perhaps, that there are some things which, even if they *are* true, we should not believe possible. He might have said: it is folly to believe one's eyes . . . since he himself is immune to shadow, due to his virginity--he does not yet know what there is to be afraid of--and due to his heroism . . . he sees before him, first and foremost, an inbred, highly strung girl child, fatherless, motherless, kept in

the dark too long . . . half-blinded by some hereditary
condition of the eyes. And though he feels unease, he
cannot feel terror; (103-104)

Significantly, this passage summarizes Carter's view regarding the impact of history on gender politics as well as the author's belief that unease (be it anxiety or fear of the unknown) makes a situation more exciting. Because he is rational and disregards appearances, the young man is not afraid. He allows himself to be seduced by the macabre temptress, whose intention it is that "the bridegroom bleed on [her] inverted marriage bed" (105). This action of desire represents Carter's reversal of what traditionally happens to virgins.

Concerned about the Countess' health and well-being, the young lad follows his hostess, unafraid. He feels pity for the young woman whose sad and frightened eyes dismiss any notion of erotic pleasure that he (or she) might have in mind. The Countess' plans for consummation are foiled, however, when she accidentally breaks her glasses and fumbles the ritual. When she bends down blindly to recover the scattered pieces of glass, she pricks her thumb. Her subsequent bleeding, of course, represents her initiation into sexuality.

The gallant bicyclist comforts her and kisses her wounded finger, offering the lonely Countess the most tender human experience she had ever known. Unfortunately, she is unable to bear the pain of becoming human, for "[t]he end of exile is the end of being" (106). The following morning, after a night of

lovmaking, the Englishman awakens feeling happy, refreshed, and full of plans to turn his hostess into “a lovely girl” (A trip to the dentist and to the manicurist is what he has in mind!). Much to his dismay, he discovers that she has died. The only thing he can do is to take home the fanged rose that she left behind. No, Carter’s ending reminds us, things do not always end as we plan.

The last three stories of this collection are retellings of the “Little Red Riding Hood” tale. The first of these, “The Werewolf,” is just two pages long. It is about an amazingly strong little girl, who, in addition to knowing how to use her father’s hunting knife, knows the forest too well to fear it. She tackles the wolf head on, slashing off his right paw without a problem. Well, there is a bit of a problem (as Red discovers when she finally reaches her destination) because the paw is actually her grandmother’s hand. Her grandmother, it turns out, is really a witch, and by chopping off the crone’s hand, Red has saved the town. For her reward, she gets to live in the grandmother’s house, where she prospers thereafter. Carter’s killing of the ancestral mother figure allows the new woman of the next generation to thrive, but only after the young girl recognizes that with maturity also comes animal-like sexuality, as embodied in Carter’s image of the wolf-grandmother.²⁴

In the second tale of this trilogy, Little Red Riding Hood not only acknowledges her impending sexuality, but she embraces it joyfully by seducing the wolf. “The Company of Wolves” is a story told in two parts. First, in a

general introduction about wolves, we are presented with certain key facts about the species. We learn that: wolves do not, cannot listen to reason, though they are “less brave than they seem” (109); the wolf “is a carnivore incarnate and he’s as cunning as he is ferocious; once he’s had a taste of flesh then nothing else will do” (110); wolves, who are symbolic of our animal impulses, “have ways of arriving at your own hearthside” (111). Why once, for example, (and Carter surely must have been smirking when she wrote this), “a woman was bitten in her own kitchen as she was straining the macaroni” (111).

The second section of the story introduces us to Red, a strong-minded child, who always carries a carving knife. Because she has been too much loved, she is (like the other Carter Red Riding Hoods) unafraid. Cloaked in her knitted red shawl, this young, pretty, and intrepid virgin heads into the woods.

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 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. (114)

On her way to grandmother's house, she meets not a wolf but a handsome young huntsman with whom she laughs and jokes as old friends do. He gallantly offers to carry her basket, which holds the knife, promising that his rifle will protect them both. (Much of the humor in this section of the story stems from Carter's use of language that is sexually charged). He further assures her that his compass will guide them safely to their destination. When he sees that she is not convinced, he proposes a game: he will travel through the woods, she will stay on the path; if he gets there first, she must reward him with a kiss.

This Red, who represents female cunning and aggressiveness, is eager to bed the wolf. She decides to dawdle through the woods in order to allow the huntsman plenty of time to reach her grandmother's house first, and thereby earn his prize. Meanwhile, the huntsman (who magically has transformed himself into a wolf) makes it to Granny's house before Red. He devours the old woman, tidies up his mess, and sits hungrily, but patiently, awaiting the girl. When the granddaughter arrives, she is quick to interpret the signs revealing that her grandmother is gone: there are no indentations on the old lady's pillow; the family Bible sits closed on the table; and a white tuft of Granny's hair stubbornly refuses to burn in the fireplace. She also hears the howling of a pack of wolves now arrived just outside the cabin.

In typical Carteresque fashion, “since [Red’s] fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid” (117). As mentioned in the discussion of an earlier tale, Carter believed that in times of trouble tears are useless. Knowing this, the young girl starts to disrobe.

[O]ff came her skirt, her woolen stockings, her shoes
and on to the fire they went, too, and were gone for
good. The firelight shone through the edges of her
skin; now she was clothed only in her untouched
integument of flesh. This dazzling, naked she combed
out her hair with her fingers; her hair looked white as
the snow outside. Then went directly to the man with
red eyes in whose unkempt mane the lice moved; she
stood up on tiptoe and unbuttoned the collar of his
shirt. (118).

This done, the young woman freely gave the huntsman/wolf the kiss she had promised him. The heroine’s freedom to do as she desires characterizes the women of Carter’s later fiction. Carter’s protagonist is described as “a wise child,” who does not flinch even after the wolfman (though himself afraid) tries to intimidate her further with the well-worn line “All the better to eat you with.” The wise child bursts out laughing, knowing full well “she was nobody’s meat” (118).

She laughed at him full in the face, she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing. The flames danced like the dead souls on Walpurgisnacht [a witches' Sabbath] and the old bones under the bed set up a terrible clattering but she did not pay them any heed. (118)

Laughter, once again, serves to dismiss the heroine's imminent danger. Roused by her animal impulse, the young woman pays no mind to the dead values that the grandmother's bones may represent, as "sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf" (118). This wise child has "tamed" the wolf just enough so as to protect herself from danger, without sacrificing the erotic pleasure she so desired.

"Wolf Alice," the final story in this collection, is the most radical of Carter's fairy tale transformations. It imagines what might happen if the wise child were to give in completely to her animal nature. As the story opens, the title character, we are told, howls because she is lonely and unable to communicate with her foster kindred of the forest:

[T]hey are trying to talk to her but they cannot do so because she does not understand their language even if she knows how to use it for she is not a wolf herself, although suckled by wolves 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. Like the wild beasts, she lives without a future. She inhabits only the present tense, a fugue of the continuous, a world of sensual immediacy as without hope as it is without despair. (119)

As the story continues, we learn that Wolf-Alice (suckled on wolf's milk) was rescued by nuns who tried unsuccessfully to humanize her. We are told, with irony, that "it was a great day among the novices when she learned to sit up on her hind legs and beg for a crust" (120). The wolf-child is delivered to the unsanctified household of the lonely Duke, who strangely "ceased to cast an image in the mirror" (120). Alice is from the start drawn to this man, who like herself is both wolf and human.

She grew up with wild beasts. If you could transport her, in her filth, 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 and her silence and her howling a language as authentic as any language of

nature. In a world of talking beasts and flowers, she
 would be the bud of flesh in the kind lion's mouth: but
 how can the bitten apple flesh out its scar again? (121)

As the "wise children" of Carter's tales know, the answer to this question has to do with the author's dream of "heroic optimism," which was explained earlier. Wolf-Alice lives her life without worry about getting married or following the socially prescribed rules for women of her time, well-aware that without a decreed plan for her future, she will be free to enjoy the world of instant gratification by giving in to her sexual desires at will.

In the end it is the wise wolf-child who gives meaning to the Duke after he is wounded and thereby humanized, and only then is the Duke given back his reflection. What this original tale suggests is that both men and women have much to gain if they can liberate themselves from inherited gender-bound notions of behavior. "Wolf Alice" is Carter's recurring story of the "Outsider" looking for someone to play with and trying to understand the ever-changing codes that rule the game of love.

If, as Warner suggests, a true writer of fairy tales sees into the future, then Carter used the fairy tale genre as a vehicle for presenting an alternative, Utopian vision of ways women are taught to perceive the world. By constantly stretching that which is permissible, the author ventured into territory where everything is taboo and nothing is sacred. With language that is at once provocative and

unsettling, Carter was able to lay bare the misogyny of popular fairy tales. In her own reworked versions, she dares to portray women both as victims and agents of violence, while simultaneously exploring erotic possibilities for women.

“Notes”

¹ See Marina Warner’s From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers, New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1995, xvi.

² Carter writes that in the game of gender politics, one partner’s pleasure need not be the other partner’s extinction. See The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History, London: Virago, 1979.

³ As fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes explains, this transmutation of the fairy tale coincided with the shift in contemporary European attitudes away from an earlier frankness and acceptance of the body and of sexual behavior. Additionally, the tales began to reflect rigidly defined gender roles. “Men became more closely associated with reason, temperance, activism, and sovereign order; females became more identified with irrationality, whimsy, passivity, and subversive deviance” (33). For further discussion of this issue, see Zipes’ Fairy Tale as Myth, Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1994.

⁴ See Carter’s introduction to The Virago Book of Fairy Tales, London: Virago Press, 1990, p. ix.

⁵ This was published in the United States as The Old Wives’ Fairy Tale Book, New York: David McKay, 1987.

⁶ Warner also makes this point in From the Beast to the Blonde, p. 25.

⁷ See Julia Kristeva’s Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

⁸ This quotation is almost exactly the same as the one used by Alice Walker in In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

⁹ See Jenny Uglow’s “Through the Female Line,” a review of The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales, Times Literary Supplement, 20 November 1992, p. 22.

¹⁰ See Elaine Showalter's essay, "Toward a Feminist Poetic" in The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory, New York: Pantheon, 1985, pp. 125-43.

¹¹ This is Carter's own phrase, first used in "The Language of Sisterhood," in Leonard Michaels' The State of the Language, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, pp. 226-34.

¹² Margaret Atwood writes that "The Bloody Chamber may be read as a 'writing against' de Sade, a talking back to him." See Lorna Sage's Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter, London: Virago, 1994, p. 120.

¹³ This red choker, which is "the family heirloom of one woman who had escaped the blade" (17), is also reminiscent of the red ribbon tied around the necks of those who during the Reign of Terror survived the guillotine, much like the Aids ribbon is worn today to raise consciousness about this deadly disease.

¹⁴ See Olga Broumas' poem about Cinderella in which she laments her weakness of giving in to material promises. In Beginning with O, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977, p. 57.

¹⁵ Freud says the act of playing with piano keys is symbolic of masturbation. This interpretation adds yet another layer to Carter's story. See Lecture X in The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, translated and edited by James Starchey, New York: W. W. Norton, 1966, p. 156.

¹⁶ It appears that when a virgin or young girl is deprived of maternal guidance -- as most fairy tale protagonists are -- they become fair game for male sexual desire. As Ellen Cronan Rose points out, without a real woman to mother her into valuing herself as a person, the young girl of the fairy tale is conditioned by male-dominated culture into perceiving herself as nothing more than object. See Rose's "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: University Press of New England, 1983, p. 215.

¹⁷ Carter revisits this powerful bond in her rewriting of Cinderella in a story titled, "Ashputtle." See Voice Literary Supplement March 1990, p. 22.

¹⁸ See Warner, p. xxii.

¹⁹ Beauty's confident laughter, a sign of her self-assurance, ultimately gives her the leverage that she needs for survival. Beauty's response evokes Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa," and the power of laughter "to explode prejudice, to confront fear,

to destroy enemies, to resist oppression” (qtd. in Warner 151). To Warner’s list, I would add to neutralize transgressive power.

²⁰ See Atwood’s essay, “Running with the Tigers,” in Sage’s Flesh and the Mirror, p.121.

²¹ See Carter’s interview with Katsavos in The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994), p. 15.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Rose says the wolf represents Red’s “ineluctable carnality” (226).

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Language of Sisterhood: Carter and the Woman Writer

The Women's Movement has been of immense importance to me personally and I would regard myself as a feminist writer, because I'm a feminist in everything else and one can't compartmentalize these things in one's life.

Angela Carter, "Notes From the Front Line" (1983)

"If the fool persists in his folly, he becomes wise." I suppose that was how I came to feminism, in the end, because still and all there remained something out of joint and it turned out that it was rather an important thing, that all the time I thought things were going so well, I was in reality a second-class citizen.

Angela Carter, "Truly, It Felt Like the Year One" (1987)

For Angela Carter "growing into feminism," as the author herself admitted, "was part of the process of maturing."¹ Her maturity, both as a feminist and a writer (and by extension as a feminist writer), was impacted not only by the changing social milieu of her time but by women (past and present) whose lives and writings she very much admired. Colette, Charlotte Bronte, Christina Stead, Phyllis Rose, Louise Erdrich, and Grace Paley earned Carter's esteem.

In her 1980 review of Michele Sarde's biography of Colette, Carter revealed her great admiration for the French novelist. Perhaps this was because Colette realized much earlier in her life than did Carter that "if you can't win, [you must] change the rules of the game."² Perhaps it was that, like Carter herself, "Colette celebrated the status quo of femininity, not only its physical glamour but its capacity to subvert and withstand the boredom of patriarchy" (177). Whatever

the reason, it is certain that Carter learned a great deal from her literary foremother.

Carter assessed Colette's La Vagabonde (1910) as "a novel which is still one of the most truthful expositions of the dilemma of a free woman in a male-dominated society" (171). Clearly this is because in this novel, Renée Nere, the central character (who like Carter's own Chance twins of Wise Children, is a music-hall *artiste*), comes to realize that the confines of her own marriage not only limit her personal possibilities but serve as well to reflect her society's view of women as non-persons. Like Carter's later protagonists, Colette's are economically self-sufficient and have learned from experience that "men are decorative but useless" (178), and often destructive. Carter relished the idea that Renée Nere "knows quite well [that] the truth of the fairy tale is, kiss Prince Charming and he instantly turns into a frog." Another of Colette's characters ages into "a fat, jolly, altogether unrecognizable old lady quite unprepared to forgive [her ex-lover] for once having flinched from her wrinkles" (179), after first being "forced to reconstruct herself as a human being in order to survive the pain of Chéri's first rejection of her" (179-80).

Carter's own effort at setting up "a new game," so to speak, is for women to start learning and speaking a new language. In her 1980 essay, "The Language of Sisterhood" (written soon after the publication of The Sadeian Woman), Carter examined the implications and limitations of the English language, and outlined

what she saw to be the role of the woman writer. Carter maintained that the so-called “language of sisterhood,” which relies on an instinctive camaraderie shared by all women, is a potentially subversive tool which can be used by women writers to find a place for themselves in history. Ten years later, Carter reiterated her wish to validate her claim “to a fair share of the future by staking [her] claim to [her] share of the past.”³

Carter’s essay traces the origins of this encoded language to those spheres inhabited traditionally and primarily by women--the kitchen, the nursery (although not necessarily one’s own kitchen or nursery), and the brothel.

It is here where women bond, often transcending class, race, and creed because this encoded language is used by women as a dependent subgroup when they are speaking of their relations to men as a dominant group. This produces the possibility of a certain instinctive fellowship or sympathy of all women, everywhere, in itself a subversive factor. (229)

Two significant points should be noted. First, the sympathy and mutual help (Carter’s term is “free-masonry”) established by the “language of sisterhood” results from certain basic similarities that women share as women. Second, such “free-masonry” is established only if women of different social classes consciously ignore the disparate circumstances of their social realities. The paradox with the

“language of sisterhood,” Carter insisted, is that it “creates a sense of universality that is both true and false at the same time” (230). On the one hand, it is true that language that speaks from the heart tends to personalize and thereby, to a degree, universalize experiences of women from differing cultures. On the other hand, it is false to believe that the kinship that results from the use of such language is reason enough to discount the circumstances surrounding the different class and ethnicity based experiences.

Carter furthermore identified what she saw as the significant characteristics of the “language of sisterhood.” She considered it to be peppered with informal, often digressive, remarks (described by Carter as “allusiveness”) which need to be recognized as a valid alternative to the more direct “men-only” language one hears in public discourse. She also believed that the use of slang terms frequently employed by women emerged from a desire “to get rid of all the shit and speak spontaneously, directly from the heart, an organ which, correctly or incorrectly, [women] believe to be at least partially atrophied in the greater part of the male sex” (233). In Carter’s opinion, slang serves to dismiss structured, patriarchal, authoritarian devices like syntax, grammar, and artistic form with a supercilious smile” (233). This kind of anti-eloquence Carter labeled “the rhetoric of privatization” (234).

Sisterhood has inherited anti-eloquence from hippie
radicalese, which honored authenticity of experience,

and of being, as the highest value; and the verbal stuttering, the use of ugly shorthand forms, results from the attempt to communicate aspects of being which are, perhaps, essentially incommunicable. The lust for the real thwarted by the necessary artifice of language. (234)

As Carter's characters know, the artifice of language thwarts real emotion. Carter's own use of the "language of sisterhood" is evidenced in much of the non-verbal but very meaningful communication that transpires between her women characters in her subsequent novels. In these works Carter made certain that her female characters confront disparities of social status and stay loyal to their sex. Her characters' actions indicate that Carter's feisty females recognize how economics modify experience that is mistakenly universalized and identified as "female." (Lizzie and Fevvers [Nights at the Circus] and Nora and Dora Chance [Wise Children] speak with confident voices, digress when they feel like it, and curse or use slang phrases, consciously informalizing language. See Chapter 8).

Carter applied her theory of the artifice of language to the artifice of gender. Written three years after "The Language of Sisterhood," "Notes From the Front Line" presents Carter's ideas of femininity as a culturally determined construct, specifically outlining how growing up during the '60s shaped the author's femininity as well as her craft:

[W]hen I look at the novels I wrote in my twenties, when I was a girl, I don't see a difference in the emotional content, or even in the basic themes; I recognize myself, asking questions, sometimes finding different answers than I would do now I'm forty-two now; therefore I was a young woman during the 1960s. There is a tendency to underplay, even to completely devalue, the experience of the 1960s, especially for women, but towards the end of that decade there was a brief period of public philosophical awareness that occurs only very occasionally in human history; when, truly, it felt like Year One, that all that was holy was in the process of being profaned and we were attempting to grapple with the real relations between human beings I can date to that time and to some of those debates and to that sense of heightened awareness of the society around me in the summer of 1968, my own questioning of the nature of my reality as a woman. How that social fiction of my "femininity" was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing. (70)

For Carter writing was the means by which she and other women writers could accelerate “the slow process of decolonializing our language and our basic habits of thought” (75). Women writers, Carter believed, have a responsibility to create a language for expressing “an infinitely greater variety of experience than has been possible heretofore, to say things for which no language previously existed” (75).

[I]t no longer seems particularly relevant to instruct people as to how to behave in a changing society, when one’s very existence is instrumental in causing changes the results of which one can’t begin to calculate. And I personally feel much more in common with certain Third World writers, both female and male, who are transforming actual fictional forms to both reflect and to precipitate changes in the way people feel about themselves--putting new wine in old bottles and, in some cases, old wine in new bottles. Using fictional forms inherited from the colonial period to create a critique of that period’s consequences. (76)

Carter’s essay ends with her proclamation that, “What I really like doing is writing fiction and trying to work things out that way” (77).

In a 1984 interview with Kerry Goldsworthy, Carter (then a Writer-in-Residence at Australia's University of Adelaide) discussed her desire to write in a new artistic form, one that could approximate more closely the actual circumstances of our lives. As I discuss in the next chapter, Carter's last two novels depict fictional universes that serve (sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly) as mirrors of our very-often restrictive realities. Using the fantastic as her mode, Carter, in these works, was aiming for a "dissolution of an order experienced as suppressive and insufficient."⁴ The author relied on her creation of "a new kind of being, unburdened with a past," through whose actions she could subvert those cultural assumptions that preclude female sexual pleasure.⁵

"Notes"

¹ See Angela Carter's "Notes From the Front Line," in Michelene Wandor's On Gender and Writing, London: Pandora Press, 1983, p. 69.

² See Carter's Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings, London: Virago Press, 1982, p. 169.

³ See Carter's introduction to The Old Wives' Fairy Tale Book, New York: David McKay, 1987, p. xvi.

⁴ See Rosemary Jackson's Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, London: Methuen, 1981, p. 180.

⁵ Carter, "Notes From the Front Line," page 74.

CHAPTER EIGHT

It Ain't No Sin: Celebrating Female Sexuality and Desire

Since it was . . . primarily through my sexual and emotional life that I was radicalized--that I first became truly aware of the difference between how I was and how I was supposed to be--I found myself, as I grew older, increasingly writing about sexuality and its manifestations in human practice The sense of limitless freedom that I, as a woman, sometimes feel is that of a new kind of being.

Angela Carter, "Notes From the Front Line" (1983)

In 1986 Angela Carter edited Wayward Girls and Wicked Women, an anthology of short stories by women writers. This collection features female characters who represent a "new kind of being unburdened with a past."¹ These women, Carter has informed us in the introduction, are ones who "know about life." They know, too, that "they are worth more than that which fate has allotted them. They are prepared to plot and scheme; to snatch; to battle; to burrow from within, in order to get their hands on that little bit of extra, be it love, or money, or vengeance, or pleasure, or respect. Even in defeat they are not defeated"(xii). Carter's own novels, Nights at the Circus (1984) and Wise Children (1991), are populated by just such women.

In these works, Carter first introduced female characters who ignore all socially imposed limits that rob them of their power. These "liberated" heroines shed their history, and with it often their clothes. (No missionaries they!) They are neither domestic nor domesticated. Rather, they are equipped with all the qualities

necessary for survival: they are autonomous women in control of their lives, their money, their bodies, their pleasures, their language. They do anything and everything except fit traditional molds of female domesticity.

With these novels Carter shifted artistic gears once again, moving away from the speculative and fairy tale forms. In these later works, the author employed conventional devices of the carnivalesque and the fantastic narrative to blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy. She lured her readers into worlds of surreal logic and metaphysical impossibilities in order to deconstruct popular icons of femininity, female sexuality, and domesticity. Specifically, as will be discussed, she artfully subverted notions of Western culture that traditionally romanticize marriage and sanctify motherhood.

If we consider that the carnivalesque and the fantastic are literary modes characterized by transgression, it then becomes clear why Carter chose elements of these forms for her most celebratory works. The term, "carnavalesque," first coined by Russian theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, is used to describe the spirit of carnival in literature marked by parody, transgression, or an exaggeration of accepted beliefs. Bakhtin likens the carnivalesque in literature to the type of activity that often took place at medieval carnivals, popular and libertarian social phenomena characterized by a lack of order, civility, and decorum. As such, the carnivalesque was the perfect milieu for Carter, who believed that nothing--no text, no system--was sacred enough to evade her raillery.

In literature, the carnivalesque has come to represent a critical inversion of all official worlds and hierarchies. Through its characteristic lampooning and overturning of traditional values, the carnivalesque celebrates a temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order. Often parodying sacred words, texts, rituals, and narratives, it resists structure and closure. Everything authoritative, rigid or serious is undermined and mocked, usually through its emphasis on the grotesque, its use of bawdy language, and its references to the body and bodily functions. Universal human activities, such as eating, drinking, evacuation, sex, birth, and death, have a leveling effect and serve well the writer who wants to obfuscate distinctions. As the mother in one of Carter's early short stories tells her son, "The bowels are great levelers."²

The "fantastic" narrative, like the carnivalesque, challenges authority by establishing a temporary condition that invites upheaval. Yoking together wildly improbable happenings, it calls for the re-ordering of an unacceptable cultural status quo. In her study, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, Rosemary Jackson argues that the original function of the fantastic is to exert "pressure against dominant hierarchical systems"(17). She explains that "[i]t represents dissatisfaction and frustration with a cultural order which deflects or defeats desire, yet refuses to have recourse to compensatory, transcendental other worlds Structurally and semantically, the fantastic aims at dissolution of an order experienced as suppressive and insufficient" (180).

For Angela Carter that “order” included the dissolution of, among other things, the debilitating myths associated with femininity and domesticity. Writing in the mode of the fantastic was undoubtedly appealing to Carter, who believed that it is “very rarely possible for new ideas to find adequate expression in old forms.”³ Because the fantastic facilitates a transformation of actual fictional forms, it allows the author to reflect and to precipitate changes in the way people feel about themselves--an important task that Carter ascribed to the woman writer.⁴

The fantastic text relies upon all the conventions of realistic fiction, asserting that what is being presented is real; it then proceeds to break the assumption of realism by introducing that which is, within the same terms, manifestly unreal. The fantastic pulls the reader from the apparent familiarity and security of the known and everyday world into something strange--into a world whose improbabilities compel one to decide whether the plot events are natural or supernatural in origin. Because neither view can be supported with absolute certainty, the reader experiences what Tzevtan Todorov describes as a “moment of absolute hesitation” that keeps the reader or hero uncertain, puzzled, hesitating--in two worlds at once.⁵

At the center of the fantastic mode is the instability of the narrative itself, resulting paradoxically from the unquestioned credibility of the viewpoint character who serves as the consciousness of the novel. The narrator in the

fantastic must be reliable if he is to gain the reader's trust. If the narrator does not share the reader's conventional perception of reality, the reader will be less inclined to accept the narrator's testimony.⁶ Todorov explains that when an individual experiences an event which cannot be justified by the laws of our familiar world (one without devils, sylphides, or vampires), the event must be explained in one of two possible ways: the person experiencing the event is either the victim of a sensory or imaginary illusion (in which case the laws of the world remain as they are); or, it must be assumed that the event has indeed taken place, but is part of a reality controlled by laws unknown to us (25). Todorov explains further that the fantastic text usually insists upon an ambiguous perception of the world experienced by character and reader, both of whom are forced to consider, simultaneously, a natural as well as a supernatural explanation of the events described. Such an ambiguous vision of reality results when, as the narrative progresses, the reader is compelled to accept as true the incredible tale of a credible narrator.

Two of Carter's characters whose credibility we initially take for granted are Jack Walser from Nights at the Circus and Dora Chance from Wise Children, both of whom are viewpoint characters through whose eyes we experience the events of the novel. We take their trustworthiness for granted because of their professional status. Walser is a California newspaper journalist, currently on assignment to interview--and possibly expose--the Great Humbugs of the World.

Dora Chance, as the family historian, functions in a similar journalistic role. She has set out on the occasion of her father's one hundredth birthday to chronicle the Chance family history.

Early in each novel the reader is confronted by moving accounts of seemingly supernatural events that the respective narrators can neither explain nor ignore. Because neither reader nor viewpoint character comprehends the turn of events, the status of what is being seen and recorded as real is constantly shifting. As soon as the reader questions the credibility of the viewpoint character, however, this character deflects the reader's disbelief by confessing to his or her own incredulity and by making explicit the impossibility of understanding the tale in rational terms. As a result, we do not doubt Carter's viewpoint characters' observations, rather we try to find, just as they do, a rational solution to an apparently inexplicable problem.

In Nights at the Circus, for example, we are told that Jack Walser has "the professional necessity to see all and believe nothing" (10). Having set out to prove that Fevvers is bogus, Jack must determine whether or not the circus *aerialiste*, allegedly hatched into existence from a swan's egg (and sporting a bona fide set of wings) is real. Are her wings real? Is Walser hallucinating? Or, is Fevvers a clever con artist? These are questions that haunt both Walser and the reader, and which help to advance the plot. In an interesting twist to the story, we learn that Walser is still shaky from a recent tussle with yellow fever. Having thus planted a

seed of doubt about Walser's credibility, Carter has set us up to accept that Walser, in his weakened state, has fallen under Fevvers' spell. We are told that, "It was as if Walser had become a prisoner of her voice, her cavernous, somber voice, a voice made for shouting about the tempest, her voice of a celestial fishwife" (43). The voice, however, does not stop the journalist from taking notes. Completely under the lady's spell, Walser realizes that "The hand that followed [Fevvers'] dictations across the page obediently as a little dog no longer felt as if it belonged to him" (78). As Walser is charmed by Fevvers, so we are charmed by Carter.

The narrative voice in Wise Children is equally successful in enchanting the reader. Seventy-five year old Dora Chance warns us from the start that at her age memory becomes exquisitely selective and that occasionally she misremembers. She says, "I have a memory, although I know it cannot be a true one" (72), going so far as to caution us, "and if you believe that, you'll believe anything." The fact is we do believe her since there is no one but Dora either to verify or to dispute the reported details, which admittedly are subjective. Moreover, though we know that in writing the story of her life Dora has the freedom (and we suspect the tendency) to tell it not like it was, but as she wished it might have been, we willingly suspend our disbelief simply because she is such a compelling storyteller.

By allowing the viewpoint characters to confess their own doubts throughout the novels, Carter has managed to validate and at the same time dismiss our disbelief. Consequently, the reader is lassoed into accepting details and

memories that are somewhat cloudy and confused, and which undermine realistic ways of seeing. Furthermore, any accurate account of events or reliable interpretation begins to disintegrate. Nonetheless, though we may doubt the verisimilitude of the viewpoint characters' observations, we are entranced by the characters' attempts to rationalize the irrational. We find ourselves questioning their testimonies, while simultaneously we are willing, even eager, to accompany Walser and Dora into their respective surreal worlds of the circus and the stage.

Whether, like Walser, we join Colonel Kearney's ensemble (where freaks, clairvoyant pigs, and intellectual chimpanzees make oddity the norm) or like Dora we enter the theater world (where things and people magically appear and disappear, die and resurrect) we must, in both cases, necessarily surrender to what Rosemary Jackson calls "a ritualized suspension of everyday law and order" (16). Although we, like the narrators, may remain in conflict about what is real and what illusory, once we yield to the fantastic, we must agree to accept, even if temporarily, whatever metaphysical premises prevail.

Nights at the Circus is set in "a little village on the Thames of which the principal industries are the music hall and the confidence trick" (8). With this multi-ring extravaganza (the characters travel from London, to Petersburg, to Siberia) Carter, the master-conjurer, dared the reader to believe that characters have magic powers and could accomplish extraordinary feats. Fevvers, we are told, can fly. As if that in itself is not enough, we are asked to believe, for

example, that Big Ben strikes midnight not once, but three times; that Fanny Four-Eyes, one of the attractions at Madame Schreck's underground museum of women monsters, in place of "nipples, she had eyes"(69); and that Monsieur Lamarck's educated apes were so smart that they negotiated a better contract. The list goes on.

Likewise, in Wise Children, Carter was defying the reader to believe that not one, but two characters (Tiffany and Peregrine) are resurrected from the dead--Tiffany, after she has drowned, and Peregrine, after his plane has crashed. Although Peregrine miraculously shows up just in the nick of time to rescue Dora from her own impending death, this feat is not so amazing if it is compared to his finale, a trick that makes pulling a rabbit out of a hat the stuff of amateurs. As a present for the seventy-fifth birthday of his twin nieces, Nora and Dora, Peregrine performs a miraculous stunt; he pulls not one but two babies out of his pockets, and thereby makes Nora's life-long dream of motherhood come true. Again, though the reader suspects a logical explanation, a gimmick behind the trick, the emotional identification forces one to overlook metaphysical improbabilities.

By transporting the reader from the world of domestic realism to one of magical surrealism, Carter was able to turn everything upside down in order to set it right side up. Although the reader, like the narrator, remains in conflict about what is real and what is illusory, the reader eventually realizes that in Carter's fantastic world (which is simultaneously realistic and surrealistic), landscapes and

situations serve as vehicles for expressing not a metaphysical reality but an emotional one. In her reconstructed fictional universes, which serve explicitly or implicitly as mirrors of, or metaphors for, our own often restrictive realities, the name of Carter's new game is "down the drain with domesticity." To the female protagonists of Carter's last two novels, neither hearth nor home is sacred. Enterprising, inventive, qualified by experience, they are naturals at ruling the roost, but they choose instead to call the shots. They flee the private, familial sphere of the kitchen and head for the public domain of the brothel, the stage, the circus, television--landscapes that evoke a Bakhtinian sense of the carnivalesque, even though they remain, to some extent, within the ordinary boundaries of everyday space and time.

Characters like Fevvers (Nights at the Circus) and the Chance twins (Wise Children) inhabit landscapes that free them from the confines of a pre-existing social order, what William Blake called our "mind forged manacles." By shifting the focus away from the realm of the domestic, Carter has, in fact, empowered Fevvers (a trapeze artist) and Nora and Dora Chance, (vaudeville dancers) to operate within territories (oftentimes ones previously uncharted by female characters) where they can behave according to their own self-generated rules. Whether they tap-dance into the night or, with the help of a set of wings, swing on a trapeze, they are permitted to take on (if sometimes only out of necessity) unconventional professions.

Fevvers, for example, like the other fakes in Colonel Kearney's troupe, is out to bamboozle not only her circus audience but Walser and the reader as well. Carter's success is predicated not so much on making us believe in the objective reality of such a character but on evoking a sympathetic identification with someone stuck, as Fevvers is, in a situation not of her making. Fevvers' wings, therefore, which are not within the realm of physiological possibility, serve as the physical manifestation of her enormous difference. Fevvers herself tells us,

I was seized with a great fear . . . that these wings were
in themselves a kind of physical deceit, intended for
show and not for use, like beauty in some women

I feared a wound not of the body but of the soul, sir, an
irreconcilable division between myself and the rest of
humankind. I feared the proof of my own singularity.

(34)

Through the character of Fevvers, Carter cracked the prototype mold of the female character who suffers and wallows in self-pity like Sade's Justine. Fevvers, unlike Justine, knows that myths that idolize (and idealize) women are nothing more than "false universals" intended to marginalize the celebrated sex.⁷ As even Walser comes to understand, there is but a fine line between the "marvellous creature" and "the freak." Fevvers knows that as a "marvellous wonder" she borders on being "a marvellous monster, an exemplary being denied the human privilege of flesh and

blood, always the object of the observer, never the subject of sympathy, an alien creature, forever estranged” (161).

Modeled more like Sade’s Juliette, Fevvers is a libertine who looks out for number one. As a practical woman who understands that her fame and fortune rest “literally” on her wings, she abandons clotheslines for the high wires. Carter, in a personal interview, described Fevvers as the new woman who, out of necessity, changed the rules of the game of femininity.

[Fevvers] is very literally the winged victory, but very, very literally so. How inconvenient to have wings, and by extension, how very, very difficult to be born so out of key with the world. Something that women know all about is how very difficult it is to enter an old game. What you have to do is to change the rules and make a new game, and that’s really what she’s about.⁸

Fevvers, unlike Sade’s Justine, does not subscribe to the old philosophy that predicates female survival on physical beauty. Possessing none of the traditionally feminine attributes, Fevvers is described as “unusually large,” “enormous,” “gargantuan” (words that as an adolescent Carter likely used to describe herself). Fevvers also boasts muscular arms, dyed hair, and warts, to boot. Her six-foot wingspan enables her, sometimes, to defy gravity; at other times, she lands with an all too human thump (hence her nickname, “the feathered frump”). What Fevvers

does have, however, is the common sense not to give credence to fairy tale endings. Practical enough to realize during her stint at Ma Nelson's brothel that she "existed only as an object in men's eyes--after the night time knocking on the door began," Fevvers is quick to assure us that she "did not await the kiss of a magic prince, sir! With my two eyes, I nightly saw how a kiss would seal me up in my appearance for ever!" (39).

Fevvers, then, serves as the symbol of Carter's "New Woman." Half-human, half-swan, she is unique not because she has been hatched but because she is unburdened by a past. With her foster mother to guide her, Fevvers is wise to the fact that marriage is not all that it's cracked up to be. (Lizzie, the wise voice of experience, asks by way of caution "What is marriage but prostitution to one man instead of many?" [21]). Lizzie's (Carter's?) insight notwithstanding, Fevvers clings to the fantasy of romance, not realizing fully that the fantasy made real is quite a different thing.

Ultimately, though, this fabulous bird-woman turns out to be just an ordinary girl, susceptible to the sting of Cupid's arrow. When she finds herself on a derailed train, she succumbs to the Cinderella myth and cries out in typical damsel-in-distress fashion, "My young man will come and save us!" (241). Fevvers yearns for Walser to give her meaning. We learn that, "[s]he longed for him to tell her she was true. She longed to see herself reflected in all her remembered splendour in his grey eyes. She longed; she yearned" (273)--

presumably for a happy ending. In fact, when she thinks she has lost Walser forever, she acts as if it's a tragedy, and even breaks one of her wings. Fevvers, unlike Nora and Dora Chance, has yet to understand that "A broken heart is never a tragedy--only untimely death is a tragedy."⁹ For her, marriage remains the ultimate goal.

Acting the fairy godmother, Carter did, indeed, grant Fevvers' wish by rewarding her with Walser (an ending that yielded some negative criticism from feminists). It is important to note, however, that she did so only after she redefined the traditional roles of both partners. If Fevvers is the New Woman, then it is only fitting that she be united with a New Man. Carter's trick was to transform Walser, who unlike Fevvers is burdened by a past, so that, "All his previous experiences [are] rendered null and void" (252)--nothing that a bout with amnesia doesn't accomplish. Walser, who in order to stay close on Fevvers' heels has joined the circus as a clown, finds himself half way through the novel separated from the group; he ends up in Siberia as an apprentice to a Shaman, gets hit in the head, suffers amnesia, and almost ends up as the main course in a cannibalistic ritual. He is at last transformed, emotionally and physically, into someone else.

Walser, like Desiderio in The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman, and Evelyn in The Passion of New Eve, undergoes a notable change. His journey parodies the visit of Odysseus and his men to the Land of the Lotus-Eaters.

Walser, however, unlike the more unfortunate victims of Circe who are metamorphosed into swine, is transformed into a “New Man.” His transformation is nothing to sneer at, mind you, for he stops being preoccupied with whether or not Fevvers’ wings are real and starts wondering if Fevvers has a name, a soul, and the capacity to love.

Walser’s transformation, I believe, owes much to Fevvers’ storytelling charms. Unlike Circe who sets out to seduce and deform her visitors, Fevvers manages to seduce and reform Walser, more because she has fallen in love with him than because she wants to destroy--own and control--him. In the clutch of her story, one that is considerably different from the “old stories” upon which he was raised, Walser is helpless. In the end, as Fevvers’ intended mate, he is charged to serve all women as “the amanuensis of all those whose tales [Fevvers and Lizzie have] yet to tell him”--tales which, presumably, have alternative endings. As the novel ends, Walser, in the service of feminism, must “put his poor shoulder to the wheel and help give the world a little turn into the new era that begins tomorrow”(285).

That new era begins in Wise Children, wherein Carter artfully subverted the institutions of marriage and family. The nuclear family as it has been idealized by Western culture--married mother and father, two children and a dog--as Fevvers and Walser perhaps imagined it would be--does not exist. Carter’s “wise children” of this novel know that much too soon after the romance, reality sets in. They

know too that although marriage, domesticity, and motherhood exist as desirable ideals, in reality being a wife, homemaker, and mother often leads to negation of self.

Furthermore, this work explodes myths associated with the happily-ever-after-endings that marriage allegedly guarantees. Herself wise, Carter knew that the happy ending depends on when you stop telling the tale (227). Smart enough to “[h]ope for the best, [but] expect the worst” (33), characters of Carter’s latest cast are wise to the ways and consequences of infidelity, adultery, secret patrimony, abandonment, and divorce, and are left to figure out what it means to be a family, or for that matter, what the words “mother” and “father” signify. Ultimately, the characters’ happy endings depend largely upon their coming to terms with whether or not marriage and parenthood are for them desirable.

Nora and Dora Chance are “illegitimate in every way--not only [because they were] born out of wedlock, but [because they] went on the halls”(11). For them, marriage, housekeeping, and motherhood--traditionally central events in the lives of most women--become marginal concerns. Qualified by the seventy-five years of experience that each sister has under her garter-belt, Dora and Nora Chance know that domesticity is not prerequisite to their happiness. Likewise, Grandma Chance (the twins’ foster mother), for example, tells us straight out, “[c]an’t be doing the wash, wash, wash, polish, polish, polish, these days, when time is so precious” (2). Lady Margarine, the twins’ step-mother, a.k.a. Lady

Hazard III, a.k.a. “the face that launched a thousand pot-scourers” (41), does pick up pan-scrubbers and washing-up liquid, but she does so for cash, doing commercials. Her deftness with the pans is not a sign of domesticity but of worldliness. Analogously, her daughter, chef Saskia, cooks only for her television audience, a job that guarantees big bucks and zero complaints. (It is noteworthy that in her first novel, Shadow Dance, Carter wrote about domestic chores, such as dishwashing, in terms of the media’s prescribed image of women. Describing a character named Emily, Carter then wrote “[w]ith a quick movement, she slit open the carton and scraped out a handful of the hardened cleanser. The pots and pans seemed to fly to her and emerge, sparkling, after she made brief passes over them with her small, strong hands, as in a television commercial for detergents” (76). Though the language and the image that Carter used to describe Saskia and Emily are strikingly similar, the feminist implications in Wise Children reflect the author’s strengthened determination to turn domesticity topsy-turvy.)

Nora and Dora know first hand that marriage brings with it the kiss not of romance but of death. Their three stepmothers serve as proof. Most obvious is the case of Lady Atlanta Lynde, a.k.a. Lady Hazard I, who amidst her picture-perfect family was once the model of domestic bliss--that is, until her “darling buds of May” grew up Goneril-and-Regan-like and pushed her down a flight of stairs, rendering her crippled, confined to a wheelchair, and the destitute charge of, yes, Chance--Nora and Dora Chance, that is.

As such, Lady Atlanta serves as a constant reminder to Nora and Dora that they should be wary of the lures of hazardous men. Consequently, in their numerous adventures with Peregrine and Melchior Hazard (hazardous men, indeed), Nora, Dora, and the other female characters in the novel cleverly manage to escape the confines of domesticity so often brought on by unwise marriage, unwanted motherhood, or both. Carter's message, evidenced by the following examples, is clear: avoid both like the plague. Dora admits, "[w]e'd well nigh two centuries' experience of love, between us, and the omens were not good" (40), reiterating her skepticism some pages later when she says "[t]he more I saw of love, the less I liked the look of it" (82). When Nora sends word that she is about to marry, Grandma Chance warns, "Whoever he is, he's not worth it" (88). Lady Atlanta Hazard sadly but wisely realizes that Peregrine, the biological father of her children, though charming, was not the marrying kind. She says, "He was splendid over the short haul but would never go the distance" (169). Even young Tiffany, Nora and Dora's godchild, learns early in life how to handle men. (She has to in order to survive). After Tristram, who possesses "a slippery kind of charm," impregnates, abandons, and finally returns to Tiffany begging for forgiveness, she tells him, "There's more to fathering than fucking you know" (21). When he goes so far as to ask her to marry him, she zings him with "fat chance . . . not on your life, you bastard . . . not if you were the last man in the world" (210-11). In the

end, Tiffany keeps the baby and kisses Tristram off (much like Emily did when she left Honeybuzzard in Carter's first novel, Shadow Dance).

For all of these characters, not having a husband increases rather than precludes their chance for happiness. And though for Carter nurturing and fertility remained important, necessary goals, in this novel the romantic notions associated with motherhood and fatherhood have been blown to pieces. For starters, as the title Wise Children suggests, the conventional truth that father knows best is inverted. Shattered is the image of the revered head of household as hard-working, dependable, omniscient. Reminiscent of Mrs. Boulder's (Several Perceptions) "wise" words, that "[f]ather is only a word at the best of times but mother is a fact" (121), in this novel (as in most of Carter's work) fathers are absent, irresponsible, or unknown. Dora and Nora's theme song, "Is You or Is You Ain't My Baby," serves to remind us that paternity is anybody's guess, a realization that reduces the role of fatherhood to mere impregnation.

Carter's 1988 review of Eric Rhodes' On Birth and Madness reveals that this idea was very much in the foreground while Carter was working on her last novel.¹⁰

There never has been a way to know [true fatherhood].

Not truly know. Until just now, in the late twentieth century, when genetics can help us But the question has been so pressing it has even resolved

itself in metaphysics, in the invention of an omnipotent but happily non-material father to whom everyone can lay claim as a last resort. “Father” is always metaphysics: a social artifact, a learned mode. (203)

In the same review, Carter asked, “If these basic, physically determined relationships are not ‘natural,’ then what is?” (204). I believe she answered this question in Wise Children. Nora and Dora are “wiser” for wondering if sometimes they

haven’t been making him [their Father] up all along. If he isn’t just a collection of dreams and wishful thinking in the afternoons. Something to set our lives by, like the old clock in the hall, which is real enough, in itself, but which we’ve got to wind up to make it go. (230)

Earlier in the novel, we are told that, “It’s a wise child that knows his own father, but wiser yet the father who knows his own child” (73). Apropos of this, with a wave of Carter’s magic wand, Melchior Hazard (Dora and Nora’s father) at last “wisens up” on his one hundredth birthday and acknowledges his daughters as his own. Better late than never, we think, though Nora and Dora are not convinced that “[h]is softening of the heart was not unconnected to the softening of his brain” (202).

If paternity, as Carter claimed, is hypothetical and cannot be proven, and if “a person isn’t flesh of its father’s flesh” (174), then our understanding of family is at once subverted. The author redefined it to mean “an arbitrary affection that grows among the chance juxtaposition of intimate strangers”—an idea that Carter embraced while living in Japan. Dora and Nora, who know not from whence they really came, know only that Grandma Chance, “No blood relation at all . . . raised [them] . . . not out of duty, or due to history, but because of pure love” (12). This matriarch of the Chance family, who, like Fevvers, came into being by some rather unnatural means--“out of a bottle, like a bloody genie”(223)--invents not only herself but the entire Chance family (28).

Love is what Carter pulled out of her sleeve for her closing act. Oddly enough, love, the oldest trick in the book is the only reality left in the author’s fantastic world. Reader and characters alike realize that it is those people who are brought together by fate, not biology, that give family its truest meaning. Though the threads that hold together the Hazards and the Chances are as flimsy and complicated as the relationships themselves, what results is kinship among people brought together by Chance, both with an upper and lower case C.

Ultimately, the real magic of Carter’s fiction is a kind of surreal logic that forces us to open our minds to new possibilities. At the close of Nights at the Circus, Walser and Fevvers, not bound by history, embark on a new, more meaningful kind of relationship wherein (we are left to assume) there is true

companionship between the sexes and a mute understanding of their shared responsibilities. At the end of Wise Children, Dora and Nora, septuagenarian spinsters, though single, or maybe because they are single, are still kicking. They are last seen, dressed to kill in their spandex miniskirts, pushing a pram (with two babies) and singing away, "I Can't Give You Anything But Love, Baby." Challenging our traditional assumptions about marriage and family, Carter, the master conjurer, created a fantastic world that is not only plausible but, at times, desirable.

"Notes"

¹ See Angela Carter's "Notes From the Front Line," in Michelene Wandor's On Gender and Writing, London: Pandora Press, p. 74.

² See Carter's short story, "A Very, Very Great Lady and Her Son at Home," in her posthumously published collection, Burning Your Boats, London: Chatto and Windus, 1995, pp. 11-15.

³ See Carter's "Language of Sisterhood," in Leonard Michaels' The State of the Language, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, p. 228.

⁴ See Carter's "Notes From the Front Line," p. 76.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See Amaryl Beatrice Chanady's Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy, New York: Garland Press, 1985, p. 69.

⁷ See Carter's The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History, London: Virago Press, 1979, p. 5.

⁸ See Carter's interview with Katsavos in The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994), p. 13.

⁹ This line, taken from Wise Children (p. 154), is poignantly sad line when read in the context of Carter's then impending death.

¹⁰ See Carter's non-fiction collection, Expletives Deleted, London: Chatto and Windus, 1993.

CONCLUSION

The Death-Defying Somersault of Love: Carter as Risk-Taker

Posthumous fame is no comfort at all and the actual satisfactions of artistic production are peculiarly lonely and solipsistic ones, while the work itself has the same compensations as those of any self-employed worker, no more.

Angela Carter, "Notes From the Front Line" (1983)

"For Angela Carter, a very good wizard and a very dear friend"--so reads the dedication of Salman Rushdie's monograph on The Wizard of Oz, one of Carter's favorite films. Rushdie reiterates the compliment in his obituary tribute to Carter, whom he further acclaims as the "high sorceress" and "benevolent witch-queen" of English literature. Indeed!

Angela Carter, I am sure, would have appreciated the plaudits, especially since during her lifetime she never enjoyed the recognition that she so desired and very much deserved. Regrettably, this literary wizard's reputation suffered because, ironically, unlike the fraudulent Wizard of Oz who daunted his believers with empty rhetoric, Carter dazzled her readers with verbal pyrotechnics that were purposeful and profound. Carter, it seems to me, was a "public intellectual" who set out to expose all shamans who hide behind the curtain of cultural myths, blind to the fact that artificial constructs are by no means universal truths. In the end, however, the author's literary and linguistic acrobatics proved too risky; many

reviewers, though often impressed by individual works, never figured out quite how to classify Carter.

Angela Carter, unlike her British contemporaries, Doris Lessing, Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch, and Margaret Drabble, did not make it into A Literature of Their Own, Elaine Showalter's 1977 study of British women novelists. Nor was Carter included in Patricia Meyer Spacks' Contemporary Women Novelists, a collection of critical essays published that same year. It is distressing that it took two decades after the publication of her first novel for Carter's fiction to find its way into collections, such as The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women (1985) edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar--the same amount of time that it took for Carter's name to appear in the International Who's Who. Fortunately, however, Carter's literary popularity is presently on the up-swing. Not only is Carter included in Richard Hosmer's 1993 collection of critical essays on Contemporary British Women Writers, but contemporary novelists, Jeanette Winterson and Michelle Roberts among others, have acknowledged the influence that Carter has had on their work. Furthermore, as the progressively increasing volume of current Carter scholarship indicates, Angela Carter is commanding a secure, if yet not specifically determined, place in the contemporary canon of English literature for many reasons.

As I have argued in this study, in both her fiction and her non-fiction, Carter imaginatively examined the construction and deconstruction of fixed gender roles.

Most notably through her use of the fairy tale and the fantastic modes, she artfully protested the repression of female sexuality and desire by debunking culturally constructed ideologies, specifically myths about femininity, marriage, and motherhood. She redefined the sexual politics of desire as separate from romantic love and procreation, suggesting too that sexual impulses are potentially dangerous and in no way gender specific. Particularly in her later works, Carter created a gallery of spirited women characters, young and old, who are lovable “bad girls”-- prostitutes, circus performers, and music-hall dancers. Moreover, she appropriated a place in contemporary fiction wherein these wayward women can parley their feminine wiles into pleasure and profit. Angela Carter is an important literary figure of our post-modern era who deserves recognition for her innovative narrative strategies as well as for her representation of strong female characters whose smarts and sexuality she celebrated without restraint.

APPENDIX

The following interview, which took place in November 1988, was published in the Fall 1994 issue of The Review of Contemporary Fiction.

Katsavos: In "Notes From the Front Line" you say that you are not in the re-mythologizing business, but in the "demythologizing business." What exactly do you mean?

Carter: Well, I'm basically trying to find out what certain configurations of imagery in our society, in our culture, really stand for, what they mean, underneath the kind of semi-religious coating that makes people not particularly want to interfere with them.

Katsavos: In what sense are you defining myth?

Carter: In a sort of conventional sense; also in the sense that Roland Barthes uses it in Mythologies--ideas, images, stories, that we tend to take on trust without thinking what they really mean, without trying to work out what, for example, the stories of the New Testament are really about.

Katsavos: In modern poetry, women openly use traditional figures of patriarchal mythology, figures like Circe, Leda, Helen, not only to reinvent them, but to retell their stories, as you say in The Sadeian Woman, "in the service of women." To what extent do you rely on traditional mythical figures in your writing? Are you drawn more to a particular mythology than to another?

Carter: I used to be more interested in it. I'm not generally interested in doing that. I mean I'm not terribly interested in these particular characters. The second novel that I wrote a very long time ago, the novel called The Magic Toyshop, has a whole apparatus about Leda and the swan, and it turns out that the swan is just a puppet. I wrote that a very long time ago, when I really didn't know what I was doing, and even so it turns out that the swan is an artificial construct, a puppet, and, somebody, a man, is putting strings on the puppet. That was ages ago, over ten years ago, when I wrote that. The idea was in my mind before I had sorted it out. But I just stopped using these configurations because they just stopped being useful to me.

Katsavos: And yet, in Heroes and Villains, myths are not seen as extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree, but rather as something necessary and useful. Donnaly promises Jewel to make him a politician, king of all the Yahoos and all the Professors, saying, "they need a myth as passionately as anyone else; they need a hero."

Carter: For most people, when they are writing over a period of years, what they think they are writing about and what they believe in is a continuum; it's not "specktic." I've been publishing fiction since 1966, and I've changed a lot in the way I approach the world and in the way that I organize the world. Heroes and Villains was quite an important book for me. One of the quotations in the front is from the script of a film called Alphaville, made by Jean-Luc Godard. It was a

favorite film of mine of the late sixties, and there's a computer in Alphaville which says the thing that's quoted in the front. [There are times when reality becomes too complex for Oral Communication. But Legend gives it a form by which it pervades the whole world.] In these times, myth gives [history] shape. When I wrote that novel in 1968, this was a very resonant theme, that I am not so sure of now. I also think that Godard was using the word myth in the same way that Barthes is as well. The film Alphaville uses one of the greatest gangster heroes of French cinema, but it projects a sort of trench-coat, Philip Marlowe character, into some sort of antiseptic city of the future, and I really think that he was meaning myth in the terms of somebody like Bogart or Philip Marlowe. You know, you try things out and you try things out, and you figure out after a while when they're not working or they stop working or maybe you no longer think it's true. I just became uninterested in these sort of semi-sacrilized ways of looking at the world. They didn't seem to me to be any help.

Katsavos: What about Fevvers in Nights at the Circus? Would you say she's out to create her own myth?

Carter: No, Fevvers is out to earn a living. Everything she says in that direction is undercut by her mother, but the stuff which she says in the beginning about being hatched from an egg, that's what she *says* [Carter stresses *says*.] We are talking about fiction here, and I have no idea whether that's true or not. That's just what she says, a story that's being constructed. That's just the story of her life.

Part of the point of the novel is that you are kept uncertain. The reader is more or less kept uncertain until quite the long way through. When she is talking about being a new woman and having invented herself, her foster mother keeps on saying it's not going to be as simple as that. Also, they have quite a long conversation about this when they are walking through the tundra.

One of the original ideas behind the creation of that character was a piece of writing by Guillaume Apollinaire, in which he talks about Sade's Juliette. He's talking about a woman in the early twentieth century, in a very French and rhetorical manner. He's talking about the new woman, and the very phrase he uses is, "who will have wings and will renew the world." And I read this, and like a lot of women, when you read this kind of thing, you get this real "bulge" and think, "How wonderful," "How terrific," and then I thought, "Well no; it's not going to be as easy as that." And I also thought, "Really, how very, very inconvenient it would be for a person to have real wings, just how really difficult."

Fevvers is a very literal creation. She's very literally a winged spirit. She's very literally the winged victory, but very, very literally so. How inconvenient to have wings, and by extension, how very, very difficult to be born so out of key with the world. Something that women know all about is how very difficult it is to enter an old game. What you have to do is to change the rules and make a new game, and that's really what she's about.

That novel is sited at exactly the moment in European history when things began to change. It's sited at that time quite deliberately, and she's the new woman. All the women that have been in the first brothel with her end up doing these "new women" jobs, like becoming hotel managers and running typing agencies, and so on, very much like characters in Shaw. There's a Barrie play called The Twelve-Pound Look, about a woman who spends twelve pounds on a typewriter, and she gets that twelve pound look in her eye because she can now have everything By the time I wrote The Sadeian Woman, I was getting really ratty with the whole idea of myth. I was getting quite ratty with the sort of appeals by some of the women's movements to have these sort of "Ur-religions" because it didn't seem to me at all to the point. The point seemed to be the here and now, what we should do now. And that is when I started getting ratty about it.

Katsavos: What is your definition of speculative fiction, and do you consider yourself part of such a tradition?

Carter: Well, I have had some following in science fiction. I didn't read a lot of science fiction when I was younger, but there was a whole group of science fiction writers in Britain in the sixties, who really were doing very extraordinary things with the genre. They weren't writing about bug-eyed monsters and space, at all. One of them, J. G. Ballard, coined this phrase, "inner space," and I was very, quite profoundly affected by them. They are all still working, and Ballard is, I suppose, the most important. Michael Moorcock has written more books than anyone else

in the history of the world, two shelves. It seemed to me that after reading these writers a lot, that they were writing about ideas, and that was basically what I was trying to do.

Speculative fiction really means that, the fiction of speculation, the fiction of asking "what if?" It's a system of continuing inquiry. In a way, all fiction starts off with "what if," but some "what ifs" are more specific One kind of novel starts off with "What if I found out that my mother has an affair with a man that I thought was my uncle?" That's presupposing a different kind of novel from the one that starts off with "What if I just found out my boyfriend had just changed sex?" If you read The New York Times Book Review a lot, you soon come to the conclusion that our culture takes more seriously the first kind of fiction, which is a shame in some ways. By the second "what if" you would actually end up asking much more penetrating questions--penetrating, forgive me [laughs]. If you were half way good at writing fiction, you'd end up asking yourself and asking the reader actually much more complicated questions about what we expect from human relationships and what we expect from gender.

Katsavos: Are you moving towards stories that are less elaborately speculative?

Carter: Yes, I suppose so. The stories in The Bloody Chamber are very firmly grounded in the Indo-European popular tradition, even in the way they look. A friend of mine has just done a collection of literary fairy tales from seventeenth and eighteenth century France, things like the original "Beauty and the Beast,"

which is in fact from the oral tradition. There's this long history in Europe of taking elements from the oral tradition and making them into very elaborate literary conventions, but all the elements in that particular piece are very lush.

I was looking at it again last week. I read from it for the first time in ages the other night, and I thought, this is pretty cholesterol-rich [because] of the fact that they all take place in invented landscapes. Some of the landscapes are reinvented ones. "The Bloody Chamber" story itself is set quite firmly in the Mont Saint Michel, which is this castle on an island off the coast of Brittany; and a lot of the most exotic landscapes in it, the Italian landscapes, were quite legit. "The Tiger's Bride" landscape, admittedly, is touristic, but it's one of the palaces in Mantua that has the most wonderful jewels, and that city is set in the Po Valley, which is very flat and very far out, so, in the summer you can imagine the mist rolling over The landscapes, there are quite real. Even the werewolf stories are set in some horror filled invented landscapes, but there's more a kind of down to earthiness in those stories.

Katsavos: Isn't that what makes them work?

Carter: Sure.

Katsavos: At the reading you gave in October 1988 at The Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, you spoke about the private pleasure of writing, of playing games with the reader. What sort of games do you most enjoy playing with your reader?

Carter: You probably noticed a lot of them. I'm doing it less, actually, because I have less time. I've noticed a very definite shift in my works, a most definite shift. Although sometimes when I read the stories that I wrote a long time ago, I think, "Oh goodness, how could I have thought of that?" I find myself thinking much more simply because I'm spending so much time with a small child [At the time of the interview, Carter's son was five].

I was reading "The Company of Wolves" story the other day, and there are a whole lot of verbal games in that that I really enjoy doing, "the dear departed," for example. People very rarely notice these when I'm reading them, but I think if you read it on the page There was one thing in the movie The Company of Wolves, when the werewolf-husband says he's just going out to answer a call of nature, and one of the critics wrote to me and said, "I didn't even notice this the first time." That's the sort of thing I like doing. These are sort of private jokes with myself and with who ever notices, and I used to enjoy doing that very much. There are lots of them in Nights at the Circus, which was intended as a comic novel.

I've always thought that [my stories] were quite loaded with jokes, but the first story that I wrote that was supposed to be really funny, out and out funny, was a "Puss-in-Boots" story in The Bloody Chamber. I mailed that to a radio place, and they censured it. (It was done on what we call Radio Three, an art channel, which uses a lot of material from BBC Radio and World Service, which you don't get

here.) They cut it! They removed, according to the producer, about half a spool of bed springs!

Katsavos: In the afterword to your short story collection, Fireworks, you write that "the limited trajectory of the short narrative concentrates its meaning. Sign and sense can fuse to an extent impossible to achieve among the multiplying ambiguities of an extended narrative." Do you see yourself staying in this genre?

Carter: It's more difficult. That kind of laconic work is actually more difficult. I know a woman who's a poet, who claims only to have started perfecting the haiku form ever since she had her daughter because she doesn't have time for anything longer. I know what a haiku is supposed to do, and I can only say life is too short for haiku for me. It's too complicated a form, and at the moment (Children are discursive), I find myself discursive.

Katsavos: In the short story, "The Loves of Lady Purple," you say, "She [woman] cannot escape the tautological paradox in which she was trapped; had the marionette all the time parodied the living or was she, now living, to parody her own performance as a marionette?" How does this apply to women in general, and more specifically, to the woman writer?

Carter: I was much younger when I wrote that. It's a very elaborate story. That was one of the first actual short pieces I ever wrote, and I was still very solemn in those days; I was a solemn girl. I looked at the story again because I used it in an anthology I did a couple of years ago. It was trying to say things about something

that still possesses me quite a lot. Let me put it like this. I was discussing the Borges idea that books are about books. What then was the first book about?

A little extension of this is that I was having a conversation with a friend of mine about a gay couple we knew, and I said their relationship seemed to be sometimes a cruel parody of heterosexual marriage. My friend thought for a while and said, "Well, what's a heterosexual marriage a parody of then?" It's the same sort of question put here. What's the original? And it's a very good question that I was asking. How do we know what is authentic behavior and what is inauthentic behavior? It's about the complex inter-relation of reality and its representations It has to do with a much older thing. I suppose it comes back to the idea of mythology and why I take so much against religion. It's because it's presenting us with ideas about ourselves which don't come out of practice; they come out of theory. They come out of pure theory, and that's what that is about.

There's a story in The Bloody Chamber called "The Lady and the House of Love," some of which derives from a movie version that I saw of a story by Dostoyevsky. And in the movie, which is very good, the woman, who is a very passive person and is very in distress, asks herself the question, "Can a bird sing only the song it knows, or can it learn a new song?" And that's behind that as well. It's whether or not we can. Is it nature or culture? Have we got the capacity at all of singing new songs? It's very important that if we haven't, we might as well stop

now. Can the marionette in that story behave in a way that she's not programmed to behave? Is it possible?

Katsavos: What about the label, "moral pornographer," which you assign to Sade?

Carter: It's not very pleasant for women to find out about how they are represented in the world. They find out much more about what their real existential status is [from pornography], and it's very unpleasant. It really is. It's enough to make women give up on the human race. One of the things about Sade is that he did know he was a pervert. Most people in the pornography business are under the impression that they're normal, and he knew perfectly well that he was a pervert. It constantly comes up, (another unfortunate choice of phrase), that he knew perfectly well he was a pervert, and I think that he was upset about it. Most perverts are very, very proselytizing. He proselytizes a little bit for his perversion, and suddenly he realizes he's doing something dreadful. But it ["moral pornographer"] was a phrase which got me into a lot of trouble with the sisters, some of the sisters.

Katsavos: In what specific ways do you see yourself helping to accelerate "the slow process of decolonializing language," which you discuss in "Notes From the Front Line"?

Carter: Just by working and by thinking quite hard about what I do. I was doing a piece of writing, an appreciation of this artist, Barbara Kruger, [who does] photo

montage with text. One of the most radical things about her pieces is that she assumes that most of the people who are going to be looking at [her work] are going to be female.

One of the texts on one of her pieces says, "Your moments of joy are constructed with precision of military strategy." Well, I know that she doesn't mean me. She uses "you" and "we" a lot. When she uses "you," I know she doesn't mean "me" just by reading the text because it isn't true of me, and it doesn't work. Obviously anybody could read her. You don't have to be a woman to understand what she's saying, but you have to position yourself in a certain way to understand [her pieces], to see what she's getting at It's very, very difficult to describe this bias in language to men. And it's not so much the fact that it's a sexed language, it's not like French or German, but [there is a] bias of discourse which usually does presuppose the interest of the organizing gender. It's something that's easy to fall into It's a question of presupposing the interest of women who can read you, of not presupposing that all human communication works on the assumption of a few.

Katsavos: What is "the death defying double somersault of love," [in Nights at the Circus] and does it work?

Carter: No, it doesn't work. It's to do with risk taking and it doesn't work. It's risk taking of the highest level and it very often, and quite usually, leads to tears before bedtime as my mother would have said.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Novels

- . Heroes and Villains. London: Heinemann, 1969; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981.
- . The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1972; published in the United States as The War of Dreams, New York: Bard/Avon Books, 1977; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981.
- . Love. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971; rev. ed., London: Chatto and Windus, 1987; New York: Viking Penguin, 1988; London: Picador, 1988.
- . The Magic Toyshop. London: Heinemann, 1967; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968; London: Virago, 1981; New York: Penguin, 1996.
- . Nights at the Circus. London: Chatto and Windus, 1984; New York: Viking, 1985; London: Pan, 1985; New York: Penguin, 1986.
- . The Passion of New Eve. London: Gollancz, 1977; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977; London: Virago, 1982.
- . Several Perceptions. London: Heinemann, 1968; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968; London: Pan, 1970.
- . Shadow Dance. London: Heinemann, 1966; published in the United States as Honeybuzzard, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967; London: Pan, 1968; New York: Penguin, 1996.
- . Wise Children. London: Chatto and Windus, 1991; New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992; London: Vintage, 1992; New York: Penguin, 1993.

Short Stories

- Carter, Angela. "Alice in Prague, or The Curious Room." Voice Literary Supplement March 1992: 30-32.

- . American Ghosts and Old World Wonders. London: Chatto and Windus, 1993; London: Vintage, 1994.
- . "Ashputtle: or the Mother's Ghost." Voice Literary Supplement March 1990: 22.
- . "Black Venus." Formations 2.3 (1986): 23-32.
- . Black Venus. London: Chatto and Windus, 1985; published in the United States as Saints and Strangers. New York: Viking, 1986; New York: Penguin, 1987; London: Pan, 1986.
- . The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories. London: Gollancz, 1979; New York: Harper & Row, 1981; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981.
- . Burning Your Boats: The Collected Short Stories. London: Chatto and Windus, 1995; New York: Henry Holt, 1995; Markham: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1995.
- . "The Donkey Prince." Don't Bet on the Prince. Ed. Jack Zipes. New York: Methuen, Inc., 1986. 62-72.
- . Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces. London: Quartet Books, 1974; New York: Harper and Row, 1974; New York: Penguin, 1974; rev. ed. London: Chatto and Windus, 1987; London: Virago, 1988.
- . "The Merchant of Shadows." The New Gothic: A Collection of Contemporary Gothic Fiction. Eds. Bradford Morrow and Patrick McGrath. New York: Random House, 1991. 181-99.
- . Miss Z, The Dark Young Lady. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970.
- , and Justin Todd. Moonshadow. London: V. Gollancz, 1982.
- . "The Quilt Maker." Sex and Sensibility: Stories by Contemporary Women Writers From Nine Countries. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1981. 117-40.
- , trans. Sleeping Beauty and Other Favourite Fairy Tales. Boston: Otter Books, 1991.
- . "Tis Pity She's a Whore." Granta 25, Autumn 1988, 179-197.

Radio Plays

Carter, Angela. Come Unto These Yellow Sands: Four Radio Plays. Newcastle on Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1985; Dufour Editions, 1985.

Verse

Carter, Angela. Unicorn. Leeds: Location Press, 1966.

Non-fiction

Carter, Angela. Expletives Deleted. London: Chatto and Windus, 1992; London: Vintage, 1993.

---. "D. H. Lawrence, Scholarship Boy." New Society 60 (1982): 391-2.

---. "Forty Means You Cry Over Spilt Love." Rev. of Forty-Seven, by Frank Moorhouse. The New York Times Book Review 13 Aug. 1989: 3.

---. Introduction to Images of Frida Kahlo. London: Redstone Press, 1989.

---. "Is Santa Claus Really St. Nicholas Or Just Some Jolly, Beery Old Elf?" The New York Times Book Review

---. "The Language of Sisterhood." The State of the Language. Ed. Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980. 226-34.

---. "A Magical Moment in Prague." Rev. of The Miracle Game, by Josef Skvorecky and Paul Wilson. The New York Times Book Review, 10 Feb. 1991: 1+.

---. "Masochism for the Masses." New Statesman 3 June 1983: 8-10.

---. "My Maugham Award." Author 81 (1970): 173-5.

---. "Memoirs of a Midget." Introduction to Walter de la Mare. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.

---. "Notes From a Maternity Ward." New Statesman 16-23 Dec. 1983: 65-6.

- . "Notes From the Front Line." On Gender and Writing. Ed. Michelene Wandor. London: Pandora Press, 1983. 69-77.
- . Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings. London: Virago, 1982. Rev. ed., London: Virago, 1992.
- . The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History. London: Virago, 1979; published in the United States as The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography, New York: Pantheon Books, 1979.
- , ed. The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales. London: Virago, 1992; London Virago, 1993; published in the United States as Strange Things Sometimes Still Happen: Fairy Tales From Around the World. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993.
- . "Sugar Daddy." Fathers: Reflections by Daughters. Ed. Ursula Owen. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983. 7-17.
- . "Time to Tell the Time." The New Review. 4.42 (1977): 41-6.
- . "Truly, It Felt Like Year One." Very Heaven: Looking Back at the 1960s. Ed. Sara Maitland. London: Virago, 1988. 209-16.
- , ed. The Virago Book of Fairy Tales. London: Virago, 1990; published in the United States as Old Wives Fairy Tale Book, New York: David McKay, 1987; London: Virago, 1991.
- , ed. Wayward Girls and Wicked Women. London: Virago Press, 1986.
- . "What Isn't Buried in Napoleon's Tomb." Rev. of Peter Doyle, by John Vernon. The New York Times Book Review, 14 July 1991: 9+.

Interviews

- Bell, Ronald. "Angela Carter, British, Novelist." The Japan Experience. Ed. Ronald Bell. New York: Weatherhill, 1973. 23-35.
- Bradfield, Scott. "Remembering Angela Carter." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 90-3.
- Goldsworthy, Kerry. "Angela Carter." meanjin 44.1 (1985): 4-13.

Haffenden, John. "Angela Carter." Novelists in Interview. Ed. John Haffenden. London: Methuen, 1985. 76-96.

Katsavos, Anna. "An Interview with Angela Carter." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 11-17.

Mortimer, John Clifford. "The Sadeian Woman: Angela Carter." In Character. New York: Penguin, 1984. 43-7.

Sage, Lorna. "Angela Carter." New Writing. Eds. Malcolm Bradbury and Judy Cooke. London: Minerva, 1992. 185-93.

---. "The Savage Sideshow." The New Review 4/39-40 (July 1977): 51-7.

SECONDARY WORKS

Carter Criticism

Allison, Dorothy. "Love Among the Ruins." Rev. of Love and Heroes and Villains, by Angela Carter, Voice Literary Supplement (June 1989): 15.

Altevers, Nanette. "Gender Matters in The Sadeian Woman." The Review of Contemporary Fiction. 14.3 (1994): 18-23.

Bayley, John. "Fighting for the Crown." The New York Review of Books, 23 April 1992: 9-11.

Bell, Michael. "Narration as Action: Goethe's 'Bekenntnisse Einer Shoenen Seele' and Angela Carter's Nights at the Circus." German Life and Letters 45.1 (1992): 16-32.

Bemrose, John. "A Welcome Literary Invasion." Rev. of Artificial Fire, by Angela Carter. Maclean's 25 April 1988: 51-2.

Blodgett, Harriet. "Fresh Iconography: Subversive Fantasy by Angela Carter." The Review of Contemporary Fiction. 14.3 (1994): 49-55.

Boehm, Beth. A. "Feminist Metafiction and Androcentric Reading Strategies: Angela Carter's Reconstructed Reader in Nights at the Circus." Critique 37.1

(1995): 35-50.

---. "Wise Children: Angela Carter's Swan Song." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 84-9.

Bonca, Cornel. "In Despair of the Old Adams: Angela Carter's Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 56-62.

Brown, Richard. "Postmodern Americas in the Fiction of Angela Carter, Martin Amis and Ian McEwan." Forked Tongues? Comparing Twentieth-Century British and American Literature. Eds. Ann Massa and Alistair Stead. London: Longman, 1994: 92-110.

Bryant, Sylvia. "Re-Constructing Oedipus Through 'Beauty and the Beast.'" Criticism 31.4 (1989): 439-453.

Chedgzoy, Kate. "The (Pregnant) Prince and the Showgirl: Cultural Legitimacy and the Reproduction of Hamlet." New Essays on Hamlet. Eds. Mark Thornton Burnett and John Manning. New York: AMS Press, 1994. 249-69.

Christensen, Peter. "The Hoffmann Connection: Demystification in Angela Carter's The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffmann." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 63-70.

Clark, Robert. "Angela Carter's Desire Machine." Women's Studies 14 (1987): 147-161.

Collick, John. "Wolves Through the Window: Writing Dreams/Dreaming Films/Filming Dreams." Critical Survey. 3.3. (1991): 283-9.

Coover, Robert. "A Passionate Remembrance." The Review of Contemporary Fiction. 14.3 (1994): 9-10.

Crofts, Charlotte. "Mirage Bombardments." Rev. of The Curious Room, by Angela Carter. Times Literary Supplement 8 November 1996: 34.

D'Erasmio, Stacey. "Bad Girls Rule." Rev. of Wayward Girls and Wicked Women: An Anthology of Subversive Stories, edited by Angela Carter. Voice Literary Supplement (June 1989)15-17.

Ducornet, Rikki. "A Scatological and Cannibal Clock: Angela Carter's "The Fall

- River Axe Murders." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 37-42.
- Dunker, Patricia. "Re-Imagining the Fairy Tales: Angela Carter's Bloody Chambers." Literature and History 10.1 (1984): 3-14.
- Enright, D. J. "Writers at Play." Rev. of Saints and Strangers, by Angela Carter, The New York Review of Books 34.3 (26 Feb. 1987): 15-16.
- Ferrell, Robyn. "Life-Threatening Life: Angela Carter and the Uncanny." The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation. Ed. Alan Cholodenko. Sydney: Power Publications in association with the Australian Film Commission, 1991. 131-44.
- Fleischner, Jennifer. "Politics of the Erotic: Angela Carter's Desire-Filled Universe." Writers 2.1 (1988): 1.
- Fowl, Melinda. "Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber Revisited." Critical Survey 3.1 (1991): 71-9.
- Garrett, George. "Technics and Pyrotechnics." Sewanee Review 88.3 (1980): 412-23.
- Gass, Joanne M. "Angela Carter: In Introduction." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 7-8.
- . "Panopticism in Nights at the Circus." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 71-6.
- . "Written on the Body: The Materiality of Myth in Angela Carter's Heroes and Villains." The Arkansas Review 4.1 (1995): 12-30.
- Goodwin, Jo-Ann. "Refusing to Learn." Rev. of Wayward Girls and Wicked Women, edited by Angela Carter. Times Literary Supplement 19 Dec. 1986.
- Gray, Paul. "On the Wings of a New Age." Rev. of Nights at the Circus, by Angela Carter Time 25 February 1985: 87.
- Hanson, Clare. "Each Other: Images of Otherness in the Short Fiction of Doris Lessing, Jean Rhys and Angela Carter." Journal of the Short Story in English Spring 1988: 67-82.
- Hardin, Michael. "The Other Other: Self-Definition Outside Patriarchal

Institutions in Angela Carter's Wise Children." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 77-83.

Hass, Donald, P. "Is Seeing Believing? Proverbs and the Film Adaptation of a Fairy Tale." Proverbium 7 (1990): 89-104.

Johnson, Heather. "Textualizing the Double-Gendered Body: Forms of the Grotesque in The Passion of New Eve." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 43-8.

Jordan, Elaine. "The Dangers of Angela Carter." New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts. Ed. Isobel Armstrong. London: Routledge, 1992. 119-31.

---. "Down the Road, or History Rehearsed." Postmodernism and the Re-reading of Modernity. Eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992. 159-79.

---. "Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions." Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction. Ed. Linda Anderson. London: Edward Arnold, 1991. 19-42.

Kaiser, Mary. "Fairy Tale as Sexual Allegory: Intertextuality in Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 14.3 (1994): 30-6.

Kendrick, Walter. "The Real Magic of Angela Carter." in Contemporary British Women Writers: Narrative Strategies. Ed. Robert E. Hosmer. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. 66-84.

---. "Rough Magic: The Many Splendours of Angela Carter." Voice Literary Supplement Oct. 1986: 7-19.

Landon, Brooks. "Eve at the End of the World: Sexuality and the Reversal of Expectations in Novels by Joanna Russ, Angela Carter, and Thomas Berger." Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature. Ed. Donald Palumbo. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Ledwon, Lenora. "The Passion of the Phallus and Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve." Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1988. 26-41.

Lee, Hermione. "Angela Carter's Profane Pleasures." Rev. of Expletives Deleted,

by Angela Carter. Times Literary Supplement 19 June 1992: 5-6.

Lewallen, Avis. Wayward Girls but Wicked Women? Female Sexuality in Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber'." Perspectives on Pornography. Ed. Gary Day and Clive Bloom. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1988. 144-57.

Linken, Harriet Kramer. "Isn't It Romantic?: Angela Carter's Bloody Revision of the Romantic Aesthetic in 'The Erl-King.'" Contemporary Literature 35.2 (1994): 305-23.

Lokke, Kari. "Bluebeard and The Bloody Chamber: The Grotesque of Self-Parody and Self-Assertion." Frontiers 10.1 (1988): 7-12.

Lurie, Alison. "Winter's Tales." Rev. of Burning Your Boats: The Collected Short Stories, by Angela Carter. The New York Times Book Review 19 May 1996: 11.

Manlove, Colin. "'In the Demythologising Business': Angela Carter's The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman (1972)." Twentieth-Century Fantasists: Essays on Culture, Society and Belief in Twentieth-Century Mythopoeic Literature. Ed. Kath Filmer, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992, pp. 148-60.

Martin, Richard. "Three Ring Circus: A Review of Nights at the Circus." American Book Review 8.4 (May-June): 12-13.

Mars-Jones, Adam. "From Wonders to Prodigies." Rev. of Nights at the Circus, by Angela Carter. Times Literary Supplement 28 September 1984: 1063.

Matus, Jill. "Blonde, Black and Hottentot Venus: Context and Critique in Angela Carter's 'Black Venus.'" Studies in Short Fiction 28.4 (1991): 467-76.

Michael, Magali Cornier. "Angela Carter's Nights at the Circus: An Engaged Feminism via Subversive Postmodern Strategies." Contemporary Literature 35.3 (1994): 492-521.

---. Feminism and the Postmodern Impulse. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996, pp. 171-208.

Oates, Joyce Carol. "Comedy is Tragedy That Happens to Other People." Rev. of Wise Children, by Angela Carter. The New York Times Book Review 19 Jan. 1992: 7.

Orodenker, Richard. "Nine Story-Tellers." Rev. of Fireworks, by Angela Carter. North American Review.

Palmer, Paulina. "From 'Coded Mannequin' to Bird Woman: Angela Carter's Magic Flight." Women Reading Women's Writing. Ed. Sue Roe. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. 179-205.

Punter, David. "Angela Carter: Suppressions of the Masculine." Critique 25 (1984): 209-22.

---. "Essential Imaginings: the Novels of Angela Carter and Russel Hoban." The British and Irish Novel Since 1960. Ed. James Acheson. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991: 142-58.

Rose, Ellen Cronan. "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: University Press of New England, 1983. 209-27.

Rubenstein, Roberta. "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): 103-18.

Rushdie, Salman. "Angela Carter, 1940-92: A Very Good Wizard, a Very Dear Friend." The New York Times Book Review 8 Mar. 1992: 5.

Sage, Lorna. Angela Carter. Plymouth, United Kingdom: Northcote House Publishers, 1994.

---. "Death of an Author." Granta 41 (1992): 235-54.

---, ed. Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter. London: Virago Press, 1994.

Schwartz, Amy. "Wild Women, Brave Men." Rev. of Nights at the Circus, by Angela Carter. The New Republic 20 May 1985: 38-41.

Schmidt, Ricarda. "The Journey of the Subject in Angela Carter's Fiction." Textual Practice 3.1 (1989): 56-75.

Sears, John. "Angela Carter's Monstrous Women." Culture Matters. Sheffield:

Pavic Publications, 1992.

See, Carolyn. "Come On and See the Winged Lady." Rev. of Nights at the Circus, by Angela Carter. The New York Times Book Review 24 February 1985: 7.

Sheets, Robin Ann. "Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber.'" Journal of the History of Sexuality 1.4 (1991): 633-57.

Shulman, Polly. "Grand Illusions: Angela Carter's Comedy of Mirrors." Rev. of Wise Children, by Angela Carter. Voice Literary Supplement March 1992: 33.

---. "Sex and Violence: Angela Carter's Body Politics." Voice Literary Supplement April 1993: 17-8.

Siegel, Carol. "Postmodern Women Novelists Review Victorian Male Masochism." Genders 11 (1991): 1-16.

Simpson, David Mark. "In the Name of Someone Other: Postmodern Performance, Feminist Utterance, and Cultural Terrorism in the Fictions of Angela Carter." DAI (1991) 566A. University of Alberta, Canada.

Smith, Patricia Juliana. "All You Need Is Love: Angela Carter's Novel of Sixties Sex and Sensibility." The Review of Contemporary Fiction. 14.3 (1994): 24-9.

Snitow, Ann. "Angela Carter, Wild Thing: Conversation With a Necromancer." Voice Literary Supplement June 1989: 14+.

---. "A Footman at the Door." Rev. of Wise Children, by Angela Carter. The Nation 20 April 1992: 526-9.

Steedman, Carolyn. "New Time: Mignon and her Meanings." Fin de Siecle/Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century. Ed. John Stokes. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. 102-16.

Turner, Rory P. B., "Subject and Symbols: Transformations of Identity in Nights at the Circus." Folklore Forum 20:1/2 (1987): 39-60.

Uglow, Jenny. "Through the Female Line." Rev. of The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales, edited by Angela Carter. Times Literary Supplement 20 November (1992): 22.

Vallorani, Nicoletta. "The Body of the City: Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve." Science Fiction Studies 21 (1994): 365-79.

Wilson, Robert Rawdon. "SLIP PAGE: Angela Carter, In/Out/In the Postmodern Nexus." Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism. Eds. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990. 109-23.

Other Works Consulted

Adams, Laurie Schneider. Art and Psychoanalysis. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

Apter, T. E. Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.

Attebery, Brian. Strategies of Fantasy. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

Auerbach, Nina. Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

---, and U. C. Knowpflmacher, eds. Forbidden Journey: Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Novelists. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

---. Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Outcasts. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

Bakhtin, W. M. The Dialogic Imagination. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

---. Rabelais and His World. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Barr, Marleen S. Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992.

Barrett, Michele. Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter. Rev. ed. London: Verso, 1980.

Barthes, Roland. Mythologies. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Noonday

Press, 1990.

Bassnett, Susan. Feminist Experiences: The Women's Movement in Four Cultures. London: Allen and Unwin, 1986.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra." Art After Modernism. Ed. Brian Wallis. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984.

Bauer, Dale. Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community. Albany: SUNY Press, 1988.

Bentz, Valerie M. and Philip E. F. Mayes, eds. Women's Power and Roles as Portrayed in Visual Images of Women in Arts and the Media. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993.

Booker, M. Keith. Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature: Transgression, Abjection and the Carnavalesque. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991.

Bronfen, Elisabeth. Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Case, Sue-Ellen. Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

Chanady, Amaryll Beatrice. Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy. New York: Garland, 1985.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Signs 1.4 (1975): 875-893.

Cranny-Francis, Anne. Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

Day, William Patrick. In the Circle of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985.

DeLauretis, Teresa. Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Dworkin, Andrea. Pornography: Men Possessing Women. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979.

- Eagleton, Terry. Exiles and Emigres. New York: Schocken Books, 1970.
- . Marxism and Literary Criticism. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- Evans, Walter. "The English Short Story in the Seventies." The English Short Story: 1945-1980. Ed. Dennis Vannatta. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985. 152-7.
- Freud, Sigmund. The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis. Trans. and ed. James Starchey. New York: W. W. Norton, 1966.
- . The Freud Reader. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: W. W. Norton, 1989.
- Greer, Germaine. The Female Eunuch. New York: McGraw Hill, 1970.
- . The Madwoman's Underclothes. London: Picador, 1986.
- . Sex and Destiny. New York: Harper and Row, 1984.
- Heath, Stephen. "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade." Formations of Fantasy. Eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan. London: Methuen, 1986. 45-61.
- Hosmer, Robert E., ed. Contemporary British Women Writers: Narrative Strategies. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Hutcheon, Linda. The Politics of Postmodernism. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Irigaray, Luce. This Sex Which Is Not One. Trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Jackson, Rosemary. Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion. London: Methuen, 1981.
- Jones, Ann Rosalind. "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of 'L' Ecriture Feminine.'" Feminist Studies 7.2 (1981): 247-63.
- Kristeva, Julia. Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

- . Revolution in Poetic Language. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- Lauter, Estella. Women as Mythmakers: Poetry and Visual Art by Twentieth-Century Women. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Lovell, Terry, ed. British Feminist Thought: A Reader. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.
- Mitchell, Juliet. Psychoanalysis and Feminism. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.
- Moi, Toril. Sexual/Textual Politics. London: Methuen, 1985.
- Palmer, Paulina. Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory. Herts: Haverster Wheatsheaf, 1989.
- . The Politics of Postmodernism. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Pratt, Annis. "Archetypal Approaches to the New Feminist Criticism." Bucknell Review 21.1 (1973): 3-14.
- Rabkin, Eric S. "The Appeal of the Fantastic: Old Worlds for New." The Scope of the Fantastic--Theory, Tecnique, Major Authors: Selected Essays from the First International Conference on the Fantastic in Literature and Film. Eds. Robert A. Collins and Howard D. Pearce. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980.
- Riviere, Joan. "Womanliness as Masquerade." Formations of Fantasy. Eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan. London: Methuen, 1986. 35-44.
- Robinson, Sally. Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction. New York: SUNY Press, 1991.
- Rosinsky, Natalie M. Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984.
- Rushdie, Salman. The Wizard of Oz. London: British Film Institute, 1992.
- Sage, Lorna. Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists. London: Macmillan, 1992.

- Shinn, Thelma J. Worlds Within Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature by Women. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Showalter, Elaine. A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Bronte to Lessing. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- Smith, Harold, ed. British Femininism in the Twentieth Century. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990.
- Spacks, Patricia Meyer, ed. Contemporary Women Novelists: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977.
- Suleiman, Susan Rubin. Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- Vannatta, Dennis. The English Short Story 1945-1980. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985.
- Walker, Nancy A. Feminist Alternatives: Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novel by Women. Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1990.
- Warner, Marina. From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1995.
- Zipes, Jack. Don't Bet on the Prince. New York: Methuen, 1986.
- . Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization. New York: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- . Fairy Tale as Myth. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994.