GOTHIC TIMES:

FEMINISM AND POSTMODERNISM

IN

THE NOVELS OF

ANGELA CARTER

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SYNOPSIS.

The problematic relationship between feminism and postmodernism manifests itself, in contemporary fiction by women, as a conflict between political and aesthetic practices which is ultimately waged upon the ground of subjectivity. Angela Carter's novels offer an extended exploration of subjectivity which utilises, in many ways self-consciously, the ongoing theorisation of subjectivity and related notions - notably desire, gender and power - which characterises contemporary feminist and postmodernist philosophy.

This thesis offers a series of readings of Carter's novels which traces their engagement with particular aspects of the theorisation of subjectivity. It attempts to present Carter's novels as examples of how the aesthetic and the political can to a certain extent be combined, and of how feminist political practice can be both represented and problematised in the postmodernist fictional text, while postmodernist aesthetic practices are also exploited but problematised in and by that exploitation.

The Introduction explores the relationship between feminist and postmodernist theories of the subject, through a survey of theorists from both 'camps' and a brief survey of contemporary women novelists, before discussing the critical neglect of Carter's fiction. Chapter 2 explores more extensively the confluence of feminist, postmodernist and psychoanalytic models of the subject and offers an exemplary reading of a short story by Carter, in order to demonstrate certain stylistic and thematic characteristics of her fiction. In particular, psychoanalytic models of subjectivity are examined.

The succeeding two Chapters address Carter's early (pre-1972) novels in order to explore the development of her fictional career from its context of 1960s British fiction, and trace the progressive elaboration of certain thematic preoccupations in their nascent form. Three further Chapters individually address each novel in Carter's 'trilogy' so as to demonstrate how each text explores a particular aspect of the construction of the postmodern self.

The Conclusion offers a reading of Carter's fiction as extensively engaged, both at a formal and a thematic level, with the deconstruction of conventional notions of the self in order to expose the political interests invested in those notions. Carter's last novel is also addressed in the context of this discussion, as are the ways in which Carter's fiction offers contributions to the feminist/postmodernist debate as discussed throughout the thesis.

Throughout the thesis, extensive reference is made to critical and theoretical works which elucidate or impinge upon the themes addressed in Carter's novels, and Carter's own comments in interviews and in her critical texts are also utilised.

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Introduction: Postmodern Women's Writing.

> But what is postmodernism? I can propose no rigorous definition of it, any more than I could define modernism itself. For the term has become a current signal of tendencies in theatre, dance, music, art and architecture; in literature and criticism; in philosophy, psychoanalysis and historiography; in cybernetic technologies and even in the sciences. [1]
>
> The most wonderful strength of feminism is and always has been its diversity and its heterogeneity. [2]

Cultural phenomena that resist definition or interpretation are certain to stimulate the inquisitive minds of theorists and critics, and never more so than when those theorists and critics find themselves sharing the historical domain of such phenomena. The very contemporaneity of postmodernism, as an aesthetic periodisation, and feminism, as a political movement, effectively demands attention, for if we are unable or do not care to interpret our own age, what hope have we of adequately interpreting the past? This is particularly true of the two phenomena indicated above - postmodernism and feminism - because the sheer range of their combined cultural influence, and the significance or import of that influence, suggests that together they comprise what may be described without exaggeration as a major shift of paradigm in Western culture.

As a result of this major paradigm shift, almost every academic discipline concerned with contemporary culture has been affected, and has been urged to re-examine its assumptions - scientific, aesthetic, ontological, structural, religious, political - with a rigorously critical eye. Together, feminism and postmodernism and the disciplines

they have influenced have been engaged in an ongoing and radical questioning of the very status and assumptions of Western 'being'. The answers they seem to be pointing to, if they be answers in the traditional sense of the word, are far from comforting or reassuring to Western societies.

Given this initially challenging perspective, postmodernism and feminism may equally be denounced as threatening or welcomed as liberating, but such reactions would reveal more about the ideological orientations of the interpreter than any qualities intrinsic to either phenomenon. Either way their significance can no longer be ignored or underestimated, and the extent of any reaction to their appearance and development on the scene of cultural debate merely reiterates the extent of their significance to that scene. Nevertheless the sheer quantity of theoretical and critical material produced to date in the debate concerning feminism and postmodernism also signifies a large degree of controversy over the precise nature of the objects of this debate, a controversy which has its basis in one vital aspect of the theoretical/critical process - the need to define the object of theoretical and critical attention.

The difficulties encountered in attempting to define or even delimit either feminism or postmodernism are entirely consistent with the breadth of application that the terms enjoy. Indeed a characteristic shared by both phenomena is precisely their resistance to reductive strategies of interpretation and easy definition. Instead, an expansive assertion of difference, disjunction and disparity confronts and

contradicts any move towards definition. This is equally true from the perspectives of both feminism and postmodernism, so that adherents to either (or both) would deny - as Ihab Hassan and Leslie Dick do - the unity implicit in the process of naming their positions as feminist/postmodernist. Thus, with respect to postmodernism, E.A. Grosz writes of

> a recognition and celebration of multiple perspectives, positions, viewpoints, in the face of a demand for a singular, cohesive, unified position of consensus [...] a broad diversity of approaches, methods, objects and attitudes. [3]

Similar assertions of postmodern pluralism may be found in most overviews of postmodernism.[4] The demand for singularity which Grosz and others describe constitutes the position of what I want to term the object of resistance, against which postmodernism (particularly in its more political manifestations) is largely oriented. Fredric Jameson argues, in an essay which is still of major significance to the debate over postmodernism, that "postmodernisms [...] emerge as specific reactions against the established forms of high modernism, against this or that high modernism which conquered the university, the museum, the art gallery network and the foundations".[5] While Jameson goes to some lengths to stress the ultimate inadequacy of a crudely historicist periodisation of cultural 'movements', the argument remains that postmodernism constitutes some kind of reaction against unitary, homologising cultural forces. Similarly with feminism - Linda Hutcheon who, like Jameson, uses the plural, argues that "there are almost as many feminisms as there are feminists", and she goes on to suggest that

> 'feminisms' would appear to be the best term to use to designate, not a consensus, but a multiplicity of points of view which nevertheless do possess at least some common denominators. '

What is understood by the term 'feminism' will vary between individuals, and will range from such direct political activity as the 'equal rights' campaigns to academic projects concerned with redefining the literary tradition. The object of resistance for feminism is easier to define than that for postmodernism, but what is significant is that both phenomena are consciously oriented along the lines of opposition, and this shared position would seem to indicate an affinity which is neverless difficult to detect. The relationship between postmodernism and feminism, as historically co-existent and (in many ways) highly political phenomena, is problematical to say the least, and will be addressed below. For now I want to concentrate on a particular problem which is shared by postmodernism and feminism.

I want to argue in this thesis that the common resistance to definition discussed above is a product of a more fundamental problem which effectively implies that the shared concerns of postmodernism and feminism are perhaps closer than some of the practitioners of each would care to admit. This problem concerns the shared preoccupation of the artistic and political manifestations of both phenomena with the concept of identity. It is no coincidence that both postmodernism and feminism have been described in terms of marginalisation in relation to the 'dominant' discourses and ideologies of Western culture, for in seeking both to challenge and to subvert that culture these phenomena necessarily situate themselves in the margins of that culture in order

to avoid the processes of assimilation and absorption (and the consequent 'blunting' of their political edge) that may accompany centralisation.[7] But there is an opposing process in operation here too, for the explicit political concerns of feminism (women/patriarchy) and postmodernism (a cluster of associated concerns: avant-garde culture, non-Western cultures, Western sub-cultures [eg. ethnic, youth, working-class] marginalised by liberal humanist ideology) are precisely those entities already defined as marginal by 'dominant' Western culture. And the reason for this definition of marginality is precisely one of non-definition. The 'dominant' ideology always defines as marginal that which resists definition by this ideology, that which cannot be represented by this ideology, that which can have no place within this ideological construction of 'reality'.

So the positions of postmodernism and feminism, as cultures of the marginal, are determined both by self-manoeuvring on the one hand, and on the other by the excluding strategies of the 'dominant' culture, which may be seen as defining itself by excluding that which it is not, and rendering this 'other' external, marginal. This paradoxical situation is, I feel, concretised within the contradictory representation of identity both as a desired (and by implication attainable) condition and as a fictional construct within both postmodernism and feminism. For while an explicit shared concern is the refutation of the traditionally imposed definition of identity as unitary, coherent and consistent, both postmodernism and feminism are simultaneously engaged in an ongoing and self-reflexive examination of their own identities, and of their representations of identity within

their own discourses. The extent of this engagement and the variety of its manifestations (from character identity to the identity of a given fictional/artistic text) suggest that this preoccupation may constitute a concern of sufficient significance as to offer a way of reading both the artistic products of postmodernist and feminist strategies.

This thesis will be concerned with the various forms of representation of identity in the fiction of a novelist who I consider to have been engaged in the kind of conflict which I will go on to examine below, namely the conflict between feminism and postmodernism. The fact that I have chosen to examine a woman writer will, I hope, move some way towards rectifying the unjustified lack of critical attention paid to experimental contemporary women's writing, and the failure of many theorists of postmodernism in literature to recognise the significant contribution that women writers have made in this field. Furthermore, I hope to indicate the extent of feminist engagement with the poetic and ontological problems posed by postmodernist theories. A recent survey of contemporary experimental literature, Brian McHale's Postmodernist Fiction, pays little attention to women writers, concentrating instead on male American writers of the 1960s and 1970s (McHale sees Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow and Carlos Fuentes' Terra Nostra as "the paradigmatic texts of postmodernist writing"[8]). In a broader examination of the cultural phenomenon of postmodernism, the critic Ihab Hassan offers a list of fifty-seven names (not including the unnamed "Yale critics") intended to "adumbrate postmodernism, or at least suggest its range of assumptions"[9] - this list includes only two women, Julia Kristeva and Christine Brooke-Rose, the second of whom has

forcefully stated her dissatisfaction with the very concept of postmodernism.[10]

Thus the apparent exclusion of women from critical examination of the phenomenon of postmodernism would seem to conform alarmingly to the pattern of suppression and marginalisation identified by feminist critics as characteristic of patriarchal ideology throughout history, and to repeat the manouevres of modernism as identified by such critics as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.[11] In order to examine the extent of this parallel it is necessary to turn to a comparison of the respective strategies of postmodernism and feminism in order to ascertain possible reasons for the lack of critical attention each pays to the other.

Feminism, postmodernism and the problem of identity.

> What can 'identity', even 'sexual identity', mean in a new theoretical space where the very notion of identity is challenged?'[12]

Thus Julia Kristeva, attempting to define her own feminist position through a deconstruction of "the very dichotomy man/woman"[13], identifies the paradox which leads to the detectable tension between postmodernism and feminism as ostensibly discrete conceptual camps. The evident resistance to definition which characterises both may be seen, as I have suggested, as arising from this tension, which centres upon a conflict of direction - while the 'project' of postmodernism appears to be oriented in one direction, the 'project' of feminism would seem to moving the opposite way; each interprets the other's ideological aims as being opposed to its own.

In order to illustrate this assertion, I shall quote two passages indicating this difference. First, Craig Owens writes as a postmodernist critic:

> It is precisely at the legislative frontier between what can be represented and what cannot that the postmodernist operation is being staged - not in order to transcend representation, but in order to expose that system of power that authorises certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others. Among those prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women. Excluded from representation by its very structure, they return within it as a figure for - a representation of - the Unrepresentable (Nature, Truth, the Sublime, etc) [...] [Michele] Montrelay, in fact, identifies women as the 'ruin of representation': not only have they nothing to lose; their exteriority to Western representation exposes its limits. . . . Here, we arrive at an apparent crossing of the feminist critique of patriarchy and the postmodernist critique of representation. . . . [14]

Owens clearly identifies the 'dominant' ideology - that which determines, regulates and controls the ideological system of Western representation - as, among other things, patriarchal. What his argument fails to take into account is that postmodernism is not only a critique of Western representation, and neither is feminism only a critique of patriarchy - if this were so, there would be little problem in defining both. Other determinants necessarily intrude upon this equation, resisting the reduction of either phenomenon to a single strategy or a single objective. So while the identification of "an apparent crossing" may be valid, its importance or usefulness is diminished by the factors it fails to take into account.

For a feminist view, I quote Patricia Waugh, whose principally literary interests serve also to focus this discussion:

> At the moment when postmodernism is forging its identity through articulating the exhaustion of the existential belief in self-presence and self-fulfilment through the dispersal of the universal subject of liberalism, *feminism* (ostensibly, at any rate) is assembling its cultural identity in what appears to be the opposite direction [...] women writers are beginning, *for the first time in history*, to construct an identity out of the recognition that women need to discover, and must fight for, a sense of unified self-hood, a rational, coherent, effective identity. (Waugh's italics) [15]

Waugh's brand of feminism would encounter staunch opposition from philosophers like Kristeva or from psychoanalytically minded feminists who have engaged with the Lacanian understanding of subjectivity. For these theorists, the moment for the construction of a feasible "unified self-hood" has long since passed, and, furthermore, the women writers Waugh examines in Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern - Woolf, Drabble, Brookner, Plath - generally pre-date the contemporary manifestations of feminism or or display little in the way of postmodernist fictional characteristics. Waugh's concept of postmodernism exists in an explicit oppositional orientation to the strategies of her feminism, so that it constitutes, in effect, the object against which women must fight in order to establish their "effective identity". This interpretation of the political orientation of postmodernism is selective, and needs to be challenged (with reference to the kind of postmodernism I will go on to outline below). The postmodernist deconstruction of the concept of "coherent identity" is one aspect of an attack on the totalising strategies of liberal humanist ideologies, which seek to impose identities on marginalised groups in the way discussed earlier. Such an imposition constitutes an authoritarian manoeuvre, the substitution of 'myth' for 'reality', so that "coherent identity" (and indeed "coherence" itself) may be seen as

a fictional construct of the power discourses comprising the 'dominant' ideology. This ideology, which I have so far taken for the sake of argument to be unitary, is itself fragmentary and non-unified, being comprised of various ideological elements which share certain assumptions (Linda Hutcheon writes of economic capitalism and cultural humanism as "two of the major dominants of much of the Western world" which share "patriarchal underpinnings"[16]). From a postmodern perspective the desirability of Waugh's "unified self-hood" fades in proportion to the extent to which it is perceived as a construct of those discourses which conform to and reinforce the repressive ideological strictures of liberal humanism. This is to say that Waugh's brand of feminism, far from challenging the marginalisation it has historically been subjected to, is rather seeking its niche within the ideological terrain of precisely the discourse structure which has systematically suppressed and excluded it.

The extent to which Waugh's *feminism* may be read as somewhat reactionary in the context of contemporary feminist debate will hopefully become apparent through the discussion of feminist postmodern fiction below. Nevertheless her point is a valid one in the sense that feminism has long been preoccupied with the problem of identity as a basis for its own theoretical development. A brief survey of recent feminist thought will demonstrate both the extent of this preoccupation and the range of opposition to Waugh's problematical stance.

Feminism and identity: recent theoretical positions.

The general trend in recent feminist theory has been towards a questioning of the value of "constructing" a feminine identity, and this questioning may be seen as being largely due to the contradictory relationship existing between feminist and postmodernist/ poststructuralist philosophies. The assumption of a given or pre-existent (that is, existing prior to the process of socialisation to which a given individual is subjected) gender identity or condition of essential femininity, for example by French theorists of 'L'ecriture feminine', has consequently suffered criticism for its apparently contradictory perspective, because the poststructuralist linguistic and textual manoeuvres which characterise this kind of theorising seem to run counter to its assertions of 'essential femininity' and of a particular and exclusive domain of feminine experience. The contributions of feminist interpretations of psychoanalysis to this debate will be discussed at length in Chapter Two and throughout this thesis, but I want to suggest for now that, as Ann Rosalind Jones argues, social and psychoanalytic theory indicates that there is no moment at which gender identities are not produced and determined by socio-cultural discourses, and so any feminist construction of an "innate, pre-cultural femininity" may be revealed to be as mythical and as delusory as masculine constructions of femininity:

> Theoretical work and practical evidence strongly suggest that sexual identity [...] never takes shape in isolation or in a simply physical context. The child becomes male or female in response to the males and females she encounters in her family and to the male and female images she constructs according to her experience. [17]

To desocialise (gender) identity, as French feminism seems in certain cases to do, is to resituate femininity within the logocentric system which feminism ostensibly challenges, and within which the quest for unified identity necessarily resurfaces as desire (for unity, for coherence, for self-hood). As Cora Kaplan points out:

> For liberal humanism, liberal feminist versions included, the possibility of a unified self and an integrated consciousness that can transcend material circumstance is represented as the fulfilment of desire, the happy closure at the end of the story. [18]

For Kaplan, semiotics and psychoanalysis offer a solution to this contradiction, through their own challenging of the liberal humanist tradition. Essential femininity is precisely the definition imposed upon women by patriarchy, within the loaded hierarchies of logocentrism - the otherness of the feminine rendering it different to the presence of the masculine. Such an imposition constitutes a concrete example of the way identity is socially and culturally defined through the establishment and exploitation of power relationships - the exertion of power in particular directions through a given socio-cultural hierarchical structure. Power relations in society determine the situation of particular social groups, and in order to challenge the resulting hierarchies it is necessary to criticise these power structures and their modes of operation:

> Only through an analysis of the power relationships between men and women, and practices based on that analysis [...] will we discover what women are or can be. [19]

Many aspects of the issue of identity are outlined and addressed by feminist theory, from the assertion of essential femininity to the

examination of the role of socio-cultural determinants in identity-construction, and it is within the range of this debate that some of the concealed affinities between feminism and postmodernism begin to become apparent. Julia Kristeva summarises the link implicit in most feminist theory between cultural criticism and political revolution:

> If women have a role to play [...] it is only in assuming a negative function; reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society. Such an attitude places women on the side of the explosion of social codes: with revolutionary movements. [20]

Kristeva identifies 'woman' according to this assertion, as "that which cannot be represented, what is not said, what remains above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies"[21], and if this recalls Craig Owens' assertion of the exclusion of women from representation, then it can further be compared with the 'definition' of the postmodern offered by Jean-François Lyotard:

> The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself [...] that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. [22]

Postmodernism's concern with representing that which is "excluded from representation by its very structure" (Owens) offers to feminism a set of fictional strategies for it to assimilate (although the relationship between feminism and postmodernism, in terms of which influences the other most, is more complex than this[23]) just as poststructuralist philosophy has served to identify the systems of logocentric hierarchy and opposition which feminism, if it is to progress in its ostensible aims, needs to challenge. The basis of this challenge, consequently,

involves not a reconstruction but a deconstruction of the liberal humanist notions of gender identity and difference, and a questioning of the cultural hierarchies based upon these notions. In assessing the combination of feminist ideological positions and postmodernist fictional strategies it will be useful to examine the extent to which the problems identified by theorists are also addressed in fictional texts, and to assess the ways in which postmodern strategies facilitate the creation of textual grounds in which such theories may be addressed without recourse to the contradictory manoeuvres demanded by more conventional or traditional modes of fictional representation. For the preoccupation of postmodernism itself with the problem of identity is extensive and arguably vital to an understanding of the operation of the postmodern literary text.

Postmodernism and identity: character in and of the literary text.

> The constituent elements of the postmodernist text seldom integrate thematically nor do the characters cohere psychologically; discontinuities of narrative and disjunctions of personality cannot be overcome - as they often can with canonical modernism - [...] by an appeal to the logic of a unifying metalanguage, a dominant stable discourse, or the constituency of the core self.[24]

Here Peter Currie identifies the association between postmodern fiction and fragmentation as operating on three distinct levels: those of the intertext (the relationship of a given fictional text to "a dominant stable discourse"), the text itself, and the constituents of the text, principally the elements which constitute the textual representation of character. The resulting tendency towards incoherence is thus situated not in any single text or textual element, but in textuality as the

field of operation of postmodernism. The breadth of theoretical writing dealing with postmodernism would seem to reinforce this assertion. Jean-François Lyotard identifies the 'postmodern age' as one experiencing a crisis in legitimation, the process by which discourses (of knowledge, in the broadest sense of the word) establish and maintain their authority. This crisis undermines the claim to authority of (in Lyotard's case, specifically scientific) discourses which in previous historical periods have enjoyed the unifying and totalising effects of absolute legitimacy. The disappearance of 'absolute' status leads to the loss of those "transcendental signifieds" (as Derrida calls them) - God, Truth, the Self etc. - which historically guaranteed the authority of any discourse - religious, literary-critical, philosophical, political, psychological - which undertook to 'represent' them within itself. One major consequence of this demystification of legitimation is the fragmentation and dissolution of hitherto 'coherent' power discourses, as Lyotard notes:

> The classical dividing lines between the various fields of science are thus called into question - disciplines disappear, overlappings occur [...] and from these new territories are born. [25]

This collapse of discrete boundaries between separable, internally coherent discourses leads to precisely the disappearance of "dominant stable discourses" of which Peter Currie writes. In place of this lost stability the poststructuralist notions of 'free play', 'jouissance' and the infinite deferral of the signified have been adopted by theorists of the postmodern as a means of examining the realm of textuality opened up by the 'removal' of absolutes; as Jean Baudrillard asserts, "there is no longer any absolute with which to measure the rest".[26]

The paradigm shift that Lyotard's brand of postmodernism describes tends to be read as a reaction against the canonisation of 'high modernist' works (Jameson), which thus represent the discourse of 'authority' against which the 'subversive' strategies of postmodernism become directed. Andreas Huyssen writes of

> a noticeable shift in sensibilities, practices and discourse formations which distinguish a postmodern set of assumptions, experiences and propositions from that of a preceding period. [27]

Brian McHale distinguishes postmodern fiction by its preoccupation with ontological problems, as opposed to modernism's preoccupation with problems of epistemology:

> Intractable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability: push epistemological questions far enough and they "tip over" into ontological questions. [28]

This is a philosophical interpretation of postmodernism as a break with a preceding tradition, but the idea of some kind of historical fracture constituting the boundary between postmodernity and modernity is most vociferously argued by Marxist critics like Fredric Jameson and the early Jean Baudrillard, whose focus is more broadly cultural than the specifically literary interests of critics like McHale. Jameson writes:

> To grant some historical originality to a postmodernist culture is also implicitly to affirm some radical structural difference between what is sometimes called consumer society and the earlier moments of the capitalism from which it emerged. [29]

Baudrillard, in essays like "Consumer Society", and Umberto Eco in Travels in Hyperreality[30], address (and, some would argue, celebrate) consumerism and its cultural effects as the clearest social and economic

results of postmodernism, thus reinscribing the conventionally "low" culture of the popular as a new domain of academic concern.

But there is a detectable reaction to this kind of theorising, which conflates the critical approach with a degree of implicit valorisation of the predominantly reactionary processes of consumerism, mass media, cultural imperialism and the other pseudo-apocalyptic manifestations of late capitalism. Andreas Huyssen, articulating this concern, writes of another kind of postmodernism:

> A postmodern culture [...] will have to be a postmodernism of resistance, including resistance to that easy postmodernism of the "anything goes" variety. Resistance will always have to be specific and contingent upon the cultural field within which it operates. [31]

The "easy postmodernism" identified here is the pluralistic stance which Baudrillard and others seem to be adopting, which Hal Foster describes as "the quixotic notion that all positions in culture and politics are now open and equal". Huyssen and Foster identify a postmodernism that is engaged in a dual task - the resistance to pluralism, and the resistance to the hegemony of institutional modernism. Foster goes on to write:

> A postmodernism of resistance [...] arises as a counter-practice not only to the official culture of modernism but also to the "false normativity" of a reactionary postmodernism [...] a resistant postmodernism is concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition, not an instrumental pastiche of pop- or pseudo-historical forms, with a critique of origins, not a return to them [...] it seeks to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations. [32]

To these two kinds of postmodernism, which might be labelled 'reactionary' and 'progressive', one may add a third application of the term which I shall generally be assuming throughout this thesis - this

is the similarity between postmodernist and poststructuralist modes of operation. J.G. Merquior, who interprets postmodernism less as a break from and more as a continuation of "the modernist indictment of the modern age", draws a clear parallel between poststructuralist thought and postmodernism in order to express his scepticism concerning both[33], whereas Linda Hutcheon, a more enthusiastic interpreter of postmodernism, argues similarly that "it is difficult to separate [...] postmodern art and culture from the deconstructing impulse of what we have labelled poststructuralist theory".[34]

It will be clear from this brief survey that interpretations of postmodernism vary widely, and that ultimately the political orientation of the interpreter becomes a major factor in these interpretations. As with feminism, postmodernism is characterised by its resistance to simple definition, and by a conflict between descriptive and prescriptive interpretations. This kind of internal split has led theorists, particularly of the postmodern, to use the term 'schizophrenia' (in its colloquial sense) in order to characterise the fractured appearance of the phenomenon. Fredric Jameson, following the Lacanian interpretation of the schizoid condition, sees postmodernist art as schizophrenic in two ways - through its effacement of continuity through the breakdown of the signifying chain, and through a new emphasis upon differentiation rather than unification[35]. Similarly Andreas Huyssen sees the cultural products of postmodernism as schizoid:

> Schizophrenia [...] is symptomatic of the postmodern moment in architecture; and one might well ask whether it does not apply to contemporary culture at large.[36]

This usage of psychoanalytical terminology will be addressed at greater length in Chapter Two, and the concept of schizophrenia with reference to feminist interpretations of psychoanalysis will be a major concern of this thesis.

It is clear that the second kind of postmodernism outlined above (the 'postmodernism of resistance') would seem to offer feminist writers the most potentially useful set of fictional strategies, if only in terms of ideological suitability. In order to examine ways in which women writers have engaged with postmodernism, it will be useful first to return to the issue of identity as it is represented in postmodern texts.

Identity in postmodern fiction by women.

Brian McHale's Postmodernist Fiction addresses the issue of identity as a significant concern of many works of postmodernist fiction. Describing the "ineluctable writtenness of character", McHale refers to Pynchon's Tyrone Slothrop in Gravity's Rainbow:

> [Slothrop] is also a literalisation [...] Structuralist poetics, in its more radical avatars, has taught us to abandon the concept of character as self-identity [...][and] to regard it instead as a textual function. Slothrop demonstrates this textualised concept of character: beginning as at best a marginal self, he literally becomes *literal* - a congeries of *letters*, mere words. [37] (McHale's italics.)

This "literalisation" of the textuality of character is an extreme form of the characteristics of postmodernist fiction with which McHale is mainly concerned. He emphasises the continuous use of the strategy of

foregrounding or 'laying bare' the text, exposing its deceptions as deceptions practiced on the reader, and consequently demystifying the literary text to reveal above all its artificiality. As a result of this emphasis McHale's examples are principally formal, like the example of Pynchon's character above. So when McHale comes to discuss the "schizoid text"[38] he refers to a formal phenomenon of which split writing, newspaper-page structure and text-and-gloss format are the principle manifestations. Thus Jacques Derrida's Glas is "one of the more spectacular examples of a double-column text", the object of this formalisation being to

> foreground the materiality of the printed book by contrast with the elusive presence/absence of the authors who supposedly "stand behind" the printed word. [39]

The main problems associated with this kind of text are, for McHale, to do with reading it - "In what order is this strange, fluctuating text to be read?", he asks - because such formal schizophrenia subverts the normal left-to-right movement of reading. As I have already pointed out, however, McHale makes little reference to women writers in his discussion of postmodernist experimentation, and I want to argue here that it is in women's fiction that the characteristic of schizophrenia takes on a function which is significant in ways different to those of formal playfulness or deliberate problematisation of form. The following survey of contemporary women's fiction will examine the various ways in which this fiction is preoccupied with the theme of identity, from the level of character to the level of the text itself.

Jane Rogers' novel Her Living Image (1986) exemplifies most clearly the mixture of schizoid formal experimentation with the theme of identity. It is a typically 'split' text (although not in the overt sense of representing more than one discourse on a single page), presenting two alternative and apparently exclusive narratives of the life of the heroine Carolyn. In this sense, it can be placed in the context of the tradition of writing on the theme of the "double" which is discussed in Karl Miller's book Doubles, a tradition which originates in the Gothic texts of Mary Shelley and James Hogg and which can be traced through Poe, Dostoevsky and Wilde into the 20th century.[40] In the first narrative of Her Living Image (i.e. that which appears first in the text) Carolyn is accidentally run over by a van at a crucial moment in her life, and the ensuing period of hospitalisation and recuperation leads to irreversible changes in her life and her character. The second narrative originates in fantasy as Carolyn ponders, while in hospital, over what her life would have been like had the accident not occurred. Beginning as a necessary process of catharsis, this fantasy narrative develops into a parallel text accompanying the first:

> As Carolyn got better she stopped hearing her other story. She no longer needed it [...] The story, once started, continued though - as stories will - quite unknown to Carolyn. It featured a Carolyn no less real than herself: her double, her living image, separated from her only by a second's timing in a rainsoaked dash across Leap Lane.[41]

The two narratives are formally separated through the second being printed in italics. They continue together in their separate progressions until certain strange events begin to occur, which constitute chiasmic points in the text - points at which characters and

actions in the 'imagined' narrative begin appearing in and influencing the 'real' narrative. The Carolyn of the first narrative who, subsequent to her accident, moves into a house shared with a group of feminists and 'discovers' her independence from her parents, begins an affair with the husband of the Carolyn in the second, accident-free narrative. The difference between the two Carolyns is one of identity, as the one thing they do not share (the accident) is also a crucial defining moment in both their self-developments - but identity is also the one thing they share at a semantic level, as the husband Alan briefly realises:

> In a vision of devastating clarity [...] he saw that they were the same; Caro and Carolyn. What you see with the right eye when the left is shut, and what you see with the left eye when the right is shut, come together with a jump when you open both eyes [...] They were the same. [42]

The structure of the text contradicts the implication that Caro and Carolyn are the same person, while at the same time it continually draws attention to this assertion through the formal differentiation between the two narratives. What the novel in effect presents is a parallel universe structure in which 'worlds' of differing ontological status (the second narrative being a product of the imagination of a character in the first) can nevertheless occupy the same textual space - the coexistence of two Carolyns, the same but different, thus constitutes a violation of the ontology of 'normal' reality, but not of the representational ontology of the fictional text. This text is characteristically postmodern in Brian McHale's sense, in that it is concerned with problems of ontology, and it seeks to address these problems through experimentation with the theme of identity.

Her Living Image presents a particularly concrete example of the way in which this preoccupation with identity may be both thematic and formal - in this text there is no easy way of differentiating the theme from the structure which represents it. Other examples of modern women's fiction display the same thematic concerns but usually in a less overtly formal manner. Jane Rogers' first novel, Separate Tracks (1984), presents a heroine, Emma, whose principal development is from the insulated security of her middle-class background towards an understanding of some of the complexities of life. The vehicle of this development is a boy she meets while working at a hostel for orphans, and it soon becomes clear that this boy represents a kind of *alter ego* to Emma's innocent character:

> Suddenly she thought, I will never be able to get rid of him. He'll follow me through my life like a disease, something dirty I don't understand that clings to me.[43]

Emma arrives at university to discover that "You could choose, as if from blank, what sort of person to be here". Coupled as it is with the binary structure of this novel's theme - the encounter between what are effectively middle- and working-class stereotypes - Emma's quest for identity becomes subservient to the problems of class and gender confrontation which the text addresses. To this extent the novel presents a conventional theme in women's literature - the movement of a young woman from immaturity to a sense of her own adult feminine identity. But an important aspect of this theme is represented in this text, which draws attention to the influence of the mother-daughter relationship upon the identity problems experienced by the daughter. As Emma tries to assert her own authority in the orphan's hostel she finds

that "her mother's phrases and tellings off sprang readily to her lips, [and] she could never have found her own words to tell the child off". This dependence upon maternal authority, and its manifestation through language and the exercising of power, constitute a major theme in contemporary women's writing which will be addressed in this thesis.

Another writer, Michele Roberts, locates a source of feminine schizophrenia in the external definitions imposed upon women by the ideological systems of patriarchy. In A Piece of the Night (1978) the heroine Julie, already uncertain of one aspect of her identity due to her dual nationality, experiences an acute form of identity anxiety when she realises the extent to which her 'self' is constituted within the heterosexual act by her lover's and her own fantasy definitions of it:

> But at the final moment with her lover and her mirror, vision distorts: she is presented with a fractured picture of herself. Because she perceives this in wordless ways, in her feelings, in her gut, she does not know which to trust: the splintered yet separately concrete vision of herself Ben offers, or the hidden whole self that struggles to say that his vision of her is distorted and moves in fantasy.[44]

This use of the mirror in self-identification points towards a psychoanalytical interpretation, and it is clear that Roberts is presenting the reader with an example of the Lacanian "mirror stage", one of the formative stages in human development. We will return to this use of mirrors in identification - the formative identification of the subject with the mirror image, according to Lacan - and the problems that result from it throughout this thesis (Roberts uses it in another novel, The Visitation (1983) where the mirror image is explicitly connected with the act of writing - literally the inscription of

identity upon a surface, resulting in the metaphor of the body as text[45].

"The hidden whole self" in the above quotation sounds reassuringly like Patricia Waugh's "unified self", until we realise its mythical status as object of a quest which may be impossible to begin:

> If she does not trust and live his fantasy, she can no longer reach out even to distorted splinters and does not know where to begin to look for herself. [46]

This extreme version of schizophrenia, in which the 'wholeness' of self is not only fragmented but entirely lost, implies that male-imposed feminine identity is always the only identity of women. The anxiety resulting from the contemplation of the self is a product of a tension between resistance to the imposition of male-defined identity, and the uncertainty (or impossibility) of subjective self-definition, described by Adrienne Rich as "the terror of positively establishing a whole self, or of discovering that there is no such simple entity"[47]. The fragmented woman as represented in texts like Roberts' is thus a victim of two contradictory strategies, the denial of wholeness asserted by patriarchal definition and the difficulties surrounding subjective self-definition. This contradiction - between imposition and seeming illusion - lies at the heart of feminine schizophrenia, because the illusory nature of the myth of the 'unified self' is itself a product of the imposition of external definition by patriarchal structures. Contemporary women's fiction repeatedly addresses the process of constructing an alternative feminine identity through resisting the

roles offered by patriarchy, and questions the possibility of defining the self without recourse to some means of objective validation.

Like Michele Roberts, Jenny Diski identifies the sexual act as one of the scenes in which feminine schizophrenia becomes most evident, although her explicit treatment of this theme has led to her needing to define her position regarding feminism. In a radio interview she stated that "it is in general the business of writers to offend", and defined her novel Nothing Natural as "non-feminist". In this novel the heroine Rachel becomes the 'victim' in a sado-masochistic heterosexual relationship. After their first encounter, her identity as an independent unmarried mother is challenged as a result of the previous limits of her self-awareness being removed:

> She had felt during this last encounter infinitely more known, more penetrated, more possessed. It was the dark, secret route that took him truly inside her, a labyrinth without a boundary leading to the hidden place, the centre that she hardly knew herself. It was there that she wanted to know and be known.

Here the metaphor of the self as labyrinth is employed to emphasise the problematic relationship between knowing the self and being known. The passivity of the woman in the sexual relationship leads to the active exploration of the "labyrinth without a boundary", but the result is the familiar loss of a sense of selfhood rather than any reassuring revelation of consistent identity: "She wasn't anyone she had ever met before".[48]

These aspects of contemporary feminist treatments of the theme of identity crisis are combined in a novel by Sue Roe, which adds another

significant dimension to the postmodern characteristics of women's fiction. Estella: Her Expectations (1982) is a rewriting - an overt imitation of a text already written (Dickens' Great Expectations) which functions in terms of representing issues suppressed or marginalised by the precursor text. Roe's novel is of course part of a long tradition of feminist rewriting, Jean Rhys and Virginia Woolf also having engaged in this strategy[48]. Rewriting as a strategy concerns itself with intertextuality, establishing and exploiting a network of relationships between the text, the precursor text and with other texts dealing with the precursor text. Textual autonomy and authorial authority is thus denied, and replaced by intertextuality, resulting in another kind of schizoid text, similar in some ways to the polyphonic novel described by Bakhtin. Roe's novel reconstructs the life of Estella, who in Dickens' novel is a marginal, shadowy figure, almost literally constructed by Miss Havisham to facilitate her vengeance upon the male sex. Where Dickens denies Estella any degree of autonomous subjectivity, Roe elevates her to the status of narrator and undertakes the examination of the resulting subjective voice. Estella is thus reconstructed as a character in her own right, although as we shall see this subjectivity leads to its own problems.

Such texts exemplify a certain feminist strategy derived from theoretical debates, that of canonical revision, of opening up the 'closed' spaces in the traditional canon, and exposing the omissions and repressions which the very process of canon formation relies upon. It is also a process of redefining existing canons by inserting the opposing, feminine, point of view in order to challenge largely patriarchal

canonical assumptions. Part of this strategy lies in the rediscovery and republication of suppressed or forgotten works by women from earlier historical periods, and feminist publishing houses like Virago and Pandora have played a major role in this process. But perhaps more significant than this material project is the freedom that feminist writers feel they are offered by rewriting - the chance to re-present old material in new forms - but there is also a political dimension to this strategy:

> Re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - is for women more than a chapter in cultural history; it is an act of survival. Until we can understant the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society.[50]

As Adrienne Rich interprets it, the act of rewriting is an act of self-definition on the part of the rewriter, a movement towards the rediscovery of the aspects of feminine experience marginalised by male-dominated culture. But this act also constitutes a redefinition of the text, and of the tradition, that is being rewritten. It determines the writer's relationship to that text and tradition, and situates her own writing in direct relationship to the tradition, while at the same time challenging the hegemony of the tradition as an authoritative canon of given texts. Rewriting serves to open a vast (almost unlimited) textual space in which feminist strategies may operate, without contradicting the feminist/postmodernist critiques which define its political viability. Such a fictional strategy is characteristically postmodern; the use of parody and pastiche which characterises postmodern intertextuality encourages the appropriation and reworking of aspects of

other texts - Flann O'Brien, writing in 1939, went so far as to assert that "the entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required [...] the modern novel should be largely a work of reference."[51]

Feminist rewriting is both retrospectively and prospectively oriented, being aligned towards both the reinterpretation of historical texts and with the establishment of alternative, egalitarian canons. For many feminist writers this amounts to an act of repossession, a reclaiming of territory from which they have been historically excluded, while simultaneously challenging the nature of and reasons for that exclusion. An interesting point about rewriting in this context is its implicit act of deferral, as a given rewriting defers its identity onto the text it rewrites, and insists upon being interpreted through that precursor text. The intertextual matrix which poststructuralism identifies as the terrain of the literary/interpretative event is thus established through the denial of textual autonomy - an assertion not of identity, but of difference. Barbara Johnson's definition of the difference 'within' identity offers the clearest example of how poststructuralism, like postmodernism, denies the totalisation which traditional liberal humanism desires:

> Difference is not engendered in the space between identities; it is what makes all totalisation of the identity of a self or the meaning of a text impossible. [52]

Rewriting and the difference it asserts serves to undermine the autonomous identity of the canonical text as a coherent, self-contained artefact just as it asserts the incompleteness of the rewritten text.

Sue Roe's novel conforms to this intertextual definition of the strategy of rewriting. While its characters are derived from Dickens' text, this derivation is minimal, as they are transported into an indefinite (probably 1960s) age of buses, trains, art schools, Frank Zappa records and television. Added to this use of popular culture is the text's literary allusions to the canonical writers of high modernism - Eliot, Lawrence, Conrad - and to writers of the feminist tradition like Stevie Smith and Colette. This mixing of 'high' and 'low' culture is again a common postmodernist strategy, signifying one aspect of the breakdown of codes of legitimation identified by Lyotard - what Steven Connor calls "the levelling of hierarchies and blurring of boundaries"[53]. Dickens'. Estella is thus transported into the twentieth century, and the main concern of the novel becomes her search for identity amid a world of consumerism and media images:

> There were so many women in the world, all painted different colours and dressed in different ways - so that you knew which was which - and you chose. And you were, having chosen, that woman. Estella had been three women. That was the difficulty [...] she, from her frail pedestal of control, could fashion and mould and sculpt a whole image of a painted self, out there in the distance [...] Estella knows, waking in the dull morning, from dreams of confusion, knows she can't exist without a finished form, a clear image of herself to represent. It's all a painting. Or it's never started.

As a character already shadowy by virtue of her Dickensian marginalisation, Estella's search is initially confined to the choice of an image to wear over her textual presence. But the images available are those created by male-dominated consumerism, and part of her education consists of recognising the universality of such stereotyping:

> There are a lot of choices. You can be any number of women. But it's futile to choose. Because once you realise there's a choice, you have to be all of them.

Estella moves from a recognition of the range of images available to women, through a realisation that these images are merely simulacra, lacking the depth essential to any adequate identity, towards an acknowledgement of the fragility of any identity constructed in such a manner due to its reliance upon an external object of definition - in this case, the man with whom she has a brief relationship. When this relationship ends, her emotional distress finds expression in a desire for fragmentation:

> She was crying on the bus at 7.30 in the morning. She cried to break. Her body splintered. How could she not break down, breaking thus [...] her body was out of it all, and just not stable enough.

The loss of the object of desire here leads to a desire for fragmentation, rendered as a physical fracturing but with clear psychological undertones. As with Michele Roberts and Jenny Diski, the sexual act is the ground upon which identity is forged, but identity here is always only an image or reflection which can shatter at any moment. At the same time as Estella's identity is fractured due to this emotional rupture, her friend Mercy loses her baby, and a different consequence of this loss of the object of desire becomes apparent:

> Mercy was here pinched and drained and nowhere [...] mastered by loss.
>
> It couldn't be Mercy's fault, this absence of Mercy [...] Mercy had no place to be, now, and her face, drained of colour, was somehow not in the room.[54]

In Mercy's case, emotional loss becomes concretised in the physical absence of the self, a vacancy wich ultimately coincides with the emptiness behind the masks she and Estella continually assume. As

Paulina Palmer suggests, Roe's novel deals with the theme of femininity as masquerade in a similar way to Angela Carter's fiction, without losing sight of the precarious nature of identity as constructed through masquerade.[55] Both Mercy and Estella are revealed to be constructed of signs rather than essences, and thus to 'cease to exist' in the absence of an implicitly male reading object, just as the textual world they inhabit is comprised of the signs and exchanges of fashion and media. Estella as painter thus allegorises within the text the concept of Estella as producer of her own image, as manufacturer not of her own identity but of her own representation.

Roe's novel exemplifies at a thematic level the kind of schizophrenia demonstrated formally in Jane Rogers' Her Living Image. Character schizophrenia, clearly a major theme of the text, is also inscribed into the text itself in its mixing of registers and references, and through its dominant intertextual dimension. In this way the novel oscillates between an exploration of its own identity, and of its own representations of identity.

This brief examination of contemporary women's fiction will hopefully have demonstrated the extent of the preoccupation of women writers with problems of identity, and shown how postmodernist strategies are being used to address these issues. I want now to turn to the writer who will be the main focus of the following pages - Angela Carter - in order to assess firstly the critical reception of her fiction, and secondly to outline my own approach to an examination of the themes discussed here with reference to Carter's fiction.

Angela Carter and the critics.

If a general overview of the relationship between feminism and postmodernism reveals that relationship to be complex, problematic and unresolvable to clear determining factors, then this is surely due in part to the sheer volume of published material addressing this issue. A more specific approach, addressing the interactions between the political and fictional strategies of feminism and postmodernism, through an examination of a body of texts which is itself continually engaged with the kinds of problems addressed earlier, might afford a clearer insight into the reasons for and results of this complexity - and it is through an examination of Angela Carter's fiction and the questions raised by this fiction that I want to approach the problem of identity with reference to the interaction of feminism and postmodernism. In order to introduce Carter's fiction, it will be useful first to examine critical receptions and interpretations of her work, so as to attempt to isolate particular recurring critical responses and strategies, and to assess the significance, if any, of these characteristics to the feminism/postmodernism debate.

What is immediately striking about the critical work to date on Carter is the relative shortage of it. Her most recent novel, Wise Children (1991) received on publication the kind of reception awarded to the new work of a major writer[56], and yet Carter remained during her lifetime a somewhat marginal figure on the stage of English letters. A comparable writer, John Fowles, whose career is roughly contemporary with and in many ways parallels Carter's, has commanded a far greater

degree of critical attention and become the subject of a plethora of books, articles, conferences and theses. In contrast there is as yet no book-length study of Carter, and journal articles are scarce. While it is tempting to explain this difference as a result of mere sexism on the part of relevant institutions (male writers being perhaps 'more important' academically and publicly), and it is also clear that this sexism is detectable in surveys of postmodernist literature and culture (cf. Carter's relative obscurity alongside many other male novelists like Pynchon, Barth, Borges, Kundera and Calvino as well as Fowles), there nevertheless remain other, more problematical questions to answer, and these relate back to the more fundamental issue of how cultural institutions, and in particular those which have to varying degrees responded positively to the rise of feminism, have responded to postmodernism. If Carter, as I hope to demonstrate, exploits a wide range of typically postmodernist devices, themes and strategies in her fiction, then why have theorists of postmodern fiction tended to ignore or marginalise her work ?

We have already examined Brian McHale's survey Postmodernist Fiction and noted the general lack of attention to women writers in this text. Similarly Patricia Waugh's Feminine Fictions deals with writers who generally predate the rise of postmodernism as a historically defined phenomenon. Waugh's book contains a single passing mention of Carter, and in her earlier survey of contemporary experimental fiction, Metafiction (1984), Carter is not mentioned at all. McHale, on the other hand, refers fairly frequently to several of Carter's novels; he links Carter with "other postmodernist writers" like Barthelme and Coover, and

more specifically (in the context of a book which offers a 'poetics' of postmodernist fiction) he points out several characteristics which Carter's texts share with those of other writers.[57] For McHale Carter is firmly situated alongside other prime examples of postmodernist fiction, and the characteristics of her fiction are readable in terms of postmodern theory. Linda Hutcheon, in her books A Poetics of Postmodernism (1987) and The Politics of Postmodernism (1989), is similarly disposed to include Carter as a writer demonstrating postmodernism at work in her fiction.[58]

In an interview with John Haffenden, Carter considers her own fiction and its relationship with literary criticism. The intertextual implications of the possibility that her novels are "a kind of literary criticism" (a possibility she returns to in a later interview with Anne Smith) leads her to consider modern fiction more generally:

> I had spent a long time acquiescing very happily with the Borges idea that books were about books, and then I began to think: if all books are about books, then what are the other books about ? Where does it all stop ? Borges is happy with the idea of a vast *Ur*-book, which is a ridiculous proposition. I think that fiction in Great Britain, and in the USA, is going through a very mannerist period. I think the adjective 'postmodernist' really means 'mannerist'. Books about books is fun but frivolous.

Later she comments on her own admitted tendency of 'overwriting': "It's mannerist, you see [...] I started off being an expressionist but as I grew older I started treating it more frivolously and so I became mannerist".[59] Carter's own (frivolous?) rejection of the term 'postmodernism' in favour of 'mannerism', an historically unspecific term referring generally to characteristics of style (hence

'overwritten', 'baroque' and 'rococo' are adjectives often used to describe Carter's fictional style) rather than to thematic or structural elements, needs to be remembered while examining the critical reception of her work. The tendency among critics to follow Carter in avoiding the term 'postmodernism', while nevertheless embracing much of what the term signifies, is an interesting and revealing factor in assessing the relationship between feminism and postmodernism as it as analysed through Carter's work. Paulina Palmer, for example, prefers the term "anti-realism" in her book Contemporary Women's Fiction, which she glosses as

> [making] use of devices and strategies which advertise the fictionality and artifice of the text. Textual fragmentation, internal monologue and a focus on the fractured self have the effect of disorientating the reader. . .[60]

A comparison between this definition and Peter Currie's broad definition of the characteristics of the postmodernist text (quoted above) would suggest that, apart from drawing attention to the absence of a mythic or other cohering structure and to an element of parodic playfulness, Palmer might be offering "anti-realism" as a virtual synonym of "postmodernism". "Anti-realism" is, however, highly ambiguous in historical terms, as anything from Homeric epic to Absurdism might justifiably be described as being in some significant way "anti-realist". Describing The Passion of New Eve, Palmer provides a good example of the kind of vocabulary used by many critics when discussing Carter's work:

> The device of intertextuality, combined with episodes of deliberate narrative contrivance such as the baroquely ornate passages describing the erotic 'masquerades' Tristessa and Leilah perform, advertise the fictionality of the text. They distance the reader

> from events, alerting us to the fact that the novel is first and foremost a vehicle for ideas.[61]

Carter's deliberately baroque style, derived from the excesses of popular fiction, Gothic novels, film and television, is arguably the most obvious postmodernist characteristic of her fiction, and the other characteristics Palmer points out, which predominantly identify the text as metafictional, might equally be signified by the term 'postmodernist' - as Patricia Waugh notes, metafiction is one constituent of the cultural phenomenon of postmodernism, rather than a synonym for 'postmodernism' itself.[62]

Flora Alexander, in Contemporary Women Novelists (1989), comments on Carter's use of "non-naturalistic narrative", a euphemism almost as ambiguous as "anti-realism". Interestingly Alexander goes on to echo Paulina Palmer's (and Carter's own) reductive interpretation of postmodernism as metafiction:

> Nights at the Circus is a work of artifice in the currently fashionable mode which, sometimes almost predictably, has authors giving themselves parts in their own fictions and playing games with their readers.

Alexander's opinion of this "mode" is clear from her tone, and one is forced to suggest that all authors, even Victorian realists, might "play games" with their readers to some extent. Alexander describes Nights at the Circus as "picaresque and fantastic", thus emphasising the generic characteristics of the text in conventional literary-critical terms.[63] Other critics who avoid the term 'postmodernism' when discussing Carter's fiction include Patricia Duncker, who describes The Passion of

New Eve as "a fantastic Gothic quest", and Lorna Sage, who also describes Carter as "a 'Gothic' writer", and elsewhere describes Carter's novels as "nasty, erotic, brilliant creations that feed off cultural crisis".[64] This tendency to either ignore (as Natalie Rosinsky, Maggie Anwell and David Punter also do[65]) or to marginalise the possible relevance of postmodernism to Carter's work has, I think, two significant effects. Firstly it articulates through omission the general unease felt by (mainly feminist) critics when confronted by postmodernism as a concept and postmodern theories as a repository of critical tools and strategies. Secondly it serves to distract attention from what I feel is one of Carter's most significant achievements - her combining of postmodernist cultural theory with a firmly materialist, politically progressive brand of feminism.

In contrast to its postmodernist characteristics, the feminist views propounded in Carter's fiction are frequently pointed out. In "Notes from the Front Line" Carter states: "I would regard myself as a feminist writer, because I'm feminist in everything else".[66] Carter is generally (and rightly) seen as being engaged in an ongoing critique, through her fiction, of patriarchy and its effects. Thus Maggie Anwell, discussing the film of The Company of Wolves, writes:

> Angela Carter's 'territory' of dreams, surrealism and ambiguity makes a conscious use of fantasy to articulate a female gaze, which [...] disturbs the everyday assumptions of patriarchy.[67]

Paulina Palmer, who elsewhere criticises Carter for being in some ways heterosexist (a criticism which will be examined later), nevertheless concedes:

> In problematising relations between the sexes and presenting them as an arena of political struggle, Carter is generally in accord with the interests of contemporary feminism.[68]

And Neil Cornwell suggests that Black Venus is comparable to Toni Morrison's Beloved in that both texts are engaging in giving "voice to the voices and stories of the past, particularly (but not solely) the voices and stories of black [...] women, which history and patriarchy have hitherto silenced"[69] - a function which echoes Adrienne Rich's comments on feminism and rewriting, quoted earlier. This general acceptance of Carter's feminism contrasts markedly with the reluctance to label her as postmodern, and would seem to suggest that the feminist ambivalence to postmodernism charted above is standard in the field of literary criticism, even though the concepts associated with postmodernism by those sympathetic to the term are frequently embraced. The closest to a 'summary' of these concepts, with reference to Carter, comes in the biographical note to Elaine Jordan's essay "Enthralment; Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions":

> Her work is often characterised as fantastic or Gothic, but considered as a whole - consciously alert and unconsciously rich - it constitutes one of the most intelligent, committed and imaginative reports and critiques of the mid to late twentieth century, its myths, folklore, theories, fashions and cultural inheritance.[70]

My discussion of Carter's fiction will concentrate on her novels, although I use one short story to exemplify certain aspects of Carter's work which the novels display in less cogent form. The next chapter will extend the discussion of subjectivity, feminism and postmodernism outlined above, and provide an exemplary reading of Carter's story "The

Loves of Lady Purple" in order to demonstrate how such themes are manifested in fictional discourse. Chapter 3 will address Carter's novels up to 1972, and will examine how thematic and stylistic preoccupations develop within texts which I perceive to exemplify nascent postmodernism - the cultural and historical influences upon Carter's early fiction will also be discussed. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 each address a single novel, emphasising a particular thematic concern of that novel within the framework of theory already discussed. Thus The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman is discussed in terms of the subject and desire; The Passion of New Eve in terms of the subject and gender; and Nights at the Circus in terms of the subject and power. Each novel represents a development in what I perceive as Carter's ongoing critique of the philosophical and political structures of Western society, and this continuity between texts published over a period of 13 years is discussed in the concluding chapter, which also addresses Carter's last novel, Wise Children, and suggests areas for future research in the light of Carter's recent and premature death.

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41. Jane Rogers, Her Living Image, p. 63.
42. Ibid. p. 196.
43. Jane Rogers, Separate Tracks, pp. 133, 99, 67.
44. Michele Roberts, A Piece of the Night, p. 67.
45. Michele Roberts, The Visitation, p. 99.
46. A Piece of the Night, p. 102.
47. Adrienne Rich, On Lies, Secrets and Silence, p. 55.
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51. Flann O'Brien, At Swim-Two-Birds, p. 25.
52. Barbara Johnson, The Critical Difference, pp. 4-5.
53. Steven Connor, Postmodernist Culture, p. 184.
54. Sue Roe, Estella: Her Expectations, pp. 115-6, 82, 140, 143-5.
55. Paulina Palmer, Contemporary Women's Fiction. pp. 36-7.
56. See, for example, Salman Rushdie's review in The Independent on Sunday, June 16, 1991.
57. McHale, Postmodernist Fiction, p.20; see also pp. 54-5, 67, 78-9; Patricia Waugh, Metafiction.
58. Hutcheon, The Poetics of Postmodernism and The Politics of Postmodernism - both texts use Carter's novels as examples of postmodernism in fiction.
59. John Haffenden, Novelists in Interview, pp. 79, 91; Anne Smith, "Myths and the Erotic", Women's Review 1 (Nov. 1985), pp. 28-9.
60. Palmer, Contemporary Women's Fiction, p. 169.
61. Ibid, p. 19.
62. Waugh, Metafiction pp. 21-2.
63. Flora Alexander, Contemporary Women's Fiction, pp. 63, 75, 72.
64. Patricia Duncker, "Re-Imagining the Fairy Tales", in Humm & Stigant (eds.), Popular Fictions, p. 222; Lorna Sage, "Female Fictions: The Women Novelists", in The Contemporary English Novel, (Stratford Upon Avon Studies), pp. 86-7; Lorna Sage, "The Savage Sideshow", in The New Review Anthology, p. 280.
65. Maggie Anwell, "Lolita Meets the Werewolf", in Gamman & Marshent (eds.), The Female Gaze; Natalie Rosinsky, Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction, pp. 10-19; David Punter, The Hidden Script: Writing and the Unconscious, pp. 28-42.
66. Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line"
67. Maggie Anwell, "Lolita meets the Werewolf", p. 77.
68. Paulina Palmer, "From 'Coded Mannequin' to 'Bird Woman': Angela Carter's Magic Flight", in Roe (ed.), Women Reading Women's Writing, p. 186.
69. Neil Cornwell, The Literary Fantastic, p. 198.
70. In Linda Anderson (ed.), Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction, p. 18.

Chapter 2: Theories of identity and schizophrenia.

In one of the few studies relating postmodern theory to specifically British fiction, Richard Todd offers an interpretation of postmodernism in fiction arising from the context of the anti-modernist writers of the 1950s, known collectively as the Movement. Recognising some of the limitations of Movement writing, Todd argues that

> The contemporary novel, in Britain at any rate, may be conceived of in terms of its having steadily evolved a number of strategies across a broad spectrum for confronting the problems posed by the constraints of selfhood, as the mode of naive social realism came increasingly to be equated with solipsistic closure [...][1]

Todd sees British postmodernist fiction as arising from a confluence of critical and literary genres (the mixing of which is conveniently demonstrated by the novels of theorists like David Lodge and Iris Murdoch), and he avoids the "countercultural, avant-garde, experimental which critical discourse has persistently located at the margins" of British fiction, seeing this as not the exclusive manifestation of postmodernism. Instead, he offers two poles, the "self-referent" or metafictional works of writers like Antony Burgess, and the "other-referent", where "we may find solipsism challenged and attempts made [...] to escape the constraints of the self". Todd includes Angela Carter in this second category, and goes on to comment that "even at this end of the spectrum we have an acknowledgement that the limitations of selfhood are inescapable".[2]

Todd does not elaborate or clarify precisely what the "limitations" or "constraints of selfhood" might be. While the fiction of the Movement was clearly preoccupied with (among other things) the assertion of individual power to achieve an illusory freedom from socio-economic forces through overcoming them (as in John Braine's Room at the Top) or escaping their influence (Alan Sillitoe's The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner), it is clear also that this assertion of selfhood is related to loosely existentialist concepts of the self. His failure to adequately theorise "selfhood" limits the usefulness of his argument for much postmodern writing, since his Murdochian notions of the coherent, fully rounded fictional character seem closer to Victorian fiction than to writers like Carter. However his suggestion that postmodernism in British fiction is directed towards the exploration of "possible attitudes towards selfhood" makes a useful starting point for an examination of the theorisation of identity in postmodernism, and for a discussion of the consequences of this theorisation with reference to a particular text, Angela Carter's short story "The Loves of Lady Purple".[3]

It is helpful to see the contemporary problematisation of identity as arising at the confluence of what Jane Flax has suggested are the "three kinds of thinking" which "best present (and represent) our own time apprehended in thought" - feminism, postmodernism and psychoanalysis. Flax's own materialist conception of identity and related problems - her argument that "there is no force or reality outside our social relations and activity [...] that will rescue us from partiality and differences" - points towards the problematisation of terms like

'woman', 'gender', 'identity' and 'subject', a problematisation that perhaps culminates in Julia Kristeva's controversial assertion that "*woman as such* does not exist".[4] In elaborating some of the attitudes of theorists of feminism and postmodernism introduced earlier to these problematised concepts, this chapter will also discuss the contribution of psychoanalytic theory to these attitudes, and will introduce some of the psychoanalytic concepts which have had a marked effect upon feminism, particularly upon Angela Carter's fiction.

Dick Hebdige, situating postmodernism historically as specifically post-1968 (the 1968 of Woodstock and U.S. campus riots, as well as of Paris) describes the cultural fragmentation observed by theorists of the postmodern as "the assertion of the claims of the particular against the general, the fragment against the (irrecoverable) whole", which led to "the apotheosis of the schizophrenic". It is here that postmodernism differs from Todd's late existentialist position, because the self is in no way conceived of as unitary by postmodernist theory - on the contrary, the self is perceived as split just as society and culture are perceived as split. Schizophrenia thus becomes "the emergent psychic norm" of postmodernism, a psychological condition which best metaphorises the cultural conditions diagnosed by theorists.[5] Jean Baudrillard connects the "obscene delirium of communication" which characterises one aspect of his interpretation of contemporary culture with the condition of schizophrenia. For him the schizo epitomises the condition of postmodernity, in which the subject is reduced to the status of "a terminal of multiple networks" in the miniaturised electronic world of information exchange. Subjectivity, metaphorised by

the schizophrenic, becomes "only a pure screen, a switching centre for all the networks of influence". Hebdige identifies two uses of the word 'subject' in this context, the 'subject of the sentence' and the 'subjected subject', and the questioning of the authority of the former arguably leads to a preoccupation with the latter, into which category Baudrillard's schizo, at the centre of the "networks of influence", clearly falls.[6]

The postmodernist exploration of the Enlightenment unitary and autonomous subject (a concept which is arguably already debunked by such modernist discourses as Freudian psychoanalysis, Darwinism and Marxism) is thus in part a resituation of the subject - a rendering of it as 'subjected' rather than 'subjecting', involving a recognition of the influencing factors which work to constitute the fiction of the unitary subject, and a challenging of the power that these influencing factors assert and of the ideological forces which valorise some of these factors over others. In this sense, the postmodernist project can be seen as less a discovery and more an exposure of the subject as always already divided, in contradiction of those ideological discourses (which are characteristically reactionary) which predicate themselves upon a unitary subject. Michel Foucault describes the situation of the 'subjected subject' within systems of power as a position of subservience: "Confronted by a power that is Law, the subject who is constituted as subject - who is 'subjected' - is he who obeys".[7] Related to this reconceptualisation of subjectivity as constituted and to an extent determined by cultural forces rather than as an innate, pre-existent and ontologically consistent essence, is the concept of the

cultural construction of gender (as distinct from biological sex) which, as Paulina Palmer recognises, is "a key concept in feminist theory". Palmer quotes Angela Carter's definition of culturally constructed gender identity:

> There is the unarguable fact of sexual differentiation; but, separate from it and only partially derived from it, are the behavioural modes of masculine and feminine, which are culturally defined variables translated in the language of common usage to the status of universals.[8]

This elevation of a particular, ideologically motivated interpretation of gender and gender relations to the status of a universal norm, and its consequences for the material relations between human beings, is precisely what feminism and certain aspects of postmodernism (in its political manifestations) challenge. Instead of the norm of identity as consistent and coherent, identity becomes decentred, unstable and radically split - hence for postmodernism the significance of the schizophrenic, the 'split-minded' subject, as a metaphor for contemporary subjectivity. Accompanying this reconceptualisation of identity as unstable, however, can be detected a desire for a lost unitary selfhood, which is manifested in fiction in the form of the quest for identity, a theme common to those novels discussed in the previous chapter and examined in detail below (Chapter 5) with reference to Carter's The Passion of New Eve. Indeed it is arguable that the quest for identity is common to literature outside the contemporary feminist/ postmodernist scene with which I am concerned - as Judith Kegan Gardiner points out, "some scholars see women's quests for identity as the dominant theme in women's fiction", and examples of an evident anxiety over the stability of the Enlightenment subject can be detected, outside

women's fiction, in such recurring literary themes as masquerade, transvestism and epiphany, and in such generic forms as the Bildungsroman (which, according to Chris Baldick, traces subjective development "through a troubled quest for identity").[9] It is the combination of this quest for identity, and all the nostalgia and desire that it involves, with its appearance in texts which use postmodernist fictional strategies, and all the scepticism concerning unitary subjectivity which this usage suggests, which constitutes the paradox with which contemporary feminist fiction seems to be struggling. Similarly feminist theory repeatedly finds itself having to restate its disavowal of the lure of essentialism - Judith Butler, with specific reference to gender, argues that

> to expose the contingent acts that create the appearance of a naturalistic necessity [...] is a task that now takes on the added burden of showing how the very notion of the subject, intelligible only through its appearance as gendered, admits of possibilities that have been forcibly foreclosed by the various reifications of gender that have constituted its contingent ontologies.[10]

- and Toril Moi, discussing the 'meanings' of the terms 'female', feminine' and 'feminist', ends by reminding the reader that "these three 'labels' are not essences. They are categories we as readers or critics operate." This evident combination of nostalgia and desire for some kind of essence or unity is clearly a powerful urge in contemporary theory, and serves to introduce psychoanalysis as a discipline intrinsically involved with such concepts.[11]

While the assault upon the unitary subject may appear to be at least two-pronged, it is arguable that both feminism and postmodernism share a

common platform from which to mount certain aspects of their attacks - this platform being psychoanalysis. Postmodernist appropriations of psychoanalytic terminology and concepts, such as Fredric Jameson's concept of the 'hysterical sublime' and his acknowledgement of the usefulness of Lacan's interpretation of schizophrenia, and Baudrillard's use of the schizo as theorised by Deleuze and Guattari, indicate the extent of the contribution of psychoanalysis to postmodernist theory, and this contribution is perhaps parallelled by the way in which certain kinds of feminist theory have been profoundly influenced by psychoanalytical thought. However it is important not to forget that psychoanalysis itself has come under close scrutiny through these connections, and, particularly under the influence of feminism, has been forced to reconceptualise certain previously fundamental 'truths'. The complexity of the relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis is clearly explained by Jane Gallop, who introduces Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction as follows:

> This book begins by calling into question certain feminist assumptions through the agency of Lacanian psychoanalysis. It ends by calling into question certain psychoanalytic positions through the agency of feminist writing.[12]

Psychoanalytic theory offers one of the most consistent and convincing critiques of the unitary subject. This critique, present in much of Freud's work but developed more overtly in Lacan, takes the form of the construction of models of the subject, and, as Freud observed in "The Ego and the Id", "the division of the psychical into what is conscious and what is unconscious is the fundamental premiss of psychoanalysis".[13] Thus the concept of a "division" or split within the subject provides,

at least theoretically, the basis of psychoanalytic theory, and Freud's dynamic, economic and topographical interpretations of subjectivity, alongside Lacan's structural linguistic approach, all derive from this initial perception of the hitherto unitary subject as being in some way split. Louis Althusser draws attention to the significance of Freud's insight into the construction of subjectivity:

> Freud has discovered for us that the real subject, the individual in his unique essence, has not the form of an ego, centred on the 'ego', on 'consciousness' or on 'existence' [...] the human subject is de-centred, constituted by a structure which has no 'centre' either, except in the imaginary misrecognition of the 'ego', i.e. in the ideological formations in which it 'recognises' itself.[14]

However it is Lacan, with his overt resistance to institutionalisation and his constant quarrels with the institution that psychoanalysis has become, who offers certain positions and theories which have been adapted by the "postmodernism of resistance" discussed in the previous chapter. Juliet Mitchell comments that "the basic premise of Lacan's work is a questioning of any certainty or authority in notions of psychic or sexual life" - a questioning which has its origins in Freud's own uncertainty over some of his theories, attributed by Lacan to Freud's lacking an adequate theoretical framework through which to express his theories - namely, the framework offered by structural linguistics.[15]

Lacan's response to the contradictions evident in Freudian theory was to abandon the humanist, unitary subject outright: "Lacan's human subject is the obverse of the humanists'. His subject is not an entity with an identity, but a being created in the fissure of a radical

split."[16] Freud's unfinished paper, "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence", indicates his own progress towards a similar position. In this paper he argues that the contradictory reactions of a child's ego to a threat (of castration) - defence against the threat and simultaneous denial of the reality of the threat - results in "a rift in the ego which never heals but which increases as time goes on". It is this primordial split which, Lacan argues, constitutes the site of construction of a fictional unitary subject, a subject which is desired by the (split) subject and which the (split) subject mistakes for itself: "A primordially split subject necessitates an originary lost object".[17] This mistaken identification of the fictional unitary subject for the self is parallelled, for Lacan, by the (split) subject's entry into the symbolic order of language through referring to itself as 'I'. Jane Miller explains this parallel clearly:

> This 'moment' [of identification with the fictional subject] is echoed by a parallel finding from linguistics, in which the child's discovery and use of 'I' in relation to herself is accompanied by the concomitant discovery that every other human being has access to 'I' within a system of contrasts which allows 'I' its meaning. So that its promise of uniqueness, wholeness, singleness of meaning, is illusory.[18]

The application of linguistic theory to psychoanalysis has particular relevance to the theorisation of schizophrenia. Freud, outlining the characteristic symptoms of schizophrenia, emphasised the effect of the condition on speech:

> In schizophrenics we observe [...] a number of changes in *speech*, some of which deserve to be regarded from a particular point of view.[19] (Freud's emphasis)

This emphasis on the linguistic disabilities of the schizophrenic is developed by Lacan into an interpretation of schizophrenia largely based upon the disruption which the condition causes to conventional linguistic organisation, and later theorists of schizophrenia have continued moving in this direction, so that schizophrenics are now interpreted by many psychoanalysts as suffering from what is "primarily a kind of communication disorder" (although it is important to stress the metaphorical function of the concept of schizophrenia in discussions of postmodernism). Deleuze and Guattari, in what is arguably the most radical interpretation of schizophrenia, argue that the schizophrenic "deliberately *scrambles all the codes*, by quickly shifting from one to another", by which they mean that the schizophrenic does not operate in obedience to but in resistance to social codes.[20] The connection between the primordially split Lacanian subject and the conventional understanding of schizophrenia as 'split personality' is clear, but the shared linguistic basis for these two psychoanalytical interpretations needs to be stressed.

Psychoanalytic theories of schizophrenia have clearly had a detectable influence on the development of postmodernist theory, and the effect of psychoanalysis on feminism must be regarded as in many ways equally profound. The psychoanalytic problematisation of femininity originates in Freud's early theories and, as Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose suggest, it is possible to read psychoanalysis as having been throughout its history engaged with the contradictory aims of constructing a workable model of the psychic aspect of the human subject, and also accounting for that which would seem to preclude the

possibility of such a model - the feminine.[21] Freud introduced his lecture on "Femininity" by remarking that "an introduction to psychoanalysis might have been left without alteration or supplement", thus indicating a reliance on what Derrida has described as the logic of supplementarity, "where what's added on later is always liable to predominate over what was there in the first place".[22] This is in a sense what has happened subsequently, particularly with regard to feminist approaches to psychoanalysis. Freud's almost exasperated abandonment of the problem of femininity at the end of this lecture ("That is all I had to say to you about femininity [...] If you want to know more [...] turn to the poets, or wait until science can give you deeper and more coherent information") perhaps emphasises the inadequacy of psychoanalytic theory in accounting for half of what it set out to explain.[23] This failure is combined, by feminist psychoanalysts, with the Lacanian reassertion of the subject as irrevocably split, into a new interpretation of femininity which emphasises the analysis of the cultural production of gender over the binary definitions with which Freud worked. Luce Irigaray uses an economic metaphor to interpret the construction of femininity, arguing that women operate in patriarchal culture as commodities, "'products' used and exchanged by men". This commodification leads, she suggests, to an initial split within the feminine gender identity:

> As commodities women are thus two things at once: utilitarian objects and bearers of value [...] Woman, object of exchange, differs from woman, use value, in that one doesn't know how to take (hold of) her.[24]

A further split occurs in the division between woman as 'woman' and masculine definitions of 'woman':

> A commodity - a woman - is divided into two irreconcilable 'bodies' - her 'natural' body and her socially valued exchangeable body - which is a particularly mimetic expression of masculine values.[25]

This division within the construction of femininity is further emphasised by Irigaray's insistence that woman's "natural body" is itself split: "Within herself, [woman] is already two [...] Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is *plural*". Irigaray's title, "This Sex which is not One", indicates the degree of ambiguity surrounding this reconceptualisation of the feminine. Helene Cixous asserts a similar kind of schizophrenia as descriptive of femininity:

> If there is a self proper to woman, paradoxically it is her capacity to depropriate herself without self-interest: endless body, without 'end', without principal 'parts'; if she is a whole, it is a whole made up of parts that are wholes . . .[26]

Such a position is noticeably similar to the pre-mirror stage of the Lacanian infant, which perceives itself as non-unified parts which are only cohered into a whole via the identification with the mirror image. Roland Barthes offers a similar rendering of femininity as fragmented when he emphasises the masculine point of view at operation in S/Z:

> The subject [...] knows the female body only as a division and dissemination of partial objects: leg, breast, shoulder, neck, hands. Fragmented Woman is the object [...] divided, anatomised, she is merely a kind of dictionary of fetish objects.[27]

The arguments of French feminists like Irigaray and Cixous tend to centre upon an assertion of femininity as in some way pre-cultural in

its pure form, only distorted by subsequent accession to the repressive masculine symbolic - as Toril Moi points out, "it is probably fair to say that Cixous [...] in the end fall[s] back into a form of biological essentialism", and Domna C. Stanton urges the examination of the discourses of writers like Cixous and Irigaray "for the extent to which phallocentric scenes and semes are re-presented, despite the desire to subvert, eliminate and replace them".[28] Such criticisms of 'l'ecriture feminine' emphasise the difficulties of escaping from either a retrograde essentialism or a slipping back into the structures of opposition which need to be eluded, and it appears that both the patriarchal denial of feminine subjectivity (as presented by Barthes) and the feminist assertion of that subjectivity necessarily culminate in a rendering of the feminine as split or fragmented in a fundamental way, in opposition to a masculinity which is perceived, however inaccurately, as unitary. It is in this sense that femininity presents such a problem to psychoanalysis, which, in its Freudian stages at least, was concerned with constructing gender as a unitary whole. In resisting this drive towards unity, the feminine is either rendered marginal and thus fragmentary, or is installed in a subversive central position, again as fragmentary - either way, it is situated and defined, in the classical Freudian manoeuvre, in relation to the 'norm' of the masculine.

To illustrate the complexities of this debate, it is interesting to note that alternative interpretations of sex and gender exist, which still attempt to escape binarism. This can be demonstrated firstly by Monique Wittig, who argues that "there are not two genders. There is only one, the feminine, the 'masculine' not being a gender. For the

masculine is not the masculine, but the general", and secondly by Deleuze and Guattari, who challenge both the Freudian notion that "there is finally only one sex, the masculine, in relation to which the woman, the feminine, is defined as a lack, an absence", and the notion that there are two sexes both equally 'whole' and unitary. Instead, they suggest that there are "not one or even two, but *n* sexes", rendered singular/binary by what they call the "anthropomorphic representation of sex". Similarly Judith Butler argues that "the limits of the discursive analysis of gender presuppose and preempt the possibilities of imaginable and realiseable gender configurations within culture".[29] This denial of binarism (which also, in a slightly different form, constitutes the basis of much of Cixous' thought[30]) and the installation instead of an extreme pluralism is characteristic of Deleuze and Guattari's often provocative style. But it is also shared by a number of recent feminist theorists like Butler who are reacting against an earlier tendency in feminism to emphasise gender by simply reversing the perceived phallocratic orientation of Western culture. Some of the variations on this shift of theme (which include the introduction of non-gender determinants such as class, age, race, etc. into the discussion of how subjects are constituted) are discussed in Susan Bordo's essay "Feminism, Postmodernism and Gender-Scepticism", in which she detects in recent feminist thought "a new scepticism about the use of gender as an analytical category". While Bordo criticises the poststructuralist manoeuvres of writers like Deleuze and Guattari for perpetuating an "epistemological fantasy of *becoming* multiplicity" (Bordo's emphasis), she also voices doubts about the usefulness of multiplicity in terms of introducing other problematics than gender into

the feminist debate: "Just how many axes *[gender/race/class/age etc.] can* one include and still preserve analytical focus or argument ?".[3]

Attempts to overcome this conflict between the (feminist) need to maintain an effective, materialist critique of gender construction and gender relations, and the (postmodernist) tendency towards difference and free-play, include a series of metaphors for the conditions of contemporary subjectivity which occur both in theoretical work and in contemporary fictional treatments of the feminist/postmodernist debate. While many of these will be addressed during the forthcoming chapters, it will be useful here to briefly examine two which seem particularly influential within the context of postmodernist fiction - the schizophrenic of Deleuze and Guattari, and the concept of the cyborg as theorised by Donna Haraway.

"We live today in the age of partial objects, bricks that have been shattered to bits, and leftovers", Deleuze and Guattari assert, and through this postmodern terrain moves the figure of the schizophrenic, the "exterminating angel" of (late) capitalism. Schizophrenia is, as Jameson and Baudrillard have also noted, "our very own 'malady', modern man's sickness", and the mechanistic metaphors which constitute much of the argument of Anti-Oedipus (and which point towards the cyborg as discussed below) serve to emphasise the situation of their schizoid subject within the technologically constructed contemporary world. Furthermore Anti-Oedipus works to establish other typically postmodern concepts, like the collapsing of history into an eternal present, and the establishment of simulation as the primary mode of operation of the

image. The valorisation of the schizophrenic in this text is derived from a reversal of conventional understanding - it is not that the schizo has been driven mad by society, but that s/he has escaped the repressive process of Oedipalisation which capitalist society inflicts upon the developing subject. This resistance to the Oedipal code derives from the "scrambling" of all codes noted above, and, in a psychoanalytical context, the Oedipal code or structure is perceived to be not a product of the unconscious (as in orthodox Freudianism and in Lacan) but a structure imposed by capitalist ideology in order to instigate, manipulate and perpetuate desire. The schizophrenic's resistance to the Oedipus structure is thus simultaneously a resistance to capitalist oppression (or social repression), ultimately exposing the limits of capitalist hegemony: "Schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence and its death". Thus for Deleuze and Guattari schizophrenia becomes a desired condition insofar as it facilitates a revolutionary position, and the implicit connections between this position and that advocated for woman by Julia Kristeva, and for the agent of the resistant postmodernism theorised by Hal Foster and Andreas Huyssen. Furthermore the condition of schizophrenia is not a static situation, but one of continual process, in concordance with Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on process and flow (through the metaphor of the machine and the production line) rather than rigid binarism - the value of schizophrenia "lies in schizophrenization as a process, not in the schizo as a clinical entity".[32]

Criticisms of Deleuze and Guattari's theories tend to centre on the degendering of the subject implicit in their insistence that humans be understood as desiring-machines. Alice Jardine argues that this interpretation implies that the condition of striving towards this ungendered condition is in fact the condition of being masculine, and that consequently becoming a desiring-machine is "becoming woman". Jardine quotes Luce Irigaray's similar criticism:

> And the desiring-machine, does it not still take the place, in part, of woman and of the feminine ? Isn't it a sort of metaphor that can be used by men ? Notably in the function of their relationship to the technocratic ?[33]

While this criticism may be valid in terms of the (perhaps unavoidable) masculine slant of Deleuze and Guattari's thesis, it is necessary to point out that they go to some lengths to emphasise the situation of the schizophrenic regarding gender, asserting that "The schizophrenic is not man and woman. He belongs precisely to both sides [...] He is not simply bisexual, or between the two, or intersexual. He is transsexual." This emphasis on a plurality rather than a singularity of possible positions parallels Lacan's "insistence on the plurality of positions that crosses language as its constantly produced effect, countering the conventional opposition used to represent difference".[34] This implies an activity on the part of the subject (also implied in the epithet "becoming") which constitutes one way of resisting the position of the 'subjected subject'. Scott Lash points out that the "de-oedipalised notion of agency constructs resistances to institutional psychiatric practices", and that the Deleuzian "body without organs" is an important step towards a non-organic and thus gender-free conception of the body.[35]

If Anti-Oedipus offers a theory of the postmodern schizoid condition which focusses upon the internal or psychological manifestations of that condition, then Donna Haraway's cyborg offers an interpretation which moves in the opposite direction, towards a collapsing of the difference between entities and identities. The cyborg, a creation of science fiction, is also, Haraway argues, "a creature of social reality" - in the late twentieth century, "we are all [...] theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism". The value of this metaphor lies firstly in its elision of boundaries, principally between organic and mechanical but also by extension between other binary polarities, particularly that of gender (and also between the two dominant modes of operation of Haraway's own theorising, scientific and artistic discourses). Secondly, the cyborg, by virtue of its non-unitary status, resists moves towards unity:

> It has no truck with bisexuality, pre-Oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. [6]

The fusion of opposites and the denial of singularity which are metaphorised in the cyborg mean that it has important implications for those theories which are striving to evade binary structures. As Haraway observes, one of the problems with feminist theory has been its need to cling to a categorisation which is arguably no longer significant, that of 'woman': "painful fragmentation among feminists (not to mention among women) along every possible fault line has made the concept of woman elusive". It is through cyborg consciousness that the polarisation and suppression that inevitably accompanies attempts to construct such categories might be resisted, because the cyborg offers not exclusive

wholes, but affinitive parts, akin to the partial objects which inhabit Deleuze and Guattari's schizoid world. Similarly, like the anti-Oedipal schizo, Haraway's cyborg resists the (Oedipal/phallogocentric) unitary code, being involved in "the struggle against perfect communication [...] that is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine". This deliberate muddying of "the smooth operational surface of communication" (Baudrillard's media ecstasy) constitutes another angle from which this kind of cyborg consciousness, like the schizo, attempts to contribute towards a politically responsible postmodernism.[37]

Through the use of metaphors like the schizo and the cyborg, feminist and postmodernist theory can be seen to be working out the binarisms which hinder any progress in criticising ideologically conditioned viewpoints, while at the same time being aware of the impossibility (and undesirability) of a privileged or universalising viewpoint. Angela Carter, in the "Polemical Preface" to The Sadeian Woman, emphasises this point:

> The notion of a universality of human experience is a confidence trick and the notion of a universality of female experience is a clever confidence trick.[38]

Carter's fictions explore these "confidence tricks" from a variety of angles and offer a range of judgements regarding their modes of operation and effects. I want to turn now to one of Carter's short stories, in order to demonstrate through a reading of a short text some of the ways in which this process of exploration and judgement is carried out in Carter's longer fiction.

"The Loves of Lady Purple" (published in Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces) is concerned with the construction of femininity and offers a critique of how social codes - language, narrative teleology, the Oedipal structure - produce a reality which is ideologically determined and perpetuated through the maintenance of a rigid gender-oriented social organisation. As Linda Hutcheon points out, the question that the story ultimately asks is "Have we ever known the 'real' except through representations ?"[35], and it achieves this questioning of the 'real/representation' dichotomy through both an overliteralisation of certain ontological assumptions and a deliberate rupture of the boundaries which separate the elements of this dichotomy. In using the metaphor of the puppet to criticise conventional understandings of 'reality' Carter introduces the notion of simulation as a significant element in the construction of identity and relates this to the narrative of the constructed subject, so that the critical angle of the text also encompasses problems of subjectivity and, more specifically, the social (i.e. male) construction of femininity.

In the story, the puppet Lady Purple enacts a narrative of the destructive force of desire, a narrative constructed for her and realised through her by the puppet master. In a moment of magic realist ontological violation, the boundary between this narrative's being a representation and its being 'real' is ruptured, and the puppet comes alive, proceeding to enact the narrative in 'reality'. The critical elements of the text reside firstly in the contents of the enacted narrative and the actions that these contents require the puppet to perform, and secondly in the circular logic by which the text operates,

and of which it is self-consciously aware: "Had the marionette parodied the living or was she, now living, to parody her own performance as a marionette ?"(39).[40]

Before examining these issues in more detail it will be helpful to address the generic problems the text raises, with a view to establishing a generic framework for understanding Carter's work as a whole. As noted in the previous chapter, generic terms most frequently applied to Carter's fiction include 'Gothic', 'baroque', 'mannerist' - terms which, I have suggested, refer more to characteristics of style than of genre. Hutcheon suggests Freud's concept of the Uncanny as a suitable generic category with reference to this particular story, and the obvious allusions to Hoffman's "The Sandman" would support such a definition, but, as Neil Cornwell has pointed out, terms like 'fantastic' and 'uncanny' remain problematical. Cornwell, in order to reinforce a distinction between 'fantastic' and the term 'magic realist', which might seem a more accurate description of Carter's work, quotes Amaryll Chanady:

> The supernatural in fantastic works is presented as a problematic or illogical intrusion in terms of the 'reality' established; in the divergent tone of magic realism, however, things are rather different: "the supernatural is not present as problematic [...] whereas there is always a suggestion of a rational explanation in the fantastic, a magico-realist text prevents the reader from even considering a rational explanation."[41]

Angel Flores, writing in 1955, describes the magic realist text as one in which "the unreal happens as part of reality", and cites the example of Gregor Szamsa's transformation in Kafka's Metamorphosis, which "is not a matter of conjecture or discussion: it happened and was accepted by the

other characters as an almost normal event". The moment of ontological violation in "Lady Purple" occurs without any explanation or implied agency – it is magical rather than rational: "[The puppet] gained entry into the world by a mysterious loophole in its metaphysics" (38). Similar instances of this kind of ontological violation may be found elsewhere in Carter's fiction, for example in the 'transformation' stories in The Bloody Chamber, and at certain crucial moments in Nights at the Circus, and this general reliance on the suspension of disbelief without any hint of a rational explanation leads me to suggest that 'magic realist' might be the most appropriate term for her work. Related to this generic categorisation is the problem of the poetics of the text itself, which presents its own conclusion as a fictional 'history' to its textual present, subverting the linearity of narrative by creating a looping, circular sequence of events in which the ending coincides with the ostensible origin. As Brian McHale points out, such a recursive structure is common in postmodernist fiction and serves to 'lay bare' the fictional process of constructing a world, and problematises the ontological horizon of the fiction. This device recurs in Carter's fiction, notably in Nights at the Circus, in which the circus ring operates as a *mise-en-abyme* for the real world of the novel.[42]

This is, however, not to say that terms like 'Gothic' are not applicable – indeed it would be difficult to find a contemporary text more conventionally Gothic than "Lady Purple", with its scenery of "dark, superstitious Transylvania" (25), its element of vampirism and, above all, its use of the Frankenstein myth. Carter's Gothicism here is clearly derived from the cinema (mainly the horror films of Universal Studios in

the 1930s and Hammer Films in the 1950s and 1960s) and, in its deliberate overuse of the cliches of this genre (the events of the tale even take place on Halloween) the text constitutes a virtual parody of conventional horror iconography. The significance of the Gothic and related cultural phenomena and their theorisation in relation to Carter's fiction will be addressed at greater length in the concluding chapter of this thesis, but it is important at this stage to note the persistence within postmodernism of a mode of representation conventionally associated with Romanticism.

Flora Alexander describes "Lady Purple" as "an exposure of male oppression and humiliation of the female", and this exposure is achieved in three ways - through the (male) rendering of ideal femininity and the resulting initial passivity of this femininity, through the (male) investment of this ideal femininity with the forces and effects of male desire, and through the consequent displacement of these destructive desires, thereby absolving any male responsibility for their effects.[43] If the text's message is ultimately negative in that the puppet cannot escape its 'conditioning', this signifies the power of that conditioning rather than any implicit condonement of it. In metaphorising the (feminine) subject as a puppet (a metaphor which, as Paulina Palmer has noted, occurs frequently in Carter's fiction[44]) Carter is effectively asking a simple question - who makes the puppet (the subject) and pulls its strings ? The answer in this case is the puppet master and the patriarchal ideology he represents as a surrogate 'God-the-father' who creates a temporary universe of simulation through his "articulating fingers" (24). The ambiguity of "articulating" - meaning both to make

jointed (i.e. mobile) and to make articulate, i.e. to (let) speak - indicates the extent of the male domination which Carter is presenting, in that as the puppet is made articulate by its master, so the feminine subject is spoken through and for by the masculine. The connection between the status of the feminine as 'subjected subject' and the process of simulation is significant in terms of the critical dimension of the text. For Baudrillard, simulation is the final (and contemporary) phase of the image, a condition of hyper-representation in which the "universe [is] everywhere strangely similar to the original" but in which the original is lost: "it bears no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum". Deleuze and Guattari connect this phase of representation with writing: "Simulation is the writing corresponding to [identification] [...] The point where the copy ceases to be a copy in order to become the Real *and its artifice*" (their emphasis).[45] The kind of simulation created by the puppet show is, writes Carter, "all the more disturbing because we know it to be false" (25). The puppets "project those signals of signification we instantly recognise as language" (25), and in this simulation of language lie both the secret of the disturbing effect of the puppets upon their audience and the skill of the puppet master. In this text speech is denied even to humans - the master's two assistants are respectively deaf and dumb and the three communicate by sign language, and his (foreign) audience cannot understand his own "impenetrable native tongue" (29) as he recites Lady Purple's narrative. The text, then offers only approximations or simulations of language, and the "iconography of the melodrama" (29) becomes confused with the "eloquent" (30) but unintelligible narration, so that both are equally real - language operates at Baudrillard's third order of simulation in

that it refers to itself and its own flawed significatory function, rather than to any preceding 'reality'. The puppet Lady Purple exists within this simulated universe, and, like Baudrillard's schizophrenic, she assumes the status of a "medium" (27) or screen upon which the narrative and desires of her master are projected, and through which those desires are realised.

The representation of femininity in the puppet is consistent with the conception of the fragmented subject as discussed above. Lady Purple's femininity is comprised of partial objects, but these parts are not the conventional synecdoches for the male-constructed feminine - instead she has "ferocious teeth", hands which seem "more like weapons because her nails were so long", and an oversize wig "stuck through with many brilliant pins" (27-8). This almost military endowment with exaggerated part-objects serves to emphasise that this representation of femininity may be ideal but it is not conventional, and her destructive appropriation of phallic symbols in the master's narrative (discussed below) reinforces this interpretation. When performing, however, she becomes, through the agency of the puppet master, "a monstrous goddess", and her performance is comprised of actions which are "not so much an imitation as a distillation and intensification of those of a born woman" (28). This portrayal of a violent and destructive sexuality is of course entirely constructed by, and ultimately reflective of, masculine desires, and constitutes an essentially pornographic male fantasy. Carter uses language similar to that of this text when discussing pornography in The Sadeian Woman:

> We know we are not dealing with real flesh or anything like it, but with a cunningly articulated verbal simulacrum which has the power to arouse, but not, in itself, to assuage desire.

Within pornography, the image of the dominant woman is, Carter argues, the "most delicious titillation" for the (almost) exclusively male audience. But it is always a "spurious" dominance - "she is most truly subservient when most apparently dominant".[46] In this sense, even though Lady Purple is constructed as a representation of feminine power, the fact of the masculine source of this construction renders her passive, and denies her the possibility of self-determination - she is absolutely defined by masculine authority.

The transference of masculine desire onto a passive female object and the acting out of that desire by that object, even though only (at this stage in the text) in simulation, constitutes the structure of the Pygmalion myth. Carter's demonic version of this myth has, perhaps, more in common with the Frankenstein myth, but both myths centre around the narcissistic identification of the male creator with his creation - what Mary Jacobus calls "the triumph of specular appropriation" of the object of desire. In an essay entitled "Notes for a Theory of Sixties Style" Carter describes "The cabaret singer in her sequin sheath which shrieks 'Look at me but don't touch me, I'm armour-plated'", and it is this insistence on the specular (which necessarily plays to male voyeurism) which dominates Lady Purple's performance, which "possessed almost a religious intensity [...] the rapt intensity of ritual" (29-30). In this context the puppet's ambivalent gender, which masquerades as the "quintessence of eroticism" (28), serves to unsettle the defining (male)

gaze. What appears to be purely feminine, constructed by and for the (visual) enjoyment of men, reveals itself, in the performance, to be a destroyer of men, and thus to assume a dominant, masculine role which is yet its most subservient position. As Mary Jacobus suggests, this is in effect a process which ensures the repression of the sexual difference which, as quintessential femininity, Lady Purple signifies. "The monster in the text", writes Jacobus,

> is not woman [...] rather, it is [the] repressed vacillation of gender or the instability of identity - the ambiguity of subjectivity itself. . .[47]

In performing, Lady Purple ensures her own negation as an image of feminine power because that power is always engaged in reaffirming male supremacy. The reduction, within the master's narrative of Lady Purple's life, of the woman to puppet, thus serves as a fable of patriarchy, suggesting as it does that to be a powerful woman is not to be a woman at all, and equally that to be a passive woman is to be constituted by male desire and thus, again, not to be a woman (in the sense of being an autonomous subject) at all.

The narrative of the puppet's performance seeks to deny this viciously circular oppression by representing Lady Purple as a figure of absolute feminine power, emphasising above all the potential 'danger' of female sexuality for the male. Lady Purple's destructive trail begins with the seduction of her foster-father, and this event establishes a pseudo-Oedipal structure (parallelled in the 'framing' narrative in the relationship between puppet and master) which serves to realise the force of the Oedipal taboo by representing the results of its transgression.

These results include the murder of both parents and the subsequent destructive sexual career of the prostitute, culminating in self-destruction as the puppet's seductive power is reflected back upon her by the recognition, in her clients, of the destructive force of her "dry rapacity" (34). In Seduction, Baudrillard writes:

> The true seductress can only exist in a state of seduction. Outside this state, she is no longer a woman, neither an object nor subject of desire, faceless and unattractive - for she is borne by an all-consuming passion.[48]

This is the condition which Lady Purple attains, becoming through exercising her seductive power "the effigy of the seductress". The "all-consuming passion" of seduction may be read as a succumbing to or a deliberate transgression of the Oedipal taboo, but either way Lady Purple's actions represent an appropriation of rather than a subservience to the Lacanian Phallus. Subsequent to the seduction of her foster-father *she acquires two phallic symbols*, the key to the family safe and the kitchen knife, with which she destroys (economically and physically) her parents and annihilates the family structure, before moving out into the world as a force which destroys, again economically and physically, masculinity. The subsequent decline of this symbol of feminine power is linked firstly to the spiral of increasing excess which Lady Purple becomes trapped in, and secondly to the reaction of society to these excesses, as she is "cast out with stones and oaths by those who had once adulated her" (33). Baudrillard's seductress "turns herself into a pure appearance, an artificial construct", and this is precisely what happens to Lady Purple; "She became a marionette herself, herself her own replica, the dead yet moving image of the shameless Oriental Venus". She

becomes, quite literally, a Deleuzean desiring machine, "entirely mechanical" (34) in her actions.

In the framing narrative, the Oedipal position of the puppet is less schematic. As in the master's narrative, her 'real' parentage is uncertain, and so the master becomes a 'foster-father' figure. A mother figure, present in the master's narrative, is absent, and this absence offers an explanation for the negativity of the political message of the text, the puppet's inability to escape the destructive paternal decree. In the absence of a mother figure, the only role model is that offered by the father figure, and his inscription of her life becomes authoritative and irresistible by virtue of this lack. Furthermore the puppet becomes to a certain extent a surrogate mother figure within the puppet master's Oedipal family, and consequently assumes an ambiguous position as daughter/parent, thus introducing the possible influence of the incest taboo into the familial equation by virtue of the master's implied pseudo-sexual relationship with the puppet. However this implied desire to break the incest taboo is not attributed to the puppet, but to the puppet master. The puppet, passive when not performing, nevertheless enacts the breaking of the incest taboo in its performance, indicating the transference onto the 'daughter' of the socially transgressive desires of the 'father', and so the puppet's function is defined through a translation - masculine desire becomes feminine seduction. The destruction of the father/husband symbolises but does not achieve the destruction of the patriarchal symbolic to which it affords access, because it becomes a fulfilment of the (masculine) desire which it constitutes. Lady Purple is bound by the absence of an inscribed (ie.

narrated) alternative to the masculine rendition of her life, and is thus forced to enact the destructiveness of this rendition.

In Lacanian theory, desire succeeds the lack caused by the separation of the child from the mother. In this succession, the object of need - the mother - is lost, because with the onset of desire the child enters the symbolic, and thus loses the pre-linguistic contact with the mother. Desire is "eternal because it is impossible to satisfy it", and "all the objects of the subject's desire will always be a reminder of some primal experience of pleasure". The transformation of Lady Purple from puppet to woman is described in terms of a single action, a kiss, which "emanated from the dark country where desire is objectified and lives" (38). This event succeeds a paragraph in which male desire is represented through the act of kissing, as the puppet master kisses his puppet good-night. The kisses described are all "too humble and too despairing to wish or seek for any response" (37), and it is this seemingly futile expression of male desire which the text inverts by allowing the puppet to respond. Anika Lemaire argues that "every desire is the desire to have oneself recognised by the other" (and Lady Purple "appears wholly real and yet entirely other" [28]), as well as "a desire to impose oneself in some way upon the other".[48] The text's ontological violation enables the first of these dicta to be realised, while the second is reversed. The "dark country", the master's unconscious, constructs the narrative which the puppet enacts, and the objectification of this desire takes the form of the transference of blood, or life, from the subject to the object, which is consequently reconstituted as subject.

The figure by which Lady Purple's reconstitution as subject is represented is that of doubling. The transference of male desire onto the inert matter of the puppet is the initial move of doubling which constitutes the (simulated) woman as object/collection of part-objects. She becomes the enactment - the representation - of the desires which constitute male subjectivity, and, in doing so, she comes to define male subjectivity by representing its lack, its other. The fictional strategy of ontological violation allows a redoubling move, a displacement of these desires back onto the space (the male 'subject') from which they were directed, so that the process of simulation is perpetuated through the proliferation of images of an initially absent subjectivity. Thus the fictionalised identity of the performing puppet becomes, in the moment of ontological violation, the reiteration of an inscribed identity.

Carter's preoccupations in this text - the construction of ideal femininity by male desire, the power relations between genders, the social denial of feminine subjectivity - demonstrate what may be perceived as an analysis of the 'problem' of femininity within a patriarchal system. While "Lady Purple" is a particularly condensed example of this analysis, similar themes can be traced through Carter's longer works, and in particular in the three novels published between 1972 and 1984. My examination of Carter's work will centre on a study of these three novels in terms of how these themes develop into an extended examination of the position of women in contemporary Western culture, and how Carter's characteristic metaphors and images recur and are transformed throughout this period.

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Chapter 3 - Angela Carter's Early Fiction.

Angela Carter's first novel was published in 1966, in the middle of the decade which marked in many ways a series of breaks with centuries of tradition and cultural stability, and two years before the events of 1968 which have been connected by many with the rise of post-structuralism and postmodernism. When writing about the sixties Carter emphasises the influence she felt from the social and cultural shifts which characterised that decade, particularly with respect to her feminism. In "Notes from the Front Line" she writes:

> There is a tendency to underplay, even to completely devalue, the experience of the 1960s, especially for women [...] 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.[1]

This emphasis, in 1983, on the significance of events 15 years earlier for a major aspect of Carter's literary project, supports the view that Carter's more recent fiction incorporates feminist dimensions, but does not explain the apparent absence or marginality of feminism in her early fiction. With the exception of The Magic Toyshop, the novels which Carter published prior to 1972 would seem to display little in the way of the polemical feminist arguments which characterise much of her later work. Four of these five novels are concerned less with an analysis of gender relations than with the mapping of a collapsing (or, in the case of Heroes and Villains, collapsed) social and cultural world - the world of late-twentieth century England - and are written in a style which

mixes an 'earthy' and critical social realism with punctuating moments of fantastic or unreal digression and insight, a style which clearly prefigures Carter's later development of magic realism as her preferred mode of writing. The aspect of Carter's early fiction which most clearly exemplifies these texts as nascently postmodernist is their preoccupation with representation, a preoccupation partly deriving from the (then) experimental mixing of realism and fantasy, but also from the overt concern of the texts with representation as a problematic concept. My intention in this chapter is to examine three of Carter's early novels - Shadow Dance, Several Perceptions and Love - in order to facilitate the tracing of the development of her later fiction from this initial exploration of representation. The attempts of Linda Hutcheon and others to define postmodernism through its problematisation of representation will inform my approach to these novels. What is also evident, however, is an approach to feminism from another angle - through an examination of the workings of misogyny, concentrating on the representation of male characters who enact their destructive fantasies upon women. In order to contextualise this early fiction, and to partially explain its seeming lack of feminist concern and its alternative emphasis on male violence, it is necessary to briefly consider the situation of English fiction in the mid-1960s.

Lorna Sage, one of the few critics of Carter to consider her earliest work, describes her first novel Shadow Dance as "a pure emanation of the sixties", and goes on to quote Antony Burgess who similarly emphasises the strong sense of contemporaneity which characterises this novel. This preoccupation with the contemporary world

characterises all Carter's early fiction except the science-fiction novel Heroes and Villains, and is an important factor in considering Carter's position within English fiction of this period. Critics of the post-war English novel tend to identify two predominant influences which were also potential lines of progress for novelists - the English tradition of realism, dating back to the great Victorian novelists, and continental and American experimentalism. This split in the development of English fiction is reflected in the titles of critical texts of the period, such as Rubin Rabinovitz's The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel 1950 - 1960, and Robert K. Morris' (ed.) collection Old Lines, New Forces. David Lodge, in 1969, characterised the latter influence as "the non-fiction novel and fabulation" (a term borrowed from Robert Scholes), and clearly stated his own preference for realism over experimentalism, expressing "a modest affirmation of faith in the future of realistic fiction". In a different division of the body of English fiction, Bernard Bergonzi, writing in 1970, detected a shift in the preoccupations of then recent fiction, from what he calls "Nature, with its emphasis on tradition and shared values" (which I take to mean the realist tradition) towards "the Human Condition", which he characterises thus: "Man is basically alone, living in a problematical relation with his fellow men, and at odds with society and his physical environment." Interestingly Bergonzi largely ignores the continental movement of existentialism from which this latter position is mainly derived, and points instead to Laingian psychiatry and, more importantly, the influence of American fiction as the principal sources of "the Human Condition" anxiety. A third source of influence, again ignored by Bergonzi, is that of Latin American fiction, which arguably

constitutes the single largest body of work which engages with the magic realist mode which will come to dominate Carter's own literary output.[2]

More recently, Elizabeth Dipple (in 1988) observes that "Although the quarrel between realism and experimentalism goes on, so many extraordinary things have happened within experimentalism that it ill behooves anyone to avert their eyes from it". The implication here that realism is still likely to be preferred over experimentalism is not, however, followed up in Dipple's book, which presents analyses of innovative writers of both schools and refers to an international range of novelists. Randall Stevenson, in 1986, suggests a similar dichotomy in post-war English fiction, but unlike Bergonzi situates the principal source of the experimental urge in Europe. Describing Martin Amis's Other People, he writes:

> Fractured time-scheme, detective-story format, and a wierd lucidity of vision all recall the innovative novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet - while realistic description and strong satiric basis in contemporary London simulataneously incorporate much longer-established strengths of fiction.[3]

Amis's novel was published in 1978, twelve years after Carter's first novel. From the perspective of the 1990s it seems that the post-war dichotomy which critics repeatedly refer to appeared irreducible - in the sixties, the future of the novel lay either in extending the realist tradition, as Lodge advocated, or in the uncertain world of experimentation identified by, amongst others, Alain Robbe-Grillet and John Barth and celebrated by critics like Robert Scholes.[4] Yet Carter's early fiction achieves a synthesis between these two movements which

could easily be described in the same terms as Stevenson's acclaim of Amis's novel.

The argument of this chapter will be that Carter's early fiction represents a 'transition' stage, occupying a ground somewhere between these two diverging movements, being neither conventionally realist nor wholly devoted to the fantastic. Patrick Parrinder offers a definition of what he sees as a "revitalising" tendency towards fantasy in contemporary English fiction: "[English fantasy writers] should be judged by their ability to use fantasy reflexively, in that, while inviting us to identify with the alien and exotic, they are able to probe unsuspected facets of our own individual and collective identity." This "reflexive" use of fantasy, which I prefer to call critical, is what Carter's early fiction may be seen as working towards, and can be differentiated from what Parrinder calls "the commercial exploitation of former private dreams and fantasies" - an opposition similar to E. Ann Kaplan's distinction between "utopian" and "commercial or co-opted" postmodernism.[5] The closely-observed and intensely contemporary realism of novels like Shadow Dance or Several Perceptions is juxtaposed with a strong element of fantasy, in which dreams take on symbolic connotations and reality becomes a dubious and at best temporary concept. Fantasy both contrasts and highlights the otherwise banal world of sixties 'lowlife' which these novels occupy, and this combination points towards the advent of a particular strand of postmodernism in English fiction, of which Amis's novel is an example, as well as backwards to what might here be summarised as the Gothic tradition in English literature. Bart Moore-Gilbert has recently written of the appropriation of Gothic forms

by English novelists in the 1960s as an example of a process of "cross-fertilization" between 'popular and 'high-cultural' literary forms which, he suggests, characterised English fiction in that decade. Moore-Gilbert suggests that 1960s Gothic helped to challenge conventional notions of 'literature' partly through its "admittedly problematic treatment of sexuality, gender and freedom"[6] - issues which extensively inform Carter's fiction.

Through tracing the themes and characteristics of these early texts, my contention - that Carter's early *fiction* comprises of characteristically postmodernist texts which transcend the perceived rupture between tradition and experiment characteristic of post-war English fiction - can be linked to an examination of how Carter's novels represent the moment of postmodernism as an end and a beginning - a moment of simultaneous exhaustion and replenishment, in John Barth's terms.

A particularly striking aspect of these early novels is the sense of exhaustion which pervades both settings and characters. The typical setting is the contemporary urban landscape, and more particularly a semi-mythical, mock-Bohemian suburbia of rented bedsits, dirty tea-rooms and dusty junkshops, exemplified by this passage from Several Perceptions:

> It was a once-handsome, now decayed district with a few relics of former affluence (such as the coffee shop, a suave place) but now mostly given over to old people who had come down in the world, who lived in basements and ground floor backs, and students and beatniks who nested in attics.[7]

The characters are populating this landscape are typically urban - poor, alienated tramps and unemployed drop-outs and beatniks (of her university years at Bristol in the early sixties, Carter writes "I was a wide-eyed provincial beatnik, and there were a lot of them around"[8]), prostitutes and tragic abandoned women. The culture of 1960s England is represented as one in seemingly terminal decline, subsisting parasitically upon the collapsing myths of the past, with no sense of the grandeur of Empire or of the possibility of success through individual enterprise which characterises earlier stages in English fiction. This sense of fragmentation is both social and cultural - in Shadow Dance Morris and Honey earn a precarious living by pillaging condemned houses and selling the pickings to American tourists, who share with the nostalgia-oriented advertising industry of later decades "a mad dream of Victoriana"(87). In sociological terms these novels are part of the changing economic and international climate which marked the end of Britain as an independent economic power, and the beginning of the commodification of the British cultural heritage for the growing international tourist market. Ultimately it is the collapse of centuries of tradition into the urban rubble represented in these texts which generates the sense of exhaustion, a collapse which is reinforced by the absence of Lyotard's unifying discourses of power - the once authoritative discourses of history, tradition, religion, etc. have disappeared, to be replaced by 'texts' like Joseph's anthology of facts in Several Perceptions, which functions to "help shore up the crumbling dome of the world" (9). The representation of fragmenting culture is also achieved through the overt intertextuality of these texts - as Fredric Jameson observes, "the explosion of modern literature into a

host of distinct private styles and mannerisms has been followed by a linguistic fragmentation of social life itself", and Ihab Hassan proclaims: "The postmodernist only disconnects; fragments are all he pretends to trust".[9] The representation of cultural fragmentation is the first characteristic which suggests that Carter's early fiction is postmodernist in its themes.

Alex Callinicos rightly points out that while fragmentation is a characteristic of 'high' modernism (exemplified in T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land as well as postmodernism, the difference between the two, lies in the former's nostalgia for lost unity, and the latter's contrasting celebration of its loss.'[10] While this attribution of a positive quality to the loss of certainties is arguable (Allen Thiher, for example, suggests that "the postmodern lives with a kind of nostalgia for the modernist belief that language is rooted in the essence of things", thus transforming modernist nostalgia into the lost object of postmodernist nostalgia''), Callinicos goes on to suggest that postmodernist celebration of loss arises ultimately from a kind of despair of any alternative to the seemingly irreversible social, economic and cultural changes which define postmodernity - Baudrillard's delirious hyperrealism, Jameson's late (dead?) capitalism, Lyotard's lost authority. "Become a parasite on the state, my lover, just like me" advises one of Carter's characters in Several Perceptions; "It's the twentieth-century way to live" (38). Carter's characters share this despair, but the nearest it gets to nostalgia is in the cherishing of the detritus of the lost past, the value of which is purely economic. Instead of the modernist angst of a Prufrock or a Marlow, Carter's

heroes display an alienation which is basically existentialist, and which points towards the influence of recent French writing. One of the models in English fiction for Carter's early heroes is Jake Donaghue in Iris Murdoch's Under the Net (1954), who in turn is clearly based on the (anti-) heroes of Sartre and Camus, as Murdoch's own admiration for existentialism would suggest. One strand of postmodernist historiography suggests that existentialism be included amongst the movements constituting postmodernism, and Ihab Hassan, interpreting postmodernism as a significant change in modernism, has suggested as an originary moment the year 1938, which saw the publication of Beckett's Murphy and Sartre's La Nausee. While this is probably too early (La Nausee in particular is more convincingly described as anti-modernist than postmodernist) the influence of the existentialist movement is clearly detectable in Carter's early novels.

In Shadow Dance the sense of social and cultural fragmentation is complemented by the text's preoccupation with surfaces and appearances, which is evident from the opening page of the novel. The subservience of material reality to the commodity culture of late capitalism is immediately established - the "fake" bar of the novel's opening scene is "an ad-man's crazy dream of a Spanish patio", an arena in which conflicting styles collide: "Why, then, the horse brasses, the ship's bell, the fumed oak?" (5). David Lodge, speaking on a recent BBC radio programme, described a similar "melange of styles" seen in a Pizza Hut in Selly Oak, Birmingham; the co-existence and deliberate juxtaposition of a multitude of styles, including that of the "dominant" modernism, characterises the postmodern. Jim Collins argues that "Post-Modernist

narratives differ from the popular and literary texts produced during the Modernist stage in that they replace "poetic" stylization with a *bricolage* of diverse forms of already well-established discourses" (Collins' emphasis), and one important addition to this description is the general absence, in postmodernist texts, of a 'master discourse' or structuring irony, typically a mythical structure in modernist texts. Linda Hutcheon characterises this diversity as a breakdown of boundaries between previously discrete discourses:

> The borders between high art and mass or popular culture and those between the discourses of art and the discourses of the world (especially history) are regularly crossed in postmodern theory and practice.[12]

This replacement of the 'unitary' style of modernism with a range of styles (already hinted at in the Bart Moore-Gilbert's identification of generic "cross-fertilization" in the 1960s, discussed above) is clearly linked to the cultural fragmentation already discussed, and is echoed later in the novel in Morris and Honey's excusions to derelict houses, where saucepans of "comfortably Victorian design" are found alongside souvenirs of Edward VII and "patently post-1914" bathrooms (86-8). These diverse styles and artefacts share one thing - their commodity value - and economic need undermines the implied connoisseurship of the antique dealers.

The style of the novel itself reinforces this fragmentation. Morris' contemplation of the home-made pornographic photographs of Ghislaine and Honey is described in the following way:

> The images of the two lovely, strong, young bodies had a certain strange and surreal beauty; but Morris could not associate these

> pictures of her with his own burning recollection of her flesh at all. '*Memento mori*', he said to himself. A quotation floated from a vague corner of his mind. 'Besides, that was in another country, and the wench is dead'. Who said that ? (19).

The combination here of pornography, Latin epithet, colloquialised allusion to Surrealism and, in an extremely ironic gesture, the 'floating' quotation, from Christopher Marlowe via T.S. Eliot, an adopted signifier of high modernism immediately deflated by the TV quiz-show tone of "Who said that ?" - this juxtaposition echoes stylistically the jumble of styles of the novel's world. Quotations become disconnected from their original texts just as objects become disconnected from their original contexts. Related to this intertextual fragmentation is the juxtaposition of 'high' and 'low' culture which contributes greatly to the stylistic force of the novel. Morris, trapped in his sterile marriage to Edna and painfully aware of the narrowness of his life, nevertheless harbours artistic ambitions through his painting, an attribute which the text reverses and ironises through its representation of him, along with other characters, in terms of artistic allusion. "You still look like an El Greco Christ" (12), Ghislaine tells him, and in return, he "could best accommodate the thought of Ghislaine as the subject of painting" (22). His subsequent figuring of her through a representation of a different, contemporary order of suffering - "a Francis Bacon horror painting" (22) - corresponds to the disfigurement which she has suffered, and is parallelled later by Morris' (dis-) figuring of Edna's genuine concern for Ghislaine into a romanticised pre-Raphaelite image: "'Compassion', Millais would have called her, with her upturned face and incandescent eyes and long hands joined like the ears of a butchered rabbit" (50). The repeated allusions to 'high'

cultural artefacts serve to emphasise the novel's preoccupation with representations as constitutive of some kind of cultural value, and their significance in the world of surfaces and appearances, as well as the connection between images of the feminine and the position of the feminine in society.

This preoccupation with representation, evident from the paragraph quoted above (in which the implied connection between the image and the reality represented is ruptured), signals the beginning of Carter's later critique of identity and gender-relations, and supports the suggestion that these early novels be read as early postmodernist texts. Linda Hutcheon, criticising Jameson's interpretation of postmodernism as "a repudiation of representation", points out that in postmodernist texts representation is problematised rather than abandoned, resulting in "a serious contemporary interrogation of the nature of representation".[13] In Carter's early fiction representation is problematised in three ways: through the intertextual incorporation of diverse and conflicting discourses (as we have seen); through an interrogation of surfaces and appearances; and through an examination of the power relationships existing between these conflicting discourses, which lead to a systematic and sometimes violent exclusion of those representations - principally signified by the feminine - which might challenge or subvert the prevailing ideological structure. Each of these methods works to reinforce the others, so that the masculine worlds of Honey and Morris, of Joseph in Several Perceptions, of Lee and Buzz in Love and of Uncle Philip in The Magic Toyshop, are comprised by what their representations exclude, and by the continual straying into

intertextuality and difference of the 'authoritative' discourses which define these worlds. It is through this concern with marginalised representations that the nascent feminism of Carter's early fiction takes on its significance.

Both Shadow Dance and Several Perceptions present male-dominated worlds which nevertheless centre around a woman who is largely (Ghislaine in the former novel) or totally (Charlotte in the latter) absent from the text. The figure of the absent woman constitutes both the source and the potential resolution of the tensions in male experience with which the novels deal. Ghislaine's return from hospital culminates in the break-up of two relationships which appear stable but are nevertheless clearly unsatisfactory to all concerned. In this way Ghislaine's return serves to expose the deceptions upon which these relationships are based, and this exposure is most evident in the case of Morris and Edna. Morris's collapsing relationship with Edna, eroded by his past infidelity with Ghislaine and Edna's frustrated desire to be a mother (both to Morris and to the children they do not have), becomes a classic example of a conflict of the desires for conformity and freedom. Edna's conformity, her desire for a traditional feminine role, is represented as the product of powerful social forces being frustrated by another element of the sixties' revolution, contraception. Morris's freedom from parenthood is maintained at her expense, while society continues to offer her little more than the subservient, child-bearing role dictated by traditional marriage. Morris plays the inadequate male (a parodic Leopold to her parodic Molly), straying into infidelity only to fail even at that: women thus come to symbolise a kind of negative

authority to the extent that Edna's matriarchal urges and Ghislaine's erotic vacuity serve to delineate the extremes of Morris's life. The entrance of Honeybuzzard, a surrogate father to Morris's little boy lost, confirms the Oedipal triangle as the structure underpinning relationships between characters. The latent homosexual appeal of Honeybuzzard further complicates this psychological structure, and his arrival with Emily, another surrogate mother whose efficiency and strength contrasts sharply with the stereotypical roles of Edna and Ghislaine and with the inadequacy of the two men, establishes a new outlet for Morris's Oedipal desire. He fulfills his latent desire for transgression by sleeping with her, in the novel's most important scene. Responding to Emily's maternal but also clearly sexual overtures, Morris relates to her his life story, which revolves around his childhood experience of witnessing his mother and another man "coupling" (139) moments before a bomb dropped, destroying the house and apparently killing his mother. The premature loss of the mother figure is made quite literal - "they found a lot of bodies nobody could identify. They buried one of them for my mother" (140) - but also maintains the possibility that she may still be alive. In the light of this revelation, Morris's relationships with women become stages in a search for mother-replacements, or more literally, a striving to satisfy an unsatisfiable desire. Freud writes of precisely this condition in his 1910 paper "A Special Type of Object-Choice Made by Men":

> We have learnt from psychoanalysis in other examples that the notion of something irreplaceable, when it is active in the unconscious, frequently appears as broken up into an endless series: endless for the reason that every surrogate nevertheless fails to provide the desired satisfaction.[14]

In a bizarre universalisation of the mother figure, even the old woman tramp who Morris and Honey disturb one night becomes, potentially, Morris's mother, and this universalisation is reinforced in Morris's mind by the analogy drawn between his witnessing of 'the primal scene' and the loss of the mother. Each encounter with a woman becomes a re-enactment of his metaphorical and delusive matricide, and his own inadequate masculinity redefines him as the lost child. However Morris' mother complex also leads him, ultimately, to reject the violent misogyny of Honeybuzzard: as Freud points out, this kind of mother complex leads the adult male to "regard his mother as a person of unimpeachable moral purity", and (by extension) mother surrogates occupy this elevated position. Honeybuzzard's destruction of women, predicated like all misogyny on their perceived impurity, symbolises an extreme form of what Freud calls "the mixture of longing and horror"[15] with which the masculine contemplates the feminine. Morris' moral and spiritual rebirth on discovering the tramp woman is still alive suggests an abandonment of his mother fixation, through a metaphorical replacement of the mother's role with himself: "He felt as though he was acting as his own midwife at his own rebirth; Morris Gray was being reborn as a new, hard, practical man" - and is also a renunciation of fantasy and self-deception in favour of "a world where there was black and there was white but no shadows" (151).

By contrast, Honeybuzzard's moral viewpoint fails to distinguish at all between fact and fantasy, so that women, as objects of his desire, become victims of the destructive force of that desire. Where Morris dreams of mutilating Ghislaine (after she has been mutilated) with "a

jagged shard of broken glass" (20), Honeybuzzard actually does so, transforming her beauty into "a hideous thing" (6), the mark of violent male desire rather than its object. The contrast in representations of femininity is only apparent, in that each man defines women in terms of his own desires, and femininity is reduced to being represented as either stereotypical or deformed. Ghislaine's consequent monstrosity is rendered in conventional Gothic terms - she is "a horror-movie woman", "the bride of Frankenstein" (7), "a vampire woman" (40); but its significance in terms of the politics of gender-relations in the text rests upon her function as a vehicle of male repression. When Morris contemplates her scar, she remarks "It's funny, that I should think you might change just because I have" (12), and thus she voices the implicit identification between male desire and its object; her tendency to speak the unspoken is "shockingly brutal and frank" (12) in its relentless exposure of the men's repressed emotion and desire. Her scarred face becomes a visible sign of her duality as embodied desire and embodied threat to male power - "the two sides of the moon juxtaposed" (145) - but both signify her defining function in relation to the male. In the text she is represented variously as "a ravishing automaton" 7), a puppet constructed by Honeybuzzard (119), and as having a face like a Hallowe'en mask (145), images which help to establish Carter's later critique of femininity as a socially constructed condition.

The constructor in this case is Honeybuzzard, and his destructive masculinity is symbolised by the knife with which he scars Ghislaine (he later nearly does the same to Morris). Honeybuzzard's attack on Morris affords a moment of insight into the power of the phallic symbol, as in

perceiving this power Morris also momentarily loses grip of reality: "He knew he was dreaming when he realised how silly it was that such a little bit of metal should have so much power in it" (132). The implied equation between an over-investment in fantasy and the power of the phallus is significant in terms of the representation of Honeybuzzard as a man obsessed with role-playing, and ultimately unable to distinguish reality from fantasy. His predilection for "false noses, false ears and plastic vampire teeth" (19), the trappings of camp masquerade, combines with his "flamboyant and ambiguous beauty" (55) to render him a figure of indeterminate sexuality, in keeping with the repressed homosexuality which his desperate phallicism implies. Honeybuzzard 'performs' in company to the extent that his real identity is unknown (and Ghislaine can ask him, "Why are you always acting a part ?" (121)), and his final theatrical murder of Ghislaine, coupled with his dramatic entrance cradling a plaster effigy of Christ, signifies the extent of his denial of the real. For Morris, it even succeeds in effacing the distinction between reality and fantasy:

> But where was the real world now? The image of it was the candlelit room in the silent house and the girl under the tablecloth. And in this new dimension outside both time and space he, Morris, could be truly heroic. (171)

The reduction of reality to image, or representation, is thus the negative triumph of Honeybuzzard, who becomes the man who renders the world, albeit momentarily, in his own image. Morris, always lured by this absolute destructive power, abandons the potential reality of a conventional married relationship with Emily (who has been 'disfigured' by Honeybuzzard's phallic power in a different way, being unwillingly

pregnant with his child) and turns instead to the fantasy world which Honeybuzzard has constructed - a world which is exclusively masculine, predicated on the redefinition of feminine subjectivity as a product of male desire. At the end, the women in the novel have all been removed - Ghislaine murdered, Emily returned to her mother to bear her child and Edna abandoned to her own adulterous affair - and the moral warnings which these women embodied go unheeded by Morris.

The text's ultimately negative portrayal of femininity as intrinsically domesticated, subservient and almost willingly sacrificial is balanced by the equally negative masculine world of brutal power, violence, facile deception and seedy capitalist exploitation - a world aptly summarised in an ironic allusion to Eliot's The Hollow Men: "And the supercilious dealers, whose voices, as they whispered secrets together, sounded like the rustling of five pound notes" (29). Femininity is thus purely represented through and by the masculine, and the women suffer because the men ultimately fail to accommodate the potential difference between representation and subjectivity which is the novel's principle theme.

The subtext of Shadow Dance is concerned with the social construction of the subject, and shows how, as social structures and conventions fragment, so subjectivity is revealed to be predicated upon a reality which is precariously balanced between the vacuous economic exploitation of a fictionalised past and the desire for a fantasy world in which traditional subject positions and power relations are stable and ruthlessly enforced. The structure which metaphorises this balance

is the Oedipus complex, the infant's desired but unfulfillable relationships with its parents. The failure of Oedipal regulation to maintain social cohesion is signified by Morris' wandering mother fixation and Honeybuzzard's ambiguous gender-identity. The identification of the male characters with images of the feminine becomes their definition, in that paradoxically both Morris and Honeybuzzard rely on the presence of women to confirm their own masculine status. Lacan observes that "the subject is caused by an object"[16], and in this novel male subjectivity is predicated upon the presence of that which it denies - the feminine. Consequently male subjects become represented in and by the feminine; Ghislaine's scar is the mark of Honeybuzzard's masculinity, and Morris's abandonment of the feminine at the end of the novel is also an abandonment of the self, in favour of "the new concept of himself as a hero" (171) - a fantasy self, no longer connected to the real through its definition by the feminine. Subjectivity thus becomes represented as an illusion, constructed out of identifications with the other. Masculinity thus becomes masquerade, exemplifying the split or 'Spaltung' which Lacan argues is constitutive of the organisation of subjective positions around the signifier of the phallus (or its metaphorisation in Honeybuzzard's knife). The male characters desire to be the phallus in order to satisfy what they perceive as the desires of the female characters for the phallus, and, in a text in which the boundaries between fantasy and reality are at best blurred, this desire can be literalised - but at the expense of 'real' subjectivity itself. A similar theme is examined more extensively in Carter's later novel The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (see Chapter 4 below).

A similarly Oedipal structure underpins the characters of Several Perceptions. The anti-hero Joseph, abandoned by his lover Charlotte, inhabits a psychologically disturbed fantasy world in which his desires can be realised, and foremost amongst these is the Oedipal urge to copulate with a mother-surrogate. The text offers three women as mother surrogates. Charlotte, the absent cause of Joseph's psychological condition, epitomises what Barbara Creed calls the 'monstrous feminine'[17], the archetypal, all-consuming powerful mother figure already encountered in Ghislaine: Joseph's representation of her is as "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" (20) (the similarity between this representation and that of the puppet in "The Loves of Lady Purple" is evident). Anne Blossom, with whose arrival the events of the novel begin, represents a kind of domestic motherliness tinged with personal tragedy - her "modest history of love and betrayal" (49) corresponds to Joseph's abandonment by Charlotte, and his inability to perceive the similarity between these histories acts as an index to his own misogynistic behaviour throughout the novel. The third mother-surrogate, Mrs. Boulder, becomes the object of Joseph's desire, or rather his ambition - as he collects facts, so Mrs. Boulder becomes the focus of an analogous sexual collecting instinct. She completes the analogy by reinscribing the polarities of the Oedipal triangle when she informs him that "Father is only a word at the best of times but mother is a fact" (113). The significance of Joseph's collection of facts as a symbolic search for the stability and security of the Lacanian Imaginary is thus emphasised. Joseph's father surrogate, the psychiatrist Ransome ("my

father figure" [113] as he calls him) becomes reduced to an element in a word game by Joseph's mental ramblings: "'May I call you Arthur ?' asked Joseph. 'Why ?' asked the Doctor in puzzlement" (30). Ransome's parting diagnosis - "You're wedged in the gap between art and life" (66) - recalls Honeybuzzard's dictum "life imitates art" in Shadow Dance, and returns us to the theme of representation. As his psychiatrist fails to point out, Joseph's development occurs through a series of dreams and mirror stages all centering on narcissism, the primal identification with the mirror image or other which comprises the moment of illusory construction of subjectivity in Lacanian psychoanalysis. These repeated identifications with the other serve to mark Joseph as Carter's first truly schizoid character, and the dislocated reality he inhabits finds its correlative in his own fragmented mental and physical condition:

> Sunny's bad performance of entertainment, memories of childhood and the oppressive noise and laughter around them combined to make him feel intolerably sepia-coloured and two-dimensional [...] He touched the cool sides of his glass with a stranger's fingers and saw the worn pile of his coat as if it was somebody else's coat altogether and the arm in it that of another man. (93)

The pseudo-epiphanic coincidence of external and internal experience, and the typically schizoid inability to differentiate between the two, results in a redefinition of subjective 'depth' as image, depthless and monochrome. Subjective experience is displaced onto an imaginary 'other', as the subject is no longer 'there' to experience, and Joseph's sense of displacement comes to be signified through an experience of dislocation. The subject, in effect, perceives itself as a representation, and Joseph's search for an object becomes a search for something that will redefine his own subjectivity.

Earlier Joseph experiences a similar effacement of the self, while contemplating his own mirror image and questioning its accuracy:

> Yet his actual physical self, his flesh and bone, often seemed to him no more than an arbitrary piece of theorizing, a random collection of impulses hurtling through a void. (11)

This image of the body as abstraction has distinct parallels with Baudrillard's schizophrenic, "a switching centre for all the networks of *influence*"[18]. The collapse of subjectivity in this novel takes place against a more historically specific background than in Shadow Dance, that of the Vietnam war, but even this is a reality available only through images from newspapers and magazines. Joseph's empathetic response to the war is scorned by Ransome, and ultimately fails to secure him ontologically. His resigned appeal - "Jesus, am I as superficial as all that?" (33) - epitomises an anxiety which is rooted in the loss of subjective certainties and, ultimately, the loss of the real to a world of endlessly proliferating images. Representation thus becomes the only mode of existence, and Joseph's ironic gestures to individual determination (sending a box of excrement to the U.S. President, freeing the caged badger from the local zoo) are all prefigured by his highly staged Beckettian suicide attempt, with which the novel opens. Unlike Morris's seemingly positive rebirth in Shadow Dance, Joseph re-enters on the failure of his suicide a world of pure cynicism:

> Now even the idea of meaning was abandoned; nothing was sacred, and, since there was no reason for his arbitrary resurrection, there was no significance in anything he would do again, all his gestures were hollow like those of a bad actor. (34)

The high modernist sense of impending apocalypse is exchanged, in Carter's early fiction, for an anxious acceptance of fragmentation which only becomes tolerable at the end of the text, after a ritual exorcism has been performed through the inversions of the carnivalesque. Honeybuzzard's murderous plunge into fantasy is parallelled in Several Perceptions by the Christmas party, at which Anne Blossom's limp is revealed to be due to "hysterical paralysis" (139) through the intervention of another male power figure, Kay Kyte. Following the party, in an inversion of the predominant gender relationships, the other mother figure in the text, Joseph's cat, produces her litter. Fragmentation is thus transformed by a partial re-establishment of traditional gender roles (male authority curing feminine hysteria) and a celebration of a romantically conventional Christmas morning.

If the weaknesses of this novel lie in its naive resolution and its reliance on conventional gender relations as ultimately offering stability and coherence in an otherwise threatening world, its interest lies in its wider significance in terms of Carter's later fiction. In establishing this initial movement towards a critique of subjectivity within an examination of representation, Carter opens up the areas which her later texts will explore in greater detail. Representation in Shadow Dance and Several Perceptions becomes the loss of the real, and corresponds at crucial moments to Baudrillard's fourth phase of the image, in which "it bears no relation to any reality whatsoever".[18] Characters exist for each other in terms of images drawn from the visual arts and popular culture, and the sometimes arbitrary breadth of these references further emphasises the cultural fragmentation which underpins

these early novels. Thus in Several Perceptions Joseph sees Anne as being like "a portentous shot in a German expressionist film" (40); Kay Kyte "somehow gave the appearance of being in costume" (15), and at one point speaks in "a 'B' feature film American accent" (60); and Joseph represents his own psychological matrix as consisting of comic-book superheroes (46-7), an example of the collision of 'popular' culture and psychoanalytic theory which recurs in Carter's later fiction. This preoccupation with representation and its significance for the subject becomes a means of resisting the pervasive social and cultural fragmentation - Joseph, contemplating "his fractured image in the glass" (47), can only perceive in terms of resemblances and secondhand images. His resulting abandonment of meaning corresponds to what Allen Thiher describes as "hyperrealism" (in a sense of the word slightly different to Baudrillard's). "The hyperrealist", Thiher argues,

> writes as if he feared his language could not [...] quite reach the world; or if it does, it can only be the world that fallen language articulates as clichés, platitudes and banalities.

A sense of this banality pervades the worlds of Carter's early fiction, and finds its expression in the seemingly futile and directionless quests for coherence undertaken by characters.

In terms of Brian McHale's suggestion that postmodernist texts are concerned with ontological rather than epistemological questions, Carter's early novels may be read as being engaged in a process which he calls "pushing epistemological questions [until] they become ontological".[21] The dual direction of this movement - both inward, towards the subject, and outward, towards the 'real' external world -

serves to highlight the postmodernist exploration of surfaces and boundaries (between inside and outside, in this case), in opposition, as Alan Wilde suggests, to the "modernist exploration of depth". Wilde argues that "surface [...] may generate a particular, complex dimensionality of its own"[22], and it is the possibility of this new dimensionality which is explored at length in the third novel I want to discuss in relation to representation - Love (1971).

Written in 1969, published in 1971 and reissued in a "completely revised" edition in 1987, Love occupies an ambiguous position in Carter's canon, being consistent in theme and mood with the two early novels discussed above, but separated from them by a gap of three years which saw the publication of Heroes and Villains, a very different kind of novel. Love deals with the familiar landscape of suburban decay, and presents another destructive sexual relationship which questions the power structures of conventional marriage and also offers a pointed critique of the sixties' ideology of free love and its implications for women. This novel differs from the earlier two, however, in that Carter introduces a more detectably theorised analysis, developing the uncertainty or collapsing of subjectivity experienced by earlier characters into an examination of the psychological effects of what might now be confidently termed postmodernity. Lorna Sage describes this novel as involving "a kind of psychological dandyism"[23], a phrase which draws attention to the process of externalising the internal (and vice versa) which Carter is working towards - the collapsing of the Humanist split between perceiving self and perceived world.

Love opens with a scene which summarises the combination of ambiguity and correspondence or resemblance identified by Baudrillard as a significant element of the postmodern condition.[24] The heroine Annabel's perception of an ambiguous sight, sun and moon in the sky together, symbolises the collapsing of boundaries between discrete objects and establishes a theme - the critique and effacement of binarism - which preoccupies much of Carter's later work. Annabel herself, who "interpreted the world [by] a system of correspondences" (1), assumes the position of a central interpreting consciousness, trying to make sense of a world which remains ambiguously familiar but unreal. Her egocentricity becomes paranoia at key moments like the opening scene, in which she momentarily becomes "the helpless pivot of the entire universe" (3) (centrality and stability being here the opposite of mastery or control), and this emphasis on the psychological instability of the subject is remorselessly maintained through to the novel's melodramatic ending. In Annabel, Carter creates a clinically schizoid character; her closeness to reality ("She had the capacity for changing the appearance of the real world which is the price paid by those who take too subjective a view of it" [3]) recalls Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on the schizophrenic's being "closest to the beating heart of reality, to an intense point identical with the production of the real".[25]

Annabel's world consists of surfaces with which she herself, "an object composed of impervious surfaces" (27), interacts through sliding connections and collisions. For her, sex (and by implication all human interaction) is "a play of surfaces" which she understands "only [...]

superficially" (24), and her husband is similarly unfamiliar: "It hardly occured to her the young man was more than a collection of surfaces" (30). This double reduction of subjectivity and phenomenal reality to two dimensions has its correlative in her husband's brother Buzz, whose ubiquitous camera performs the same function of flattening depth into image. The metaphor of the image even replaces narrative when Lee's descriptions of Annabel are presented as "behavioural snapshots [...] stills from expressionist films" (40), and the poetics of the novel (which makes extensive use of prolepsis and analepsis to blur the chronological sequence of events) achieves the effect of collapsing temporality into a single seemingly present moment.

The representation of subjectivity in the novel is consistently problematised through this emphasis on the dominance of the image. Annabel's relationship with Lee becomes at times that of artist and subject, and a major theme of the novel is the way in which Lee's sense of his own subjectivity is nullified and dissolved through her insistence on interpreting him as consisting only of appearances and surfaces. Lee's loss of depth becomes the crucial element in the text, leading him into adultery in an attempt to re-establish a sense of his own selfhood: "Over the years [Annabel] drew and painted him again and again in so many different disguises that at last he had to go to another woman to find out the true likeness of his face" (25). But even this attempt at self-definition through a kind of transgression is thwarted by the fact that the woman he finally sleeps with, one of his pupils, has inscribed him within her own fantasies "quite unknown to himself and entirely without his consent" (73). Lee's loss of

subjectivity becomes the novel's principal focus, as he slides further and further from reality into Annabel's world of simulation and resemblances. When telling his other mistress, Carolyn, of his wife's attempted suicide, he becomes "aware that everything he did or said could not fail to breathe stale cliche for he had seen so many scenes of this nature in 'B' feature films, it seemed, in reality, second hand" (49-50). This dislocation of subjectivity finds predictable expression in Lee's relationships with women: "soon he saw himself as a red-handed butcher to whom both women seemed no more than curious meat" (53), an image which is repeated later when Buzz sleeps with Annabel: "She felt herself handled as unceremoniously as a fish on a slab, reduced only to anonymous flesh" (94) - a representation which is extended in Carter's later work (see Chapter 4). Love continues the preoccupation with misogyny evident in the earlier novels, but adds a melodramatic element in Annabel's insanity and eventual suicide, which is paradoxically the end result of the misogynistic behaviour Annabel seems to deliberately provoke. This is not to undermine the latent feminism of the novel, but rather to emphasise the complexity of Carter's representation of problematised gender relations, and the significance of feminine insanity to her analysis of power relations between genders. The trope of the 'mad woman', present in Buzz and Lee's mother (whose "spectacular psychosis" [10] constitutes the model for Annabel's self-conscious rendering of her own death as a spectacle), occupies an ambiguous position in Carter's early fiction, being both a product of male violence and abuse but also in many ways a stimulus of that abuse (Ghislaine in Shadow Dance is, like Annabel, calculatingly provocative in a similar way).

Lee's interview with Annabel's psychiatrist, who seems to him "like a holy image in a very white case" (59), serves to establish the "hermetic" (60) nature of the relationship existing between his wife, his brother and himself. The psychological condition which the psychiatrist mentions, "folie a deux", or the mutual stimulation of psychosis, offers a structure (different to that of the Oedipal relations in the earlier novels) in which Lee becomes objectified by the fantasies of Buzz and Annabel: "They have a world which they have made so they can understand it and it includes me at the centre . . ." (60). Lee's response is to attempt to redefine the polarities of the relationship by situating Buzz at the 'centre', and Buzz becomes "a giant , hairy toad squatting upon his life and choking him" (66). In effect Lee strives to re-establish a space in which his self can be reconstituted, and the tragic element of the novel lies in the power of the image to resist any attempt to establish a subjective materiality. Each character, and in particular Lee, is repeatedly hyper-realised or over-mediated in their relationship with reality. In the cases of Annabel and Buzz this hyper-realisation is chosen and perpetuated through a continual unwillingness to differentiate fantasy from reality. Lee, however, is represented as a victim of the fantasies of others. Annabel's insistence that Lee be tattooed with her name, which he interprets as "a baroque humiliation" (69), becomes in this context both an attempt to stabilise their marriage and a denial of Lee's subjective autonomy. He is thus defined as "a necessary attribute of her alone" (64), inscribed with her name as "a certificate of possession" (70) rather than as a sign of his love for her. At the same time, the internal bonding of partners is achieved through a denial of

externality, in that Lee's extra-marital life ceases (and Annabel, being virtually an ahistorical character, never had one anyway). Carter's implicit critique of the institution of marriage hinges on this dual movement, in that in order to signify in the real world, marriage has to renounce the real world. Marriage becomes a power relationship with, in this case, the mental instability of the woman demanding the sacrifice of the man's selfhood.

Two significant scenes in the novel point towards later developments in Carter's work in terms of its relationship with postmodernist fictional strategies. The ballroom in which Annabel briefly works comes to symbolise a world in which simulation dominates - "It was a synthetic reduplication without an original model and there was nothing in it at all peculiar to itself" (78). Like the bar in Shadow Dance, the ballroom becomes an arena of confrontation, and Lee's fight functions in terms of allowing him a momentary semblance of subjective determination. The physical nature of fighting temporarily overrides the denial of physicality which Annabel's fantasy world insists upon, and Lee briefly escapes from her definition of him: "It was nothing to do with the person he had become" (81). Instead he steps back into the historicised self of personal experience (of playground fighting), which is scarcely represented at all in the novel. The escape is also a moment of revelation because Lee establishes, through this action, an awareness of his wife as the cause and focus of his unhappiness, as he realises that her definition of him has left little but "fragments of himself" (82). The ballroom, a self-consciously excessive simulation, thus represents a context in which both the loss of the real and the illusory possibility

of regaining the real are enacted, as Lee's momentary contact with reality is essentially nostalgic.

Annabel's final definition of herself (a process which owes much to Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar[26]) brings an ironic emphasis on the arbitrariness of subjectivity and the social forces which define it - themes which Carter's later fiction examines extensively. Earlier in the novel the arbitrariness of naming is represented in the fact that neither Lee or Buzz is known by his given name. Annabel's redefinition of her self is more material, an attempt to "dissociate her new body from the old one" (103). Subjectivity, desired in one form or another by all the characters, loses any connection with coherence or consistency and becomes merely a matter of formal concern, comprised of elements easily arranged into new structures (104); to Lee Annabel becomes a "composite figure" (104) mingling aspects of his mother, his aunt and the psychiatrist as well as her self. The mingling of conventional matriarchal authority figures into a single constructed subject is significant in drawing attention to the absence of male authority figures in the text - Annabel becomes the source of power in the text, and the two brothers become 'subjected subjects'. To Buzz she embodies the monstrous-feminine, potentially having "concealed fangs or guillotines inside her to ruin him" (94) as he prepares to commit adultery with her. Her destructive sexuality is, however, different from that of Honeybuzzard, in that it is directed against herself. Annabel's consistent evasion of reality is terminated by her death, at which the all-consuming subjectivity she has meticulously constructed collapses: "She did not spare a thought or waste any pity on the people who loved

her for she had never regarded them as anything more than facets of the self she was now about to obliterate" (109-10).

Carter's early novels delineate the areas with which her later fiction will be preoccupied, and it is possible to view the texts discussed above as in many ways preliminary forays into the territories which the later texts explore more fully. Certain patterns and consistencies can however be detected in the early fiction, notably the emphasis upon the problematic structures of psychoanalytic theory and how they impinge upon the political relations between subject, gender, power, and desire.

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26. David Punter has pointed out the connection between Carter's novel and The Bell Jar; see The Literature of Terror, p. 399.

Chapter 4: The Magic Toyshop and Heroes and Villains.

The 'social realist' tendencies of the novels discussed in the preceding chapter tend to a greater or lesser extent to override the fantastic elements, so that each text can be connected by the thread of sixties Gothic iconography, while each nevertheless combines with this 'realism' elements of fantasy which become foregrounded in Carter's later novels. During the same period (1965-71), however, Carter wrote two other novels which conform more closely to the generic definition of magic realism or fantasy, while still sharing the same thematic preoccupations which define Carter's entire oeuvre. The Magic Toyshop (1967) and Heroes and Villains (1969) can be respectively categorised as Gothic and science fiction novels - while the former shares much with Shadow Dance and Several Perceptions in terms of its setting and surface iconography, its explicitly feminist themes link it with the later novels discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 below; Heroes and Villains, on the other hand, looks forward to the more explicit usage of the structures of literary fantasy of The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman without sharing settings with the novels that precede it. Both The Magic Toyshop and Heroes and Villains extensively explore the construction of feminine identity, and both novels make much use of theoretical structures which will come to predominate in Carter's later fiction, notably psychoanalysis and the associated problems of gender and identity. Consequently both texts, in their political focus, are unproblematically feminist, but more problematically postmodernist in the senses already discussed; both novels assume resistant stances

(albeit in slightly differing ways), but both can be assimilated into a 'mainstream' of either the canonical text (The Magic Toyshop) or standard science fiction. Thematically, though, each novel explicitly concerns itself with problems addressed throughout Carter's subsequent fiction, and can thus be connected to the ongoing critique of postmodern subjectivity which Carter's texts constitute.

Each text focusses on a central heroine (thus separating them from Shadow Dance and Several Perceptions, which feature male central protagonists) in order to articulate the problems of representing a specifically feminine process of ensubjectification. In this way these novels can be seen in terms of establishing thematic rather than formalistic concerns which Carter's later fiction expands upon, although they also share much with the novels already discussed. Both are products of Carter's most prolific period of writing, and articulate in particular a nostalgic sense of loss which orchestrates the movement of the desiring subject through the text. The object of this nostalgia is figured in both texts as childhood and its concomitants of innocence, security and comfort; each text removes its heroine from this condition and displaces her into a world of experience, insecurity and discomfort. Both novels are thus fables of the subject-in-becoming as constructed and defined along Blakean lines as a movement from innocence to experience, and both novels represent the process of becoming (feminine) subject as being enacted in explicit relation to a male authority figure, who represents the figure of paternal law. Patricia Waugh, discussing the postmodernist preoccupation with fragmentation (of the subject and of society), suggests that

> "it is the nostalgia which produces the desire to fragment, the impossible yearning for the lost (imaginary) object of desire which issues in the frustrated and atavistic smashing of the ideal object.'

Nostalgia, Waugh argues, is explicitly connected in the Nietszchian tradition of postmodernist thought with nihilism, or the negation of the present and its potentials. Carter's novels express this nihilistic nostalgia in their representation of a present or a future which is chaotic, contingent and threatening to the fragile, nascent subjectivities of the heroines, which are thus placed in antagonistic opposition to the world around them. This world, in turn, constitutes both the arena in which and in relation to which their subjectivities can develop, and the source of the power and discourses which structure and (to a greater or lesser extent) determine those subjectivities - it is, in Lorna Sage's words, "the very splintering of reality" which provides the dynamic of the subject-in-becoming.[2] Consequently the process of becoming-subject, which lies at the core of both these and all of Carter's subsequent novels, becomes a process of continual displacement or oscillation of the subject between a stability defined wholly in relation to externally produced subject positions (i.e. an identification with the mirror image), or in terms of an internally produced sense of fragmentation and alienation. Both Marianne and Melanie (the heroines of these two novels) figure a kind of nascent subjectivity which is split from the surrounding world and within itself - and both novels explore the condition of this split or schizoid subjectivity through a series of characteristic metaphors and scenarios which come to be repeatedly rearticulated in Carter's later fiction.

Carter's The Magic Toyshop has been widely accepted as an accessible text, being studied at 'A' Level and on undergraduate courses. Given the common ground it shares with much of Carter's other fiction, this might seem a curiosity, since none of Carter's other novels have achieved such recognition. This feature means that it should perhaps be among the most extensively criticised of Carter's novels, but in fact commentary on it is scarce and of a brief kind. The Magic Toyshop continues the vein of 'London Gothic' characteristic of the novels discussed in the previous chapter, being largely set in an area of London where "All the shops were in the lower parts of tall houses and had curly, old-fashioned lettering on them".[3] The toyshop itself appears as "a dark cavern of a shop, so dimly lit one did not at first notice it" (39), and contrasts drastically with the comfortable, airy childhood home of the first chapter. The modern Gothic scenario is thus established as a context for Carter's exploration of the unconscious and the structuration of subjectivity, as the toyshop offers at the literal and the symbolic level an arena in which the dynamics of the subject-in-becoming can be enacted. The toyshop serves as an ambiguous metaphor, signifying both the object of nostalgia for childhood, and the demystification of that nostalgia through an exposure of its destructive and authoritarian undercurrents. Carter comments to John Haffenden that "the intention was that the toyshop itself should be a secularised Eden";[4] Eden itself is figured three other times in the novel, each time parodically, ending with the closing image of Melanie and Finn in what is effectively an intermediate position, cast out of the destroyed 'Eden' of the toyshop and facing the "night, in the garden" (200). None of these representations affords a sentimentalised vision of Edenic fantasy;

instead, each reinforces the inescapability of signification by reiterating the acculturation of the Edenic myth and its failure to offer 'solutions' to the postmodernist problems of the text.

The novel presents a heroine, Melanie, whose narcissism is emphasised at the beginning of the text by her preoccupation with mirrors and images. The death of her parents, and her subsequent removal, with her younger brother and sister, from an idyllic middle-class home to the house of her estranged Uncle in London, constitutes a psychological rupture which reverberates throughout the novel in the context of Melanie's burgeoning puberty. Her establishment in Uncle Philip's household, and her relationships with his mute wife Aunt Margaret and her brothers Finn and Francie, are presented as contexts in which the development of feminine subjectivity within a violently patriarchal society (which nevertheless contains its own repressed structures of resistance to the authority it embodies) can be examined. Uncle Philip's regime constitutes a graphic representation of the 'Law of the Father' in action, being at times quite literally an absent but wholly structuring 'centre' of power with respect to the subjects surrounding him, or "the planets round a male sun" (140), as the novel puts it. His authority is represented as banishing Melanie from her idyllic childhood and imposing instead the 'wilderness' (or false Eden) of the toyshop upon her life. Elizabeth Grosz outlines the significance of the "symbolic father" in Lacanian theory, the position which Uncle Philip seems to occupy:

> The symbolic father is the (ideal) embodiment of paternal authority, the locus from which patriarchal law and language come. The (imaginary) father only more or less approximates and gives

> tangible presence to the symbolic father [...]he is the support or agency necessary for the Other, the symbolic father, to make its appearance in the child's life.[5]

The "imaginary father" is represented in Uncle Philip's brothers-in-law, Finn and Francie, both of whom appear to Melanie as excessively male: "A ferocious, unwashed, animal reek came from them both" (36), "[Finn's] insolent, offhand, terrifying maleness fill[ed] the room with its reek" (45). The patriarchal structure into which Melanie and her brother and sister are pitched is thus figured by absences and approximations; Uncle Philip's prolonged absence, prefigured in the absence of Melanie's parents at the beginning of the text, is filled by the substituting presence of Francie and Finn, who in turn approximate the authority Philip symbolically represents - as Finn tells Melanie when they first meet, "In a way, we're uncles" (35). Similarly Philip's authority is transmitted through them, as Finn relays Philip's commands concerning the novel's central scene to Melanie:

> You're not to see the swan until the performance so that you will react to it spontaneously. But you've got to practice with me to get the movements right so I'm to stand in for the swan. (145)

This series of metonymic shifts - Finn/Philip/swan - emphasises the process of displacement of authority with which the novel deals. Melanie's subjection - her development as a subject in accordance with the 'Law of the Father' - is achieved through displaced transmissions of power, through a network in which she, with her implicit trust for Finn, is complicit. The patriarchal silencing of the feminine voice, crudely figured in Aunt Margaret's muteness, fixes femininity as static, enabling the usurping of feminine creativity through puppetry which is

the central theme of the novel. "He's pulled our strings as if we were his puppets" (152), laments Finn, emphasising the connection between the puppets and the characters, and Melanie cries out against the world she finds herself in:

> 'There is too much', she repeated. This crazy world whirled about her, men and women dwarfed by toys and puppets, where even the birds were mechanical and the few human figures went masked and played musical instruments into the small and terrible hours of the night [...]. She was in the night again and the doll was herself. (68)

Unlike Carter's later short story "The Loves of Lady Purple" (see Chapter 2 above) closure in this novel comes through destruction of the puppets; Finn's act of destroying the swan is both an act of liberation from and a destruction of the imposed subjectivities under which all the characters except Philip labour.

To the extent that it deals with the developing subjectivity of Melanie, the novel is a conventional *bildungsroman*, featuring only the initial migration to London which prefigures the preferred picaresque structures of the later novels; however Carter infuses this superficially conventional scenario with a degree of Gothic morbidity and a complex psychoanalytic slant which together transform the text from a 'girl growing up' novel into an analysis of the oppressive structures of patriarchal domination and their effects upon the possibilities of the developing feminine subject.

Carter's exploration of these themes begins with this text, to be taken up again later in Love (see Chapter 3 above) and the subsequent

novels, and it is interesting to note that the figure of the puppet predominates in The Magic Toyshop both as a metaphor for (male-) constructed subjectivity and as an object of fascination and terror. Carter presents, in Melanie, a character whose horizons are inscribed by male-constructed representations of the ideal femininity to which she aspires, and whose fears of these imposed identities come to be figured in the puppets her Uncle painstakingly constructs in the basement of the house. In conventional Gothic form, the basement can be taken for the unconscious, in which a series of scenarios are acted out under surreal, authoritarian circumstances, notably the forced re-enactment by Melanie of the myth of Leda and the swan, assisted by a giant puppet swan controlled by her Uncle. In this episode, Melanie's sense of displacement is made explicit:

> She was hallucinated; she felt herself not herself, wrenched from her own personality, watching this whole fantasy from another place; and, in this staged fantasy, anything was possible. Even that the swan, the mocked up swan, might assume reality itself and rape this girl in a blizzard of white feathers. The swan towered over the black-haired girl who was Melanie and who was not. (166)

The doubling of Melanie in this paragraph emphasises the process of narcissistic self-preoccupation which she is trapped in; unable to establish a stable subject position, she instead becomes displaced or doubled in external reality, and thus becomes schizoid. While this moment of aporia is central to the novel's problematisation of Melanie's position as determining subject, it is clear that the figure of the puppet permeates the text at several levels. Most obviously, characters are frequently represented as puppet-like in their movements and behaviour: Melanie, on learning of her parents' deaths, demolishes her

bedroom "like an automaton" (25), and is "as unbending as wood" (26) when the housekeeper tries to comfort her. Francie wears "the archaic smile of an early Greek terracotta statuette" (37), and later Finn is described as resembling "a small, precious statuette, a chessman" (186); her brother Jonathon appears to Melanie, in a parallel chain of images, "as though the real Jonathon is somewhere else and has left a copy of himself behind so that no-one notices he's gone" (116) (Melanie earlier perceives the painting of the guard dog as a replacement for the real guard dog [59-60]), and Melanie asks herself, "What is Aunt Margaret made of? Bird bones and tissue paper, spun glass and straw" (138). Francie makes a voodoo doll of Uncle Philip, and as the swan attacks her Melanie imagines that "if she did not act her part well, a trapdoor in the swan's side might open and an armed host of pigmy Uncle Philips, all clockwork, might rush out and savage her" (166). Puppets act both as displaced embodiments of patriarchal power (as with the swan) and as simulations of the subjects under the sway of that power - a dual function which suggests a complex figuring of the position of the subject-in-becoming under patriarchal law.

This proliferation of representations (and there are many more similar ones in the text) serves to emphasise the artificiality of subjectivity within the ideological environment the novel describes. Critics have frequently commented on this feature of the novel; Sue Spall and Elaine Millard note that the puppet is

> an image especially pertinent to a feminist analysis of the novel. Within the power structure of the toyshop, women's position is equal to that of the puppets.[6]

Similarly Paulina Palmer argues that Carter "treats the relations between puppet-master and puppet as symbolic of the control exerted by a patriarchal culture on women and the roles available to them".[7] Both these criticisms would seem problematic given the ways in which Carter presents all the characters in the novel, male or female, in terms of puppetry; and the problematics of Carter's later puppet story "The Loves of Lady Purple" suggest a more complex process of cultural criticism is being attempted or at least prefigured in the puppet metaphors of The Magic Toyshop. Related to this representational thematic is the novel's preoccupation with images of the body, and it is this theme which I want to explore *in more detail*.

In its focus on the human body as one of the sites of the inscription of identity, The Magic Toyshop problematises its own overtly psychoanalytic stance by resituating the operation of psychic power within the text on a *firmly material level*. Melanie, at the start of the novel, enacts the Freudian interpretation of femininity as "the dark continent" in her "discovery" that "she was made of flesh and blood". The narrator's ironic comment immediately afterward - "O, my America, my new found land" (1) - establishes the equation between feminine sexuality and male colonialism both through its allusion to John Donne's overtly sexual poem (which itself exploits metaphors of colonialism) and in its ironisation of Melanie's discovery, which subsequently becomes less a discovery of self and more a discovery of the available images of the feminine self, which, as Spaull and Millard note, are all "derived from male images of women".[8] The discovery of the sexual female body, with its "mountain ranges" and "secret valleys" (1), is thus both

a recognition of the materiality of sexuality and a comment on its immediate textualisation. Melanie's journey into sexual maturity - her exploration of this land - is thus immediately established as a voyage through a patriarchally constructed topography, and to this extent any subjective autonomy which Melanie finds at the end of the text is always seemingly predicated upon the pre-existing power structures which ostensibly determine, either positively or negatively, women's representations of themselves. The problematic of self-definition is thus immediately confronted with its own seeming impossibility, and Melanie subsequently undergoes a series of 'mirror stages' which confirm her entrapment within the patriarchal structure while always offering potential escapes from it. Uncle Philip's bizarre present to her is a jack-in-the-box which presents "a grotesque caricature of her own face leer[ing] from the head that leapt out at her" (12), and later, in a moment of Freudian identification, Melanie borrows some of her mother's perfume and has to "glance at herself in the mirror to make sure she was still Melanie" (14). This identification between Melanie and her mother extends to her nighttime adventure in the garden wearing her mother's wedding dress, an episode reworked later in Love but resonant here of transgression and illicit desire. Melanie's transgression is the appropriation of the ultimate image of feminine passivity, the bridal dress, without patriarchal sanction, but it is also the assumption of a defined subjectivity without the intermediate stages of development which the logic of the novel seems to demand. The menacing externality of the garden is purely Gothic in its symbolism: "In the silence of this night, no horror from film or comic book or nightmare seemed too outlandish to be believed" (19). Melanie's terror of the dark contrasts

with the Edenic symbolism of the apple tree which affords her only means of re-entry into the cosy bourgeios security of the house (coded white in this monochrome passage) and her removal of the (white) dress (as symbol of adulthood but also of sexual initiation) in order to climb the tree only serves to emphasise the violence of nature:

> She was horribly conscious of her own exposed nakedness. She felt a new and final kind of nakedness, as if she had taken even her own skin off and now stood clothed in nothing, nude in the ultimate nudity of the skeleton. (21)

The dress, shredded by its encounter with tree and cat, constitutes a substitute skin upon which the marks of transgression are inscribed: "[T]he dress was filthy, streaked with green from the tree and her own red blood. She had bled far more than she realised" (22). The sexual symbolism of this passage is evident, but more significant is the way in which Melanie's body and its surrogate surfaces constitute textual surfaces upon which 'natural identities', signified by the green of nature and the red of female menstruation, are inscribed by hostile, violent forces. The feminine body becomes a textual surface upon which identifications (with the mother, via the wedding dress) and imposed identities (from the "symbolic father") are simultaneously inscribed; Melanie's desire for "the lover she had made up out of books and poems she had dreamed of all summer" (45) both conflicts with and reinforces her mother-identification, so that her desire displaces itself into textuality as her body is textualised by patriarchy. Her symbolic rape by the swan, already figured by Finn's enactment of the performance in obedience to Philip's metonymic authority, is thus a fulfilment of the desire of the Other (the "symbolic father") inculcated in her through

the metonymy of textuality, but is also figured as a balancing transgression to the incestuous relationship between Francie and Aunt Margaret. The fact of this relationship serves to destabilise Philip's authority from within - incest becomes an act of resistance, a figuring of feminine "desire for a masculine body that does not re-spect the Father's law".[9]

The shattering of the mirror with the news of her parents' deaths is accompanied by another distorted image of Melanie: "Covered with lipstick and mascara, her face was a formalised mask of crimson and black" (26). The shift in colour coding from red/green to red/black, both pairs respectively inscribed upon the "white satin" (16) of the dress and the "marbly white" (2) flesh of Melanie's body, emphasise the Gothic import of the event; as a prefiguring of the closing line of the novel ("At night, in the garden, they faced each other in a wild surmise" [200]), this passage sets up ominous portents for the value of both the idyllic potential of the garden, and Melanie's accession to the symbolic status of adulthood and, ostensibly, coherent subjectivity.

The sequence of identifications outlined above establishes the mirror image as the constitutive force of Melanie's developing subjectivity, as well as asserting that her own drive towards identification with her mother may be the only patriarchally sanctioned self available to her. Mrs Rundle's injunction that she "must be a little mother to" (28) her brother and sister thus takes on a sinister tone, as fate and ideological pressure conspire to deny Melanie her more promising fantasy identifications. More significantly, Melanie's

imagination has already conceived of the possibility that she might be mother to herself:

> Since she was thirteen, when her periods began, she had felt she was pregnant with herself, bearing the slowly ripening embryo of Melanie-grown-up inside herself for a gestation time the length of which she was not precisely aware. (20)

In this feminisation of the Wordsworthian paradox ("The child is father of the man") Carter establishes the opposite of what the text has so far asserted - Melanie's potential for self-determination. In images like this, Carter's text offers the possibility of femininity as, in Paulina Palmer's words, "a problematic, disruptive presence within the phallocratic social order".[10] But it is within the environment of her childhood home, with her parents absent and the benign matriarch Mrs Rundle in control, that Melanie's self-directed explorations of available identities occur; at Uncle Philip's, the regulation of her identity is so complete that she becomes to an extent schizophrenic, divided between memory of security and desire for freedom; "'But this can never be me, not really me!' But it was" (90). Melanie's desire is as nostalgic as it is sexual - she experiences the dislocation of the subject characteristic of postmodernist fiction, and figures this dislocation as the loss of identification with the mirror image:

> If she did not tread on any of the black, perhaps when she got to the end of the floor she would shiver and rouse in her own long-lost bed, in her striped sheets, and say good morning to the apple tree and look at her own face in the mirror she had not broken. She had not seen her own reflection since. She was seized with panic, remembering that she had not seen her own face for so long. (102)

It is no surprise when she learns on her arrival that there are no mirrors at Uncle Philip's house. The patriarchal authority embodied in

Philip acts to deny the implicit autonomy offered by identification with the mirror, and instead imposes its own definitions of femininity upon the women under its control. Philip's own situation, labouring in a basement workshop producing puppets, connotes both the puppet maker Spalanzani in Hoffman's "The Sandman" (a connection explored by Paulina Palmer[11]) and, more pertinently in the context of Carter's later fiction, Frankenstein's labours in his attic laboratory. Philip's workshop features, in true Gothic style, "a wooden-leg factory *Walpurgisnacht* of carved and severed limbs" (66), and later Melanie imagines Philip "surrounded by severed limbs and watching masks" (171). The fragmented bodies with which Philip is frequently associated clearly figure the *corps morcele* of Lacanian theory, and Melanie's identity anxieties can be related directly to the tension between the absence of mirrors in the house and the prevalence of fragmented simulations of human subjectivity - Elizabeth Grosz notes that

> The mirror stage is a necessarily alienating structure because of the unmediated tension between the fragmented or 'fragilized' body of experience; and the 'solidity' and permanence of the body as seen in the mirror.[12]

Melanie's schizophrenia, then, is a product of the lost unity of the illusory identification with the mirror image (also figured as her identification with the mother) and the subsequent proliferation of representations of fragmented subjectivity which surround her in the toyshop. To this extent the novel broadly conforms to the Lacanian schema of subjectivity as an illusory product of a primal schism, a rupture represented in the novel by the death of the (absent) parents and the movement to London and a more overtly patriarchal realm. As

Paulina Palmer notes, certain aspects of The Magic Toyshop "challenge the notion of unified character, pointing to the existence of multiple identities and the possibility of change they contain";[13] nevertheless the problematics established in the novel are not satisfactorily worked out until much later in Carter's career.

The purgative fire at the end of the novel, lit by Philip in his rage at discovering his cuckoldry, constitutes the destruction of the patriarchally sanctioned imposed subjectivities: "All burning, everything burning, toys and puppets and masks [...] 'All my paintings', said Finn quietly. 'Such as they were' (200). Only the character's selves remain - "Nothing is left but us" - although the text undermines this potentially optimistic closure with final allusions to the Biblical garden of Eden and Keats' "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer", intertextual references which seem to reassert the reliance of notions of subjective autonomy upon textual representations which, in the former case at least, firmly establish patriarchal mythology as 'natural'. The Magic Toyshop offers a theorisation of feminine subjectivity which uses the Lacanian model to criticise conventional notions of subjectivity by foregrounding the primacy of signification in the process of becoming-subject. The most resistant political gesture in the text is the implication throughout that all subjects - masculine and feminine - are enthralled by the power structures of patriarchy, and that resistance to this enthrallment can be orchestrated through the exploitation of channels of desire which (as Aunt Margaret and Francie's incest signifies) are both prohibited by patriarchy and structure the margins of patriarchal authority. "The roles adopted by men and women

are, in fact, flexible. They are open to change", Paulina Palmer concludes, and it is this potential position of resistance which is opened up but not fully established in the novel.'[14]

If The Magic Toyshop can be read as being ultimately unsuccessful in its representation of a fable of feminist resistance to patriarchal oppression, Heroes and Villains presents, via a more overtly fantastic fictional scenario, an investigation of similar questions and problems which come under scrutiny through similar images and contexts. Heroes and Villains presents a post-apocalyptic world in which the survivors of civilisation struggle with hordes of Barbarians and mutant "Outpeople" for the scanty remaining resources; the Professors, who act as conservative protectors of 'culture' and civilised values in a world where such values are increasingly anachronistic, live in heavily fortified agrarian communities while the other survivors, actively constructed as Others by the Professors, live nomadically and plunder the villages for resources, ammunition and food when necessary. It is during one of these attacks that Marianne, a Professor's daughter, is abducted by a Barbarian, Jewel, and the novel goes on to relate her subsequent life in the Barbarian tribe, eventually marrying Jewel and carrying his child. Central to this tribe is the figure of Donally, who, like Uncle Philip, symbolises the patriarchal Law; his cryptic pronouncements, scrawled in graffiti around the Barbarians' temporary compound, communicate only with Marianne (the rest of the Barbarians being largely illiterate) and thus constitute parodies of the dictates and social taboos imposed upon the developing feminine subject by the patriarchal Law. The novel deals, then, with the opposites of civilised/

barbaric and masculine/feminine, and charts Marianne's process of subject-in-becoming as a movement between these pairs of opposites, but also as a migratory journey which is repeated later in Carter's fiction, in The Passion of New Eve (1977). Marianne's journey from the security of the Professors' village, through the waste land of the devastated world, to the ocean, is also the skeleton of Evelyn's journey in the later novel; furthermore, the text seems to prefigure The Passion of New Eve in several specific ways - for example Donally calls Marianne "Lilith" (124), a name reiterated in the later novel and linked in both texts to the myth of Eden, while Donally himself is described as a "felled archaeopteryx" (74), an image which assumes greater import in the later novel.[15]

As the most overtly generic of Carter's novels, it is interesting to note how closely this novel follows The Magic Toyshop in the way it patterns the experiences of its central protagonist. Both texts feature an alienated heroine, dislocated in space and culture; in Heroes and Villains, Marianne is brutally raped and then forced, wearing an oversized and bizarrely inappropriate wedding dress, to marry the rapist; in The Magic Toyshop, Melanie undergoes symbolic rites of passage while wearing her mother's oversized wedding dress, and is later symbolically raped by the puppet swan. The shared concern in these two texts with the Edenic myth points towards a particular reading of each heroine as in some way figuring Eve, and Heroes and Villains places strong emphasis on metaphors of 'natural' or essential human identity which can be organised around the notion of original innocence which is represented in Marianne. The text presents a reversal of the Adamic

process in its emphasis on decline and decay, and the fact that Marianne appears before her 'Adam' in the novel suggests that the reversal Carter effects is also an inversion of the Edenic myth. This reversal is most evident in a passage near the end of the novel:

> Losing their names, these things underwent a process of uncreation and reverted to chaos, existing only to themselves in an unstructured world where they were not formally acknowledged, becoming an ever-widening margin of undifferentiated and nameless matter surrounding the outposts of man, who no longer made himself familiar with these things or rendered them authentic in his experience by the gift of naming.'[6]

The world of the text is thus a world of nameless chaos, of an ontological order which is post-human but mirrors the 'chaos' of a fictional pre-human world. Human knowledge survives in the rigid and arid disciplinarity of the Professors, but is parodied by Donally's fragmented cultural experience, and several times Marianne tries to pigeonhole him ("Maybe [he was] a Professor of music once" [61]). By representing a world in which the Adamic function of naming has been lost, Carter opens up a space in which the concomitant structures of power that constitute patriarchy are also in the descendant; as subjectivities and other socially constructed entities fragment in the post-apocalyptic world, so do the power structures and ideologies that are inscribed upon and within them.

In Heroes and Villains Marianne's journey is metaphorically through the structures of her own unconscious (hence her repeated questioning of the reality of her experiences), just as Melanie's reluctance to believe the transformation in her life suggests that The Magic Toyshop is exploring similar psychic structures. Within Marianne's unconscious the

Barbarian Jewel constitutes the object of desire which structures her developing subjectivity by virtue of its symbolic substitution for the Phallus (also signified by the elusive Donally) and by its elusiveness; Marianne notes that her desire is displaced at the moments when it seems to be satisfied: "I've never seen his face, in bed with him; perhaps it was never him at all, perhaps something else" (116). The impossibility of satisfying desire structures Marianne's relationship with Jewel, which in turn enacts the process of dual identification and definition by which the subject constitutes itself through and in the Other; Lacan writes that "[t]he Other is, therefore, the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks with him who hears, that which is said by the one being already the reply, the other deciding to hear it whether the one has or has not spoken".[17] Marianne's desire is constituted in Jewel who thus constructs her subject position by virtue of his own inaccessibility; their relationship, predicated on fantasy and loss (Marianne having witnessed Jewel killing her brother many years before his abduction of her), is thus a dialectic of power in which the Other, always elusive at the margins of signification, constitutes the subject at a similar position and in a similar way.

More significant, however, is the emphasis the text places upon Jewel's function as signifier of the pseudo-transcendant patriarchal law embodied in Donally. In many ways Jewel is represented as a text upon which Donally inscribes his own rendering of the Law; "Everywhere I go, I'm doomed to be nothing but an exhibit" (124) he laments, and what he is doomed to exhibit is the fragmentation of patriarchy. His tattoo, done by Donally, is of the Edenic scene - Adam, Eve, the Tree and the

Snake (85) - and is described as a "grotesque disfigurement" (85) and, by Marianne, as "hideous" and "unnatural" (86), "a mutilation" (86). This emphatic repudiation of the representation of Eden draws attention to the novel's exploitation of myth as representation (later, Marianne points out to Jewel that the Professors would find his tattoo "interesting" as "a relic of the survival of Judaeo-Christian iconography" [123]), a relation which applies also to the novel's treatment of myths of human subjectivity. The overriding feature of the text is its emphasis on appearances - one of Donally's pseudo-Situationist slogans reads "Mistrust appearances - they never conceal anything" (60), drawing attention to the superficiality of the various subject and object positions the text represents. Above all Heroes and Villains is concerned with appearances; Carter comments, in her interview with Lorna Sage, that "it's a world of appearances. I call this materialism", a stance which the novel demonstrates in its preoccupation with the 'superficial abysses' of subjectivity.[18] As in The Magic Toyshop, Marianne's abduction operates at the level of a seduction; she is seduced by the object of desire into a false identification with the Phallus, and her subject position is thus constituted within language and desire as an unstable condition. This is most clearly demonstrated by her wedding to Jewel, which is performed through a ritual devised by Donally. Like Melanie's mother's wedding dress, the dress Marianne is forced to wear is too large for her, signifying perhaps that this accession to the symbolic structures of patriarchy is premature; Marianne's donning of the dress is performed "mechanically" as she "turn[s] into a mute, furious doll which allowed itself to be totally engulfed" (69). The reappearance at this moment of

the imagery of The Magic Toyshop clarifies the power structures which are operating here - Marianne's new identity as Jewel's wife is imposed on her by Donally (the symbolic father) in a ritual of appearances and false identities:

> [Jewel] was like a work of art, as if created, not begotten, a fantastic dandy of the void whose true nature had been entirely subsumed by the alien and terrible beauty of a rhetorical gesture. His appearance was abstracted from his body, and he was wilfully reduced to sign language. He had become the sign of an idea of a hero; and she herself had been forced to impersonate the sign of a memory of a bride. (72)

Signs and impersonations replace the stable subject positions to which the characters aspire, and the 'puppet master' behind this performance is Donally, whose "voice issued with mysterious hollowness from behind the mask" (72). Like Donally's, Marianne's face is concealed by the wedding veil; all three agents in the ritual are thus concealed or disguised in some way, although a disruptive draught upsets this equilibrium by "lift[ing] the veil and waft[ing] it right over Donally, momentarily clinging to his wooden brow and feathered shoulders like a sudden snowfall" (72). This momentary disruption leads to the partial exposure of Marianne's face (72) which in turn incites a significant response in Jewel:

> He caught sight of her face at a new angle, half in shadows; the opaque brown discs of his eyes opened up and, for the first time transmitted a message to her, a sudden and horrified flash of recognition. (72)

In this moment of insight Jewel recognises Marianne's power and its function of structuring her Otherness, and the dialectic of subject and object becomes concretised within their marriage. As Donally remarks to

her earlier, "You'll have to remain terrifying, you know; otherwise, what hope is there for you?" (50). Marianne functions for the tribe as the tribe functions for the Professors; she signifies the Other, which at certain points in the text is quite literally encoded through her as the monstrous-feminine - one character remarks that "It's a well-known fact that Professor women sprout sharp teeth in their private parts, to bite off the genitalia of young men" (49).

Heroes and Villains explores this dialectic in order to expose the mutual structures of interpretation upon which the positions of subject and other rely; each subject position is constructed as other to another subject position, so that each subject position is always already an object or other. Marianne's becoming-subject necessarily entails a recognition (parallel to Jewel's insight) of her own Otherness, upon which any fictional subject position she constructs or has imposed upon her must be predicated. Malcolm Bowie's description of Lacan's theorisation of the subject demonstrates this condition clearly:

> The other-infested subject can have no other destiny than that of successive disappearance and return, entity and non-entity, sense and nonsense, concentration and dispersal, being there and being gone.'[15]

Heroes and Villains represents the dynamics of this vacillation of the subject in its remorseless debunking of the myths of subjective agency which structure contemporary culture, and, as with The Magic Toyshop, masculine subject positions come under as much scrutiny as feminine.

The initial encounter between Jewel and Marianne emphasises the specular nature of their mutual identifications, and points towards an illusory grounding of both their subjectivities in a moment of specular interaction:

> The boy looked up and saw the severe child who watched him.
> An expression of blind terror crossed his face, which was painted in stripes of black, red and white. He made some vague, terrified gestures with his hands; when she was much older and thought about him, which she came to do obsessively, she guessed these were gestures with which he hoped to ward off the evil eye. (6)

The perception of the gaze is the recognition of the Other seeing the self - Jewel's recognition of Marianne as Other, requiring defence against the evil eye (which signifies and is signified by her look), is also an unconscious recognition of himself as Other to her Subject position and its possession of the gaze, a recognition which entails a schism in the subject postion he ostensibly occupies - hence, perhaps, the pun on his name (Jewel/dual). His "blind terror" is thus a signification of his own passivity, unable to return the gaze by being "blind". Marianne is thus active constructor of Otherness at this moment, suggesting that Carter's exploration of feminine subjectivity in this novel is based upon a reversal of conventional power roles. This double process of identification structures the entire novel, and implies that Heroes and Villains is less about Marianne's subject-in-becoming than it is concerned with Jewel's fragile status as illusory subject of her Otherness. At the end of the text, he dies, but not before Marianne metaphorically 'kills' him by exorcising his image:

> She thought; 'I have quite destroyed him', and felt a warm sense of self-satisfaction, for quite dissolved was the marvellous, defiant construction of textures and colours she first glimpsed marauding

> her tranquil village; it had vanished as if an illusion which could not sustain itself . . . (147)

Jewel, then, is doubly constructed as the object of Marianne's desire and as the metonymic substitute for Donally's patriarchal authority. Nevertheless it is his Otherness which comes to figure Marianne's illusory subjectivity; in a telling moment of Freudian transference (echoed in a later novel, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman) Marianne's gaze and its construction of Jewel are reversed:

> She saw his face in the transfiguring firelight and felt a sharp, extreme, prolonged pain as though the lines of his forehead, nose and jaw were being traced upon her flesh with the point of a knife. (118)

All the elements of Carter's ongoing exploration of the construction of subjectivity are in this passage; Marianne's identification with her object of desire is experienced as a figural assumption of his image, enacted through the gaze and its construction of the Other. The image is "traced upon her flesh" with a phallic symbol, the knife, suggesting the subordination of the female body to the structures of patriarchal oppression. The medium of the gaze is itself "transfiguring" of Jewel's image, echoing the earlier representation of his tattoo as a "grotesque disfigurement" (85) just as the very image of the transference relies upon the figure of tattooing to give it force. Donally later claims that "Tattooing is the first of the post-apocalyptic arts, its materials are flesh and blood" (125), emphasising the process of moulding subjectivities with which he is engaged. Heroes and Villains offers the figure of the tattooist as a development of or replacement for the figure of the puppet master, and examines the transformations of the

subject/ object dialectic that this refiguring implies. Where the puppet master constructed and controlled his artificial subjects in The Magic Toyshop, the tattooist here inscribes the bodies of the subjects he controls with the mythos of subjective coherence (signified by Jewel's tattoo).

Both Heroes and Villains and The Magic Toyshop articulate the process of becoming-subject which will come to inform all of Carter's subsequent fiction. While the central characters of each novel are women, it is clear that the problems both novels raise around the issues of subjectivity and identity apply equally to men - Carter's self-conscious utilisation of psychoanalytic theory seems to recognise its ostensible application to the notion of a general human subject, while at the same time exploring the implications of such a concept. Patricia Waugh has recently emphasised the symbolic construction of femininity in postmodernist discourse:

> From Nietszche through Hassan and Lacan, femininity has been used to signify an 'otherness' which has effectively been essentialised as the disruption of the legitimate or the Law of the Father. This 'otherness has variously been expressed as the repressed other; the hysterical body; the semiotic; the pre-oedipal; the ecstatic, fluid, maternal body.[20]

Carter's novels seem to be working towards a reconceptualisation of the notion of otherness in their emphasis on the dialectical relationship between subject and object. Heroes and Villains in particular offers a representation of otherness as explicitly masculine, a representation which is developed in Carter's later novels. More important, however, is the examination of the very notion of otherness and the potentially

positive possibilities it holds for a resistant fusion of postmodernist aesthetics and feminist politics. Both the novels discussed above constitute extended critiques of the repressive power structures of patriarchy, and attempt to articulate ways in which these repressive structures can be resisted, and both texts represent the process of becoming-subject as a sequence of false or illusory identifications with images or simulations which are always constructed by the hegemonic ideology of patriarchy in order to foster the myth of the coherent self. To the extent that both novels challenge this myth at the level of its symbolic operation in representation, both texts are postmodernist explorations of the problematic postmodern self. Their significance, however, may lie more in the various ways in which they 'prepare grounds' for the explorations of particular aspects of the process of becoming-subject which constitute Carter's later novels. Heroes and Villains and The Magic Toyshop present, in this reading, incomplete and therefore unsatisfactory renditions of the thematics of subjectivity, but work to open up spaces within the psychoanalytic theorisation of subjectivity - notably in the representation of Marianne and Melanie as desiring subjects - which the later novels explore.

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9. Jane Gallop, The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis, p. 79.
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11. "From 'Coded Mannequin' to Bird Woman", pp. 184-5.
12. Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction, p. 42.
13. "From 'Coded Mannequin' to Bird Woman", p. 185.
14. ibid.
15. See Chapter 6 below for my discussion of The Passion of New Eve.
16. Angela Carter, Heroes and Villains, pp. 136-7; all subsequent references are given by page numbers in parentheses after quotes.
17. Jacques Lacan, quoted in Malcolm Bowie, Lacan, p. 81.
18. "The Savage Sideshow", p. 293.
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Chapter 5: Desire and Postmodernism - The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman.

> The question posed by desire is not "What does it mean?" but rather *"How does it work?"* How do these machines, these desiring machines, work - yours and mine?'

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (1972 - hereafter referred to as Hoffman) is, as Ricarda Schmidt points out, the first of a trilogy of novels (Carter refers to "a project of three speculative novels") which articulate, among other things, an extended critique of contemporary conceptions of subjectivity. Hoffman, as its title suggests, offers an examination of subjectivity through the notion of desire - a notion already explicitly utilised in several of Carter's earlier novels. However this novel differs from the earlier ones in many ways, not least being Carter's virtual abandonment of any pretension towards the social realism of the earlier texts, in favour of a full-blown use of fantasy. Carter recently (in 1991) described Hoffman as "the novel which marked the beginning of my obscurity", a comment which perhaps suggests her own awareness of the prevailing valorisation at that time of realist/conventional fiction over fantastic/experimental. "Obscurity", in this sense, might be understood as a positive term, emphasising Carter's dissociation from the conservative literary styles which dominated English fiction in the period in which Hoffman was published.

One consequence of the shift of stylistic focus from 'realist' to fantasy is that Hoffman can be more easily regarded as a postmodernist work of fiction than Carter's earlier fiction, in that it makes use of

fantastic and magic realist themes and devices as well as displaying an extensive intertextual awareness. At the same time, however, it is possible to read Hoffman as a critique of nascent postmodernism, and particularly of the political naivety of the brand of 1960s radicalism which arguably influenced the later development of politically naive postmodernist thought. In this sense the novel offers pointers towards an 'archaeology' of postmodernism, in its use and criticism of theories specific to and influential upon the intellectual 'scene' of the 1960s, and my discussion will touch upon some of these theories in order to delineate the position which Carter's fiction seems to take regarding the ideologies of early postmodernist thought. The most significant aspect of this novel, however, is its treatment of the concept of desire, a concept which has important implications for the representation of subjectivity in contemporary culture.[2]

The significance of desire as an object of contemporary theory is partly a product of the confluence of postmodernist, feminist and psychoanalytic discourses, outlined in Chapters One and Two. Laura Mulvey comments that "Desire is founded on loss and is consequently the source of signification. [...] The aesthetics of the present moment seem to be an ultimate aesthetics of *desire*, compensating for economic and social loss with excess of spectacle". Here Mulvey posits desire as a principally cultural/political rather than a simply psychological phenomenon, clearly related to the 'nostalgia mode' of contemporary culture which Fredric Jameson and others have seen as characteristic of postmodernism. This relation between desire as a cultural and political experience and the conception of postmodernism as an historical moment

primarily manifest in an aesthetic practice which, according to many theorists, lacks the ability to move from cultural practice to political agency, will form the basis of my examination of Carter's novel.[3] Hoffman offers a critique of the process of desire through the use of postmodernist fictional devices (principally those of magic realism), but the nature and consequences of this critique require some examination in the context of the postmodernist-feminist debate. Carter's examination of desire and subjectivity does not, ultimately, fully engage with the field of gender relations - the hero Desiderio ostensibly "functions as a general subject"[4] rather than as a representatively gendered subject. Although there are some qualifications to this assertion which I will discuss later, this generalisation of the subject suggests that the text can be read as feminist only in a very problematic sense. The use of a male first-person narrative further problematises the issue of the text's politics, as does the novel's evident scepticism about the 'liberating' cultural revolution of the 1960s, an attitude developing out of the implicit scepticism of Carter's earlier fiction.

The narrative of Hoffman relates the picaresque adventures of Desiderio, chosen by his master the Minister to find and kill the renegade Doctor Hoffman. Desiderio's unnamed city has been under attack from Hoffman's desire machines, which operate to materialise the objects of desire of the citizens, creating a world in which the distinction between fantasy and reality disappears. The Minister seeks to re-impose this distinction via various strategies, the ultimate of which is to assassinate Hoffman. Desiderio's journey towards Hoffman, his adventures

during this journey, and his 'romantic' entanglement with Hoffman's daughter Albertina, constitute the substance of the novel, and offer Carter a series of backgrounds against which the theory of desire, and the struggle between ideal and 'real', is depicted. Desiderio enters and abandons a series of different societies, being endowed in each with a new identity, and the novel extensively details the rituals and processes by which these various identities come about. Hoffman draws extensively on anthropology, myth, the works of Sade, and the political idealism of the 1960s in addressing the issues it engages with, and offers a sequence of manifestations of objectified desire which operate to challenge that idealism on its own terms rather than from any rationalist standpoint. Through this examination of the machinations of desire, Carter works towards the critiques of gender and subjectivity of her later novels, and problems of both gender and subjectivity arise out of Hoffman's engagement with desire and the relation of desiring subject and desired object.

Before turning to the novel's assessment of gender, subjectivity and political idealism, it is necessary to explore the notion of desire and its relation to postmodernist theory, in order to assess the ways in which the novel uses this theory. In The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis Jacques Lacan asserts that "desire is the essence of man", and through this assertion by a notoriously anti-essentialist thinker the post-structuralist logic at work in the Lacanian understanding of desire becomes apparent. Lacanian desire is characterised by the impossibility of its satisfaction, as it operates, in Lacan's linguistic metaphor, by substitution and displacement.

Christopher Norris draws attention to the apparent similarity between Lacanian desire and Derrida's theory of language as a network of traces and differences: "Desire simply *is* this differential movement perpetually at work within language".[5] Lacan's "essence of man" (desire) is thus constituted by an endless process of deferral - it becomes a condition of continual displacement, offering the possibility of satisfaction but always evading this satisfaction. For Lacan, this is the human condition. The potential satisfaction of desire, initially offered in the mirror stage (the moment of illusory perception of wholeness on the part of the subject), is mediated through the child's accession to language and the social, which insists upon desire being spoken and thus deferred into the linguistic realm. This initial moment of displacement emphasises the connection between the metaphor of language and the operation of desire. As signifiers mark the absence of signifieds, so desire marks the lack of the object of desire, the moment of loss which necessitates the use of a symbol to 'stand for' the lost object - an aspect of Lacan's theory which Carter touches on in Hoffman, when Desiderio describes the initial onslaught of hallucinatory desires upon his city as "a language of signs which utterly bemused me because I could not read them".[6] Earlier in The Four Fundamental Concepts Lacan states that "desire, in fact, is interpretation itself", and this connection between continual displacement and the process of interpretation is useful for an understanding of how desire operates in Carter's novel.[7] Throughout the text Desiderio is presented with situations which require interpretation through the workings of desire. Each chapter of the novel offers an insight into a different aspect or mode of operation of desire, including "cannibalism, sadism, the will

for power, murder, and violent idealism"[8] - a list which indicates the extent of the novel's sceptical interrogation of desire as a politicised force. Similarly each stage of the novel - each new adventure in the picaresque journey - requires Desiderio's entrance into a new configuration of the social, entrances which are marked by metaphorical mirror-stages like the one he experiences in the society of the river people:

> On the way, in the glass of a shop-window, I saw the reflection of three brown men in loose, white, shabby clothes [...] I could have been Nao-Kurai's eldest son or youngest brother. (78)

Each section of the novel is thus accompanied by a transformation in Desiderio's appearance which is concretised in a moment of (always illusory) self-recognition; the corresponding shifts in the nature of (his) desire, and in the object of that desire, provide the structure of the novel and will be examined below.

The crucial element of the novel lies in the name of its hero, Desiderio. David Punter points out that this name anagrammatically "contains the 'desired I' but also the 'desired O'", and Ricarda Schmidt elaborates this ambiguity by pointing out that the translation of the name offered in the text ("The desired one" [54]) is a mistranslation - "Desiderio is the Italian word for wish, longing, desire" - thus implying an active rather than a passive emphasis.[9] The significance of this confusion lies in Desiderio's status as "representative subject". Lacan states that "Man's desire is the desire of the Other", by which he means that desire is both the desire *for* the Other (or the experience of lack), and the subjective interpretation of the desire *of* the Other -

"Consciousness desires the desire of another to constitute it as self-conscious".[10] This complex duality is the crux of the organisation of the Lacanian subject, which is ultimately only constituted as a subject by its illusory appropriation of the desires of Others, and Hoffman clearly states its awareness of this logic. Albertina tells Desiderio, "I've been maintained in my various appearances only by the power of your desire" (204), and Desiderio's eventual recognition of his own features as being those of Albertina emphasises the illusory nature of his subjectivity which he is nevertheless unable to recognise: "Now I was entirely Albertina in the male aspect [...] I know I looked like Albertina" (199). Desiderio, insofar as he conforms to this model of subjectivity, is driven by his own desires which repeatedly resolve themselves into the desires of others. As he pursues, in Albertina, an object of (his) desire which is constantly shifting, so his own subjectivity becomes unstable, defined as it is by the imputed desire of the object. The subjective instability in desire is emphasised by Deleuze and Guattari:

> Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the *subject* that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression.[11]

This view is opposed by Linda Hutcheon, who argues that "the very notion of desire would seem to presuppose a coherent subjectivity", although she goes on to agree that "desire is clearly problematic". Hutcheon equates desire and its operation with "the realm [...] of Baudrillard's simulacrum", although Baudrillard denies the equation of the alienating process of desire (which is arguably what constitutes Desiderio's

experience of desire) with simulation, because for him alienation is a product of history, and in simulation history is abandoned.[12]

Critics of Hoffman tend to approach the novel through psychoanalysis, a perspective clearly licensed by the title. David Punter notes that the text is organised around "the interplay of Freud and Reich", an approach to the novel's organisation which tends to slip back into the binary structures which the text resists (although I will shortly return to the influence of Reichian theory on this novel), while Ricarda Schmidt concentrates on a sequential reading of the development of the notion of desire through the novel. Both critics, while emphasising the value of historically contextualising the text, ignore the possible relevance of postmodernist theory in approaching this novel.[13] Linda Hutcheon and Brian McHale, on the other hand, use this novel to exemplify certain aspects of postmodernist fiction in their respective classifications. Both comment on the critique of colonial ideology which constitutes one aspect of the text, and McHale refers to Carter's parodically Eurocentric representation of the Africa explored by Desiderio and Albertina as the "imperialism of the imagination". McHale also offers the "ontological confrontation" of Hoffman and the Minister of Determination as an example of what he calls "the *topos* of fantastic invasion and rationalistic resistance", a theme wholly characteristic of magic realist fiction in general, as well as of science fiction.[14]

The ideological poles which engage in this "ontological confrontation" are readable in terms of another aspect of the text

which, I feel, is equally significant in arguing for a postmodernist interpretation, and which is provided by Elaine Jordan's discussion of Hoffman. Jordan argues that "this story is so evocative and so acute in its response to contemporary Western culture" because the war between the rationalist Minister and the revolutionary Hoffman - or rather, between the ideologies they ostensibly represent - "makes the world we live in". In rooting her interpretation in an awareness of the novel's significance for contemporary culture, Jordan emphasises the text's deliberate problematisation of any crude binary interpretation of the relationship between Hoffman and the Minister:

> The Minister can represent both conservative common sense, and Marxist claims to be scientific [...] Hoffman is both the surreal, liberatory opposition to both, and capitalist control of desire through the media.[15]

This ambiguity is arguably less significant in the Minister than in Hoffman. The combination in Hoffman of the offer of absolute freedom and the authoritarian manipulation and regulation of that freedom, and the consequent ambivalence of Desiderio to Hoffman's supposed liberating strategies, is ultimately one of the main themes of the novel, and brings us back to the critique of sixties' idealism which lies behind much of Carter's exploration of the politics of desire. I have already noted the tendency to connect the rise of an identifiable postmodernist ethos with the 'revolutionary' events of 1968 (see Chapter 2), and Ricarda Schmidt suggests that "Dr. Hoffman is a manifestation of the principle of 'L'Imagination au pouvoir' of the 1968 students' revolt".[16]

The connections between this novel and the political eruptions of the 1960s is worthy of attention, if only because Carter's critique of the political idealism of the 1960s focusses upon theoretical positions which were influential at that time but which have since lost currency, being replaced by the more 'rigorous' practices of post-structuralist thought. The initial confrontation between Hoffman's ambassador and the Minister presents itself as an ideological conflict constructed along Reichian lines. The ambassador (later revealed to be Albertina) offers an orthodox Reichian psychoanalytic argument, which the Minister opposes through mechanistic rationalism, an ideology which was an object of criticism in much of Reich's work. The minimal appeal of the Minister's strategy to Desiderio, who "could summon no *interest* in all this" (25 - italics original), perhaps marks Desiderio as a representative of the masses, of whom Reich was, at least at one stage in his bizarre career, a champion. Reich's assertion (in The Mass Psychology of Fascism) of the appeal of fascist ideology to the basic instincts of the masses is clearly parallelled by this appeal of the Minister's overtly authoritarian manouevres to Desiderio. However, Hoffman avoids advocating either Hoffman's or the Minister's viewpoints. The exposure of the Doctor, at the end of the novel, as a "hypocrite" (208), clinging (through the mummified corpse of his dead wife) to a familial and societal structure which his desire machines seek to overthrow, clearly connects him with Reich himself, whose own hypocrisy was described by his son, Peter:

> I'm sorry he [Reich] gave me an attitude toward military authority that was consistent with his paternity [...] but inconsistent with his philosophy.[17]

Furthermore Hoffman's desire machines display clear affinities with Reich's Cloudbusting device, a connection which links Hoffman's ideological viewpoint with the more contestible theories of Reich's later years. In a similar way, the Minister's rationalism is largely abandoned as impracticable and discredited by the end of the novel - Desiderio's assassination of Hoffman is done not so much in the name of order and reason as "unintentionally" (217), an action in self-defence rather than in defence of a rationalist ideology.

Carter's overt use of Reichian theory does, however, draw attention to the novel's implicit critique of 1960s idealism. Hoffman satirises the appeal of Reich's early theories of sexual and political liberation to a generation who felt, however briefly, that they stood on the threshhold of such a liberation; Carter's own sharing of this belief is expressed in "Notes From the Front Line", but the ease with which Hoffman's promises of liberation are revealed to be delusive suggests a more sceptical attitude in this novel. Paul A. Robinson suggests that Reich understood fascism as "only the most highly developed form of a malady which had plagued mankind for centuries, namely mysticism", and ironically it is this "malady" that most of Reich's later work was to suffer from, and which his adherents in the 1960s found most appealing.'[18] The cryptic utterances of Hoffman and his daughter (for example, his first words to her are "I go to the city tomorrow and arrive there yesterday" [199]) indicate the mystification inherent in Hoffman's ideological position, and carry connotations of what Jeff Nuttal has called "the popular idiom" of "the generation war".'[19] Hoffman's ambassador claims that "the Doctor is about to reveal the

entire truth of the cosmogony" (37), an assertion which echoes Reich's claims for his pseudo-science of Orgonomy, which "promised both a total interpretation of reality and a total therapy for man's individual and social ills", and Hoffman's liberation of desire parallels Reich's sexual utopianism.[20] If Carter's attention in this novel to Reichian theory implies its possible relevance to an understanding of the archaeology of postmodernism, Jeff Nuttal's discussion of the late 1960s underground scene reinforces this implication. Nuttal emphasises the loss of the 'Grand Narratives' of meaning which some later theorists of postmodernity (especially Lyotard) have seen as constitutive of the postmodern condition, while at the same time Nuttal emphasises the latent appeal of a potentially totalising theory within this context of loss and fragmentation:

> All former reference points - society, morality, religion - are eradicated, [and] the individual may move to establish his own values and relationships according to his own experience. [...] Sex [...] became a purchase on the spiritual, a direct contact, in orgasm, with whatever might exist that might be called God. The perfect orgasm as studied and preached by Wilhelm Reich, was seen simultaneously as a holy union with the cosmos and a cure for the squares.[21]

Hoffman offers similar securities and assurances ("I alone have discovered the key to the inexhaustible plus" [206], he tells Desiderio), but the political implications of such a totalising ideology are repeatedly foregrounded in the novel - "He might know the nature of the inexhaustible plus", Desiderio ironically comments, "but, all the same, he was a totalitarian" (207). Reich's early conflation of the discourses of psychoanalysis and Marxism (described by Robinson as "quite literally a 'Freudo-Marxism'"[22]), and the related but more

successful attempts of Herbert Marcuse to achieve a similar combination, might be read as early examples of the breakdown of discourse boundaries which later comes to typify postmodernist (and post-structuralist) textuality, and Carter's attention to this intellectual shift emphasises the ultimately monolithic alternatives that political idealism of the late 1960s offered. Marcuse's own monolithic theorisation of Freud and Marx, in Eros and Civilisation, can equally be seen to be criticised through Carter's Dr. Hoffman; as Robinson points out, Eros and Civilisation was "a book of prophecy, outlining in a general fashion the contours of a non-repressive civilisation and the intellectual and practical means by which such a civilisation might be realised", and Hoffman's liberation of desire meets another striking parallel in Marcuse's "resexualised body".[23]

Through both the character of Hoffman and the strategies he pursues, Carter achieves a critique of the sixties' 'revolution' which is simultaneously a critique of the nascent stage of the politically naive postmodernism which is identified by later theorists, and which Carter's later novels continue to engage with. Apart from their revisions of Freud, which prefigure the more pervasive influence of Lacan's "return to Freud", the shared characteristics of the different theories of Reich and Marcuse - their (sometimes mystical) utopianism, their promise of impending liberation through the release of repressed human desire, and their attempts to merge contradictory discourses into unitary ideological structures - can be read as direct pre-cursors of the later manifestations of reactionary postmodernist thought. Variously described as a postmodernism of reaction (Hal Foster), of "the 'anything

goes' variety" (Andreas Huyssen), or as "commercial or 'co-opted' postmodernism" (E. Ann Kaplan), this brand of postmodernism is generally opposed to the 'postmodernism of resistance' which I have argued is more useful to a feminist aesthetic practice, and it is usually associated with the theories of Jean Baudrillard. Indeed, Baudrillard's vision of the contemporary world is in many ways remarkably similar to the world of Desiderio's city as redefined by Dr. Hoffman.[24]

While Desiderio can be understood as a representation of the naive contemporary subject, and his narrative as offering little in the way of critique of his own actions and experiences, the city he inhabits, under Hoffman's assault, might be interpreted from a more critically motivated viewpoint as a representation of the world of late capitalism. Carter's comment that Hoffman "began as an inventory of imaginary cities" would suggest an analogy with Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities, also published in 1972.[25] Another interesting alternative parallel to Carter's novel can be found in the science fiction film Forbidden Planet (1956, dir. Fred Wilcox), in which an alien civilisation has been destroyed, after learning to exploit the forces of the unconscious mind, by "monsters from the id". Forbidden Planet is widely regarded as an adaptation of Shakespeare's The Tempest, and similarly Hoffman, as Desiderio observes (200), can be regarded as a demonic Prospero, "the man who made dreams come true" (199).[26] The destructive effects of Hoffman's strategy of bombarding the citizens with the objects of their own desires are both 'real' (i.e. material) and psychological. While the people suffer "a deep-seated anxiety and a sense of profound melancholy", the social infrastructure of the city is

also damaged: "Trade was at an end. All the factories closed down and there was wholesale unemployment [...] the public services were utterly disorganised" (20). At one point Desiderio implicitly connects the effectiveness of Hoffman's strategies with the economic differentiation between rich and poor; he and the Minister meet Hoffman's Ambassador in a "confidential bar too comfortably redolent of money to be affected by the tempest of fantasy" (31). The implication here, in terms of consumer politics, is that the poor rather than the rich are both targeted and affected by the seductive fantasies offered by the media. The experience of social collapse amid a fantastic proliferation of images in the novel has a clear bearing upon the media-dominated and debt-ridden Western democracies of the late 20th century, and in many respects resembles Baudrillard's interpretation of the consumer age. The basis of Hoffman's attack is to remove the structures of time and space from the city, structures which are embodied in the very fabric of the city:

> Consider the nature of a city. It is a vast repository of time, the discarded times of all the men and women who have lived, worked, dreamed and died in the streets which grow like a wilfully organic thing . . . (17).

The destruction of time, of the separation of past, present and future, is also the loss of these categories, as the city becomes "the kingdom of the instantaneous" (18). Hoffman's materialisation of desires as principally specular entities ("I *saw* them" [18], Desiderio emphasises) is paralleled by Baudrillard's diagnosis of the 1960s/70s prominence of the media:

> Communication is too slow; it is an effect of slowness, working through contact and speech. Looking is much faster; it is the medium of the media, the most rapid one. Everything must come into play instantaneously.[27]

However the tone of Desiderio's narration, and his insistence that "boredom was my first reaction to incipient delirium" (16), suggest that Carter's novel is far from celebratory in its representation of a Baudrillardean postmodernity. The social effects of Hoffman's assault are the most obvious indication of this critical attitude, but it is also detectable in Desiderio's dislike of the Minister's strategies of resistance.

Hoffman's liberation of the id ("For us, the world exists only as a medium in which we execute our desires" [35], his Ambassador states) is countered by the Minister's reinforcement of the super-ego, in the form of the Determination Police, which "looked as if they had been recruited wholesale from a Jewish nightmare" (22). Desiderio's position amid this conflict is one of necessary ambivalence - his boredom with Hoffman's trickery is balanced by his evident reservations (as a character very conscious of his Indian descent) about the pseudo-fascistic policies of the Bureau of Determination. The political extremism of both positions is clearly criticised in the novel, with the implicit advocation of a 'middle line' being, despite its implicitness, the clearest expression so far in Carter's fiction of an ideological position. In order to understand the implications of this position is is necessary to scrutinise Desiderio's ostensibly representative status as a 'general subject' embodying the liberal ideal.

The centrality of his own subjectivity to the novel is emphasised by Desiderio from the outset. His reconstruction of the war is also an

attempt to "unravel my life as if it were so much knitting and pick out from that tangle the single, original thread of my self" (11). But this reliance on the originary point, the single thread of consistent selfhood, is repeatedly challenged by Desiderio's transformations, which locate the ontological focus of the text somewhere beyond the Ambassador's crude opposition of appearance and reality (37). Desiderio's mission to assassinate Hoffman begins with an action which points towards the arbitrariness which will come to characterise his dubious subjectivity: "The computers constructed me an identity sufficiently foolproof to take me past the checkpoints of the Determination Police . . ." (40). The process of constructing a new identity characterises each stage of Desiderio's journey, so that, as the object of his desire shifts through the text from a desire for peacefulness ("I myself had only the one desire [...] for everything to stop" [11]), to a desire for the polymorphous Albertina, and as his own sexuality is alternately confirmed and challenged by his many sexual encounters, the heterosexual structure of masculine desirer and feminine desired which underpins psychoanalytic theory is explicitly linked to the various representations of the (social) construction of the subject. It is this conformity to the structure of (conventional) sexual relations which, while challenged by the implied gender-ambiguity of both Desiderio and Albertina in their representative roles as subject and object of desire, ultimately constitutes one of the consistent threads of his subjectivity, along with his perpetual alienation, which manifests itself as boredom or disaffection. Even in the society of the river people, where he stresses his happiness (77), Desiderio's outsider status is what defines him as a subject, and as an object of the river

people's cannibalistic desire; while in the travelling freakshow, his outsider status is marked by his possession of "the unique allure of the norm" (101).

This alienation is the basis of Paulina Palmer's criticism of Hoffman, which amounts virtually to dismissal:

> [In Hoffman] the point of view is chauvinistically male. The sexual atrocities represented in this novel (and some of them are very brutal indeed) are described by a male narrator. His response is *not one of anger, but of detached curiosity. The fact* that, in the final pages, the atrocities are revealed to be illusions, contrived by the evil Dr. Hoffman and illustrating (parodying perhaps?) misogynistic male fantasies, does not, in my opinion, justify their inclusion in the text.[28]

Palmer's comments are understandable to the extent that Carter has confessed to a tendency towards 'male impersonation' (the Afterword to Love describes that novel as an "almost sinister feat of male impersonation"[29]), but the significance of Desiderio's alienation to the representation of desire in Hoffman needs to be stressed. For Lacan, alienation is the inevitable product of the subject constituted in language and by and through identifications with the Other. The subject is constituted through a split between "the subject of the enunciation" and "the subject of the utterance"[30], and Lacan writes:

> It is in the interval between these two signifiers that resides the desire offered to the mapping of the subject in the experience of the discourse of the Other, of the first Other he has to deal with, let us say, by way of illustration, the mother.[31]

Alienation is the effect of the subject's entrance into the symbolic order of language, a necessary stage in the subject's illusory

construction of itself through recognition of the other. Anika Lemaire summarises the Lacanian position clearly:

> Alienation is the fact of giving up a part of oneself to another. The alienated man lives outside himself, a prisoner of the signifier, a prisoner of his ego's image or of the image of the ideal. He lives by the other's gaze upon him, and he is unaware of this.[32]

The connection in Lacanian theory between alienation and the processes of desire (as an effect of alienation) have a clear bearing on the alienated experiences of Desiderio. Arguably Palmer's description of his attitude as one of "detached curiosity" is an overstatement, as the deadpan narration of his violation by the acrobats of desire might suggest (115). Desiderio's disinterest is explicitly linked to his desire early in the novel:

> Under all my indifferences, I was an exceedingly romantic young man yet, until that time, circumstances had never presented me with a sufficiently grand opportunity to exercise my pent-up passion. [...] That, you see, was why I was so bored. (41)

- and this boredom continues to the end of the novel, when, after having killed Hoffman and Albertina, he remarks, "If you feel a certain sense of anti-climax, how do you think I felt?" (218). David Punter connects this disillusion to Desiderio's status as representative of the 'new youth', a reading which leads back to the novel's critique of sixties' idealism, but this reading largely misses the fact that Desiderio's alienation is mirrored by that of Hoffman, whose "faded weariness" and "depressing ennui" (211) disgusts Desiderio, even if he is too self-blind to see his own attitude in Hoffman. Punter's reading also neglects the connection between desire and alienation which seems to underly

Desiderio's function in the novel.[33] The interplay between illusion and disillusion constitutes his relationship with Albertina, and it is through this relationship that the full extent of Carter's examination of subjectivity through the processes of desire becomes apparent.

It is within his relationship with Albertina that Desiderio's scepticism becomes most seriously compromised. Albertina supplants the earlier manifestations of his desire (his wish for peace, and, more significantly, the visitations of his dead mother [25]) to become the sole object of his desire, but the shape-changing abilities that this function gives her is treated sceptically by Desiderio: "Shape-shifting was so much hocus-pocus to me" (157). Consequently he never approaches a full understanding of the ways desire operates in the novel, even though, ultimately, it is also the process by which he exists as a subject. Albertina explains, through describing the demise of the Count, how the function of desire provides the dynamic of the text:

> His self-regarding 'I' willed himself to become a monster. This detached, external yet internal 'I' was both his dramatist and his audience [...] When he reached a final reconciliation with the projective other who was his self, that icon of his own destructive potential, the abominable black, he had merely perfected that self-regarding diabolism which crushed and flattened the world as he passed through it. (168)

A similar fate awaits Desiderio in his coming confrontation (rather than consummation) with Hoffman and Albertina. His refusal or inability to perceive the extent of his own involvement in the processes to which he believes he is subject is explicitly contradicted by Albertina - "Oh, Desiderio! Never underestimate the power of that desire for which you are named" (167) - and it is at this point that Mary-Ann's earlier

translation of his name as "the desired one" (54) is challenged. "That desire for which you are named" implies desire as an active rather than a passive force, and thus suggests that Desiderio is (as Ricarda Schmidt observes) "the desiring one". At this point in the novel, when Desiderio and Albertina are "Lost in Nebulous Time", Hoffman's control over the objectification of desire has ended (with the loss of the "box of samples" in the landslide which destroyed the travelling fair [119-20]), so "desires must take whatever form they please" (169). It is no coincidence that Desiderio and Albertina are united here - his construction of her as the object of his desire is facilitated by Hoffman's loss of control over his (Desiderio's) desires.

The implied gender ambiguity mentioned earlier is the principle way in which the novel resists the heterosexist bias which the relationship between Desiderio and Albertina would seem to imply. Albertina's first physical appearance is as Hoffman's Ambassador, a male figure who nevertheless arouses Desiderio's desire in an oblique way, and also supports the textual emphasis on identity as above all a construction to be established: "I think he was the most beautiful human being I have ever seen - considered, that is, solely as an object, a construction of flesh, skin, bone and fabric" (32). When he becomes aware, in retrospect, that this was Albertina, Desiderio's desire becomes explicitly sexual: "I was nourishing an ambition - to rip away that ruffled shirt and find out whether the breasts of an authentic woman swelled beneath it" (41), and while the misogyny of statements like this adds fuel to the reservations of critics like Palmer, it is also arguable that Desiderio's desire for Albertina is established through

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his apparently homosexual desire for the Ambassador. Nevertheless the combination of tiresome disaffection, frequent heterosexism and latent (and at times explicit) misogyny which makes Desiderio such an objectionable character needs to be resituated in the context of the novel's cultural critique, in order for it to be read as in many ways a progressive criticism of the effects of these qualities. Furthermore the systematic way in which the text deconstructs the ideological cornerstones of Desiderio's world reinforces the argument that Carter is criticising rather than advocating such an attitude. Palmer's personal distaste at "certain episodes in the novel"[34] seems to miss this element of critique, emphasising instead the melodramatic dimension of these episodes.

Throughout the novel conformity to bourgeois ideology and to the normative gender relations that this ideology supports is repeatedly criticised. The Minister's rationalist approach is mocked by Hoffman's Ambassador, who reduces the conflict to one of the cultural oppositions that underpin it - that between Classical and Romantic ideologies. The Minister's reply - "Somebody must impose restraint" (37) - is equally reductive in its diagnosis of an even more elementary opposition, that between order and disorder. Although theoretically opposed, these two extremes are revealed through the text to be ideologically similar. The text's means of deconstructing these oppositions is the undermining of any difference between the Minister and Hoffman by emphasising instead their similarity. The element which each suppresses is revealed to reside within the ideological framework of the suppressor, so that the Minister is "tainted with a little envy for the very power the Doctor

abused with such insouciance, the power to subvert the world" (28), while Hoffman's "clanking, dull, stage machinery" (201) contradicts his ostensible wizardry. While this and other oppositions in the text are framed by the appearance/reality dyad which constitutes desire and its relation to the subject, it is clear that Carter's critique is aimed at power and its abuse, rather than at any particular ideological formation. Carter's favourite image for this kind of deconstructed opposition is one which emphasises the combination of artifice and nature within illusion. For example, the second exhibit in the peepshow presents "a disturbing degree of life-likeness which uncannily added to the synthetic quality of the image" (45); and the Count "had scarcely an element of realism and yet he was quite real" (123).

But the most consistent attack on the ideology which Desiderio represents comes from the text's repeated exposure of the illusion of coherent subjectivity, and the related establishment of an implied uncertainty concerning gender which is more significant than critics of the novel have acknowledged. The sequence of transformations undergone by Desiderio and Albertina have already been noted, and several of the minor characters who display degrees of subjective instability can be included in this sequence as they constitute manifestations of Desiderio's objectified desire - that is, they are in effect manifestations of Albertina. Mary Ann, the first woman Desiderio encounters on his quest, displays this tendency most clearly. His narcissistic preoccupation with his own image in her mirror causes the first of his 'misreadings' of his own objectified desire: "I do not know if, for a moment, I saw another person glance briefly out of her eyes"

(57), and the implication that this "other person" is Albertina is reinforced later when Mary Ann is shot:

> The second bullet whistled past my ear and, while I watched, shattered the exquisite rind of the dead girl's features so that her blood and brains spattered over my face. (62)

This grossly literal superimposition of the image of the object of desire onto the features of the desirer clearly underlines the specular operation of desire, in its connection between the image (i.e. the features) of the desiring subject and that of the desired object. Similarly the momentary perception of Albertina's face superimposed on that of the gipsy girl (81) marks Desiderio's initial moment of doubt over marrying into the river people - and his eventual understanding that by marrying Aoi he is fulfilling not his own desires, but the desires of the Other (here represented as an alien culture which assimilates him but maintains his difference in its desire for his knowledge) stems from this perception of Albertina as the alternative configuration of the Other. In effect Desiderio is repeatedly offered choices which are not choices at all, but various subjugations to the desires of Others, and his ostensible disinterest becomes, ultimately, an attempt to validate his own lack of control over his (illusory but persistently clung to) status as autonomous subject.

Desiderio's reliance on conventional heterosexual relations as a means of affirming his subjective autonomy, and the text's implicit critique of this reliance, is made clear in the extensive description of the crudely misogynist culture of the centaurs, which is only the most fantastic of many such representations of male-oriented culture. The

text suggests that this entire culture, which is described in meticulous and highly parodic anthropological detail, is an objectification of Desiderio's wayward (because uncontrolled by Hoffman's machines) desires. The situation of the centaur women is firmly secondary to that of the men, who "believed women were born only to suffer" (172). The emphasis on feminine 'inferiority' is reinforced by Desiderio's evident interest in the phallic endowment of the male centaurs, whose "organs were so prodigious" (175). This focus on the phallus is frequently emphasised through the text, from the exposing garments that Desiderio and the Count are forced to wear in the brothel (which "grossly emphasised our manhoods" [130]) to the final fight with Albertina for the possession of a kitchen knife. Albertina's last disguise is as a hermaphrodite technician in her father's laboratory, a role which again emphasises a degree of ambivalence over gender. Her possession of the knife is thus to an extent validated in its symbolic import, while Desiderio's male certainties are threatened. The metaphorically sexual nature of the struggle is emphasised - "We wrestled [...] for possession of the knife as passionately as if for the possession of each other" (216) - and this struggle does in effect enact the endlessly deferred consummation of their relationship by presenting this consummation symbolically. Desiderio's stabbing of Albertina is thus both a symbolic penetration which eliminates the possibility of 'real' (i.e. sexual) penetration, and a confirmation of his own misogynistic tendencies, as his subsequent throwaway comment suggests: "It was a common kitchen knife, such as is used to chop meat fine enough for hamburger and so on" (217).

In conquering Albertina's final manifestation as phallic woman, Desiderio effectively lays to rest an image which has haunted him throughout the novel, and the coincidence of this exorcism with the end of Hoffman and his machinations suggests a connection between the destabilising ontology of Hoffman's strategies and the instability of gender relations which the phallic woman represents. The image of the phallic woman occurs in various guises in nearly every episode of the novel, and points towards the deep-seated fear of femininity (as difference/Other) which underpins the rationalist ideology of the Minister (to which Desiderio eventually nails his colours [195]). Leaving aside Albertina's various male configurations (as the Ambassador, as Lafleur) we can see the phallic woman in Aoi, the daughter of the river people whom Desiderio nearly marries, and who possesses "a clitoris as long as my little finger" (84). As David Punter notes, the fish-doll that she carries makes the transition, in Desiderio's perception of it, from representation (as it is first perceived by Desiderio as a doll), to symbolic (as fish), to real (in its replacement by a knife on the eve of their wedding day).[35] However, in the context of the text's theme of phallic women, the last metamorphosis (into phallic symbol) remains within the realm of the symbolic rather than the real, as the knife symbolises the phallic power that Aoi possesses by virtue of her elongated clitoris, which is, symbolically, a similar threat to Desiderio's masculinity. Similarly Mamie Buckskin, the sharpshooter in the travelling fair, is, like Albertina as hermaphrodite, "a paradox - a fully phallic female with the bosom of a nursing mother and a gun" (108). And in a further

configuration, the chief of the African tribe offers an image of the phallic woman as the monstrous-feminine:

> 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. (160)

The monstrous-feminine also characterises the prostitutes in the House of Anonymity, whose "ideational femaleness took amazingly different shapes though its nature was not that of woman" (132), and it is interesting to note that Carter's description of the prostitutes as "figure[s] in rhetoric" (132) is repeated almost verbatim in "The Loves of Lady Purple", published two years later.[36]

The figure of the phallic woman or the monstrous-feminine, as Jane Gallop observes, represents "the pre-Oedipal mother, apparently omnipotent and omniscient, until the 'discovery of her castration', the discovery that she is not a 'whole' but a 'hole'".[37] This discovery (on the part of the male child) is thus predicated on a fantasy attribution of the pre-Oedipal mother with a penis, which is at once an investment of symbolic power within that organ. Desiderio's frequent encounters with phallic women, combined with his pre-occupation with phallic power in males, points towards his own castration complex - his fear of 'lack' or subjective incompleteness - which his narrative continually suppresses but always returns to, as Carter returns to this theme more extensively in her next novel, The Passion of New Eve.

This implicit questioning of gender and its relationship with subjectivity through an examination of the workings of desire suggests that Ricarda Schmidt's schematic division of Carter's 'trilogy' is more problematic than it might at first appear. Schmidt argues that each of the three novels focusses on "one dominant aspect" of "essentialist, humanist notions of the subject": "desire in Hoffman, gender in Eve and free womanhood in Circus".[36] It is clear that Hoffman also offers a nascent critique of gender divisions through its analysis of desire, and we shall see in the next chapter how the theorisation of desire contributes to Eve's analysis of gender construction and, equally importantly, its critique of sexuality (an aspect of this novel which Schmidt underemphasises[37]), and subsequently how notions of free womanhood are related to and even undermined by the operations of gender and desire in Nights at the Circus. This is to say that the continuities in Carter's fiction extend beyond the shared project of criticising the bourgeois subject, into a sustained examination of how the various elements which serve to construct the subject interact and conspire to maintain the illusion of subjectivity, even within a historical period in which they are suffering a continual process of debunking.

The degree of postmodernist experimentation in Hoffman becomes clear when one considers the connections between the gender ambiguitites of Desiderio and his various objects of desire, and the genre ambiguities of the text itself, which offers pastiches of the picaresque, the fantastic, the detective thriller, science fiction, Gothic horror and romance, as well as parodies of anthropological and philosophical treatises, and a host of allusions to literary and non-literary texts,

all of which serve to emphasise the textuality of Desiderio's narrative and of his experience (as the emphasis on the process of 'writing life' at the beginning and the end of the novel would suggest). Intertextual displacement thus mimics the movement of desire within the text, and suggests that Carter's fictional strategies, in escaping the pull towards social realism of her earlier novels, are now engaging with the process of narrative as a configuration of desire. Desiderio's journey is also the journey of the text - his text - which is constructed out of the endless displacement of desire into narrative and linguistic figures (a process repeated in the subsequent novels, discussed in Chapters 5 and 6). The picaresque structure of Carter's later fiction becomes, in this reading, the orchestration of the forces of desire into a narrative structure which facilitates the exploration of how the action of desiring, gender and subjectivity are constructed in and through narrative strategies. Movement, enabled in and by the picaresque structure, affords the possibility of representing the movement of desire through language, and the precarious *positioning of the desiring* subject in language, which, in movement, becomes perpetually displaced and alienated.

This foregrounded intertextuality also has a direct bearing on the novel's basis in an exploration of different ontological worlds. Brian McHale points out that "Postmodernist fiction [...] foregrounds the ontological dimension of the confrontation amongst discourses, thus achieving a polyphony of *worlds*"[40] (McHale's emphasis). "Our primary difference is a philosophical one" (35), the Ambassador tells the Minister, and this grounding of the text's flights of fancy on a

conflict of different ontologies provides the point of separation between Carter's earlier experimentation with different modes of representation and her later focus on normatised gender and subjectivity. The opposition between the Minister's rationalism and Hoffman's anti-rationalism opens up a space between the extreme manifestations of these ideological positions, which is the area in which Carter's critical evaluation of their respective assumptions and claims can be situated. In Hoffman's metaphor, it is the gap between signifier and signified which allows interpretation, the "shadow" between "the word and the thing described" (194). It is this space, which in The Loves of Lady Purple Carter calls "the dark country where desire is objectified and lives", that Carter's later novels inhabit.[41]

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28. Paulina Palmer,"From Coded Mannequin to Bird Woman: Angela Carter's Magic Flight", in Sue Roe (ed.), Women Reading Women's Writing, pp. 179-205; p. 190.
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36. Carter, Fireworks, p. 32.
37. Jane Gallop, Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction, p. 22. For a more extended discussion of Carter's use of the figure of the monstrous-feminine, see John Sears, Angela Carter's Monstrous Women.
38. Schmidt, "Journey", p. 56.
39. David Punter does, however, suggest this connection; see "Supersessions", p. 28.
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Chapter 6: Gender and Postmodernism: *The Passion of New Eve.*

> I haven't interrupted Evelyn - she's unstoppable,
> a machine - and she continues talking.
> Brett Easton Ellis, American Psycho.

The Passion of New Eve (hereafter referred to as New Eve) presents Carter's first extended examination of the problem of gender. It offers a critique of essentialism which rests uneasily with some feminist ideologies, and at certain points in the novel these ideologies seem to suffer direct parody. *Consequently this novel has been ambiguously* received, and its contribution to the postmodernism/feminism debate has on occasions been overlooked. Paulina Palmer, for example, chooses to largely ignore it (along with The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman) in her otherwise comprehensive survey of Carter's work, and her passing criticism of the novel notes its "satirical" representation of the theme of feminine community.[1] This tendency to dismiss what is arguably Carter's most sustained attack on patriarchal values and literary conventions will be addressed below - first, it is necessary to survey those critics who offer a more extensive engagement with the novel.

Brian McHale describes New Eve as a "quasi-science-fiction picaresque novel", a description which emphasises the ambivalence which dominates the novel.[2] It is both a science-fiction novel and a cultural document, a critique of the cultural construction and investment of signs and an experiment with narrative authority, a picaresque adventure and an elegy for the end of a world. Ultimately the novel offers an

exploration of gender and the construction of gender difference, through an analysis of cultural myths and their modes of operation. The novel charts the adventures of the narrator, Evelyn, whose journey to a nightmarish postmodern New York becomes a journey of sexual conquest. His passionate relationship with Leilah, and his subsequent abandonment of her, sterile after aborting his child, forces him to leave the city for the desert, where he is kidnapped by an army of feminist guerillas who proceed to surgically alter him, transforming him into the "New Eve". His escape and subsequent adventures in the desert constitute a series of encounters with allegorised ideal societies, against an apocalyptic backdrop of nuclear conflict. Throughout these adventures Eve, as Evelyn now is, is compared with Tristessa, a semi-mythical filmstar whose disappearance many years earlier has never been solved, and the meeting of Eve and Tristessa (who represents ideal femininity but is in fact a man in drag) brings together Carter's dual focus on both the social construction of femininity and on the illusory nature of essential identity. This dual focus is set against the background of a series of scenarios in which the fiction of subjectivity is enacted - the transition from a seemingly 'given' condition (that of the masculine 'norm') through the process of "becoming-woman", with which the novel is thematically concerned - for Deleuze and Guattari, "becoming-woman" is the process necessary to an achievement of resistance to "any mode of representation presented by any dominant majority". While there are problems with Deleuze and Guattari's theorising of this necessity, it is clear that Carter's text revolves around an exploration of what "becoming-woman" might involve.[3] My examination of New Eve will centre on this exploration and assess its relevance to the critiques of

essentialism which the text also offers. Ultimately the question arises: what is this "woman" that Evelyn becomes? How is she constructed, and how is she organised by and in relation to the discursive practices she is exposed to?

A plot summary such as that above can scarcely do justice to the complexities and subtleties of Carter's novel, nor can it convey a sense of the (at times heavily ironic) narrative grandeur through which Carter addresses her themes. At the same time, however, the first-person narration seems distanced from the action, so that a sense of impersonality and even absurdity is frequently detectable in the pseudo-passivity of the narrating voice. Elaine Jordan comments on the narration in Eve, noting that

> Eve is a narrative device, as passive as Desiderio because like him she is a way for the reader to pass through possible options, as it were experimentally.[4]

The act of narration itself is highly problematical in this novel, as David Punter emphasises when he writes of his own difficulties in reading the novel:

> As a male reader, I find myself the victim of illusions. Although I am aware that Carter is a woman [...] I nonetheless find that the first-person narration of Evelyn/Eve appears to me throughout, no matter what the overt sex of the new Messiah at the time, as a masculine narrative. When Evelyn becomes Eve, my experience is of viewing a masquerade; I read Eve still through the male consciousness (Evelyn's) of what he has become.[5]

Arguably Punter is the victim of a further twist in this narrative confusion, because the entire novel can be read as written retrospectively from Eve's (post-operative) point of view; the narration

of Evelyn is thus the narration of Eve describing her life as him. Given that the text deals explicitly with essentialist ideas of gender, it is perhaps inappropriate to assign gendered voices to the narrative - Carter's style, deliberately using pastiche and irony, works hard to efface any distinctly gendered narrative tone. In this way, New Eve represents a progression from the overtly masculine voice of Desiderio's narrative, although Carter is presenting what is in effect a similar argument - that the images of femininity which predominate in Western culture are constructs of male desire, and that the claims of both genders to stability are undermined by the relationship between desire and its representation.

Ricarda Schmidt emphasises this focus upon desire and its representation when she notes that New Eve "explores the function of symbols".[6] Most of the characters in the novel occupy allegorical positions and can be read as symbolic rather than naturalistic - indeed, any approach to the novel which relies upon realism will encounter a serious challenge. New Eve is not, however, magic realist in the way The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman or "The Loves of Lady Purple" were. Instead, Carter takes certain elements of science-fiction - an impending apocalypse, advanced surgical techniques, anti-authoritarian guerilla warfare - and parodies them. Myth and monstrosity, staples of fantasy fiction, undergo similar treatment, as do the discourses of cultural analysis and of political oration. Intertextuality becomes the predominant mode of operation, and this is perhaps Carter's most densely allusive text, a description which is perhaps borne out by the range of themes and elements which the novel's critics have focussed on. David

Punter argues that "the symbolic heart" of the novel "has to do with mirroring", while Ricarda Schmidt examines the novel's treatment of "patriarchal symbols of femininity". Natalie Rosinsky argues that "Carter's donnee [is] the question of personal as opposed to gender identity". Elaine Jordan emphasises how New Eve articulates women's irreversible entry into "any adequate account of history", while Brian McHale suggests that the novel offers "what may be the paradigmatic representation of America as the zone" ("the zone" being a metaphor for "the heterotopian space of postmodernist writing").[7] Carter herself has argued that the novel says "some quite specific things about the cultural production of femininity", and it is this particular emphasis that I want to begin with, as most of the other possible focusses seem to ultimately coalesce around this principle preoccupation.[8]

New Eve offers, in its picaresque structure, a sequence of encounters with images of the feminine which are repeatedly revealed to be illusory. These encounters take place, as I have already noted, against a series of backgrounds which emphasise subjective fictionality by presenting degrees of alienation - thus the city, the desert, the operating theatre, the 'hall of mirrors' and the 'cave of making' operate to destabilise in various ways (which will be discussed below) any subjective certainty that Evelyn/Eve achieves. Conventional images of femininity are challenged throughout the text: Leilah's apparently passive, victim-like femininity is revealed to be a guise of her role as agent of the coming feminist revolution; Eve's paradigmatic femininity is purely constructed from media images and cultural models; Tristessa's screen image of pure femininity is an illusion, a mask for his

masculinity; Mother's archetypal phallic womanhood is surgically constructed and exaggerated; the women of Zero's harem are telescoped representations of a conventional, passive femininity; and the old woman whom Eve and Lilith encounter at the end of the novel is a parodic representation of stereotyped femininity, smeared with make-up and rolling drunk. This gallery of constructed women is parallelled, although to a much lesser degree, by the men in the novel - Evelyn's misogynistic masculinity is virtually self-parodic and is 'punished' by his transformation into Eve (and one of the text's recurring questions concerns why this transformation should be perceived as a punishment), while Tristessa offers an equally ambiguous representation of manhood. Between these two trans-gendered beings lies Zero, whose excessively stereotyped masculinity is almost purely parodic, although no less terrifying for being so.

The short introductory chapter of the novel offers an insight into how these constructions will be treated by the rest of the text. Evelyn's (I will assume for convenience's sake that Evelyn narrates until his transformation, when Eve takes over) lyrical account of Tristessa's film career and her influence on his youth is punctuated by the context, a visit to "a crowded cinema" with an unnamed girl. The overwhelming sense of this chapter is one of falsity; Tristessa's falsity ("all you signified was false"[3]), the material illusion of the film itself, the photograph of the ('real'?) Tristessa which "shocked and bewildered" (7) young Evelyn, and the false climax of the film ("Wuthering Heights") which is matched by Evelyn's climax during fellatio with the forgotten girl:

> My gasps were drowned by the cheers and applause of the unruly section of the audience as Tyrone Power, in too much hair-cream for a convincing Heathcliff, roared his grief over a cardboard moor in a torrent of studio rain. (9)

Falsity is continued in Evelyn's descriptions of himself, which point towards tendencies which could be described as psychopathic but which are delivered in a deadpan style which undermines their seriousness: "Sometimes I'd amuse myself by tying a girl to the bed before I copulated with her. Apart from that, I was perfectly normal" (9). This effacement of narrative reliability could, as I have argued, be attributed to the ironising presence of Eve's retrospective narration - at least, we are presented with a narrator who is clearly unreliable. Evelyn's abandonment to "nostalgia, to the ironic appreciation of the revisited excesses of [Tristessa's] beauty" (8), signifies the postmodern dimension of the novel's opening. "When the real is no longer what it used to be", writes Baudrillard, "nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality".[10] Evelyn's world is one of signifiers of a lost reality, a perpetual indulgence in nostalgia which corresponds to a loss of the material present and which conceals an underlying quest for origins (a theme of the novel which I will address shortly); the 'ideal' Tristessa overrides the 'real' girl, and the simulated sexuality of the audience/film relationship - the cathartic passion of "Wuthering Heights" and of Tristessa's "luminous presence" (5) - is collapsed into the purely phallic pleasure of fellatio, to be rudely interrupted by the intrusion of the fellatrix into this relationship. Her humanity, symbolised in her unexplained tears, causes "furious embarrassment" (9)

in Evelyn, a reaction which implicitly prefigures the phallic impotence which awaits him. The relation between genders, between the overtly misogynistic masculinity of Evelyn and the idealised/derogated femininity of Tristessa and the girl, is foregrounded as one of mutual self-deception - Evelyn's masculinity is as reliant upon his ideals of womanhood, and the symbols which conventionally constitute it, as it relies on his 'authority' for its own existence. The distinction between creator and created, implicit and ultimately structural in Carter's earlier novels, is here approaching a collapse which effaces any distinction. New Eve offers a deconstruction of the relationship between genders as it is conventionally perceived by patriarchal ideology. As Natalie Rosinsky notes, the opening of New Eve ensures that "we begin our reading of this text with a statedly critical outlook".[11]

This critical outlook is not, however, shared with the Evelyn who arrives in New York as a "tender little milk-fed English lamb" (9). Evelyn's naivety, and the awareness of this naivety which is demonstrated by his ironised and overtly retrospecting narrating voice, offers a judgement on Evelyn's actions in New York which is not immediately apparent on first reading the novel. Alan Wilde suggests that postmodern irony suspends judgement upon that which is represented:

> Confronted with the world's randomness and diversity, it enacts (*urbi et orbi*) [an] attitude of suspensiveness which [...] implies the tolerance of a fundamental uncertainty about the meanings and relations of things in the world and in the universe.[12]

The New York of New Eve offers a classic example of such a confrontation - Carter's postmodern version of 'the city of dreadful night' is anti-

technological, "a lurid, Gothic darkness" (10) with more in common with the Los Angeles of Ridley Scott's Bladerunner or the Gotham City of Batman than with the "clean, hard, bright city" (10) of Evelyn's expectations. The city paradigmatically figures the postmodern world through which Evelyn journeys - it is an ideological battleground for the minority terrorist movements of "the Blacks" and "the Women" (11), an arena of random violence (the death of the Czech alchemist occurs while Evelyn buys milk from a supermarket [18]), and a space in which the rational no longer operates. The alchemist creates a gold ingot from base metal, and this single example of magic realism emphasises the paradox of this postmodern city, the co-existence of chaos and beauty. The city itself is labyrinthine, the first of many such spatial metaphors for the endlessly circling quest for truth in this novel. Elizabeth Wilson writes of the city (in a non-specific sense) as "the contemporary labyrinth: the city that must be the setting for all such journeys of discovery", and indeed it is possible to read Evelyn's journey as a continual failure to escape the city and all that it signifies.[13] Each new arena in which he finds himself - the desert, Beulah, Zero's harem, Tristessa's glass house, the cave - offers a reiteration of the essentially labyrinthine structure which he initially encounters in New York.

The conflict of discourses within this labyrinth is both an "intoxicating rhetoric" (14) and a menacing proliferation of signs lacking signifieds: "The city was scribbled all over with graffiti in a hundred languages expressing a thousand griefs and lusts and furies" (12). Evelyn's situation within this unstable situation is that of

outsider, precariously clinging to a threatened subjective position. His means of stabilising his position are wholly conventional - he finds an Other against which to define himself. As his naive Englishness is bewildered and seduced by the city, so his naive masculinity is seduced by Leilah, the perfect Other (dark and female) to Evelyn's white male self. In a series of metonymic shifts the text equates the city with chaos and death, and Leilah with "the profane essence of the death of cities" (18); her seduction of Evelyn signifies the end of his supposed innocence. Any pretence at objectivity ceases, and his narrative becomes a sustained process of self-definition. Ricarda Schmidt identifies Leilah as "the incarnation of woman as the temptress", a reading which hints at the significance of Leilah to the textual project of deconstructing essentialism.'[14] Leilah is a temptress insofar as she can be identified with the Gothic seduction of the city. Where the puppet Lady Purple signified a male fantasy of feminine seduction, Leilah offers an ironised version of this; her seduction of Evelyn is not his destruction, but the revelation of the Phallic economy which defines him and by which he perceives the world. As he pursues her through the night under "the wasted city moon" (20), they together enact the process of deferral which later becomes the driving force of Evelyn's quest:

> So she led me deep into the geometric labyrinth of the heart of the city, into an arid world of ruins and abandoned construction sites, the megapolitan heart that did not beat any more. (21)

The heart of the city is strikingly similar to "the excoriated towers of the architectless town" (43) of the desert, in which Evelyn finds an incongruous, dying albatross - the symbolic connection between Leilah and this bird, with its poetic resonance, is ironic in that it is

initially Evelyn's own metaphor, a product of his inability to perceive Leilah in any terms other than those of the patriarchal misogynist which he is. At the climax of the seduction, Evelyn is consumed by his own symbolic status, and renders Leilah as symbolic in a way which accommodates his own obsessions: "I was nothing but cock, and I dropped down on her like, I suppose, a bird of prey" (25). Leilah's status as temptress, image of seductive feminine sexuality, reduces Evelyn to the correlative status of pure phallic symbol, a synecdoche Carter has already played with in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman.[15] The masculine economy which Evelyn's phallic status signifies is also that which defines and enthralls Leilah ("I never knew a girl more a slave to style" [31], Evelyn remarks), and his bestial desire for his "prey" is reiterated in his repeated representations of Leilah as a beast. She seems "more like a demented bird than a woman, [...] a strange, bird-like creature plumed with furs, [...] a fully-furred creature, a little fox pretending to be a siren, [...] entirely the creature of this undergrowth" (19-21). This persistent denial of her humanity is balanced by an emphasis on her mythically feminine qualities - she is the seductress, the witch and the succubus (27) - "once a night she witched me" (29) - and as such she is the epitome of feminine otherness. Leilah's significance in the novel, beyond her functional role of delimiting Evelyn's destructive misogyny, lies in her pseudo-archetypal representation of chaos - in Catherine Clement's words, she is "[t]he feminine figure who crystallizes around herself the swirling glances of a threatened culture. And not far away - revolutionary myths, the figure of liberty".[16] The liberty which Leilah figures is dual - her role in the seduction and transformation of Evelyn, in the feminist

project of which he is the subject, does not become apparent until later. At this stage, she offers a series of clues to the process of constructing identity which become significant in the context of Carter's critique of essentialism.

Leilah's relationship with Evelyn is enacted in almost purely transactional terms - another way of understanding her is to read her as representing woman as commodity. Evelyn describes her as "Leilah, the night's gift to me, the city's gift" (25), and his first reported speech *to her seeks not to establish her name* (still at this stage unknown to him) but her position in the socio-economic system: "How do you earn a living, Leilah?" (26). Luce Irigaray, in This Sex Which is Not One, suggests that "heterosexuality is nothing but the assignment of economic roles", and Leilah's employment as "naked model" (26) confirms her commodity status within the patriarchal economy which still structures the collapsing city.[17] Evelyn first meets her in a shop, a place of transactions, and she subsequently becomes, as far as he is concerned, his possession: "the crucible of chaos had delivered her to me for my pleasure, for my bane, and so I gave her Baroslav's gold" (27). Evelyn's payment of gold completes his part of what seems to be an economic transaction, and Leilah becomes the object of his wilful abuse. "She seemed to me a born victim" (28), he remarks, before proceeding to demonstrate how the patriarchy for which he stands requires the subservient Other to define it. Evelyn's illusions concerning his own complicity in Leilah's derogation are emphasised by his transference of agency onto her; for him "she systematically carnalised herself and became dressed meat" (31) - a turn of phrase which recalls Desiderio's

killing of Albertina with a butcher's knife. Leilah represents a paradigm of the marginalised feminine Other, constituting in economic, mythic and sexual terms the passive 'victim' against which patriarchy asserts its characteristically active authority.

The major way in which Carter emphasises Leilah's significance is in the explicit connection between the girl and the mirror. As David Punter suggests, New Eve is much concerned with mirroring; and Punter's description of the process of the mirror stage which Leilah undergoes is particularly succinct:

> Leilah's existence as whore is predicated on an everyday refraction of herself into the perceived Other, in which shape she figures male fantasies as she arrays herself in the form of the totally fleshly; her self slides away in a haze of narcotics and she reimplants herself nightly before the mirror, a self-creation of painted nipples and erotic furs.'[8]

It is this gap between the 'real' self and the fictional, constructed self which Carter's novel is examining and emphasising. The Lacanian mirror stage becomes a moment of illusory reassertion of identity, a moment which coincides with sexual climax, in Evelyn's egocentric interpretation of it: "So aroused was I by her ritual incarnation [...] that I always managed to have her, somehow, at the last minute" (31). The process of constructing an identity is, as Punter observes, also the process of figuring male desire. This becomes clearest when Evelyn contemplates the mirror's function in a lengthy passage which exemplifies his narcissistic engagement with the figures of his own desire:

> To watch her dressing herself, putting on her public face, was to witness an inversion of the ritual disrobing to which she would

> later submit her body for, the more clothed she became, the more vivid became my memory of her nakedness and, as she watched me watching the assemblage of all the paraphernalia that only emphasised the black plush flanks and crimson slit beneath it, so she, too, seemed to abandon her self in the mirror, to abandon her self to the mirror, and allowed herself to function only as a fiction of the erotic dream into which the mirror cast me. (30)

From Evelyn's point of view, the abandonment of self has always already occured, as Leilah exists only as a collection of synecdochal parts (again characteristic of the Lacanian mirror stage) signifying a false wholeness which nevertheless represents his desire in the form of the Other. The "fiction of the erotic dream" supplants the materiality of their sexual relationship, enabling Evelyn to slip away from any real recognition of Leilah's subjectivity. To reduce her to a "function" of this dream is merely to reiterate her status as object to his defining subject.

Evelyn's apparent passivity, or the transference of his subjective power onto the impersonal surface of the mirror, emphasises the importance of the mirror as a screen upon which desires are projected, rather than as an agency which constructs desires. The voyeuristic contemplation of the dressing woman is also the displacement of the contemplating subject, via the "fiction" of the mirror, into the same act of concealment which the dressing woman performs. Evelyn's subjectivity, at the moment it seems to assert its presence in the intensity of the erotic experience, is merely a product of the mirror-illusion of subjectivity. The act of 'possession' ("I always managed to have her somehow" [31]) implies a preceding lack in the supposedly experiencing subject, a lack that can only be filled by the action of

possessing that which has already been denied subjectivity - the Other which supposedly constitutes the self by virtue of its being non-self. It is through Leilah's overtly constructed identity, and the schizoid duality which results from this construction (her 'public' and 'private' selves) that the constructed identity of the narrating voice becomes apparent. Leilah's reliance on the mirror to confirm her identity is ultimately a representation - a displacement - of Evelyn's reliance on her to confirm his identity - that which she is, he is not. Luce Irigaray's economic definition of feminine duality is appropriate to Leilah's position: "*A commodity - a woman - is divided into two irreconcilable 'bodies';* her 'natural' body, and her socially valued exchangeable body, which is a particularly mimetic expression of masculine values".[19] The intrusion of Leilah's 'natural' body into the system of exchange which has constituted their relationship signifies its end.

In the face of Evelyn's impending abandonment of her, Leilah turns, in his perception of her, from sorceress to hysteric: "Her eyes rolled until they were all whites [...] she demanded in a hysterical falsetto that I marry her [...] It seemed her pregnancy had unhinged her" (32). Catherine Clement has theorised the "ambiguous" feminine role of sorceress/hysteric, which she argues, is "anti-establishment, and conservative at the same time".[20] Leilah's wholly conventional, reasonable and pathetic expectations of Evelyn are not, in this novel, signifiers of feminine weakness, but act as indexes to the extent of Evelyn's brutality - her hysteria is his reaction to it as much as her own reaction. As hysteric, her bewitching powers diminish when

confronted with the material reality of her situation. As she had ritually donned it, she ritually abandons her socially determined identity ("She took her case of cosmetics, flung up the sash of the window and tipped all out into the street below" [32]), and demands instead an alternative but still male-oriented accession to the social, through marriage. Evelyn's refusal leads inexorably to a last attempt to reassert the sorceress's power, via the botched abortion at the hands of a "Voodoo abortionist accustomed to sacrifice a cock before each operation" (34). The irony of this touch is rich - Evelyn's coming sacrifice in his own operation is made all the more significant when we recall that he was "nothing but cock" (25) at the moment of his consummation with Leilah. At this stage, Evelyn escapes this symbolic sacrifice, and instead Leilah's female organs are the victim - a hysterectomy to punish the hysteric. Again, Evelyn's own endowment with the same organs later in the novel adds layers of ironic comment upon his actions, but the removal of Leilah's biologically female organs adds a further twist to the novel's critique of gender, in that the essentialist argument is challenged at a biological as well as a cultural level. The question arises, is Leilah still a woman despite her hysterectomy, and her reappearance later in the novel as one of the feminist guerillas suggests an answer which opposes any synecdochal reduction of femininity to a combination of (biological/cultural) parts which combine to produce a whole.

Evelyn's apparent escape, from Leilah and her avenging mother and from the city, is ultimately for him a flight from the seducer, but it is not an escape from the very real crimes he has committed. His final

condemnation of her emphasises the importance of these crimes, and his metaphorisation of her influence as "the slow delirious sickness of femininity, its passivity, its narcissism" (37) indicates the degree of self-blindness (another aspect of subjectivity which the text implicitly criticises) which his own narcissism has engendered. The escape becomes, in this rejection of Leilah, the beginning of the quest for "that most elusive of all chimeras, myself" (38).

The text which Carter chooses to base her representation of the quest for identity on is T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets, allusions to which resound throughout New Eve. Carter's novel is structured around two moments of disjunction which operate to disturb the ostensibly teleological process of questing by offering false endings; *Evelyn's* castration and Tristessa's exposure enact Eliot's repeated theme in East Coker, "In my beginning is my end/In my end is my beginning";[21] similarly Carter's use of the imagery of circles and descent to represent the metaphysical nature of Evelyn's quest recalls Dante's Inferno, a text frequently referred to in Eliot's poetry. As Dante placed Judas Iscariot at the bottom of his hell, so Carter's moments of apparent conclusion are also moments of betrayal, of the deferral of meaning at the moment when it seems most present. Evelyn's insistence on the pursuit of the quest constitutes his last 'free' choice, although the text later implies that even this move has been determined; the element of determinism which permeates this part of the narrative indicates a degree of paranoia on the part of the questor which points in turn towards a failure of self-recognition - a further irony in a

novel explicitly concerned with achieving self-recognition. "Descend lower", narrates Evelyn to himself,

> descend the diminishing spirals of being that restore us to our source [...] towards the core of the labyrinth within us [...] Descend lower. You have not reached the end of the maze yet. (48-9)

This is self-address, an allusion to Eliot's Burnt Norton, but it also reminds the reader of the critical attitude that is required; the journey into the desert is an act of abandonment, a turn towards purity and internal contemplation. As I have noted, the desert is described in terms which recall the city, and this connection has been made by Baudrillard, for whom "the extensive banality of deserts" corresponds to "the equally desert-like banality of a metropolis". Baudrillard's comments on the American desert are interesting in the context of Carter's novel; he goes on to write:

> America always gives me a feeling of real asceticism. Culture, politics - and sexuality too - are seen exclusively in terms of the desert, which here assumes the status of a primal scene.[22]

The desert, for Baudrillard, is, according to Peter Nicholls, "a liberation fom 'melancholy European analyses' into a freedom which is now a condition not of the inner self but of the subject as consumer".[23] The Englishman Evelyn's journey into the desert is also a movement away from the European past - he decides not to go South because "there were too many ghosts of Europe in the bayous" (38) - and can thus be read as an attempt to escape history, in the broadest sense of patriarchal tradition and the violently patriarchal actions he leaves behind but also in the sense of the historically defined subject. Evelyn's quest is thus in itself paradoxical, being in many ways both a search for and

an escape from the self. For Evelyn, the desert does "assume the status of a primal scene" in which his escape from the Other becomes redefined as his 'discovery' of the Other within his self. One of the clues to this process comes earlier, during his final emotive struggle with Leilah:

> She was a perfect woman; like the moon, she only gave reflected light. She had mimicked me, she had become the thing I wanted of her, so that she could make me love her, and yet she had mimicked me so well she had also mimicked the fatal lack in me that meant I was not able to love her because I myself was so unlovable. (34)

The symbolic 'lack' in Evelyn, his coming castration, is what his flight from otherness leads to. Signified by Leilah's imitation of him, it points towards his own imitation of himself, his own 'desire of the Other'. Evelyn's illusory and unstable subjectivity is exposed, in his own unwilling re-enactment of the primal scene, to be a mirror image of the schizoid duality which Leilah figures, a paradox of which Evelyn is retrospectively aware: "I did not know I was speeding towards the very enigma I had left behind - the dark room, the mirror, the woman" (39).

In the desert, which is "a landscape that matched the landscape of my heart" (41), Evelyn finds the albatross, a moment of potential self-discovery as he evinces a pity that was lacking in the city; but this minor moment of revelation is displaced by his immediate capture, at which point his destiny is finally removed from his own hands. What began as a quest for the self, then, becomes a process of discovery of the otherness of the self, of the transformation from constructed masculine subject to constructed feminine object.

Evelyn's forcible abduction in the desert is effectively a removal from one pseudo-city to another. Beulah, the "Women's Town" (81), is everything Evelyn expected New York to be - clean, ordered and highly technological. In fact it ironically figures a typically masculine world, a contradiction (given its explicitly matriarchal political structure) which will become important later in the text. Unfortunately for Evelyn, it is also a classic dystopia, an ideologically rigid world in which he is entirely Other, and which subjects him to the most intimate and irresistable of assaults. As David Punter points out, Carter largely ignores the Blakean Beulah except to parody it, although she does exploit Blake's emphasis on the femininity of Beulah:

> There is from Great Eternity a mild and pleasant rest
> Nam'd Beulah, a soft Moony Universe, feminine. lovely,
> Pure, mild & Gentle . . . [24]

"The daughters of Beulah follow sleepers in all their Dreams", Blake continues, and the fact that Leilah is the daughter of the monstrous Mother Evelyn encounters in the matriarchal city suggests the extent of Carter's exploitation of Blake. Beulah is also reminiscent of Calvino's city of Zobeide, which is constructed according to a communal dream of a city through which a woman was pursued. Like Carter's Beulah, Zobeide is an "ugly city", a "trap".[25] Through these allusions, Evelyn's quest for his self becomes more emphatically a quest for the feminine Other, a pursuit of womanhood disguised as the search for a masculine ideal, although he can only recognise this ironically in retrospect.

As is Carter's New York, Beulah is a "crucible" (49), but not of chaos; rather, it is an arena in which elements are mixed into

compounds, in which opposites mingle and become one - "the place where contrarieties exist together" (48). It is here that Evelyn's quest rèveals its true trajectory, a spiralling regression which seems neither forwards nor backwards, but which is represented through a regression to childhood and beyond, to the womb. "I broke down and think I must have called for my mother" (51), he confesses after his capture and imprisonment, and the responding cheers of the unseen women bring the point home forcibly: "No humiliation like a child's humiliation" (51). Natalie Rosinsky points out that "in this satiric description of Beulah's "Women", Carter lampoons what is only one segment of a significant movement in contemporary feminism" (13). The separatist, gynocentric essentialists of Carter's Beulah suffer precisely the same ruthless satirisation as does Zero's essentialist masculinity - the object is to ridicule not feminism but essentialism. The point is emphasised by the programming procedure that the New Eve undergoes, which contradicts Mother's assertion that "To be a *man* is not a given condition but a continuous effort" (63), a dictum which is echoed by Baudrillard when he writes "One can hypothesize that the feminine is the only sex, and that the masculine only exists by a superhuman effort to leave it".[26] The essentialism which Baudrillard controversially gestures toward is Carter's target - the privileging of one sex or gender over another, and the accompanying establishment of the privileged gender as 'natural'. Such a position is conventional in sceptical feminist thought - for example, Toril Moi argues that the terms 'female', 'feminine' and 'feminists' "are not essences. They are categories we as readers or critics operate". Gender becomes the focal point of Evelyn's quest for identity, and behind Carter's critique lies the Freudian dictum that

"Anatomy is Destiny, to vary a saying of Napoleon's", with its implicit self-irony drawn to the fore.[27] The closer Evelyn gets to discovering himself, the more that self is revealed to be culturally determined, a construct concealing the absence of essential identity.

Evelyn, imprisoned in Beulah, responds like Kafka's Josef K. in The Trial, unable to comprehend the crimes for which he is being punished, and yet profoundly suffering despite his professed innocence. At this point the mythological references which permeate the novel undergo a marked shift, from the supernatural iconography associated with Leilah to the Classical and mystical allusions of the Beulah Women. This shift serves to foreground the artificiality of myth itself, and the ease with which myth can be enthralled to serve particular ideological interests. Evelyn's mystification of Leilah is thus parallelled with (but also separated from) the Women's mystification of their own ideological prejudices. On one level this difference is understood by Evelyn: "In Beulah, myth is a made thing, not a found thing" (56), he narrates. But the significance lies in how this difference illuminates Evelyn's own tendency towards mystification. Several of the myths explicitly referred to in Beulah - Oedipus (560, Faust (60) and the Christian creation myth (63) - emphasise the cultural association between transgression and punishment which Evelyn eventually begins to comprehend as in some way applicable to him. "I guessed that, somewhere in the darkness and confusion of the city, I had transgressed and now I must be punished for it" (74), he writes, as if the signals were not clear enough. Evelyn's continuing self-blindness offers a further ironic comment on his ostensible quest for self-awareness.

Evelyn's encounter with Mother is represented as one possible closure of his journey, but that closure is also, characteristically, a deferral of closure:

> She is the destination of all men, the inaccessible silence, the darkness that glides, at the last moment, always out of reach; [...] beyond time, beyond imagination, always just beyond, a little way beyond the fingertips of the spirit. (58-9)

She represents a femaleness (rather than a femininity) which is "too vast, too gross" (66) for Evelyn, and she also represents the point at which symbol collapses into fact ("Mother has made symbolism a concrete fact" [56]). Her monstrous femininity threatens and overwhelms Evelyn's rapidly devaluing phallic authority - she is the pre-Oedipal mother, the 'phallic mother' who rightly evokes castration anxiety as Evelyn gazes on her. Mother symbolises the feminine difference which Evelyn's patriarchal ideology suppresses; Jane Gallop argues that the 'phallic mother' signifies the repressed incompleteness of the male, the initial 'wholeness' from which the male [child] is separated by the Oedipal and castration complexes.[28] Mother thus figures the lack which Evelyn detected in his relationship with Leilah, and which will now be made material rather than figural, via his castration. Mother, in this sense, offers a representation of essential femininity as powerful, all-consuming and threatening to masculinity - but this overt representation is heavily ironised by Evelyn's emphasis on Mother's artificiality, her status as a constructed body/subject which foreshadows his own shift:

> And she had made herself! Yes, made herself! She was her own mythological artefact; she had reconstructed her flesh painfully, with knives and with needles . . . (60).

If all symbols are culturally constructed to serve ideological purposes, as the text repeatedly asserts, then the extensively symbolic Mother is equally artificial. By implication, her threatening femininity is a product of male fantasy, as Barbara Creed has argued in her discussions of the monstrous-feminine.[29] Myth is made, not found, and in making of herself a myth Mother implicitly commits the same crime as Evelyn, that of confusing and conflating the cultural and the 'natural' and of consequently elevating the 'false natural' to the status of ontological absolute. Evelyn's confused descriptions of her highlight her own assertion that "it's a hard thing, in these alienated times, to tell *what is and what is not*" (66). Her significance to the anti-essentialist stance, as absolute subject alienated from and therefore transcending the binary of gender in which Evelyn is still bound, is thus ironically figured in her own pseudo-essential significance as both absolute ("she was a piece of pure nature" [60], Evelyn tells us, drawing attention to her ultimately synecdochal status) and as construct or imitation of an absolute. Similarly the irony of his castration is not lost on Evelyn ("To be castrated with a phallic symbol!" [70]), and neither is the conflation of phallus (in Lacan's sense) with phallic symbol; Evelyn's "change in ontological status" (71) is neither a removal of the phallus, nor a transference of power - it is rather a redefinition, a shift from one non-essential subject position to another. The metonymic transfer of Evelyn's genitals to his guard, "who slipped them into the pocket of her shorts" (71), is neither an end point nor a point of origin. Evelyn has always already been aware of the lack which has now been made material, and the process of redefinition as feminine has little to do with the presence or absence of the male genitals. As Natalie Rosinsky

emphasises, Mother's "new female must *learn* to be a woman" - the process of feminisation which the New Eve (whom I shall from now on call Eve) undergoes reveals the artificiality of gender difference.[30] As Simone de Beauvoir has famously commented, "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one".[31] Eve's psychological conditioning suggests the understanding of gender, a highly problematical concept in modern feminist thought, which Judith Butler advocates. Butler writes:

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*.

Gender, Butler argues, is "a constituted social temporality", an externally perceived unity which is produced by internally discontinuous but repeated acts.[32] The new Eve's psychological conditioning, consisting of the same images and sounds (among them Tristessa's films) "repeated over and over again" (72), suggests this kind of disjunctive externalised repetition. As David Punter comments, Eve's construction as a woman embodies "the wrench and dislocation which is at the heart of a woman's relationship with herself in a world riddled with with masculine power-structures".[33] This world, for Eve, is immediately dominated by the image of Tristessa, whose films constitute a major part of the psychological programming - but, as is revealed later, this image of idealised femininity is also a construction, and an illusion.

Eve's post-operative contemplation of her "change in ontological status" (71) emphasises the success of the operation in creating a purely stereotyped feminine symbol, "the *Playboy* center fold" (75) in Eve's own words. She is constructed not as a 'woman's woman' but in the

image of a male-defined stereotype of feminine beauty - so where Desiderio, in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, constructed Albertina as the signifier of his own objectified desire, Eve is constructed as the image of Evelyn's representative masculine desire: "I was the object of all the unfocussed desires that had ever existed inside my head" (75). In this way the text deconstructs the essentialism of Mother by reintroducing the masculine symbolic order into the process of Eve's construction precisely at the moment it is ostensibly excluded by castration, and only the (inevitable, given the ironic logic of the plot) failure of the psychological reconditioning saves Eve from what might have been an irresolvable conflict - the forced enactment of an ostensibly matriarchal ideal equipped only with patriarchally valued attributes. The conflation of male and feminine, through impregnation with her own (Evelyn's) sperm, is also escaped from by Eve, thus avoiding another moment of aporia - although the alarmingly easy escape from Beulah leads straight into another world of apparent essentialism, that of Zero's harem.

Outside Beulah, Eve finds herself, ironically, in the condition of 'purity' which Evelyn set off into the desert to achieve - deprived of the conventional signifiers of phallic status and identity ("I had no money; [...] no passport; no means of identification; no traveller's checks; no credit card" [83]). Like Frankenstein's monster she finds herself at large in a world with which she is in no way equipped to deal; provided only with "an elaborate female apparatus [...] constructed around the nascent seed of another person, not Evelyn, whose existence Evelyn, as yet, persisted in denying" (83). The condition of

being female, of "becoming woman", thus appears to be wholly inadequate to the condition of being feminine within an environment like that of Zero's harem, in which pigs are valued more than women (94). Zero represents an extreme parody of the patriarchal system, although one in which most elements of humour have been effaced by the sheer violence of the representation. Zero offers a means of examining the process of socialisation which produces the feminine stereotype, which for convenience's sake may be assumed to be along the lines of Freud's differentiation of genders: "Maleness combines [the factors of] subject, activity and possession of the penis; femaleness takes over [those of] object and passivity".[34] The sense of femininity that Eve learns from Zero and, more significantly, from the women Zero "owns", is the culturally sanctioned one of passive, suffering victim, although this education is equally one that should produce feminine anger, as Eve notes: "The mediation of Zero turned me into a woman. More. His peremptory prick turned me into a savage woman" (107-8).

The text thus presents the argument that it is cultural conditioning and exposure to particular ideological forces and their modes of operation which determine the construction of gender. Zero's phallic status, ironised by his impotence, is defined by reference to an absent Other, Tristessa: "Of all the women in the world, Zero had chosen Tristessa as the prime focus of his hatred of the sex; he thought you'd bewitched him, Tristessa" (91). This self-definition against Tristessa further emphasises the dialectic interdependence of gender definitions which operates in this text. Zero's claim to absolute masculinity, to represent "masculinity incarnate" (104), is predicated upon an Other in

whom the phallic power he claims for himself is actually invested; Zero's paraphernalia of phallic symbols, his wooden leg and his guns and knives, does not conceal the absence of the phallus - of meaning - from his "realm of sterility" (102), and the writing metaphor used to describe his impotence ("Alas! [His sperm] won't print out any new Zero's" [92]) quietly emphasises the dominance of signification (symbolised throughout the novel by Tristessa) over essentialism. As an icon of male destruction Zero perfectly figures the patriarchal system. It is however the relationship between Zero and his women, and their explicit complicity with his dictatorship, which Carter reserves for her most savage criticism. Carter's emphasis on this complicity has affinities with Michel Foucault's discussions of power and the complicity of the subjugated in maintaining repressive power-structures; "Power", Foucault argues,

> is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.[35]

Zero's women work to maintain his domination of them; "I could see they all loved him blindly", (87) Eve comments; "'subservience' is the wrong word; they gave in to him freely, as though they knew they must be wicked and so deserve to be inflicted with such pain" (95). The myth of feminine masochism is Carter's ultimate target, but this is rendered ambivalent by the evident circling of Zero's society around his signification of the Law of the Father. Eve's introduction to the process of "becoming-woman" within a patriarchal structure is thus

represented as a process of self-definition through the orientation of subject positions within a network of power which already exists, which constructs itself as 'given' or 'natural' and which each subject position strives to maintain; the women exist only in relation to Zero, who in turn is established in his position of pseudo-transcendental signifier through their deferral of self-definition onto him. "He regulated our understanding of him and also our understanding of ourselves in relation to him" (97), Eve narrates, and it is this process of regulation to which Eve's experience of life under Zero repeatedly returns. His systematic organisation of the women's lives, extensively detailed by Eve's narrative (e.g. 96-8), offers an extended metaphor of the networking of power that Foucault describes. Gender, within this rigid network, assumes the status of a potential excess, because it persistently slides from under the definitions assigned to it, a process which is signified by Tristessa, figured as "the Witch, the Bitch, the Dyke" (92) in Zero's misogynist mythology; and, as Tristessa is later revealed to be falsely feminine, so Eve's false femininity assumes this position of excess: "My manner became a little too emphatically feminine. I roused Zero's suspicions because I began to behave *too much* like a woman" (101 - italics original). The instability of the gender structure is figured in this potential excess of gender, which Zero's ideology constructs within its own system as a marker of the boundaries of that system. At the points where Eve or Tristessa threaten the system by being too complicit, too stereotyped, the illusory nature of the exclusive categories of gender becomes apparent and the structure based upon these categories ceases to be tenable.

This innate instability is later figured in Tristessa's glass house, to which, as David Punter points out, Zero comes to throw stones, and within which Zero's system is pushed to the point of collapse by the exposure of Tristessa's masculinity, an exposure which is prefigured in the repeated connotations of fragmentation with which Tristessa and her (his) glass house are associated.[36] Tristessa represents, to Eve, "the brink of an abyss [...] an illusion in a void" (110). The abyss "of [Eve's] self" (110) is also the abyss or aporia of unstable gender relations with which Zero's universe is confronted, a museum of effigies of images (117-8) or "simulacra of corpses" (119). The glass house returns us the the realm of simulation, a Baudrillardean scene which evokes the endless circulation of empty signifiers. Gazing on what seems to be Tristessa's corpse, Eve narrates her own experience of the aporia of the simulacrum:

> It was as if all Tristessa's movies were being projected at once on that pale, reclining figure so I saw her walking, speaking, dying, over and over again in all the attitudes that remained in this world, frozen in the amber of innumerable spools of celluloid from which her being could be extracted and endlessly recycled in a technological eternity, a perpetual resurrection of the spirit. (119)

The loss of the subject (Tristessa) in the nostalgia for (of) the subject (Eve) - Eve is reduced to a gazing subject, confronted with an image - 'the real thing' - which insists on slipping into its own representations, which cannot be pinned down to be what it seems to be. Tristessa becomes a screen upon which the drama of the constructed, transcendental subject is endlessly enacted, and also a screen in the sense of Baudrillard's schizophrenic, a surface upon which different networks of power (Zero's misogyny, Eve's nostalgia) play. Tristessa is

the final locus of displacement in Eve's quest for a self, a "perfect man's woman" (128) revealed to be a man at the moment her (his) femininity is exposed. As Eve comments:

> "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. (129)

Tristessa's "becoming-woman", his realisation of his own "secret aspirations", is thus clearly parallelled with Eve's own experience of "becoming-woman". Both attempt, either willingly or unwillingly, to constitute the object of desire within the subject that desires, and both rely on deception and illusion in order to reinforce the stereotypes of femininity that each represents. Eve's own response to Tristessa's exposure emphasises the conflation of essentiality with representation which defers the realisation or discovery of the essence through a displacement into simulation:

> When I saw Tristessa was a man, I felt a great wonder since I witnessed, as in a revelation, the great abstraction of desire in this person who represented the refined essence of all images of love and the dream. (129)

The mock-religious language of this passage emphasises the encounter with an ostensible transcendental signifier, but the language also effaces the significance of this encounter through its irony. Thus the embodiment of desire is here a repository of "the great abstraction of desire", and the essence is "refined", just as Hoffman's "eroto-energy" was produced by the endless mechanical copulation of his perfect lovers Tristessa, and by implication Eve, are represented at this point as

desiring-machines, which, Deleuze and Guattari argue, operate in an economy of disjunction:

> In desiring-machines everything functions at the same time, but amid hiatuses and ruptures, breakdowns and failures, stalling and short circuits, distances and fragmentations, within a sum that never succeeds in bringing its various parts together so as to form a whole.[37]

In effect Carter's novel traces these moments of disjunction through Eve's quest in order to highlight the false premises from which the quest was begun. The lesson which Eve repeatedly learns is that the unified subject is an illusion, a product of the operation of desire through the power structures of signifying practices. The quest ultimately becomes a quest for meaning, and the subject figures that meaning as elusive and illusory, beyond language but endlessly gestured towards in and by language. "Speech evades language", Eve states: " How can I find words the equivalent of this mute speech of flesh . . ." (148). The consummation with Tristessa is a union of opposites which nevertheless contain their opposites - an impossible figure, labyrinthine but clearly representing the futility of ascribing rigid binary structures to systems of power. Eve and Tristessa, modern and ironic versions of Tiresias, can still offer no real explanation of gender difference other than the argument that it is socially constructed. "Masculine and feminine are correlatives which involve one another", Eve comments: "but what the nature of masculine and the nature of feminine might be [...] that I do not know" (149-50). The dialectic of gender relations and the accretion of cultural symbolism which surrounds them combine to obscure any point of origin, any clear demarcation between genders, producing instead "an endless sequence of

reflections" (132) as, for example, Tristessa's screen images are plundered by Zero's rampaging women. Eventually Tristessa's constructed world of polarised and false genders is left, in a moment of high modernist irony, as "a heap of broken images", which mirrors the surrounding desert and the socio-cultural 'waste land' of New Eve's postmodern America.

The conclusion of New Eve is particularly complex and ambiguous, presenting a confusion of images an events which are difficult to interpret from any conventional standpoint. Natalie Rosinsky argues that

> questions raised by the final pages of [New Eve] strongly suggest that it is we, the readers, who must "start" from whatever conclusions the text has provided.[36]

The novel offers a final image of the process of deferral/loss of absolutes which the protagonists have repeatedly enacted in the "archaeopteryx", "bird and lizard both at once [...] A miraculous, seminal, intermediate being whose nature [Evelyn] grasped in the desert" (185). The novel's close enacts this collapsing of distinctions in a variety of ways which emphasise the invalidity of conventional ontology when dealing with issues which concern social power struggles; thus time, in the cave which Eve enters, runs backwards, the cave itself becomes a metaphorical body ("Walls of meat and slimy velvet" [184]) perhaps signifying a return to the womb as one possible point of origin. At the same time Eve's narrative consciousness knows better: "I know, now, that Mother is a figure of speech and has retired to a cave beyond consciousness" (184) - the return to origins is thus parodied by the text, becoming a dizzying slide backwards into prehistory while the

'origin', Mother, is redefined as a linguistic construct - until the subject "becomes a solution of amino acids and a tuft of hair, and then dissolves into the amniotic sea" (186). This repetition of Mary-Jane's lines in The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman emphasises the shared anti-essentialism of both novels - New Eve's pseudo-Darwinistic conclusion is always already a fantasy, a moment of illusion which pushes logic to its limits, as is the subject in the process of constructing the object of desire. Like Desiderio's, Eve's narrative closes on a moment of nostalgic desire, for the dead Tristessa who "often comes to me in the night" (191). Each quest for subjectivity becomes, in the end, a retrospective longing for a lost moment of coherence or meaning, a moment which the archaeopteryx symbolises in its transitory state (trapped, to exploit the text's persistent allusions to Eliot, between "memory and desire") and in the closing allusions of the novel to Eliot and Swinburne, who become in this postmodernist text poetic monuments of a lost Modernist or nineteenth-century coherence.

If, as would seem to be obvious, New Eve closes with ambivalence, it is this very ambivalence which also problematises the novel and makes it resistent to absorption by mainstream feminist thought. The implication that Eve's impending child (she has been made pregnant by Tristessa) will offer a new symbol to replace those encountered in Mother's cave suggests a positive, progressive anding, but at the same time, as Ricarda Schmidt argues, it would seem that Eve's final journey is towards death, and consequently that the quest for the self always leads to ontological oblivion:

> At the end of the novel we are left with the paradox that the narrator who very probably died must yet have survived to tell her tale.[39]

This final problematisation of narration points towards an equation between the authority of the conventional narrator and the ideological structure of gender, which operates through language to assign and evaluate the voice of the narrator. The text's overt use of intertextuality and its self-conscious use and critiques of cultural symbolism imply an elision of the act of narration with the process of deferral which constitutes textuality - as Ricarda Schmidt notes, both New Eve and The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman are "narratives full of cryptic hints at events to come, insights still to be gained, and explanations in the light of experiences which take place much later in the chronology of events".[40] Narration, that is, is foregrounded as another illusory coherence - the logical chronology and consequential structure of events is continually problematised by the narrators' 'running ahead of' themselves. David Punter equates this tendency with what he calls "premature ejaculation":

> The suspicion remains that all ejaculation is premature, and that this truth applies also to narrative itself, insofar as the urge towards climax and ending is to be read only as a displaced version of an urge to return to the womb and obliterate self-differentiation.[41]

New Eve conforms to this tendency in narrative but more importantly the novel thematises it, collapsing the distinction between departure and arrival through the semi-mystical logic of Eliot's Four Quartets. Behind this preoccupation lies a more subtle flirtation with the theories of modern physics - the novel, in effect, collapses in upon itself as its

moments of revelation become moments of problematisation - Beulah becomes a black hole inside which Evelyn discovers "a place where contrarieties are equally true" (48), and into which Evelyn/Eve's quest is pulled, both before he arrives there and after she leaves. The ageing star Tristessa offers another possible configuration of this metaphor - her own centrifugal collapse is the slippage of image and referent within the whirling glass house, which, as it collapses into the pool, "tried to tug us after it as it swilled back towards its source" (141). These implicit gestures towards the meta-narrative of science focus on the illogics of time and space that contemporary physical theory grapples with, offering them as parallels with the cultural production of codes which the mythological aspects of the text seek to deconstruct.

Carter's focus on gender in New Eve as the site of the construction of power networks which are both repressive and which are in certain ways actively supported by those who are repressed suggests a reading of essentialism which exploits illusion and deception, as the mainstays of the maintenance of a cultural order based on myths of essence. "Gender", argues Judith Butler, "is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred" (16), and David Punter offers a connection between the deferral of gender and that of the satisfaction of desire, in his reading of New Eve:

> Eve's new body, equipped with an instantly pleasured clitoris but racked with unassuaged desire (for unity within the self, for unification with another) is the symbol for [a] promise which cannot be satisfied.[42]

Desire and gender link Carter's work in fiction with that of continental rather than British feminist philosophers, as Ricarda Schmidt points out when she pulls back from offering a post-structuralist critique of New Eve, a body of theory which "did not decisively influence Anglo-American feminism until the 1980s", at least three years after New Eve was published. Schmidt is perhaps unfair on Carter in her criticism of the novel - her argument that "hermaphroditism still adheres to the phallogeocentric [sic] rule of the One and denies difference" in a way misses the irony of Carter's novel, through which this self-conscious use of phallogocentrism is always *already criticised.*[43] *It is important* to recognise Carter's apparent engagement with problems raised by continental theory which were, at the time, unacknowledged by British theorists, because this issue returns us to the argument propounded in Chapter 3, that Carter's predominant influences were continental rather than American. The conceptual circularity which the novel propounds is figured in Tristessa, as Leilah points out: "He himself formed the uroborus, the perfect circle, the vicious circle, the dead end" (173). It is Tristessa, and not Evelyn/Eve, who ultimately signifies the quest - beginning as a fantasy image, a fixated Other of Evelyn's childhood, he returns in the closing chapter as a figure in Eve's dreams, thus exemplifying the circularity of the passage from one constructed identity to another.

The drag act which Zero forces Eve and Tristessa to perform epitomises the problematic of gender and identity which the novel examines. The drag act embodies a double and contradictory inversion - on a literal level, it asserts the illusory quality of appearance by

emphasising that while the surface, the appearance, is feminine, the essence, that beneath the surface, is masculine. However at the symbolic level drag inverts this assertion, implying instead that the 'essential' masculinity of the artist is merely a surface, the 'shell' of the body, concealing an 'essence' that is really feminine. In Eve's drag this contradiction is literalised, as Eve is a man 'disguised' as a woman 'disguised' as a man. This displacement of the binary structure of conventional gender into a tertiary structure highlights the culturally constructed nature of that binary structure; as Judith Butler, discussing drag, asserts, "[i]n imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency".[44]

Carter's critique of gender and its relation to identity in New Eve situates itself firmly alongside post-structuralist stance, anti-essentialist and sceptical of the validity of 'given' absolutes. The conception of gender as a 'given' and defining attribute is thus challenged as a conception produced and regulated by patriarchal, rationalist ideology, a challenging ideological framework which foregrounds the cultural rendering into power-related discourses of such hitherto 'natural' oppositions as that of gender. The situating of gender relations - that is, the structure of power relations surrounding and constituting the binary divide of gender - within the field of other discursive power relations, such as those of class, race, sexuality etc. - suggests that the repressive function of conventional gender structures can be equated with the equally deterministic effects of these other discursive structures. The significance of New Eve is that

it ultimately equates gender with identity, so that the exposure as a construct of one is necessarily the exposure as a construct of the other. In denying the innateness of gender/identity, the novel asserts the primacy of artificially constructed discursive practices (myth, religion, politics) in mystifying gender/identity into a 'given' quality. Evelyn's quest for his 'self' leads not to the discovery of an essence, but to a scene of imposition - the "womb" of Beulah - in which the conceptual structure of essentialism is deconstructed. The continuation of the quest beyond the scene of imposition further emphasises the process of deferral which any such quest must inevitably become, as does its fantastic (non-) resolution in a representation of infinite historical regression. It is this infinite regression which most comprehensively challenges the conventional conceptualisation of gender/identity; the 'essence' is inscribed as another false bottom to the labyrinth of the 'self' into which Evelyn descends - albeit a false bottom which is invested, by patriarchal rationalism, with a particularly acute degree of significance.

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Chapter 7: Nights at the Circus.

> "And then you won't know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin's jacket - a jay in borrowed plumes." (Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre, p. 288)

The Passion of New Eve is explicitly concerned with the process of constructing the subject. Evelyn's reconstruction as Eve offers a commentary upon the system of discourses (political, social, sexual, mythological) which contribute to this process - a process of subjective enlightenment which culminates in the recognition, through the tortuous logic of infinite historical regression in "the cave of making", that the subject is always already constructed, and that there is no archaic, pre-cultural essence upon which the subject is constructed. Eve, and the novel which preceded it, present in the very structure of their quests for identity the impossibility of ending the quest satisfactorily; in Deleuze and Guattari's words, "We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some future date".[1] The conclusion in irresolution shared by Eve and its predecessor Hoffman is not however apparent in Nights at the Circus, although the three novels have much in common. Selfhood, the original object of Evelyn's quest, is deconstructed in each text through an exploration of the cultural and 'natural' (i.e. biological) factors that contribute to it, and Carter's exploration of selfhood shifts from a psychological focus (in Hoffman) to a focus on the body in the later novels. Both offer representations of the subject as body which share many characteristics with the description of the body of the postmodern subject offered by Arthur Kroker and David Cook:

> The body is a power grid, tattooed with all the signs of cultural excess on its surface, encoded from within by the language of desire, broken into at will by the ideological interpellation of the subject, and, all the while, held together as a fictive and concrete unity by the illusion of *misrecognition*. (italics original)[2]

Eve's condition immediately after her operation is that of being female without being feminine; she possesses a female body but is yet to be 'inscribed' with the cultural markers of femininity. The body, in the argument of this novel, is thus the site of the cultural construction of femininity. Her encounter with Zero is effectively an accelerated education into the material condition of femininity in a patriarchal environment, through the violent inscription of patriarchally defined 'feminine' qualities upon Eve's body. Furthermore, the recognition of her transformation as a "change in ontological status" rather than as a point of origin serves to instigate an interrogation of the illusory stability of conventional subjectivity. The power of the image, illustrated by Tristessa's illusory femininity, becomes the focus of Carter's attention, a development from the examination of the politics of the (male) gaze and (male) desire in Hoffman, towards an analysis of the (female) body as screen upon which (male) desires can be projected.

Nights at the Circus (1984 - hereafter referred to as Circus) extends this examination by shifting the focus of attention from the problem of the self-seeking subject to the problem of the self-defining subject. At the simplest level this shift is evident in the change of narrative form - where the earlier two novels were first-person narratives, Circus begins as third-person and then shifts, alternating

between first- and third-person. Set on the cusp of the 19th century, the novel presents the character Fevvers, a stage performer who apparently possesses a pair of wings. In the first section, she narrates her life story (a dubious collection of bizarre adventures) to the investigative journalist Walser, who philosophises over the status of Fevvers: "Is she fact or is she fiction?".[3] Subsequently Fevvers joins Colonel Kearney's Circus for its tour of Russia, and Walser pretends to be a clown in order to follow her. After a hazardous time in St. Petersburg, where Fevvers is almost undone by a Grand Duke and Walser is mauled by a tigress, the adventures of the Circus troupe culminate in a train crash in mid-Siberia, because of which Walser suffers amnesia and is reconstructed as a "New Man" by a tribe of Shamans who constitute a symbolic representation of the magic realist genre in practice; his eventual reunion with Fevvers is romantic, and the novel closes with Fevvers' carnivalesque laughter, echoing Molly Bloom's positive "Yes" at the end of James Joyce's Ulysses. Such a summary, again, does little justice to the complexities of the novel, which is arguably the most playfully creative and successful of all Carter's fictions.

Critical responses to this novel are generally enthusiastic, and given that many of Carter's critics have feminist sympathies (at least) this reception may be partly accounted for by the abandonment of the overtly misogynist male narrators of the earlier novels. Flora Alexander describes Circus as "a far richer and more successful novel" than New Eve, and as "a joyful comic vision that asserts female strength and intelligence". Paulina Palmer, who is (as I have noted) elsewhere sceptical of Carter's work, ends her consideration of Circus by

eulogising what she describes as Carter "courageously exploring new realms, both personal and political". Ricarda Schmidt argues that the novel is concerned "with matching woman and freedom in a new symbol of femininity", and she goes on to ascribe the critically popular stylistic gusto of this novel to historical changes in the circumstances of women:

> It is the increased self-confidence of women in the 1980s and their deeper theoretical understanding of patriarchy and the constitution of the subject that have made [Circus'] light-heartedness and humour possible.[4]

As I have suggested, this novel is different from its predecessors not only in terms of being "light-hearted", but also in the form of its closure, which is not uncertain: instead, Carter offers a conventional 'romantic happy ending', with Fevvers and Walser signifying the new, sexually equal heterosexual couple of the coming (twentieth) century. This ending presents certain problems both in terms of the narrative form (this being one of Carter's most overtly magic realist texts) and in terms of the ideology it seems to espouse, and at the end of this chapter I shall address these problems. For now, it is useful to consider Circus as in many senses offering a conclusion to the excursions into problematic theorisation of the subject in the earlier novels - the prevalence of comedy over critique suggests that this is a novel of 'progression' away from theoretical concerns and towards potential resolutions - and it is these resolutions which, in turn, become problematic if Carter's fiction is viewed as a body of connected texts. In particular, the conclusion of Circus poses problems which are, more than anything, political; and while the novel continues Carter's exploration of postmodernist and poststructuralist theories, these

political problems are predicated upon what may be seen as an 'evasion' of some of the implications of these theories.

Some critics have not seen the novel's ending as problematic. Like Ricarda Schmidt, Elaine Jordan emphasises the shift in focus in Circus, away from the 'quest for origins' of the earlier novels towards an analysis of how the self/selves can be produced. The ending of Circus, argues Jordan, "indicates that the production of new selves, as well as the deconstruction of old fixed identities, is very much part of Angela Carter's discourse".[5] By situating her exploration of the "production of new selves" in the circus ring, and by pursuing it in a novel which exemplifies the carnivalesque (as Paulina Palmer observes[6]), Carter shifts the focus of this stage of her ongoing critique of subjectivity onto the specular/spectacular subject, and introduces in more concrete form the notions of masquerade and performance which her earlier novels (and The Sadeian Woman) have often alluded to. The heroine of Circus offers a highly problematic representation of the specular/spectacular subject, and in her Carter conflates a series of conventional representations of the feminine in order to explore the possibilities of self-definition in a more complex way than attempted in her earlier fiction. Fevvers is a typical postmodern subject, displaying a self-conscious irony (which borders at times on paranoia and hysterical anxiety) which can be found in postmodern art, for example in Barbara Kruger's slogan collages. Kruger's Untitled 1983 image shows a female face, with the jaw of a man above it, intercut with the slogan "We are being made spectacles of".[7] The inclusion of the viewer in the pronoun "We" invests the image with a significance which mingles political

insight and protest with self-conscious irony; in much the same way, Carter's heroine implicates her audience in the process of constructing her stage image, while apparently maintaining an ironic distance from the process of performance. The weak points of the novel, notably its lapsing into a conventional 'New Man gets New Woman' romantic ending, do not detract from the importance of Carter's exploration of the issues of subjectivity, specularity, and the significance of the body to an understanding of postmodern identity, and it is on these elements of the novel that my main discussion will focus.

As Ricarda Schmidt notes, Circus is a "logical sequel" to New Eve, carrying from the earlier novel the image of the archaeopteryx and transforming it into Fevvers, equally an "intermediate being", a woman with wings. Schmidt is wrong, however, when she asserts that "the symbolic connection between hermaphroditism and the bird archaeopteryx from Eve is not pursued in Circus", for, as we shall see, the central character is to a certain extent invested with an implied androgyny - although the difference between the hermaphrodite and the androgyne problematises this continuity slightly.[6] In Fevvers Carter creates a female character neither predicated upon literal masculinity (as Eve was created out of Evelyn) nor represented through the eyes of a male narrator, as Albertina was represented through Desiderio. Instead, Fevvers is ostensibly 'her own woman', although my argument will also attempt to demonstrate how this apparent self-determination is compromised at source by a reliance upon the defining authority of the (implicitly male) gaze. The extent to which Fevvers is viable as "a new symbol of femininity" depends upon the success with which the text's

suspensive irony (in Alan Wilde's phrase) overrides the traces of the earlier, conventional and oppressive representations with which Fevvers is imbued. In many ways it is possible to see Fevvers as a feminist version of the Nietszchean subject emphasised by Deleuze and Guattari, the subject "who passes through a series of states, and who identifies these states with the names of history".[8] Fevvers is encumbered with names and symbolic connotations from mythology rather than history (Pygmalion, Azreal, Venus, Flora), but she carries the traces of these significations within her ostensibly unified identity as a symbol of liberated femininity. The easiest way to assess the viability of this symbolic status (and also to provide an index to the success of the novel) is to examine how Fevvers is represented. Through this examination, the novel's exploration of poststructuralist and postmodernist theories - and in particular its seemingly deliberate engagement with certain theorists - will also become apparent.

The principal way that Fevvers is represented is as a monster, in the sense (emphasised by Chris Baldick, following Foucault'[9]) of being a creature for display. A significant aspect of this representation is the textual emphasis on the potentially lucrative economic rewards of monstrosity (as Foucault points out, in the early 19th century "the hospital of Bethlehem exhibited lunatics for a penny, every Sunday [...] the annual revenue from these exhibitions amounted to almost four hundred pounds"[10]). Monstrosity is, for Fevvers, a means to economic survival, enabling her 'independence' to be material as well as philosophical. Indeed, much of the action of the novel is largely determined by economic factors: Fevvers' life story as told to Walser in

the first part of the novel hinges upon a series of contracts between herself and a number of agents and institutions who would exploit her - the brothel, Madame Schreck's "Monster Museum", Mr. Rosencreutz and finally the Circus - and while with the Circus she remains preoccupied with financial matters and with making money. This emphasis on the material reality of Fevvers' situation (to which I shall return later) counterpoints the aesthetic and philosophical problems that the text raises, which have largely to do with what might be termed 'the politics of monstrosity'. Paulina Palmer rightly emphasises the ambiguous status of Fevvers' monstrosity when she writes:

> The image of the winged bird-woman which she represents is, however, more complex in significance than it appears. It is 'transparent' in the sense that a number of contradictory meanings are constructed on it.'[12]

While the bird-woman is principally an image of liberation in the mould of Icarus (a mythological connection which invites comparison with James Joyce's images of winged escape), it is also a problematic image in that it draws on conventional images of femininity which clearly carry the opposite connotations, of frailty, ease of entrapment and idiocy. Carter's solution to this problem is to segregate these two contradictory connotations, so that the positive, liberating readings are provided by female characters (like Lizzie and Ma Nelson, the text's two 'mother' figures) and the negative, oppressive readings by male characters.

Under the 'umbrella' of monstrosity, a number of separate ways of imaging Fevvers can be distinguished, all of which contribute to her

status as typical postmodern subject. Each is the product of attempted external definition - that is to say, each is the result of an attempted 'reading' of Fevvers by another character, and each is explicitly connected to the perception of her monstrous difference. Each thus becomes a construction of Fevvers, and the reductive and fictionalising effects of such constructions are repeatedly highlighted by the text, which succeeds in demonstrating that what Fevvers signifies is ultimately uncontainable by any or all of these 'readings' - she represents an excess or instability which resists conventional definition and continually threatens the assumptions on which conventional definition is *constructed and imposed*. In this sense Fevvers constitutes an example of what Lyotard has termed "the postmodern sublime", which he elsewhere describes as "that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself". Lyotard emphasises Kant's connection between the sublime and monstrosity ("the feeling of the sublime is the feeling of something monstrous. *Das Unform*. Formless."), and it is clear that Fevvers' monstrosity challenges her audience to contain her by imposing 'form' upon her polysemy;[13] Walser's extended pondering of her act (pp. 14-18) indicates the extent of the paradox she presents:

> . . . he was astonished to discover that it was the limitations of her act in themselves that made him briefly contemplate the unimaginable - that is, the absolute suspension of disbelief. (17)

Fevvers' evident unrepresentability contradicts the ostensible clarity of her condition, and leads to the series of interpretations of her which surface throughout the text. Her motif song, "Only a bird in a

gilded cage", implies furthermore an imprisonment within the stage image and the interpretations it produces, which is prefigured by Fevvers herself when she talks of being "seal[ed] up in my *appearance* forever" (39 - italics original) as a child. The connections between this fear and the import of the Lacanian mirror stage are clear, but Arthur and Marilouise Kroker comment on a similar representation of the imprisoning image when they discuss Francesca Woodman's photograph sequence Space;

> The image of the woman inside the case whirls in a dancer's pose as if to reflect that it is her imprisonment in this zone of surveillance (the glass case is the *reverse image* of Foucault's panoptic gaze) that gives her a certain magnetic, almost celestial, presence.[14]

Indeed much of Walser's pondering of Fevvers emphasises not so much the paradox she presents to her audience as the paradox she herself is trapped in - "For, in order to earn a living, might not a genuine bird woman [...] have to pretend she was an artificial one?" (17). The interpretations of Fevvers which the text offers are thus both responses to the challenge she presents and attempts to contain her excess of signification (and her stage show operates within an economy of excess which is nevertheless underplayed in implicit self-parody) - and they offer in microcosmic form a range of interpretations of the postmodern subject which can also be read as a summary of the ways in which Carter's fiction has addressed the issue of subjectivity.

At one extreme, Fevvers is represented as wholly artificial, an automaton of unknown but evidently human construction. Walser briefly ponders this possibility:

> And who or where in all this business was the Svengali who turned the girl into a piece of artifice, who had made of her a marvellous machine and equipped her with her story? (28-9).

- and later, her discordant voice sounds to him as if it "could almost have had its source not within her throat but in some ingenious mechanism or other behind the canvas screen" (43). When the Circus arrives in St. Petersburg, "the newspapers carry an anonymous letter which claims that Fevvers is not a woman at all but a cunningly constructed automaton made up of whalebone, india-rubber and springs" (147), and the Charivaris, whom she has deposed from the top of the Circus bill, believe that she performs "with the aid of mechanical contrivances. They even held, a little, to the 'gutta percha' theory concerning Fevvers' anatomy" (158). This repeated implication of mechanicity emphasises at a crudely metaphorical level the 'constructed' nature of Fevvers' subjectivity (by drawing attention to her implicitly constructed physical state), but it also serves to connect Fevvers with the puppet in Carter's own story "The Loves of Lady Purple" (see Chapter 2) and, via this story, with the doll Olympia in Hoffman's "The Sandman". Paulina Palmer argues that Carter's use of the image of the puppet is largely abandoned in this novel: "The image of the puppet is no longer central to the text. It is replaced by the images of Fevvers' miraculous wings . . ." [15] This seems to me to be contradicted by the representation of Fevvers' wings as implicitly puppet-like appurtenances, as they offer means by which she can be controlled by others, and the implication of her automaticity offers an example of how this control is attempted. More significant in terms of Fevvers' status as postmodern subject is the connection between this representation and

the emphasis on the cyborg in postmodern theory. Given that Circus is set at the turn-of-the-century, Baudrillard's distinction between the automaton and the robot is perhaps historically inappropriate - the automaton, he argues, works by analogy to humanity where the robot works by equivalence.[16] Fevvers as automaton (and the other automata which appear in this novel) belongs to a different order of classification, closer to Donna Haraway's 'cyborg as utopian feminist identity' in its potential transcendence of the constraints of the organic body.[17] To argue for a reading of Fevvers as 'cyborg' would be to misread the novel, however; this chain of images is merely an implication in the text, highlighting one extreme of the range of readings which Fevvers provokes.

Claudia Springer has recently argued that in popular culture, "cyborg imagery often exaggerates conventional gender difference [...] [but] does not always conform entirely to traditional sexual representations".[18] Contemporary cyborg imagery, she suggests, "implies a wider range of sexualities" than conventional gender stereotypes offer, although this potential has yet to be realised, given that most cyborg imagery (for example in films like Paul Verhoeven's Robocop [1987], or James Cameron's Terminator 2 [1991]) exaggerates conventional stereotypes rather than subverts them. In this sense, Carter's representation of Fevvers as implicitly mechanistic differs from the more orthodox cyborg imagery which Springer discusses. One connected aspect of the representation of Fevvers is the repeated implication that she is a man - an interpretation which implies an ambiguity concerning gender which is not wholly developed in the text. Walser introduces this

possibility: "It flickered through his mind: Is she really a man?" (35). Unlike the possibility of her mechanicity, this implication is elsewhere presented largely through the omniscient narrator, so that the reader becomes aware of how the connotations of certain events and actions serve to reinforce it. Thus for example when Fevvers rescues Walser from the rampaging Strong Man, she does so with a hosepipe, and the narrator comments: "She shook out a last few drops [of water] in a disturbingly masculine fashion and laid it aside" (166). The neat juxtaposition of the cuckolded and thus symbolically emasculated Samson with the image of Fevvers symbolically endowed with a phallus serves to underline one apsect of her potential for feminist subversion, and I will return to this implied phallic status shortly.

Most important, though, is the ambiguity that these representations establish concerning Fevvers' status and act, an ambiguity which remains until her final speech in the novel: "'To think I really fooled you!' she marvelled. 'It just goes to show there's nothing like confidence'" (295). Walser (and the reader) has either been fooled into belief, or fooled into doubt, and the confidence is either his confidence in her (in her 'real' status as intermediate being) or the confidence trick she has pulled. Either way, the combination of ambiguity, exaggeration and hyperbole which characterises all the representations of Fevvers draws attention to her excessive literalisation at the same time as it undermines her significance as a 'general' feminine subject. Linda Hutcheon emphasises the novel's description of Fevvers as "the female paradigm", an epithet of questionable suitability, as I hope to demonstrate.[13]

One way of addressing the issue of Fevvers' 'paradigmatic' status is to examine the other major theme of the novel with which she is connected. If her implied mechanicity is one strand of her representation in Circus which suggests a reading of her as at least a representative postmodern, if not feminine/feminist, subject, then her connection with the broader theme of simulation further emphasises the possibility of this reading. Much of the novel is based on the problematic relationship between reality and illusion, and Baudrillard's conception of simulation as the absence of a stable, verifiable reality is often applicable to the characters in Circus. The various forms of the novel's representations of a world dominated by simulation suggest that this aspect or interpretation of postmodernity is subject to critical scrutiny by Carter, and the political implications of simulational postmodernity become the central focus of this examination.

Simulation is explicitly connected in this novel to the economics of capitalism, as I have already suggested. The exploitation of the deformed, the freakish and the insane by the able-bodied and sound of mind could be said to be a major theme of the novel, and in itself constitutes a thinly veiled allegory of the exploitation of women under patriarchal capitalism. The environments in which these exploitations take place are constructed out of illusion and deception (the ways in which the novel draws upon the history of illusionism in many of its forms would demand a chapter of its own), and most of the characters in the text are illusionists of some form or other, who earn their living through exploitation. Thus Herr M., who temporarily adopts the Strong

Man's woman Mignon, conducts illusory seances in order to put the bereaved in touch with the dead (134-9), and Mignon's role in his enterprise is to simulate "the perfect image of the lost" (137). Ma Nelson's brothel, in which the young Fevvers occupies pride of place, sells "only the simulacra" (39) of sex (echoing the "cunningly articulated verbal simulacrum" of pornography in Carter's earlier writing, a phrase which also refers to the puppet Lady Purple and implicitly to Fevvers herself[20]). Madame Schreck's "museum of women monsters" (55) relies upon impersonation as much as 'reality', and in the Circus Colonel Kearney's 'talking pig' Sybil represents an apparent illusion which is never challenged in the novel. The clowns offer perhaps the most extended example of the process of simulation in the novel. The Grand Duke's attempted seduction of Fevvers relies wholly on a process of simulation, as he bombards her with representations of her 'self' in an attempt to restabilise, in an oppressive way, the ontological instability which she, in turn, strives to maintain through simulation. Finally, the Shaman whom Walser encounters is an accomplished simulator, performing "the supreme form of the confidence trick" (263), and Walser himself simulates the clowns in his attempts to follow Fevvers into the Circus.

Such a range of simulations and deceptions indicates the degree of instability with which the reader is confronted, and the variety of ways in which the text challenges the Baudrillardean view of postmodernity. Nevertheless, virtually every aspect of the text is questionable in terms of consistent logic, and what is achieved is not a coherent vision but a fragmentary, contradictory representation of the postmodern world

as one in which images reign and reality disappears into simulation. From this plethora of simulators and tricksters I want to focus briefly on two passages in the novel (the description of the clowns, and the Grand Duke's seduction), in order to adumbrate the significance of simulation to the text's exploration of subjectivity, and to demonstrate how other areas of poststructuralist theory impinge upon the simulational interpretation of contemporary reality. Both passages offer extended semi-theoretical critiques of the ontology of verisimilitude through a deconstruction of the opposition between appearances and essences, and both rely upon moments of metafictional trickery which draw the fiction itself into the process of deception through simulation.

Clown Alley is presented (as are several other sections of the novel) in terms which clearly derive from certain elements of poststructuralist theory, notably Derridean deconstruction and Foucault's historical texts; it has "the lugubrious atmosphere of a prison or a madhouse" and the clowns are like "inmates of closed institutions" (116). The body is foregrounded as the "body without organs", as Buffo the Great "wears his insides on his outside" (116), a literal aspect of the "exteriorisation" of body organs which Kroker and Kroker see as symptomatic of the postmodern panic-obsession with the body and bodily functions.[21] Like that of the acrobats of desire in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, the clown's act is a display of "self-deconstruction" (the phrase *is Buffo's own*), "*a convulsive* self-dismemberment" (117) which organicises the psychic trauma that the clown represents, which in turn is, in effect, another configuration of

Fevvers' ontological paradox - like Fevvers, the clown is confined by the gaze of the audience within an image which is not 'real' but which constitutes the only 'reality' of his subjectivity. What separates the clowns from Fevvers is the existential angst which torments the clown - a degree of (non-) self-awareness which Buffo, at least, finds unbearable. "Take away my make-up and underneath is merely not-Buffo. An absence. A vacancy" (122) he tells Walser, emphasising the absence of essential identity which is shared to varying degrees of unwittingness by all Carter's questing protagonists. Buffo is reduced to his appearance, becoming a simulation which "masks the *absence* of a basic reality" (Baudrillard's third phase of the image[22]). The "untenanted replicas" (116) of clowns are akin to the wax effigies in Tristessa's glass house in Eve, in that they connote the tyranny of the image which appropriately accompanies the pseudo-apocalyptic act of the clowns, in which appearances constantly deceive and "violent slapstick" (117), the excess of theatrical signification, undermines the performer's control of the act. Baudrillard writes of the "superficial abyss" of seduction that "there is [...] nothing hidden and nothing to be revealed [...] THERE IS NEVER ANYTHING TO PRO-DUCE"[23] (emphasis original). The effect of the clowning upon the audience (in this case, little Ivan) is to provoke "near panic, near hysteria" (125), an incitement of fear in the face of "the dance of disintegration" (125) which seduces the audience into the carnival condition of "teetering between tears and laughter" (118).

Paulina Palmer relates Carter's use of the clowns to Bakhtin's theorisation of the carnivalesque, but argues that Carter offers "a

feminist critique of certain carnivalistic images and values".[24] What seems as important is the counterpoint between the clowns and Fevvers' own ontological insecurity, a connection which is emphasised by the structure of this chapter, which presents in miniature the structure of the first part of the novel, as Walser is introduced to the clowns, who reveal their secrets after a brief retrospective description of their act. As Fevvers is more clearly the unstable centre of the novel, Buffo is also "the centre that does not hold" (117), the focus of the objectifying gaze which displaces that gaze at the moment of definition; his "impenetrable disguise of wet white" (119) recalls Fevvers' own *incarceration in a "shell" of* wet white (39), and constitutes a surface upon which his status as both "the object and yet [...] the *subject* of laughter" (119 - italics original) can be inscribed. In high modernist style, the clowns are T. S. Eliot's "Hollow Men" (121) as well as personifications of Yeats' apocalyptic vision in The Second Coming, but these allusions are misleading because the clowns are not enervated victims of modernist disillusion, but are rather unwilling celebrants of postmodern excess. Buffo's fault, for which Fevvers roundly condemns him (and her opinion of the clowns and their "gigantic uselessness" [249] is the clearest index to their difference from her), lies in his attempt to collapse the simulation into the essence; he is in effect trapped betwen two ontologically incompatible states. Buffo argues that his mask, although identical to that of other clowns, "is, all the same, a fingerprint of authentic dissimilarity, a genuine expression of my own autonomy" (122). The modernist allusions become relevant if one considers this assertion as an expression of nostalgic longing, an attempt to escape the aporia of simulation which threatens to engulf the

disintegrating clown through an appeal to authenticity and artistic integrity. The logic of Buffo's argument (which leads, via his alcoholism, to insanity), its predication upon a rhetoric of authenticity, contrasts with Fevvers' parodic denial of authenticity (through her impossible narrative of self-origin) and her espousal instead of difference. The clown's great strength, according to Buffo, is precisely his lack of difference - "The beauty of clowning is, nothing ever changes" (117) - but at the same time the linguistic deferral of difference is evoked to differentiate the clowns: "Without Grik, Grok is a lost syllable, a typo on a programme . . ." (123). Buffo, then. can be seen to be clinging to a nostalgic vision of stable identity while at the same time continually enacting the loss of that vision. By the same logic, the transgressive freedom of the clowns' carnival and its associated concretisation of roles and identities is caught in a paradoxical situation that demands both obedience of and resistance to the defining gaze - a situation that Fevvers, too, cannot avoid.

If the clowns present a simulated model of late modernist anxiety (and the allusions to Samuel Beckett's texts tend to support this reading) which epitomises the mode of nostalgia incited by the 'panic' of postmodernist insecurity, then the Grand Duke's attempted seduction of Fevvers represents a full-blown descent into the environment of the postmodern simulacrum. Fevvers finds herself in a situation where her *own excess of signification is* turned against her, and the defining (male) gaze relies on a plurality rather than a singularity of meanings in order to establish its authoritative interpretation. In this chapter

(pp. 184-93), simulation is masculine, connecting it with the patriarchal authority embodied in the Grand Duke. Fevvers' appeal to her minder Lizzie - "What harm can a touch of sham with a grand duke do, our Liz?" (181) - draws attention to the coming confrontation between the mistress of illusion and the master of images. The "touch of sham" becomes a concerted attempt to define Fevvers by imprisoning her within her own image, and the duke's confessed love of "marvellous toys and artefacts" (187) suggests a process aimed at reducing Fevvers (from 'autonomous' subject to subjected "toy") through representation. As Baudrillard notes, "it is appearances, and the mastery of appearances, *that rule" in the game of seduction.*[25] *In effect* the Grand Duke 'attacks' Fevvers by inflating her symbolic economy, flooding the ostensibly empty signifier of her body (which is in this context little more than a surface upon which a range of significations can be inscribed) with representations of her in order to challenge one of the *most significant aspects of her own ambiguous status* - her symbolic possession of the phallus, in the form of the sword given to her by Ma Nelson. Elsewhere in the novel Fevvers' status as passive (and therefore represented/representable) femininity is undermined by this symbolic phallic endowment, which is arguably (in terms of her status as 'new woman') the most important quality her character possesses; for example, she shocks Mr. Rosencreutz into temporary immobility by whipping out her sword at the moment he tries to rape her (83). The Grand Duke, however, exploits Fevvers' excess of signification by refusing to privelege the phallus, relying instead on plurality and difference (Fevvers' own qualities) to destabilise her phallic status. In this sense, the Grand Duke's attempted seduction becomes a re-enactment of Desiderio's final

struggle with Albertina (in Hoffman) for possession of the knife that eventually kills her, although in this case Fevvers' escape is via a piece of ontological trickery of which Dr. Hoffman would have been proud.

The Grand Duke's palace contains a plethora of representations of femininity (186 - 90), most of which constitute elements of Fevvers' own significations at various points in the text. Most prominent is the ice sculpture of her, which melts throughout the seduction, clearly indicating that a kind of clown-like deconstruction of Fevvers is taking place (186/192). Her escape, via an ontological violation of the kind characteristic of magic realism, is accompanied by an exclamation of phallic impotence which suggests that if Fevvers' phallic status does not confer absolute power and stability, then neither does the Grand Duke's:

> She dropped the toy train on the Isfahan runner [...] as, with a grunt and a whistle of expelled breath, the Grand Duke ejaculated.
>
> In those few seconds of his lapse of consciousness, Fevvers ran helter-skelter down the platform, opened the door of the first-class compartment and clambered aboard. (192)

The ontological rupture facilitates the transition between rape and escape through a complex conflation of contradictory images - the man momentarily becomes the train, and his sexual release is also Fevvers' release from his violent sexuality, enabling her to return to Lizzie and the safety of feminine company. The reversal of movement from 'real'/toy (Fevvers) to toy/'real' (train) closes the chapter by imposing a circularity which marks this chapter as a turning point in the text. The loss of the phallus in simulation is also the loss of the illusory self-

determination which Fevvers has clung to until now ("Broke your mascot and could have broken *you*", [198] Lizzie admonishes her), and the final section of the novel presents Fevvers as a disintegrating subject, deprived of audience and the male desire which her audience affords her, phallic symbolism and the other means by which her stable representational instability was maintained. Only when Walser is rediscovered in Siberia does she recover the illusion of her appearance.

Which brings us to the question of Fevvers herself ("Is she fact or is she fiction?") and her status as new symbol of femininity. Most critics of the novel broadly agree with Flora Alexander's statement that the novel, through the character of Fevvers, offers "a joyful comic vision that asserts female strength and intelligence".[26] Ricarda Schmidt's perceptive analysis of the novel emphasises the economic determinants which influence Fevvers' own understanding of herself:

> . . . she finds that her unique appearance need not be considered a pitiable aberration but can be viewed as an enviable, mysterious figuration of human aspirations. Fevvers discovers her excellent exchange value on the market for wonders, humbugs, sensations.[27]

Circus is constructed around these two poles, which can be reduced to the concepts of freedom and confinement, and the basic dynamic of the novel presents the growing understanding of Fevvers that her economically based freedom is merely another form of confinement within her image. Her encounters with and escapes from male attempts to define her are all motivated by her own economic greed, and suggest that her own self-rendition as an object of desire (in both consumerist and sexual terms) is in itself an attempt at containment which contradicts

the excess of signification which enables such self-determination in the first place. We can see the source of this contradiction as it is teased out in her long 'interview' with Walser, who occupies the position of surrogate reader assessing the significance of Fevvers as she (re-) presents herself.

Fevvers' ostensible 'laying bare' of her life story to Walser is accompanied throughout by a prolonged parody of the Lacanian mirror stage, as she strips away her stage make-up after performing. As the stage persona is removed, the 'real' woman is revealed, but this 'reality' is of dubious reliability as Walser is presented with facts and narratives which he, as a journalist and thus representative of objectivity, cannot check or verify. With Fevvers and Lizzie he, and the reader, encounters "not one but two Scheherezades" (40), and the fictions which they produce parallel the fiction of Fevvers' act which the audience is challenged to unravel. The subjectivity which the parodic mirror stage reveals is composed of fragments, scraps of narrative and information of dubious ontological status. At the same time, however, that subjectivity is "larger than life" and resistant to rationalising strategies of interpretation - the narration of her life story is in itself a performance which bewilders and confuses Walser, compromising his own sense of the rational through presenting him with what is clearly and authoritatively irrational. Her narrative contains a deal of self-theorising, most of which focusses on her own perception of her difference: "I suffered the greatest conceivable terror of the irreparable *difference* with which success in the attempt [to fly] would mark me" (34 - italics original), she remarks, and this terror has its

source in the fear "of the proof of my own singularity" (34). However this ostensible singularity seems to contradict recent theorists of the spectacular, inviting comparison between them and the ways Fevvers is represented. The Situationist Guy Debord, for example, observes that the apparent unity of the freak or spectacle - what marks it as spectacular or unmatched - masks a different 'reality'. Debord writes:

> The spectacle, like modern society, is at once unified and divided. Like society it builds its unity on the disjunction. But the contradiction, when it emerges in the spectacle, is in turn contradicted by a reversal of its meaning, so that the demonstrated division is unitary, while the demonstrated unity is divided.[28]

Debord seems to suggest that the spectacle is based upon a moment of radical disjunction which causes it to be ontologically unstable - a double movement of definition and resistance-to-definition which calls into question the dialectic of spectacle and audience as it is conventionally understood. Applying this insight to Fevvers, it becomes clear that her spectacular status rests upon a succumbing to and simultaneously a resistance of the collective gaze. For Walser, as representative of this gaze, her interest lies in the fact that she is not defined by being a spectacle (if she were, she would not be worthy of investigation, as she would be of clear and stable ontological value). Instead she apparently subverts the defining power of the gaze at the moment it attempts to define her - that is, she seems to assume the identity-as-spectacle assigned to her by the gaze, but makes it clear at the same time that she is 'playing along' with this assignation. Her body becomes the site of the ontological anxiety that this combined acquiescence and resistance provokes; as Walser notes, her act "neither attempted nor achieved anything a wingless biped could not

have performed" (17), and when Walser ruefully observes that "in a secular age, an authentic miracle must purport to be a hoax" (17) he echoes Debord's summary of what later becomes Baudrillardean postmodernity: "[W]hat is genuine is *reconstructed* as quickly as possible, to resemble the false". The "basically tautological character of the spectacle" which Debord diagnoses as the dominant form of modern society is thus figured in Fevvers' self-referentiality and in her transformation of her supposed 'reality' into images, a "degradation" into modernised religiosity which, Debord suggests, epitomises the "refinement of the division of labour into a parcellization of gestures" - the fragmentation of the social which is symptomatic of postmodernism.[29]

Another theorisation of the gaze and the spectacle is offered by Michel Foucault, upon whose work Carter self-consciously drew in this novel (rf. her comments during a speech at Sheffield University, c. 1986[30]). A brief examination of some aspects of Foucault's thought *also* affords insights into the importance of other aspects of Circus, notably the panopticon constructed by the Countess P. Foucault makes a similar point to Debord's analysis of the spectacle when he writes of the prisoner/patient confined in the panopticon:

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relations in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.[31]

Elsewhere (in Volume I of The History of Sexuality) Foucault asserts that "power comes from below", again drawing attention to the complicity

of the dominated in the process of domination.[32] Andrew Haase, in an essay on Bataille, articulates the implications of Foucault's theorisation of power:

> Within a modern understanding of power, transgressive acts are primarily conservative, re-affirming the necessity for law and reason. Indeed, within the economism of gift-giving, heterogeneous transgressions stabilise the homogeneous "order of things".[33]

Such is the paradox that Fevvers, as symbol of new femininity, is constrained by; her transgressive status ("I only knew my body was the abode of limitless freedom" [41], she remarks) serves to define the limits of, and thus reinforce, the patriarchal hegemony which encompasses her, and each encounter with the repressive authority of that patriarchy becomes an encounter with limits which are also her own. Fevvers situation is thus a more complex representation of the complicity of Zero's women in their subjugation in Eve, with the ironic self-commentary of Fevvers serving to distance her from the abandoned passivity of the harem.

Nancy Hartsock has examined the implications of Foucault's theory of power for feminism, and her conclusions offer a means of assessing the success with which Carter maintains the resistant ambiguity of Fevvers. Hartsock writes:

> It is certainly true that dominated groups participate in their own domination. But rather than stop with the fact of participation, we would learn a great deal more by focussing on the means by which this participation is exacted. Foucault's argument for an "ascending analysis" of power could lead us to engage in a version of blaming the victim.[34]

Whether Foucault actually argues that this participation is "exacted" (exacted by whom?) is questionable. In emphasising the "intentional and nonsubjective" status of power, Foucault implies firstly that the exercising of power is, paradoxically, neither local (or individuated) nor general (or social), and secondly that, consequently (and as he repeatedly asserts) the 'origins' of power are indefinable and unlocatable: "Power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations".[35] However the implied inversion of the conventional power relationship established by the panopticon (which, Foucault is at pains to stress, is a metaphor for an ideal 'utopian' model of the *potential transparency of power*, *rather* than a literal concretisation of existing power relations[36]) is not considered by Foucault (though he argues for the inevitable complicity of the object of the gaze in its own subjection) simply because it is a question which cannot arise if power is understood as an abstract, impersonal and directionless force.

The reconception of the binary pair dominator/dominated clearly has significant implications for feminism, however, and it is through the character of Fevvers that Carter's novel examines some of these implications. In order to understand more clearly how Fevvers operates it is necessary to briefly examine how certain elements of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory might contribute to the theorisation of the spectacle, in particular his construction of the relationship between the object and the gaze. Lacan's theory of the gaze is complex and obscure and this reading of it will be necessarily reductive, but it is important to examine the logic which his ideas exploit in order to

understand how it might apply to Fevvers, and to Carter's project in Circus. The relationship between Fevvers and the men who act as metonyms of her audience is two-directional - she views them as means to economic security, while they view her in primarily sexual terms (even Walser succumbs to the sexually seductive element of Fevvers). It is the second aspect of this relationship which I want to examine - the view of Fevvers as (sexually) desired object. In this sense, these men operate voyeuristically, and Lacan sees the gaze as primarily a voyeuristic concept:

> What [the subject] is trying to see, make no mistake, is the object as absence. What the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain. There he will phantasize any magic of presence, the most graceful of girls, for example, even if on the other side there is only a hairy athlete. What he is looking for is not, as one says, the phallus - but precisely its absence, hence the pre-eminence of certain forms as objects of his search. [7]

Elizabeth Grosz offers an interpretation of this theory:

> Lacan affirms that seeing is a function both of the subject looking from a singular, perspectival point - in which case, what it sees is located *outside* itself [...]; it is also contingent on the *possibility of being seen*. The gaze is thus, like the phallus itself, the drive under which the subject's identity and certainty fail. (italics original)[8]

Lacan's example of "the most graceful of girls" being fantasised out of "a hairy athlete" is (despite its crass sexism) particularly appropriate to Fevvers, whose physical bulk ("She was twice as large as life" [15]) is frequently contrasted with the apparent grace of her act. Her own emphasis on her status as object of the gaze draws attention to her significatory function in this role:

> - and for seven long years, sir, I was nought but the painted, gilded *sign* of love, and you might say, that so it was I served my

> apprenticeship in *being looked at* - at being the object of the eye of the beholder. (23 - italics original)

As object of the gaze in this situation (at the brothel) she is invested with a symbolic value which bears little relation to her reality (as a child imprisoned in wet white). The gazers (the male clients of the brothel) invest her with this significance, constructing on the surface of her appearance a (mis-) reading of her meaning. She becomes merely "the sign of love", lacking a subjective agency as she is nightly recast into her role as Cupid. This recasting enacts the myth of Pygmalion in reverse, with the living Fevvers becoming a statue which signifies desire, but it is also (as she is aware) a re-enactment of her own ostensible "primal scene", her own hatching from "a bloody great egg" (7):

> I existed only as an object in men's eyes [...] I was as if closed up in a shell, for the wet white would harden on my face and torso like a death mask that covered me all over, yet, inside this appearance of marble, nothing could have been more vibrant with potentiality than I! Sealed in this artificial egg, this sarcophagus of beauty, I waited . . . (39)

Her status as sign is thus invested with mythical (Cupid, Pygmalion) and artistic (Botticelli's "Venus") significance both to the extent that she is specularised by the male gaze and that she embodies several aspects of the cultural history of patriarchally represented femininity. She is imprisoned, by these imposed representations, within the spectacle which constitutes her, and consequently lacks, at this stage, the ambiguity which undermines the imposition of stable definitions of her.

In her act (which I am taking to mean her stageshow and her narrative to Walser), Fevvers is able to exploit her audiences' (mis-) reading by becoming the object which is fantasised by her audience - that is, by allowing her audience to inscribe their fantasies upon the spectacular space that her performance opens up. She is both an "over-literal winged barmaid" (16) whose performance is unconvincing to Walser, but also an unsettling reflector of his gaze, as in a moment of postmodern aporia she returns his look:

> Walser felt the strangest sensation, as if these eyes of the *aerialiste* were a pair of sets of Chinese boxes, as if each one opened into a world into a world into a world, an infinite plurality of worlds, and these unguessable depths exercised the strongest possible attraction, so that he felt himself trembling as if he, too, stood on an unknown threshold. (30)

In an essay entitled "Why Women Go to Men's Films", Gertrud Koch describes a scene from an Ingmar Bergman film, Summer With Monika (1952):

> [...] a long, static scene in which Harriet Andersson looks directly into the camera, that is, she looks directly out of the scene at the spectator. [...] This use of the camera was felt to be extremely unsettling when it was first used and it is still very suggestive.

This gaze, Koch argues, "accompanies the breaking of the taboo on the [woman's] gaze: if woman dares to gaze, then there is nobody who can freely reply to her"[39]. Interestingly Koch cites Mae West as an example of a woman "who is allowed to gaze uninhibitedly at men", and Carter has described Fevvers as "basically Mae West with wings".[40] The returned gaze is both an act of self-definition in terms of the other and a resistance to definition by the other, and is a vital pointer to the

kind of aesthetic by which Fevvers operates. Walser's encounter with the "essence of Fevvers" (9), with her returning the gaze, is arguably his own 'mirror stage' in that it prefigures his later deconstruction of self in Siberia, indicates the potentially destabilising force that she embodies. Seduction and displacement are combined in a vertiginous moment of insight into the nature of her spectacle as it reveals its own and Walser's instability. The object reveals its status as absence (as the clowns are "vacancy" beneath their masks), and the fiction of the spectacle is displaced into seemingly endless difference. This momentary insight is not afforded through the act itself, which instead constitutes a discourse which reveals its own inadequacy through its unconvincingness; Lacan writes that "the desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work, in the lacks of the discourse of the Other".[41] The act becomes in this context an act of concealment, presenting an illusory stability which nevertheless hints at its own illusory status and is thus unsettling, unsatisfactory. Walser's sceptical commentary on Fevvers' act incorporates this unsatisfactory element in his repeated questioning which (as Lacan implies[42]) constitutes his own desire for the Other which Fevvers represents. Likewise, Fevvers' self-consciously ironic narration points towards a different reading of her life, exploiting the tropes of fiction to evade a stable, coherent interpretation.

So how useful is Fevvers as a symbol of 'new' femininity? In "Women's Time" Julia Kristeva describes a kind of feminism which can accommodate a character like Fevvers; this "new phase" of feminism

refuses "the subjective limitations imposed by [...] history", and Kristeva describes it thus:

> [B]y demanding recognition of an irreducible identity, without equal in the opposite sex and, as such, exploded, plural, fluid, in a certain way non-identical, this feminism situates itself outside the linear time of identities which communicate through projection and revindication.[43]

It is clear that in Fevvers Carter has attempted to create a character who represents these qualities, and who can subsequently be read as a positive image of femininity without falling back into the oppressive logic of power discussed earlier. Fevvers' indeterminacy remains to the end of the novel, and her escapes from male violence offer a series of exposes of how patriarchy misinterprets, abuses and denies the subjectivity of women. At the same time, however, there are problems with this novel in terms of its formal structure and its marginalisation of certain themes - notably homosexuality - which tend to undermine its effectiveness as a feminist 'manifesto' text, and I want to conclude this chapter by briefly addressing these problems.

Paulina Palmer notes that Circus "contains a number of episodes focussing on woman-identification and female collectivity, themes which, in her earlier texts, Carter either marginalised or ignored".[44] Palmer goes on to discuss the representation of the lesbian relationship between Mignon and the Princess of Abyssinia, relating this to Cixous' theorisation of music as a metaphor for feminine communication. Palmer's comments on this relationship are, however, based on a reading which ignores the context in which her crucial quote appears. When Carter describes the lovers as "these beings who seemed, as a pair, to

transcend their individualities" (202-3) she does so from the point of view of Samson, the Strong Man. Samson's "sensibility", Carter notes, "was still at the stripling stage" (203), a clue to an ironic reading of this passage. Samson's understanding of Mignon and her lover as "beings" who "transcend their individualities" thus becomes a rendering of them as (male-constructed) archetypes of femininity, 'general' feminine subjects similar in this sense to Fevvers - a reading which invites the same kind of destabilising deconstruction as Fevvers' act. "He knew [...] he could not love the singer without her song" (203), Carter writes, echoing the Yeatsian paradox ("How can we know the dancer from the dance?").[45] The impossibility of separating Mignon from her song, or Fevvers from her act, suggests that each is defined by their role to the extent that any subjective stability is achieved through the assumption of the role. The problem of power (who does the defining?) and the desirability of being role-defined, problems which Fevvers and her act ostensibly engage with, remain ultimately unchallenged. Instead, a vision of transcendent subjectivity is offered, based upon conventional images of women - precisely those images which Carter's *fiction* has systematically criticised. Gender becomes 'normalised' along conventional lines - the lesbian relationship is protected by Samson, while Fevvers and Walser offer a vision of a utopian heterosexual future.

In a parallel *but marginalised* addressing of the problem of *masculinity*, the socialisation of Samson and the nourishment of his sensibility (203) prefigures Walser's reconstruction as a "New Man" after the train crash in Siberia, and constitutes a similar

'normalisation' of previously (if only implicitly) problematic gender identities. It is in this 'normalisation' that the principal problem of the novel resides. Carter's flirtation with lesbianism as a possible resolution of the problem of hierarchical gender relations (a flirtation which occurs in many of her novels) fails to adequately engage with the problems it raises. Mignon and the Princess are at best minor characters in Circus, and their significance as 'ideal' representatives of feminine community is outweighed by the other aspects of feminine community which the novel addresses, notably the escapees from the Countess P.'s panopticon (210-8). The panopticon contains women who have responded violently to patriarchy by murdering their husbands, and Carter's attitude to this action is made clear: "There are many reasons, most of them good ones, why a woman should want to murder her husband" (210). Like Ma Nelson's brothel (and like the "House of Anonymity" in Hoffman), the panopticon is in effect a metaphor for the depersonalising effects of any institution, feminist or not. Just as Fevvers is reduced to "the gilded sign of love" in the brothel, so the warders here are, like the prisoners, "anonymous instruments" displaying "no personal qualities" (215).

The Countess P.'s panopticon is important for its representation of power in terms of the Foucauldian model discussed earlier. The structure of power is impersonal and directionless, so that "all within were gaoled" (214). Desire, the uncontainable and irrational force of Hoffman, performs a similar function here:

> Desire, that electricity [...] leapt across the great divide between the guards and the guarded. [...] The stale air of the House of Correction *lifted and stirred, was moved by currents of*

> anticipation, of expectation, that blew the ripened seeds of love from cell to cell. (216-7)

Problems arise when it becomes apparent that the naive utopianism of the escapees is also being criticised, as, after their brief encounter with the amnesic Walser, they disappear into the Siberian tundra, which would seem to be offered as a suitable environment for the feminist 'separatism' that the novel seems to be using them to criticise.

Carter discusses Circus at length in her interview with John Haffenden, emphasising the "frivolous" nature of the supposedly polemical aspects of the novel:

> It's not possible for me to write agit-prop. [...] In my work I keep on saying, in what I think is the nicest way, that women are people too, and that everything is relative - you see the world differently from different places.[46]

It is this relativism which Circus strives, ultimately unsuccessfully, to maintain. Another less significant weakness of the novel is the way in which the sheer imaginative creation of the text tends to overwhelm and distract from any philosophical import. The device of the picaresque is, as Carter points out[47], a way of striving for relativism, but its function in this novel seems to an extent undermined by the comparatively neat closure of the text. To end with Fevvers' carnivalesque laughter may be, as Paulina Palmer suggests, a positivie resistance to orthodox closure; but, equally, the confirmation and establishment of the heterosexual relationship between Fevvers and Walser may equally be read as a failure or succumbing to the requirements of conventional narrative closure, and consequently as an

expression of a naive political view which, elsewhere in Carter's fiction, is subjected to the severest scrutiny. This is to say that Circus, while representing in many ways a positive development of the concerns and issues addressed in Carter's earlier fiction, is also problematic in its explicitly feminist stance, which seems to contradict at crucial points the overtly postmodernist elements of the text, and thus to return us to the starting point of Carter's examination of the complex relationship between feminist political agency and postmodernist aesthetic practice. The representations of Fevvers and Walser as 'subjects-in-process', lacking (particularly in Fevvers' case) origins and conclusions, and the corresponding boundaries of subjectivity, is successful up to the point that the theory which the novel self-consciously uses allows. Ultimately the novel can be read as an entertaining rebuff to postmodernist and, more overtly, poststructuralist theories - Foucault, Derrida, Debord and Baudrillard suffer at least indirect satirisation during the course of the text, and it is perhaps here that the problems of the novel finally reside. In criticising the anti-essentialism inherent in the thinking of these theorists, Carter's novel tends to fall back into a kind of essentialism of its own, explicit in the text's neatly rounded closure.

In contrast, no particular feminist theorist comes under fire, although a host of representations of feminist separatism, and Fevvers' own brand of naive materialist feminism, are scrutinised through the mouthpieces of Lizzie and the omniscient narrator. To this extent the novel affirms a feminist political position while problematising its own postmodernist fictional strategies, and I want, in the concluding

chapter, to examine the generic characteristics which the three novels discussed most extensively above share, in order to assess the value of Carter's fiction in terms of the relationships between narrative forms and thematic concerns. Within this discussion I shall also address Carter's last novel, and assess its position within her oeuvre.

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8. Schmidt, "The Journey of the Subject", p. 67.
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14. Kroker & Kroker, Body Invaders, p. 23.
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Conclusions: Angela Carter's Fiction in the Postmodern World.

The novels discussed above offer, when taken together, an extended overview as well as a critique of recent cultural developments, and suggest that Carter's consistent concern with subjectivity and identity is a symptom of a wider preoccupation in contemporary culture. From the machinations of desire to the specularisation of the body, Carter's texts engage with this preoccupation in ways which are not merely representations but which are also theorisations. Carter's cultural reference points are contained in what she called "a common body of knowledge, a folklore of the intelligentsia", a description which reiterates both the materialist emphasis of her political position and the rigorous engagement with mythic representations and their processes of construction and operation which characterise her writing. The literary forms which Carter favoured, notably the picaresque, facilitate, according to John Haffenden, a "mingling of adventure and the discussion of what one might loosely call philosophical concepts", but more importantly they offer generic frameworks amenable to the exploration of limits which ultimately forms the project of Carter's work.[1]

The picaresque, which is the literary form of the three novels discussed most extensively in this thesis, is eminently suitable for the project of Carter's fiction because, in its episodic narrative structure, it enacts the process of displacement from incompleteness to incompleteness which is characteristic of the movement of the desired

object. Carter's texts articulate in their formal structure the movement which their protagonists are forced to endure - a movement through narrative and language in pursuit of objects of desire which delineate the construction of the desiring subject in and through language. To the extent that Desiderio, Eve/lyn and Fevvers and Walser desire, they are positioned in language as desiring subjects, and thus condemned to the process of metonymic displacement by which desire operates, and by which language and narrative both construct fictional realities, and situate desiring subjects within those fictional realities.

The texts discussed above exhibit a progression, which can be characterised in a variety of ways (from misogyny to feminism, from binarism to relativism, from defined to indefinable) all of which work to establish the notion of progression as the constitutive narrative function of Carter's literary career. As we have seen, *critics of Carter* tend to align with this metanarrative structure in their interpretations - for example, Paulina Palmer, David Punter and Ricarda Schmidt (all of whose work has been extensively referred to above) all approach Carter's fiction - as I also have - chronologically, seeing each text as in many ways logically progressing from each preceding text. As the title of Ricarda Schmidt's essay ("The Journey of the Subject in Angela Carter's Fiction") might suggest, this tendency also structures Carter's ouevre itself into a picaresque narrative form, with each novel representing a particular stage in a larger, ongoing progression or journey. Each text is rendered incomplete by this structuring, and thus requires a subsequent and 'supplementary' text to extend the process of analysis. This is to say that each text becomes a metonymy, a partial exploration

of a 'whole' ("contemporary culture"? "The postmodern scene"?) which nevertheless remains unattainable. Notions like 'gender', 'the subject' and 'desire', which have been the foci of my discussion, thus become further metonymised, being mere constituents of the already metonymic textual representations which the fictions constitute. Attempts to forge links between the novels - for example, to see them as a trilogy or to emphasise the thematic link between The Passion of New Eve and Nights at the Circus - serve to reinforce this situation by seeking, through the process of critical interpretation, a consistency or unity which the texts, in their very structures and relations, actively work to deny. Carter's novels always already preclude the possibility of a viable and coherent critical reading, perhaps to a greater extent than most other texts do, by virtue of their self-conscious representation of and engagement with contemporary theoretical positions. This self-consciousness, evident in the incorporation of Lacanian theory in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman or of Foucauldian notions of power and the gaze in Nights at the Circus, results in a pre-empting of contemporary critical discourse which renders Carter's texts problematic in terms of the application of literary theory - if the theory is already there, what's the point of applying it to produce a reading? As Noel King remarks of Don DeLillo's novel White Noise, "one hesitates to use postmodern critical theories on a book which contains postmodern sunsets . . .".[2] Each novel thus constitutes its own theoretical analysis of that which it represents, within its own textual frame. Each novel features a central protagonist one aspect of whose function is to ironically voice suitable critical standpoints at certain moments in the text. It is this ironic process of self-criticism which ultimately

renders Carter's texts problematic for the contemporary user of critical theory, in that the critical response which is seemingly invited is the one which is always already in the text. The resulting collapsing of discourse boundaries (i.e. between 'literature', 'philosophy' and 'criticism') suggests that Carter's texts constitute examples of the self-reflexive moment of postmodernism, the point at which the production of discourse coincides with the reflexive analysis of the possibilities of the production of discourse.

However, certain other common features of Carter's work might be considered equally significant, and the work of critics engaged in interpreting Carter's texts need not be 'invalidated' by this self-reflexive characteristic. The conceptual framework of this thesis has been the representation and exploration of the confrontation between feminist political stances and postmodernist fictional strategies in Carter's novels, and I want to conclude my discussions by arguing that while the novels are ultimately unsuccessful in terms of offering potential solutions, the approaches to the problems which the novels identify do function metonymically by displacing the possibility of resolution - a function which conforms to the requirements of the position of 'resistant postmodernism' outlined in Chapter 1, a position requiring resistance to definition, totalisation and completion. Carter's self-conscious engagements with theories of postmodernity represent a displaced engagement with the territory of postmodernity itself - for to the extent that postmodernity exists, it exists in theorisations of it. In one sense, it is nonsense to suggest that something called 'postmodernity'/'postmodernism'/'the postmodern' does

not exist, because the proliferation of the word itself functions to call into being both the the cultural products which constitute it and the concept it signifies. Carter's texts (which never use the word in any form) and her dismissal in interview of "postmodernist" as "really meaning 'mannerist'" (see p.35 above) constitute, I feel, an ironised pre-empting of the application of the concept to her texts. But to argue for or against postmodernism is, in this context, to evade the issue - the tropological worlds of Carter's fiction correspond sufficiently to those delineated by much postmodernist theory to enable the critic to draw and examine comparisons between each fictional representation or spatialization of the concept. Carter's fictions may thus be seen as examples of postmodernist cultural practice which call into question the theoretical 'norms' of postmodernist thought while at the same time exploiting those 'norms' for fictional purposes.

A more fruitful examination of Carter's engagement with postmodernism might be found in the ways in which her texts effect transformations of certain characteristics of postmodernist thought. The shared resistance of postmodernism, the postmodern subject and the picaresque narrative structure to strategies of totalisation suggests one nexus of commonality which might usefully be examined, in that each seems to involve a notion of the transcendental; postmodernism itself (as I will discuss below) incorporates the notion of the 'sublime', subjectivity (as Carter's texts demonstrate) is an elusive condition, and the picaresque structure involves the process of episodic narrative and displacement of resolution which is potentially infinite. In each, a position of totality or completeness becomes a transcendent notion,

beyond representation but implied by and ultimately structuring the process of representation.

Postmodern sublimity, or the implication of transcendence which (despite all claims to the contrary) still delimits the boundaries of postmodern art, has been theorised by Jean-François Lyotard, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and others in the context of its intellectual or aesthetic affinities with the Romantic theorisation of sublimity. Lyotard argues that "with the sublime, the question of death enters the aesthetic question", and he points out that "Kant himself said that the feeling of the sublime is the feeling of something monstrous. *Das Unform.* Formless" [3](italics original) - a feeling which he relates to death as loss of form. Paul Crowther criticises Lyotard's "partial utilisation" of the Kantian sublime, and offers instead a version of Kant's theory which is useful to an understanding of Carter's novels:

> If an object exceeds or threatens our perceptual and imaginative capacities, through its totality of size or *complexity*, or potentially destructive character, this can nevertheless still cause us pleasure, in so far as we are able to *present* it as excessive or threatening - in thought, writing, or visual representation. The fact, in other words, that what transcends can be *represented as transcendant* serves to make vivid the scope of our cognitive and creative powers. We inscribe the dignity of our rational being even on that which overwhelms or threatens to destroy.

Crowther goes on to suggest that "sublimicism" - his own term - "may be a definitive feature of Post-Modern culture *as such*".[4] The presentation of the unpresentable which constitutes the aesthetic manifestation of the sublime experience can be related to the notion of excess which structures the metonymic progression of narrative - the 'totality' which

each of Carter's novels seeks to represent, and the coherent subjective position which each of her protagonists seeks, thus become presentations of the sublime, constructed through the partial displacements of desire.

Paradoxically the Lyotardian version of the Kantian sublime presents the possibility that sublimity, being beyond representation, is also the 'death' of representation, and yet it simultaneously constitutes the horizon of desire. The phallus, which in Lacanian terms fulfills both these functions (being the transcendant end point of signification and also the structuration of desire), constitutes a configuration of the desired object which Carter's novels offer as the motivating condition of the subject-in-becoming. The aspirant condition of the subject-in-becoming - to be a 'become-subject' - thus corresponds to the condition of sublimity, because the subject-in-becoming can only be constituted in and through language or representation, and can only move beyond representation in terms of a notion of transcendance or the sublime (i.e. representation cannot be transcended). The desire for selfhood or subjective coherence, experienced by all Carter's central protagonists, thus constitutes both a seeking for the sublime (which would guarantee the sought-for coherence), and an abandonment of the subject to the movement of desire within and throughout the limits of representation. Carter's subjects are thus caught in a double bind which corresponds to the double bind experienced by Deleuze and Guattari's schizophrenic, situated on "the boundary between the molar organisation and the molecular multiplicity of desire"[5]. The subject-in-becoming thus aspires towards the condition of sublimity, which is at the same time structured

by the movement of desire as displacement towards an absent point beyond representation. Lacan expresses this condition as an enslavement:

> . . . the subject [...] if he can appear to be the slave of language is all the more so of a discourse in the universal movement in which his place is already inscribed at birth, if only by virtue of his proper name.[6]

The picaresque narrative structure articulates this double bind as a simultaneous possibility of completion and deferral of completion, and the movement of Carter's protagonists through the picaresque structures of her texts corresponds at the level of narrative to the movement of their desired objects (i.e. their subjectivities) through language. The process of naming the protagonist, which is significant in each text, reinforces the notion that the subject is situated in language only to be desituated by language; misnaming, either in Albertina's mistranslation of Desiderio's name or in his renaming by the River People (as Evelyn is renamed Eve, and Fevvers is renamed by various characters) reinforces the instability of the subject position which the proper name offers - like the Anti-Oedipal schizophrenic, Carter's protagonists are potentially "every name in history".[7]

Carter's novels, then, represent the quest for identity in terms of a notion of sublimity which structures and displaces the sought for identity. The sublime 'beyond representation' is achieved in an illusory fashion by Desiderio's attempt to render in text his desire for Albertina's desire of him, or by Eve's transmutation into an "intermediate being" (185) like the archaeopteryx, or by Fevvers' carnivalesque laughter which closes Nights at the Circus. Each

configuration of this desire is an illusion because it comprises the elements of internalised, redoubled schism which constitutes the desiring subject. Carter's fiction expresses the motion of the desiring subject as a constant resituation of the signifier/signified division from outside the subject (i.e. a desired object) to inside, as desired subjective condition. Julia Kristeva articulates this resituation:

> Writing is precisely this "spontaneous motion" that changes the formulation of desire for a signifier into objective law, since the subject of writing, specific like no other, is "in-itself-and-for-itself", the very place, not of division but, overcoming it, of motion.[52]

Motion overcomes division through the process of displacement. Each construction of the subject as fissured by and in desire is thus escaped but only to be replaced by another similar construction. The writerliness of Carter's fiction, with its "baroque" and densely allusive style, emphasises the movement of the textualised subject along the metonymic chain of signifiers into intertextuality. The experience of desire is thus expressed by the subject in desire, and it is important to reiterate at this point that desire itself is inexpressible except by displacement into representation. Lorraine Gauthier emphasises this paradox and connects it to the position of women in the Lacanian scheme:

> Metaphor articulates not only the means by which the search for adequate expression is conducted but most effectively represents the impossibility of definite expression which characterises both truth and desire. This search for an appropriate signifier marks the path from pre-human infancy to human "subjectivity". Women occupy a specific position in each of the three stages of this search: the original gap in the realm of the Real; its necessary misrepresentation and eventual revelation as such in the realm of the Imaginary; and its more accurate though necessarily incomplete expression in the realm of the symbolic.[53]

Women function as expressors of the lack which the human subject-in-becoming experiences, but at the same time women represent the desired condition of Carter's protagonists - the process of desire being also the process of experiencing lack.

Related to this quality of "baroque" writerliness is the use which Carter's fictions make of the Gothic genre and tradition. The figures of Gothic fiction - vampires, monsters, freaks, dilettantes, questing heroes and desired heroines - also populate Carter's fictions, as do the metaphors and symbols characteristic of the Gothic. Chris Baldick, discussing the complexities of meaning surrounding the term 'Gothic', observes that

> just as the consciously Protestant pioneers of the Gothic novel raise the old ghosts of a Catholic Europe only to exorcise them, so in a later age the fiction of Angela Carter has exploited the power of a patriarchal folklore, all the better to expose and dispel its grip upon us.'[9]

In Baldick's terms, Carter's fiction cannot satisfactorily be included within the Gothic genre (the combination of an enclosed geographical space [the crumbling castle or mansion] with a menacing weight of historical tradition [the inheritance connected to the mansion] being Baldick's criteria for defining the Gothic'[1]), but the elements of Gothickry which her works consistently exploit should not be overlooked. Their significance can be appreciated in two ways - in terms of reinforcing the connections between postmodernism and Romanticism, already addressed via the above discussion of the sublime, and in terms of the Gothic's preoccupation with the process of figuring the unconscious desires of its protagonists. If the picaresaque is eminently

suitable for the representation of metonymically displacing desire, then the Gothic is equally useful for the representation of the unconscious and repressed structures which, psychoanalysis argues, regulate human behaviour. Gothic offers a framework of historically loaded symbols and metaphors which have conventionally (in terms of the Gothic genre) served to articulate the metonymic functioning of desire - repressed sexuality being both the overt theme and the structuring dynamic of much Gothic fiction, from Matthew Lewis to Bram Stoker. Baldick's suggestion that the Gothic may be particularly significant for women writers offers some insights into Carter's own use of its conventions:

> [the] enduring adoption of Gothic fiction by women has to do with the relative failure of modern societies to ensure for women the kind of economic, legal and personal security that are enjoyed as the post-Absolutist rights of man.[12]

The concern of Carter's fiction with the situation of women within a culture which marginalises, derogates and oppresses them finds expression in her use of Gothic themes and devices which have been traditionally used by women writers to articulate the same *concerns*. A framework of Gothicism enables the structures of the unconscious to be made manifest as symbols which in turn facilitate their exploration in fiction. Of course, in psychoanalytic terms the unconscious can only ever be apprehended in symbolic terms - but Carter's Gothicism seems to exploit this necessity by making Gothic fantasy in its contemporary manifestation as magic realism the primary mode in which the unconscious can be not only represented, but also politicised. Laplanche and Pontalis observe that "fantasy is not the object of desire but its setting"[13], and Carter's fantasy settings situate desire and its

displacements as a series of symbolic representations, in terms of both the narrative structure and the symbols which constitute the central elements of that structure. Thus the Minister's city, the "House of Anonymity", the River Peoples' boat, the centaurs' hut and Hoffman's castle (in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman) constitute perhaps the clearest example in Carter's fiction of a series of scenarios which are intrinsic to the picaresque structure (being scenes attained and lost during the process of the journey) and which also offer symbolic configurations conforming to the characteristic symbols of the Gothic. Such images of decadence can be linked, in Chris Baldick's reading, to fears of a decaying and corrupt aristocracy, so both Hoffman's castle and the Ministry of Determination make explicit a particular historical fear of totalitarian aristocratic dominance partly by virtue of the historical resonance of the castle/ministry image itself. Evelyn's movement from London to New York to the "fantastic space"[14] of the desert (a movement, I have suggested, through a series of cityscapes), and Fevvers' movement from Ma Nelson's brothel to Madame Schreck's freakshow, and then to St. Petersburg, the Grand Duke's palace and the Siberian tundra (another kind of desert)- both sequences offer similar representations of the metonymic displacement of the desired object through a series of symbolic configurations which constitute the scenes of desiring in terms of symbolic representations of the unconscious - albeit representations which increasingly take on a more overtly postmodernist resonance.

The possibility that Carter's fiction can be read as representing a postmodernist stance which is structured around the notion of the

sublime or the transcendental, and which incorporates significant elements of the Gothic tradition at both the thematic and symbolic levels, would seem to suggest a reframing of the notion of postmodernism itself in the light of these characteristically Romantic qualities. Carter's fictions become, in this light, postmodernist manifestations or continuations of a significant tradition of feminine Gothic writing which incorporates, in its explorations of the structures and workings of desire and the unconscious, an essentially Romantic notion of the unrepresentable as a structuring element both implied by and outside the picaresque framework. Craig Owens has noted that women, excluded from Western representation, return within it as figures for "the unrepresentable (Nature, Truth, the Sublime etc.)"[15], and Diane Elam has recently re-articulated this theorisation of women outside/in representation in terms of postmodernism's rewriting of the genre of romance. "Within postmodern romance", writes Elam,

> the figure of woman is what allows the work of re-membering to be performed. Postmodernity's re-membering of the past is performed through a re-engendering of the historical past as romance. That is to say, the figure of woman is what allows the past to be represented (via the en-gendering of romance), but she is also the figure whose very inscription reveals, through the play of gender, the inpossibility of accurate and complete representation.[16]

The Anti-Oedipal process of "becoming woman", which in many ways organises the process of becoming subject of Carter's protagonists, is, in this reading of the symbolic function of woman in postmodernism, also a process of becoming unrepresentable - of attempting to transcend representation through a crossing of the bar between signifier and signified, or man and woman. Each central protagonist can be situated topographically in relation to a series of possible subject positions,

but each character is also in the process of moving between subject positions, so that the structures of the becoming subject are constantly destabilised by motion and displacement. Paul Crowther's notion of "sublimicist" art combines the sublime 'beyond' with the notion of "the subliminal closures and concealments of 'art'"[17], a combination which foregrounds the concept of the *limen* or boundary between representation and the unrepresentable. Teresa de Lauretis has connected this boundary with a theory of the functioning of monstrosity (Kant's *Das Unform*) which affords a useful structure in this context:

> What these monsters stand for, for us, is the symbolic transposition of the place where they stand, the literary topos being literally, in this case, a topographical projection; the *limen*, frontier between the desert and the city, threshold to the inner recesses of the cave or maze, metaphorises the symbolic boundary between nature and culture, the limit and the text imposed on man.[18]

These topographical spaces also structure Carter's novels: Eve/lyn moves from city to desert to cave, Fevvers from city to desert, Desiderio from city to the 'desert' of Nebulous Time.

The project of Carter's fiction, which might be summarised as the offering of a materialist critique of those philosophical and theoretical discourses with which feminist thought has engaged, can be viewed in the light of the insistence of her novels upon the impossibility of closure in any form, as a project which relies upon anti-essentialist notions of deferral and perpetuation. To this extent the process of becoming woman (or becoming subject) is also coincidental with the process of becoming feminist - the political

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agency of Carter's own brand of feminism being largely inseparable from the critical examination of the structures of objectified femininity with which Carter's texts engage. The project is thus explicitly political in that it critiques the material social conditions which produce and perpetuate the oppression of women, and explores a range of theoretical alternatives to this oppression. At the same time it is politically infused in a literary critical sense, in that the form of the project necessitates the critical engagement with the conventional structures of literary production, at the level of the text and at a generic level. A range of conventional 'literary' qualities are problematised by Carter's insistence on the collapsing of discourse boundaries, and on the notion of writing as pleasure which is the source of much critical disapproval of the 'excessive' qualities of her texts. To problematise closure, boundaries and the notion of writerly decorum is to challenge conventional orderings of knowledge by erasing the structures which bind and separate creative contemplation and critical engagement. Similarly Carter's journalistic writing frequently assumes a stance which has been perceived as provocative by the mainstream literary establishment, by virtue of its slippage between such generic categories as autobiography, social criticism, cultural criticism and reviewing.

During the writing of this thesis two events occured which emphasised the significance of the critical neglect to which Carter's fiction has been subjected, and highlighted both its injustice and the difficulty with which it can now be continued. Carter's most recent novel, Wise Children, was published in 1991 to wide critical acclaim,

and her untimely death eight months later meant that this was her last novel. The critical reception of Wise Children has tended to be overshadowed by her death, but the novel was generally welcomed in a way which contradicts the previous neglect of Carter's work. Salman Rushdie described it as "a funny, funny, funny book", and Jonathon Coe commented on the "important subject" of the distinctions between 'high' and 'low' cultures which the novel addresses. Obituaries in the national press spoke of Carter's work as "part of the contemporary canon" (Lorna Sage), and of Carter herself as "a true witness of her times" (Neil Jordan).'[5] Such acclaim, for a writer whose seventeen published works have attracted little critical attention and no book-length study, suggests both a degree of revisionism on the part of the literary establishment, and that the significance of Carter's work as novelist, essayist, poet and playwright has yet to be fully considered. A brief examination of Wise Children will reveal some of the reasons for this newfound interest in Carter's work, and also raise problems with respect to the significance of Carter's fiction in the 1990s, already labelled the age of "postfeminism" and "post-postmodernism".

In theme, Wise Children represents a development of certain elements of Nights at the Circus, drawing heavily on the history of stage and screen but utilising less of the ontological experimentation of Carter's earlier fiction. Wise Children is scarcely a realist text, however; its flamboyancy resides less in the magical or the fantastic, and more in the sheer verbal vigour and outrageousness of the style in which the world of ('high' cultural) Shakespearean acting is debunked

by the ('low' cultural) Cockney vulgarity of the narrating voice and its experiences. The image of the winged woman, a problematic symbol of feminist emancipation in Nights at the Circus, is here transformed into a proliferation of images connecting women and birds: for examples, the first stage appearance of the heroines is as "little brown birds"[20] in an adaptation of Babes in the Wood. Playfulness and persiflage combine in this novel with the parody and pastiche more clearly associated with the earlier fiction - the bizarre coincidences and juxtapositions make little pretence at realism and rely instead upon the conventions of Elizabethan drama. The aesthetic problems raised in Nights at the Circus continue to be addressed, but from a different angle and in a differently complex way. The problematic relationships in contemporary culture between notions of 'appearance' and 'reality' and the ways in which the differences between the two are constructed, emerges as the dominant theme of this novel, and can be seen retrospectively to have been an underlying concern of most of Carter's earlier fiction. Stage and screen provide the arenas and surfaces in and on which a panoramic view of English cultures is displayed. From the very first page the novel states its intention of performing this analysis, in its emphasis on the divisions within conventional notions of 'Englishness' as a monolithic cultural entity. The narrator, Dora Chance, is one of twins, born on "the wrong side" in terms of class, sex and geography (being South Londoners). The Chance twins can be seen as the final configuration of problematised identity which has constituted the dynamic of all Carter's novels, from Morris and his alter ego Honey in Shadow Dance, through the pairings of Desiderio and Albertina, Evelyn and Eve, and Fevvers and

Walser. The dyadic structure of character relations is echoed in the dual time-scheme of the novel, which leaps between reminiscence and contemporary narration, and in the thematic opposition between legitimate and illegitimate (again derived from Shakespearean drama) which offers the clearest insight into the ways in which this novel can be seen as a development of the themes of Carter's earlier fiction.

Karl Miller's book Doubles outlines in some detail the tradition of the figure of the double or twin in literature. Miller traces the history of this tradition from antiquity to its present day manifestation in the works of writers like Martin Amis, and Miller celebrates what he calls "the literature of instability" which has "survived incorporation in the experiments of Modernism":

> It has indeed triumphed with the triumph of these experiments, as it has by virtue of an incorporation in the theories which have succeeded them.[21]

Carter's Nora and Dora chance are identical twins, so alike that even the Prince of Wales "couldn't tell the difference any more than anybody else could" (93). Their lives are interchangeable, as are their bedpartners, and the plot of deceptions and mistaken identities which Carter weaves around this basic structure is as comic as it is intricate. At the same time, however, the figure of the twins has significance in the context of Carter's earlier novels: Dora narrates, and assumes the position of speaking subject, a position which is also one of continual attempted self-definition. The preoccupations of Carter's earlier first-person narratives are thus continued in this

novel, but are transformed by the presence of Nora, who constitutes at one level the defined other to Dora's subject position, but an other who is no different from Dora's self - identity is thus problematised by the notion of the identical but different twins. Nora and Dora represent, in this structure, a further attempt to transcend the subject-object binary which has been the constitutive dynamic of much of her fiction.

As much as anything, the novel is a lament for the past of stage and screen, but at the same time it celebrates the age of television. "Who would have thought", opines Dora, "that little box of shadows would put us all out of business, singers, dancers, acrobats, Shakespearians, the lot?" (37). The histories of the two central families, the Chances and the Hazards (the blatant significance of the names perhaps confirms the novel's anti-realist stance), are simultaneously histories of the social changes and popular cultural fashions of the twentieth century. The brief summary offered of Tristram Hazard's life exemplifies this:

> Little Tris, busted for pot in '68, in a satin vest and velvet knickers, Titian ringlets. He danced naked on the stage in Hair. In '76, he crashed his first Lotus Elan while under the influence, wearing (ever the snappy dresser) his hair in spikes and tartan bondage trousers. (38)

Tristram's television game show epitomises the collapse of cultural barriers which the novel deals with, being a crassly commercial enterprise ("It's all about greed" [41]) in contrast to the 'high' cultural tradition embodied in the history of his family, but the connections between the game show which Dora describes and the themes

of dramatic tragedy and revenge are evident throughout this passage (40-50). Tiffany's on-air exposure of her pregnancy by Tristram constitutes an intrusion of the 'real' into the simulated world of television, and the novel stresses the distinction between reality and simulation in what is perhaps the clearest definition of Carter's consistently materialist political stance:

> It was a shock to see her breasts under the cruel lights - long, heavy breasts with dark nipples, real breasts, not like the ones she'd shown off like borrowed finery to the glamour lenses. This was flesh, you could see that it would bleed, you could see how it fed babies. (46)

This conflict between reality and appearance, in which the 'real' irrupts into representation in a shocking and disruptive way, permeates the entire novel. Moments like this echo the perceptions of the materiality of human flesh which punctuate the earlier novels (the prostitutes in the 'House of Anonymity', Eve's wounding, Fevvers' broken wing) and which suggest a focus on the human body as the terrain of the inscription of subjectivity which is shared by theorists of power and dominance like Michel Foucault. John Fiske has written that

> [t]he struggle for control, top-down vs. bottom-up, is waged on the material terrain of the body and its immediate context.[22]

- a position which Carter's novels clearly share. Occuring in a novel so overtly concerned with appearance and deception, this bodily materiality both resituates the power structures which define the human subject, and rearticulates them in terms of its anti-transcendant stance. Wise Children presents an analysis of the

relationship between appearance and reality which extends beyond the complex ontological dilemmas of Nights at the Circus, and offers insights into how the material can be celebrated rather than effaced by the superficial. At one level this exploration occurs through the Chance twins themselves, who, like Fevvers, are gauchely Cockney with genuine 'hearts of gold', but this element of realism is contrasted with their penchant for performance and the power of the mask. Like Fevvers, they make their living by being the objects of a predominantly male gaze, but the complex psychoanalytic structures which Carter's earlier fiction employs are largely absent from this text. What remains is the narrative voice, an extension of Fevvers' carnivalesque laughter into the present century. The novel's comic vigour derives largely from this narrative voice, but also from its relentless exposure and celebration of illegitimacy in all its forms, and principally in terms of sexual attitudes. In addressing, through Nora's life and narrative, the relationships between sexual reality and social prejudice, Carter is on familiar territory - ultimately this can be seen as the theme of The Passion of New Eve, and Evelyn's opening discussion of cultural symbols in that novel ("A critique of these symbols is a critique of our lives") applies equally to Wise Children.

However, it is also clear that Wise Children differs in many significant ways from the earlier novels. The aspect of this difference which may be seen as most important, in this context, is the seeming absence of an overtly critical stance which can be directly related to those of the earlier texts. However it could be

argued that the heavily ironised narrative voice offers an implicit critical dimension in its dialogic relation with that which it narrates, and further that the novel's extended critique of conventional notions of the nuclear family and its structures and ideologies constitutes a further example of Carter's exploration of Foucauldian conceptions of power and its institutional operation. In her review of the novel, Susannah Clapp points out that the novel "has things to say about what makes kitsch, about high and low culture, the real and the fake"[23], and indeed this preoccupation can be related to the concerns of Carter's earliest works, notably Shadow Dance with its setting of antique shops and suburban decadence. Where Wise Children does differ is in its use of fantasy, which is of a different ontological order to the more science-fictional elements of the earlier texts.

Wise Children continues the detectable move in Carter's novels (with the possible exception of Nights at the Circus) away from the magic realist style which predominated in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman - a move that, interestingly, is not parallelled in her shorter fiction. This shift in style and genre, with its corresponding changes in theme and emphasis, suggests two things: firstly, that a growing awareness of the carnivalesque potential of the novel form itself led to a decreasing reliance upon the more 'mechanical' devices of fantasy and ontological violation; and secondly, that the frequently complex theorisation of fictional ideas which characterises the earlier novels was becoming, as far as the novelist was concerned, 'worked out' to some degree of satisfaction.

In an interview published in 1991, the American writer Kathy Acker (whose work is in many ways comparable to Carter's, not least in its official unpopularity) commented upon changes in her own writing:

> I have to use other texts when I write, that's just how [I] am, but now I don't have irony towards them. The irony is gone. I'm not so interested in pulling them apart, I don't have that suspicion towards them anymore, cause I respect them. I want to learn from them about myth because [we're] both myth dealers.[24]

Carter made a similar point in comments to John Haffenden on her own writing:

> I have always used a very wide number of references because of tending to regard all of Western Europe as a great scrap-yard from which you can assemble all sorts of new vehicles . . . *bricolage*.[25]

Acker's sense of a loss of irony in her work corresponds to a narrowing, in Carter's last novel, of the range of references, so that a strongly Shakespearean focus is conveyed. In this way Carter's texts can be used to map a progression through a period of great intellectual uncertainty, in order to refocus a critical faculty away from intertextual exploration and onto intratextual doubling. This is not to argue that intertextuality has been abandoned in Wise Children (for it is clearly still a powerful element of the text) but to suggest that its role is subordinate to the more significant exploration of the ways in which the narrative voice can achieve polyphonic qualities without overt reference to other texts.

Elaine Jordan has written of Carter's work that

> each project is tactical and specific within a general feminist and materialist strategy - you cannot lay a grid across her work and read off meanings from it.[26]

This assertion would seem to contradict my own strategy of approaching Carter's fiction from within a framework of feminist and postmodernist confluences and conflicts, but it is difficult to see how such a framework could be avoided. Carter's fiction displays a consistent engagement with the unsettling aspects of contemporary culture; her own comment that "we live in Gothic times" can be taken as a pointer to an understanding of her fictional project as an analysis of the 'Gothicness' of the postmodern world. David Punter has written of the Gothic and its enactment of "psychological and social dilemmas", and argues that

> [t]he most crucial element in the definition of Gothic is this: that as the realist novel has been the occupier of the 'middle ground' of bourgeois culture, so Gothic defines itself on the borderland of that culture.[27]

The occupation of cultural margins by the Gothic genre clearly parallels the marginal aesthetic practices of postmodernism, as the Gothic concern with taboo questions parallels postmodernist interrogations of representation and its ideologies. As the picaresque offers a narrative form conducive to the thematisation of desire, so the Gothic offers a generic framework which facilitates and to an extent validates Carter's fictional preoccupations with sexuality, power and social and ideological control. Carter's comment in the "Afterword" to Fireworks reinforces this comparison; "the Gothic tradition", she argues, "[...] retains a singular moral function - that of provoking unease".[28] The contemporary revival of the Gothic

mode (discussed by Bart Moore Gilbert in "The return of the repressed"[29]) has to an extent been 'led' by Carter's fiction, as a younger generation of writers now form a recognisable 'school' of contemporary Gothic fiction (including Jeanette Winterson, Patrick McGrath, Alasdair Gray, Iain Banks and James Kelman in Britain, and Mary Gaitskill, Cormac McCarthy and Toni Morrison in the USA).

Elaine Jordan also emphasises another of Carter's comments, from her interview with Anne Smith, where Carter describes one of her short stories as "a kind of literary criticism: literary criticism as fiction, really"[30] - a comment which I think can be more broadly (in the sense of cultural rather than literary criticism) applied to all Carter's fiction. The range of thematic and intertextual reference in the novels supports this view, and Carter's fiction generally invites an approach which is thematically aware, while at the same time being unfailingly vigorous and entertaining.

If Carter's fiction is to be read as a kind of cultural criticism, and its object can be taken to be the myths which structure and inform our interpretations of the world, their processes of construction and operation, then the narrative structures in which these criticisms are couched constitute examples of the postmodernist conflation of discourses described by theorists like Lyotard. Much of this concluding chapter has been oriented around an exploration of how narrative forms can constitute examinations of their own constructions of the world, and what remains to be addressed is how far this process of self-referential analysis contributes to a politically constructive

feminism which is contained within, and also adumbrates, a politically effective postmodernist aesthetic practice. I want finally to consider Carter's combination of a feminist political stance and a postmodernist aesthetic practice through a discussion of an essay by Sabina Lovibond, entitled "Feminism and Postmodernism".

Lovibond argues, from a feminist standpoint, for a sceptical *approach to the liberatory claims* of postmodernist philosophy, and it is a similarly sceptical position which, I think, can be detected throughout Carter's fiction, and which may afford a useful summary position from which to evaluate her work. Lovibond's scepticism is most clearly stated in the following sentence:

> How can anyone ask me to say goodbye to 'emancipatory metanarratives' when my own emancipation is still such a patchy, hit-and-miss affair?[31]

Postmodernist *scepticism of 'universal reason'*, summarised in Lyotard's diagnosis of the postmodern as constituting the end of the 'grand narratives' of enlightenment rationalism, is subject to severe scrutiny by Lovibond. The ostensible pluralism advocated by much postmodernist political theory and aesthetic practice is criticised for its alignment with "reactionary distaste for modernist social movements, and specifically for the movement towards sexual equality". Clearly Lovibond's critique is of relevance to the conflicting positions I have outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, where postmodernist theorists can be seen to have contributed to a general neglect of potentially relevant feminist theories and vice versa. Lovibond also criticises the postmodernist valorisation of "the local

and customary", which I take to be synonymous with its celebration of marginalised cultures and discourses. Lovibond's diagnosis of the failings of postmodernist theories from a feminist perspective centres on postmodernist attitudes to marginality:

> Feminists need to know, and postmodernist theory fails to explain, how we can achieve a thoroughgoing revision of the *range* of social scripts, narrative archetypes, ways of life, ways of earning a living, etc. available to individual men and women. (italics original)[32]

At the same time, the influence of the 'narrative' model (as in Lyotard's notion of 'metanarratives') and its structuralist reductionism (reducing characters to archetypes and functional roles within a broader narrative framework) is challenged; Lovibond connects this tendency with the re-mythologising movement in postmodernism, which offers "a choice between the various narrative archetypes furnished by existing society". Archetypes, she argues, offer classifications which reinforce rather than challenge the conventional and oppressive social roles into which women have historically been forced. Such an ideological manoeuvre ultimately becomes not a liberatory but a reactionary move - similarly, postmodernist scepticism towards the totalising strategies of earlier modes of thought is, ultimately, reactionary; feminism, on the other hand, should strive to be understood as "a component or offshoot of Enlightenment modernism, rather than as one more 'exciting' feature (or cluster of features) in a postmodern social landscape".[33]

The connections between the perspective which Lovibond articulates and that which seems to orchestrate Carter's fictional examinations of

the postmodern world seem fairly clear. Carter's critiques of various aspects of postmodernist theory and of various ideological positions within the postmodernist intellectual terrain are ultimately, I would suggest, directed toward an assessment of their utility and relevance for a materialist feminist political stance, and in interviews Carter always stressed her political orientation as a feminist rather than as a postmodernist (if such a person exists), and also the importance of the history of feminist thought as a major political influence on her development as a writer.

Lovibond's emphasis on the process of the developing subject is also worth quoting as a correlative of Carter's own extended study of this theme. Lovibond writes:

> The idea of subjectivity as socially (or discursively) constructed, and thus as inherently fluid and provisional, opens up a world of possibilities [...]. Its political significance lies in the implication that contrary to appearances [...] we can remake ourselves as better - more autonomous, less pathetic - people.[34]

Carter's fictions explore this terrain populated by fluid, reconstructible subjectivities with a view to examining how it is that the subject is constructed, how cultural myths of subjective stability become tools for the oppression of certain categories of subjects, and how these situations and processes can be changed. The "world of possibilities" Lovibond identifies in the notion of fluid subjectivity might be, indeed, a suitable term to describe the thematics of Carter's novels in their systematic representation of a variety of

problematised subjectivities though a variety of theoretical frameworks.

One major reason for the critical neglect of Carter's work has to be its 'outrageousness', its willingness to critically engage with subjects which are discomfiting to conventional tastes and prejudices - sex, desire, violence, pornography, perversion. Operating in the margins of conventional hegemonic ideology, Carter's fiction thus offers a challenge to orthodoxy of theme, subject matter and style (i.e. the conventional concepts used to 'define' mainstream English fiction) on the grounds of conventional notions of 'taste' and 'decorum', and her novels can be seen as monuments to a process of pushing back and redefining the boundaries of conventionalism. Nevertheless any concomitant notion of marginality is rarely celebrated in her novels, as the critiques of rigidly repressive societies like those of the River People and the Centaurs in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman demonstrate. Indeed, feminist ideologies frequently come under scrutiny, particularly in forms which rely upon separatist political positioning. Through their adherence to this process of interrogation Carter's fictions can, I feel, be aligned with the best postmodernist art, which self-consciously positions itself in the margins of contemporary culture in order to perform its critiques of its own processes of representation and ideological manoeuvring. Julia Kristeva's questioning of the term 'postmodernism' highlights certain aspects of this self-reflexive marginal situation which are pertinent to Carter's fiction:

> [borderline] writing confronts more directly than did its predecessors the *asymbolicity* peculiar to psychosis or the logical and phonetic drifting that pulverises and multiplies meaning while pretending to play with it or flee from it. All the better does it thereby both experience its discomfiture and put up with it, founding its meaning upon both Artaud's semiotic glossolalias and Burrough's cut-up style unfolding and suspending discursive logic and the speaking subject.[35]

Kristeva pinpoints the conflict between the social conditions of postmodernity and its aesthetic manifestations as postmodernism when she writes that "we are faced with ideolects, proliferating uncontrollably [...] within a society whose general tendency, on the *contrary*, is toward uniformity".[36] Carter's fiction challenges, through its insistent intertextuality and in its resistance to conventional decorum, this move towards uniformity both on the part of wider society and by certain elements she perceived within feminist movements. As Linda Hutcheon stresses, this resistance/challenge is not achieved through an abandonment of representation (as Fredric Jameson's understanding of postmodernism would suggest) - postmodernist fiction (and postmodernist art in general) does not involve a "dissolution or repudiation of representation"[37] but rather a problematisation of it which enquires into the myths and conventions which constitute representation and its politics. As I have suggested, Carter's fiction concerns itself with the boundaries of the acceptable, supporting Kristeva's suggestion that a concern with "the horrible, the abject" offers the most successful position from which to perform this problematisation:

> Modern writing knows how to "musicate" best (to use Diderot's term) that which for our mascara and soap-opera age is the most horrible and abject.[38]

In another way Carter's fiction can be read in the light of Kroker and Cook's provocative diagnosis of the postmodern "scene". "We're living through a great story", they write -

> an historical moment of implosion, cancellation and reversal; that moment where the will to will of the technoscape (the dynamic expansion outwards of the technical mastery of social and non-social nature) - traces a great arc of reversal, connecting again to an almost mythic sense of primitivism as the primal of technological society.[39]

Carter's fiction maps this implosion into the "almost mythic", the reification of myths and mythic structures as tools for the manipulation of ideological positions. In "Notes from the Front Line", a muddled essay which nevertheless offers some important insights into Carter's position as a feminist and a materialist, she describes myths as "extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree", and myths are the principal target of Carter's "demythologising business".[40] Folktales, on the other hand, provide the basic narrative forms of many of her short stories and of the episodic structures of her best novels, and Carter emphasises in this essay the democratic sources of these "orally transmitted traditional tales". This material basis orchestrates all Carter's work, and suggests ultimately that her fiction is a battle against the unanchored Baudrillardian culture of simulation and seduction as much as against more concrete oppressive institutions and conventions. "It *is* all applied linguistics", she insists: "Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation".[41] Throughout her fiction language and its operation through myths of oppression are constantly under scrutiny; an interrogation of the linguistic construction of

reality constitutes the philosophical basis of Hoffman's assault on the city, and the Minister's defence, in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, and the cultural construction of images of femininity through myth and the patriarchal denial of female access to language and representation is exposed in The Passion of New Eve. Fevvers' relentless punning and double entendres in her interview with Walser is one aspect of Nights at the Circus's playfulness with the conventional literary canon, and the Cockney vigour of Wise Children represents the polyphonic linguistic structures of English in terms of an examination of cultural differences. Further to this one might add the potentially fruitful ground offered by Carter's fiction for linguistic and stylistic analysis, particularly in terms of the modes of operation of literary and linguistic generic forms like parody, irony and pastiche.

Above all, Carter's fiction reiterates again and again the process of construction of subjectivity, and explores the implications of this process. Desiderio's construction of Albertina and of himself, Evelyn's reconstruction as Eve, Fevvers' status as ambivalent subject/object of the gaze, Walser's reconstruction in the Siberian desert; all these central characters experience moments of blankness, upon which their new subjectivities are projected or inscribed. The power structures which facilitate these processes of construction and inscription are the objects of Carter's feminist scrutiny, while at the same time the very process and possibility of such scrutiny is problematised through the employment of a writinig style which effaces, through repeated textual slippage, the subject position (that

of author/narrator) which can perform it. The "sinister feat of male impersonation" which Carter self-confessedly achieves in her early novels is replaced by a narrative voice (and, in some cases, voices) which mimics, through its self-consciously dialogic movement, the fluidity of the subjects and subject-positions it describes. Cora Kaplan has clearly described the kind of texts which Carter's novels are, in her argument for a new object of feminist literary criticism:

> The literary text too often figures in feminist criticism as a gripping spectacle in which sexual difference appears somewhat abstracted from the muddy social world in which it is elsewhere embedded. Yet novels, poetry and drama are, on the contrary, peculiarly rich discourses in which the fused languages of class, race and gender are both produced and re-presented through the incorporation of other discourses. The focus of feminist analysis ought to be on that heterogeneity within the literary, on the intimate relation there expressed between all the categories that order social and psychic meaning.[42]

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