

**DESTABILIZING PATRIARCHAL DISCURSIVE PRACTICES:
STRATEGIES OF SUBVERSION AND RE-VISION IN ANGELA
CARTER'S FICTION**

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By

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Certificate

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Dr. Mohandas C.B.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mohandas', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Declaration

I, Bindu, R. hereby declare that the thesis entitled, “Destabilizing Patriarchal Discursive Practices: Strategies of Subversion and Re-vision in Angela Carter’s Fiction”, submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a bona fide research work carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. Mohandas C.B., Associate Professor and co-guide Dr. Divya N., Assistant Professor, P.G. Department of English and Research Centre, Sree Keralavarma College (Affiliated to the University of Calicut), and it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship, title, or recognition.

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Destabilizing Patriarchal Discursive Practices: Strategies of Subversion and Re-vision in Angela Carter’s Fiction” submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a bona fide research work carried out by Bindu. R, Research Scholar, P.G. Department of English and Research Centre, Sree Keralavarma College (affiliated to the University of Calicut) under our guidance and supervision. Neither the thesis nor any part of it has been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma or title before.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“She was born subversive,” wrote Margaret Atwood in an obituary published in London *Observer* on 23rd February 1992, precisely one week after the sad and untimely demise of Angela Carter, “She had an instinctive feeling for the other side, which included also the underside.” Atwood’s words succinctly present the most important specificity of Carter and her works – their subversive potential. Being a proclaimed and committed feminist, Carter was conscious of the different ways in which the relations of power operate in an unequal society in order to sustain the hegemony of certain classes, sections and gender. In her writings – not only fiction but also non-fictional and journalistic writings – she was careful in representing those sections who occupy the margins and upholding their causes and rights. In her fictional works, she undertook this political task in a very artistic and aesthetic manner and very adroitly, she handled the process of destabilizing the hierarchical structures of power through her favourite strategies of subversion and re-vision.

One of the most brilliant and bold writers of the late twentieth century, Angela Carter allured the readers widely and established her literary reputation in the twenty-first century. Carter received much fame, wide recognition and critical acclaim as a writer posthumously and quite paradoxically, she who always resisted all kinds of canonizations and engaged in all sorts of de-canonization businesses became a canonical figure in

British academic circles as soon as her unfortunate demise at the age of fifty one prompted diverse obituaries praising the magical and talismanic qualities of her life and works.

A writer endowed with daringly original and densely intellectual genius, she walked ahead of her times and her fiction amazed the reading world with their subversive potential. Carter's anti-realist fiction, where she articulated power relations in terms of gender, strongly challenges the established notions of gender, constructed to suit the purposes of patriarchal system which facilitates the supremacy of the male. Judiciously employing certain strategies to subvert and undermine the patriarchal discursive practices, Carter points towards possibilities of change through her unconventional fictional world.

It is precisely an attempt to articulate the repressed and the silenced residing in the margins and to envision experiences from various subject-positions that was undertaken by Angela Carter in her anti-realistic fictional works. Starting her literary career in the vibrant and turbulent cultural climate of the 1960s, created by the rebellious counter-cultural movements including hippieism, Angela Carter's bawdy and wild narratives boldly questioned the established notions and traditions created by the patriarchal discursive patterns and practices with monstrous agility and playful ease, transcending what is often termed as 'decencies'. Straddling the borders of the sacred and the profane, the real and the unreal, she was very adept in the art of blurring the boundaries. During the early phase of her career, her fictional works were more modernist, and their apparently simple plots which can be neatly summarized in one or two sentences, were mostly linear. But beneath their apparent simplicity, they also have psycho-analytical

features which create a sense of decentring about them with tropes like madness and murder. Her later novels bear features of postmodernism abundantly and through the deployment of strategies like intertextuality, parody, fantasy, the Gothic, the carnivalesque etc. Carter tries to realize the conscious political aim of subversion and revision of established and canonical notions preserved by patriarchal discursive practices.

Carter defied all sorts of authorities in her writing and purposefully paid attention to question and challenge the traditional and conventional social assumptions associated with the hierarchical nature of class and gender relations. Blurring the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, the decent and the obscene, she actively engaged herself in destabilizing the rigid, hegemonic nature of patriarchal discursive practices and the resultant social inequalities. Various strategies of subversion and revision are employed with dexterity in her fiction and this adroit play with inverting and reversing the existing structures of power with a hilarious and joyful attitude contribute a lot to raise trenchant questions about what are generally believed to be eternally and universally true according to the versions of experiences projected by patriarchal discourses. Her unusually provocative and iconoclastic fictional works are powerful cultural critiques, deconstructing the processes that produce shared meanings which contribute a lot in the assimilation of societal norms and values needed for the sustenance of existing structures of power in an unequal society. These works even deconstruct our idea of both the novel and the short story by blurring the boundaries between these two forms. She challenged the general perceptions of the readers' idea of a short story or novel by making most of the nine novels written by her relatively short. Apart from these novels, there was a

proliferation of short stories, children's fiction, scripts for plays and non-fiction from the part of this genius which often defied all sorts of traditional categorizations.

Born on 7th May 1940 to middle class parents, Angela Olive Stalker was evacuated from London to a working-class suburban coal-mining village of Wath-upon-Deerne, one of the sooty progenies of industrialization, by her maternal grandmother during the war years. Her grandmother, who was the prototype of the gun-toting mother of the bride who rushes to the rescue of her daughter, mounted on the horse in the tale *The Bloody Chamber*, took Angela to the politics of working class radicalism and it was her granny's influence which inspired her to be attracted to the suffragette movement. After the war once again, Angela returned to her parents in their South London home. There, the over-protective parents with their conservative, middle class values tried to prune her personality. Crammed with gifts and delicious dishes, Angela was pampered by the over-indulgence of her parents and she grew into a tall, fat and shy child with a stammer. But without much delay, the girl started to rebel, went on a slimming diet and transformed herself from a fat, obedient girl to a slim, rude girl. After her schooling, Carter proceeded to Bristol University for her higher education. Meanwhile, she had an early marriage with Paul Carter at the age of twenty. At Bristol University she was fascinated by the Bohemian way of life and became an active participant of the counter cultural movements of the university. It was the age of 'Angry Young Men' in Britain, the 'Beat Generation' in America, Existentialists in France and the Hippy culture which generated an anti-establishment feeling among the youth. The spirit of rebellion was in the air and Carter imbibed it largely. During this phase of her life, Carter was deeply influenced by the surrealists and the psycho-analysts. The Bristol Museum which hosted

many surrealist and exotic art works became her favourite place and she got very much excited by the works of symbolists and Dadaists. Wearing fancy clothes reminding Gypsies, she revelled in camp culture and started her bold transgressions.

In 1966, Carter published her first novel titled *Shadow Dance* (a title which indicates Carter's passion for 'shadows' during that period) which had a touch of the camp and the surreal with it. Next year she got John Llewellyn Rhys Prize for her second novel *The Magic Toyshop*. The third novel *Several Perceptions* won her Somerset Maugham Award which provided her an opportunity to choose any foreign country to live for one year. She chose Japan, the exotic oriental land which transformed her sensibilities thoroughly. "In Japan I learnt what it is to be a woman got radicalized" (28), she wrote in *Nothing Sacred* in 1982. In 1983, she repeated in "Notes From the Front Line," "I can date to that time to ... 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 fiction of my femininity was created..." (70). In Japan, Carter's artistic sensibility came of age and from then on, she was "on the move". An omnivorous reader and a wonderful dreamer, Angela Carter travelled extensively throughout the globe. Worldly wise, she emerged as a matured genius. Japan stimulated the fabulist and fantasist in her and the exotic nature of that land provided an appropriate ambience for her imagination. The result was the genesis of fantastic novels like *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffmann* and *The Passion of New Eve*.

By this time, she got separated from Paul Carter and after a short stint with a Japanese lover while she was staying in Japan, she married Mark Pearce who was much young to her. By 1976, she settled in South London, became the Arts Council for Great

Britain Fellow in Sheffield and member of the Advisory Board of Virago Books. She wrote *The Saedian Women: An Exercise in Cultural History* in the year 1979. In 1980 she started to work as the Visiting Professor on the writing Programme at Brown University, Rhode Island. After two years she left this contract and in 1983 at the age of forty-three gave birth to a son who was named as Alexander Pearce. Next year she took an assignment as Writer in Residence, University of Adelaide. In the same year, the film *Company of Wolves* based on *The Bloody Chamber* was released and *Nights at the Circus* published by Chatto & Windus which bagged James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1985. By then, she started to work as a part-time teacher at the University of East Anglia and in 1991, published *Wise Children*, her last novel. Afflicted by cancer, she passed away on 16th February, 1992, at the age of fifty-one, and in the torrent of obituaries, her fellow writers and established critics lamented the loss of one of the most inspiring presences in English literature. By the third day after her death Virago Books sold out all her books printed by that publishing house with which she collaborated for years. Next year British Academy got forty proposals of Doctoral research into Angela Carter's works. She has become a household name and an integral part of the canon.

Carter's novels can be broadly categorized into four. The first (*Shadow Dance*, 1966), the third (*Several Perceptions* 1968) and the fifth (*Love* 1971) of her novels are often called as the 'Bristol Trilogy' by her critics because they obviously share a common recognizable locale which reflects the details of life as experienced by Angela Carter in a Bohemian district at Bristol. Apparently, the novels categorized under the label 'Bristol Trilogy' are realist narratives when compared to her later novels, but they too, being curious combinations of the Gothic (a very subversive genre) and psychological fantasy,

prove themselves as deviations from drab realism. The second novel *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and the fourth one *Heroes and Villains* (1969) can be grouped together as both of them are female Bildungsroman, tracing the growth of an adolescent young girl into adulthood, thereby scrutinizing and exposing the process of social and cultural construction of gender through the cultural conditioning of the female subject. The novels written in 1970s, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffmann* and *The Passion of the New Eve* bear resemblances as they are fantasies which can be brought within the purview of science fiction. The last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *The Wise Children* (1991) are stunningly hilarious and carnivalesque and they adroitly turn the world upside down in a playful, light-hearted manner. *Nights at the Circus* features the Bird-Woman aerialist Fevvers as its heroine and her autobiographical narrative is composed of many fantastic episodes. *Wise Children*, provides the details of the lives of Dora and Nora, the showgirls of the vaudeville, who share the ignominy of illegitimate birth and Dora's presentation of their tale is couched in the sweetness of positive attitude to life. These novels bear the signs of the postmodern constellation, the ludicrous space-time of the postmodern.

Carter's collections of short stories also are unconventional and iconoclastic. *The Bloody Chambers*, published in 1979 shocked the readers out of their complacency through the chilling adult versions of fairy tales. It is the most widely read and appreciated book of Carter. *Fire Works*, another collection of short stories also exhibits unsettling qualities through its strange, but thrilling stories. These works represent the peak of her showy aggressiveness at its best. Her later short stories are included in

anthologies titled *Black Venus* and *American Ghosts and other Stories*. These stories are largely intertextual and parodic in nature.

Although Angela Carter's works occupy an undeniable space in the contemporary canon, the breadth and depth of her works are still to be explored in detailed manner. Paulina Palmer has done excellent work on Carter and her accurate assessment of Carter's corpus as a movement from coded mannequin to the bird-woman is praiseworthy. In her study of novels written by women writers titled *Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory*, she examines some of the specificities of Carter's work. With an intimate knowledge about the person and her genius built up through effective interviews, Lorna Sage has undertaken a brief but in-depth study of Carter's works, covering all her fictional works as well as non-fiction, as part of the British Council's effort of publishing a series on established writers as *Writers and their Work*. In her book titled *Angela Carter*, Sage traces out the roots of Carter's originality and the lushness of her imagination. Apart from this book which provides a clear insight into Carter's life and works, Sage has edited a collection of essays commemorating Carter and her arts, through scholarly reviews of her writings and polemics. This collection with a powerful introduction by Sage herself, is titled as *Flesh and the Mirror*, an expression accurately suggesting Carter's preoccupation with issues related to body, sexual desire, subjectivity, identity etc. This volume of essays where her fellow writers and well-known critics discuss the novels, short stories and other journalistic kind of writings can be considered as an indispensable companion to Carter's works. Some of the major contributors are Margaret Atwood, Isobel Armstrong, Elaine Jordan, Robert Coover, Laura Mulvey, Hermion Lee, Marina Warner and Kate Webb. In

Lorna Sage's book *Women in the House of Fiction* which reviews the works of post-war women writers, Angela Carter and her works occupy a substantial space along with Fay Weldon, Tony Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Joyce Carol Oats et al.

Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh have done considerable work upon Angela Carter related to their inquiries in the field of postmodernist fiction. They scrutinize her later works and put her under the postmodern constellation and acknowledge their metafictional nature. In her survey of late twentieth century fiction to locate the poetics and politics of postmodernism, Hutcheon refers to Carter's works several times. Patricia Waugh's *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* analyses the ways in which Carter's revisit to the past texts and her questioning of meta-narratives in her fictional works undermine the patriarchal claims of authority.

Linden Peach also has written a book titled *Angela Carter* which is the product of a detailed and thorough research on the specificities of Carter's work. Peach's study elucidates on the innovative nature of Carter's style and strategies and discusses elaborately the tropes and motifs repeated by Carter in her fictional works. This is one of the most extensive and authoritative studies of Carter's works. Peach places Carter's works in their respective social and historical contexts and discusses their contents in detail.

Anna Kerchy has undertaken a very original study of the corporeographic dimensions of Angela Carter's works developing a new body-text interpretive model, linking body politics with textual performance. What she claims to do in the study is "a close reading interface of semiotized bodies in the text and of the somatized text on the

body.” The study is titled as *Body Texts in the Novels of Angela Carter: Writing from a Corporeographic Point of View*. Kerchy’s observations are very much original and inventive.

In the gripping and authorized biography titled *The Inventions of Angela Carter*, Edmond Gordon uncovers Carter’s life story which is as unconventional as her fiction. This biography is a judicious and witty account of her life from an isolated childhood through her energetic youth in Bristol and Japan to a fully matured genius, establishing herself as one of the most daring and acclaimed writers of her period. At the same time, it does not limit itself to the details of her life story; it largely examines the inventive nature of her novels and other writing which made her an icon not only of her generation, but also of the posterity. This widely researched and elegantly written biography places each and every book written by Carter in its historical and social contexts and brilliantly analyses their literary quality and the intellectual and political strategies employed by the most magical of writers.

The study undertaken by me which gets recorded in this thesis is different from the existing research in this area as it scrutinizes almost all the fictional works done by Angela Carter in order to trace the peculiarities of the ways in which Carter employs certain destabilizing strategies which upset the pyramidal power structure of patriarchy. I undertook the project as I seriously felt that the subversive potential and re-visionary possibilities of these works are yet to be analysed in a comprehensive and systematic manner. Through my research, I proposed to examine how various strategies like parody, intertextuality, re-vision, demythologization, carnivalization etc. are employed by Carter

to thwart the prescriptions of gender ideology and hence opening up possibilities of change.

I focus upon the political dimensions of Carter's works in order to highlight the importance of her endeavour to give voice and visibility to those who occupy the margins, thereby, dislocating the discursive practices of the hegemonic sections. I undertake such a study because I firmly believe that a close analysis of Carter's subversive efforts and the evaluation of her feminist politics which gets embodied in her works would be highly valuable in the context of women's emancipation and empowerment as cultural politics is not an optional extra for women. The attempts to bring the eccentric/ex-centric to the centre and to envision them as autonomous individuals with agential capacity are positive acts charged with social commitment and concern for 'Others'. I strongly consider that in a world where the marginalized sections are more and more relegated to the background, such deep concern for them is to be acknowledged and highlighted. The systematic erasure of the subaltern sections and gender altogether from what is counted as official culture should be resisted and, in my opinion, Carter was a relentless crusader for the causes of women.

The first two chapters of my thesis comprise the introductory part of the study. In this chapter titled "Introduction," I provide an introduction to the author and her works and then state the research problem. In my thesis, I enquire how far the strategies of subversion and revision help Angela Carter to destabilize the patriarchal discursive practices. I have chalked out a broad review of the existing research in this area. The difference of my study from the previous literature on this area is pointed out and its objectives and relevance are delineated.

The methodology followed in the thesis is explained in detail in the next chapter. As far as methodology is concerned, I use theoretical postulations related to Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of parody, intertextuality and the carnivalesque, Kristeva's notion of the 'Subject-in-process', Alice Jardine's 'Gynesis' and Judith Butler's notion of gender as performance to explicate the ways in which Carter's fiction subverts the rigidities of concepts related to Gender and Subjectivity.

Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism, intertextuality, parody and the carnivalesque have immense scope for decentering the unitary and normative notions transmitted by the dominant power structures and the discursive practices associated with them. His theories are primarily concerned with the subversion of power and related to this; he examines the ways in which operations of power are represented in novels. For Bakhtin, parody is a powerful tool for literary subversion as it reveals the contradictions and biases inherent in the parodied text. Bakhtin, in his search for further examples for subversion of power in literature, outlined the concept of the carnival through his revolutionary reading of Rabelais. Carnival is the celebration of the "other", the repressed and the marginalized and it is characterized by grotesque bodies, freakish transgressions, unabashed indulgence in bodily activities, carnival laughter etc. Since Angela Carter uses parody and the carnivalesque largely in her novels, I use the theoretical premises drawn by Bakhtin in my study as my primary concern here is the issues related to power and its subversion.

Kristeva was largely influenced by Bakhtin and her formulations related to parody and intertextuality, are extensions of his theoretical assumptions. Her concept of the subject-in-process is highly relevant to my study, as its applicability to Carter's sexual politics embodied in her fiction, is very enormous. For Carter's female protagonists,

identities are never fixed or finite. They are in the state of flux and process. They experience the ambivalence of the “in-between” state which is part of the process of becoming. But at the same time, being smart and cunning *femme fatale* kind of characters, they are endowed with agential capacity to strike back at the right place, at the right time.

Alice Jardine and Judith Butler are heavily indebted to Kristeva for their theories of Gynesis and Gender as performance. Jardine’s Gynesis envisages the feminine and the woman as a gap, an absence or a non-knowledge which is always excluded by the meta-narratives and argues for the insertion of the dispersed, othered and erased subject into the discourse. For example, tropes like madness become feminine for her because it threatens the poise of the system. Butler’s Gender Trouble and gender as performance are used by me in my analysis to a large scale because her extension of Kristevan subject-in-process is appropriate in the context of most of the later novels written by Carter. According to Butler gender is part of a performative act, where it is recognized only through the regular and systematic repetition of certain acts. Here, the subject is never a fixed or stable and gender is cognizable only as part of repeated performance.

In the second chapter titled “Becoming Woman: Fluidity of Identities and the Subject-in-process”, I discuss the theoretical formulations which provide sense of direction to my study in a detailed manner. I apply the above-mentioned theories in my study, as I found them organically related to each other in the politics they share, related to the nature of the constitution of the subject and the subversion of the very processes related to it. I think this politics is highly relevant in discussions related to gender equality and emancipation of women both in the literary and social worlds.

In the third chapter titled “Demythologising / Remythologising: Contesting “False Universals”” I undertake an investigation of the ways in which Carter deconstructs and denounces cultural myths which have been used by patriarchy to keep women in their inferior social position. For Carter, “myths deal with false universals” (Carter, *Saedian Woman* 5). Carter boldly undertakes the project of subverting the oppressive status quo maintained by myths propagated by the hegemonic discourses of patriarchy which subjugate or over-idealize women, thereby, putting them under male power and control. In this chapter, I scrutinize Carter’s fiction to trace the ways in which she De/Remythologizes received notions propagated by patriarchal discursive practices.

In the fourth chapter titled “Double-Coded Politics of Intertextuality and Parody,” I examine Angela Carter’s clever and cunning utilization of intertextuality and parody to realize her feminist motives of challenging and de-stabilizing patriarchal discourses. Carter uses intertextual displacements extensively to challenge the normative sense of history as competitive progression headed by the public acts of ‘Great Men’, as it has been projected through the patriarchal discourses. Only by offering alternative universe of discourses, can the monologic authority of patriarchal discourses be exposed.

The fifth chapter is titled as “Breaking the Old Mould: Feminist Re-visioning of Fairy Tales”. Fairy tales which are ideologically presented as value-free collections of childhood fantasies are reputed to be harmless and innocent amusements. But in fact, they are carriers of conservative ideological discourses. These tales serve as an important site for the cultural and social construction of the subject, reinforcing social norms by creating a space where social experience can be worked through, collectively possessed and made conscious. In the case of sexual politics which is central to patriarchy, most of

the fairy tales participate in the process whereby the dominant sex seeks to maintain and extend its power. In this chapter, I undertake a detailed analysis of the ways in which Carter subverts or sabotages the gender ideology precipitated by patriarchy.

In the sixth chapter titled “The Fantastic / The Gothic: Marvels of the Unconscious”, I undertake an examination of the role played by fantasy and the Gothic elements in the novels of Carter. Fantasy which hovers between the imaginary and the real gives the feminist writers to transcend the limits imposed upon women by patriarchy. It gives them a chance to project possible worlds where their repressed desires can be fulfilled. Through transgressing into hitherto prohibited areas and fantastic projection of repressed desires, Carter revels in subverting the traditional notions of the self, the subject and gender. In this chapter, I trace the manner in which Gothic and fantastic motifs, tropes and situations are judiciously deployed by Carter in her novels.

The seventh chapter, titled “Carnavalesque Subversion and Celebration of Feminine Energies in Carter’s Later Novels”, attempts a detailed enquiry into the carnivalistic elements in her later novels. The fundamental sense of playfulness which Carter shares with the postmodern writers exhibits a liberating stance which underscores the potential shared by the marginalized sections to oppose the repressive social and aesthetic values of official culture produced by the hegemonic discourses and their practices. Playfulness then becomes a deliberate strategy used to provoke readers to critically examine all cultural codes and established patterns of thought.

In the eighth chapter titled “Body as a Site for Struggle and Resistance: Corporeality and Feminist Politics”, the treatment of body in Carter’s fiction is analysed.

The strategy of depicting the body and its urges, its perils and perversions is employed by Carter in order to challenge the ways in which patriarchy construes body. Issues like the nature/ culture dichotomy and women's identification with the body, rape and 'meatification' of the body, the grotesque body's transgressive possibilities and the bold treatment of sexuality (especially women's sexuality) are addressed in a detailed manner.

In the last and final chapter, I sum up the arguments of the previous chapters and list my findings, emphasizing the relevance of the study. I demonstrate how these different strategies serve in order to destabilize patriarchal discursive practices fostered by official culture. Carter's adroit ways to undermine the hierarchical power structures through shocking subversions and exhilarating re-visions are summarized once again to substantiate my arguments. I conclude my thesis with the reiteration of the thesis statement, pointing towards the future scope for extended research in this direction.

Drawing a new map of alterity, Angela Carter's novels are clearly informed by the use of contestatory voices and parodic modes to challenge political and social consensus constructed by the patriarchal discursive practices. Expanding and reviewing the concepts handed over by the so-called historical knowledge and myths of personal identity or subjectivity, they expose machinations of the processes of legitimization. Her fiction breaks down the academic divisions between good and bad literature.

Supplementing her experience of academic (male) discourses of philosophy, anthropology, psycho-analysis, literature etc. with enthusiastic unconventional readings in other genres like fairy tales, nursery rhymes, fables and folk memory, she explores the subcultures of the marginalized sections in dialogue and imagery. Her speculative fiction illuminates the dark side, the blind spots of enlightenment: the class, ethnic, gender and

sexual identities that the 'Universal Rights of Man' left out. Ransacking children's stories and traditional myths, she rethinks assumptions of gender identity created through the dominant patriarchal discursive practices. As Carter herself puts it in "Notes from the Frontline" (a section included in her collection of journalistic and prose writings *Shaking a Leg*), "The literary past, the myth and folklore and so on, are a vast repository of outmoded lies" (41). And she creates new lies out of these old lies in order to bombard us with truths. Her fictional world is a world of second hand trade. She pirates past literature of all genres to undo their biased and prejudiced versions of the world. The effect of this carnival of rewriting is to shift the narrative focus into transformations, metamorphoses and exchanges of identity.

Carter's biographer Edmond Gordon summarizes the specificities of her as a writer in the introduction of the biography titled *The Invention of Angela Carter*:

For more than twenty-five years, Angela Carter had been producing novels, short stories and journalism that stood defiantly apart from the works of her contemporaries. At a time when English literature was dominated by sober social realists, she played with disreputable genres – Gothic horror, science fiction, fairy tale – and gave free rein to the fantastic and the surreal. Her work is by turns funny, sexy, frightening and brutal, but it's always shaped by a keen, subversive intelligence and a style of luxuriant beauty. She was concerned with unpicking the mythic roles and structures that underwrite our existences – in particular the various myths of gender identity and during the last decade of her life she was beginning to emerge as a feminist icon. But it was only now, when her

voice had been silenced that her genius became widely acknowledged.

(xii)

Detailed and in-depth studies of such a politically conscious, socially committed writer will be fruitful not only in doing justice to her efforts but also in effecting positive transformations in society by transmitting optimistic energies of egalitarian perspectives.

My humble endeavour is in this direction.

Chapter 2

Becoming Woman: Fluidity of Identities and the Subject-in-Process

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.

(Simone de Beauvoir).

In the second half of the twentieth century, a broad socio-cultural shift occurred in the western societies in the context of the bitter aftermath of various wars including the world war which resulted in a sense of fragmentation and decentring in world-view. The erstwhile absolute guarantees based on the epistemological certainties provided by the traditional anchorages like 'God', 'Man', 'Truth', 'History', 'Reason' 'Meaning' etc. have been put into crisis and doubt. The old paradigms of knowledge centred round these absolute guarantees have begun to be questioned. Various streams of human discourses and disciplines started to share a sense that western civilization's inherited forms of knowledge and representation are undergoing a thorough and fundamental change. A new socio-cultural pattern which challenged the credibility of universal knowledge was getting evolved, raising trenchant questions about the validity of absolute truth claims of universal knowledge produced by the hegemonic discursive practices. The rejection of the attempt to find an absolute grounding for knowledge resulted in a disbelief in those masterly and masterful accounts of the world or the dominant discursive practices which worked for making sense of the world according to some overarching 'Truths'. In the war-torn world, with the suspicion towards the existential certainties, the stage was being

set slowly for the ‘postmodern turn’ characterized by the pervasive cynicism about the universalist, progressivist and foundationalist claims of enlightenment.

In such an environment, the systematic erasure of the experiences of the subaltern sections, classes and gender and the distortions in their representation by the dominant discursive practices have been started to be recognized and strongly repudiated. I use the phrase ‘discursive practices’ in the Foucauldian terms, where the operations of various hegemonic discourses collude with the structures of power in society in order to ensure the sustenance of these relations. The processes of closely scrutinizing the universal and triumphalist narratives of discourses ensuring the supremacy of certain sections of society over others have been started. The efforts to re-inscribe the hitherto marginalized sections into the discursive realms (including the project of history where these subjugated sections are negated space or relegated to the background) and social structures are made to be an integral part of the political project of different movements which contested or resisted such suppression and marginalization of any kind.

Feminism, being one among those movements which desire for resisting the imposition of power by certain hegemonic sections over the other, was one of the first movements which became happy about the uprooting of the epistemological anchorages in the discourses of enlightenment. As Susan J. Heckmann puts it in *Gender and Knowledge*:

Feminists like other postmodernists attack enlightenment epistemology, specifically its rationalism and dualism. But unlike the postmoderns, feminists reject enlightenment thought because of its gendered bias. They argue that the rationalism that

is the source of enlightenment epistemology has been defined as a specifically masculine mode of thought. Thus, for example, they interpret the positivist's claim that only rational, abstract, universalist thought can lead to truth as a claim about the masculine definition of truth" (5).

For the feminists, the dualisms at the root of enlightenment thought are a product of the fundamental dualism between the male and the female. Susan J. Heckmann continues in this regard, "In each of the dualism on which enlightenment thought rests, rational/irrational, subject/object, and culture/nature, the male is associated with the first element, the female with the second and in each case, the male element is privileged over the female"(5).

Feminism with its emancipatory impulses and teleological motives surely inherits a modernist legacy and it can never deny its modernist origins supported by enlightenment claims. It is inevitable for feminism to acknowledge its modernist roots to claim itself to be an emancipatory movement. But during the process of evolution of feminist thought and political movements based on feminist impulses, some varieties of feminist movements became increasingly aware of the inner contradictions of such a heritage. As Patricia Waugh notes in *Practicing Postmodernism, Reading Modernism*:

The discourses of feminism clearly arise out of and are made possible by those of enlightened modernity and its models of Reason, justice and autonomous subjectivity as universal categories. Feminist discourses, however have been powerful forces in exposing some of the most entrenched and distinguished contradictions and limitations of

enlightenment thought. Simply in articulating issues of difference, the very existence of feminist discourses weaken the rootedness of enlightenment thought in the principle of sameness; It exposes the ways in which the universal principle is contradicted by enlightenment's construction of a public/ private split which consigns women to the private realm of feeling, domesticity, the body in order to clarify a public realm of reason as masculine." (119)

As the enlightenment model of beliefs concerning Truth, Knowledge, Power, the Self and language within contemporary western culture have dwindled, some varieties of feminism found ample scope for appropriating this for their political ends. As Jane Flax puts it in 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory', "Feminist notions of the self, knowledge and truth are too contradictory to those of the enlightenment to be contained within its categories. The way(s) to feminist future(s) cannot lie in reviving or appropriating enlightenment concepts of the person or knowledge" (42).

Feminists began to deconstruct notions of reason, knowledge, truth and the self-propagated by patriarchal discursive practices in order to expose their bias and prejudices in relation to the gender arrangements hidden behind their veneer of neutrality and universality. Those feminists who began to suspect the transcendental claims projected by the patriarchal discourses which reflected and reified the experiences of only a particular section (mostly the rich, white, western males who dominated the social world), started to produce counter knowledges. Having seen women erased, othered or essentialized by the old regimes of truth and knowledge propelled by patriarchal discursive practices, these feminists began to disseminate knowledge made from different places than those

occupied by male, heterosexual Subjects. As the enlightenment episteme got shattered, the concept of the knowing subject also gets shattered. As the masterly accounts of the world projected through patriarchal discursive practices lose their credibility, the subject who presumes to know loses 'his' authority also. This happened to be a positive turn for women as they always remained as the other, as the 'object'. As Craig Owens puts it, "the representational systems of the West (of which Cartesian Cogito is the most traditional) admit only one version; that of the constitutive male subject (and) posit the subject of representation as absolutely cantered, unitary and masculine" (66).

If women work out for the realization of a female subject, they would be moving towards the same episteme with which they had sought to overthrow. In centralizing 'woman' as a unitary category, the attempt would end up in essentialism, once again, wiping out the social and historical differences of different women's situations thereby reproducing the Cartesian dualistic approach. Instead of this, feminism should displace the binary logic of Cartesian dualistic categorization by stressing differences not in terms of binary oppositions, but in multiplicities and pluralities. Such an approach breaks down the opposition between "masculine' and 'feminine' and substitute them as elements that represent multiple differences. Unitary notions of gender as a fixed category should be thwarted with confidence in order to carve out diverse worlds of different experiences.

According to such an approach, subjectivity is never absolute or identifiable because it is constantly being reshaped as it is located not in one particular context of experience but in a wide horizon of knowledge and meaning (which are culture specific), shifting with changing historical contexts.

It is in this context that Julia Kristeva's notion of the subject-in-process becomes useful for feminists. For Kristeva, 'subject- in process' means a kind of pluralized identity which never gets fixed or finished. Opposed to the fixed entity that is Cartesian knowing subject, Kristeva presents the subject in process, one that is constituted differently by different forms of discourses. Kristeva notes in *In the Beginning Was Love: Language and Subject in Psychoanalysis*:

We are no doubt permanent subjects of a language that holds us in its power. But we are subjects in process, ceaselessly losing our identity, destabilized by fluctuations in our relations with the other to whom we never the less remain bound in a kind of homeostasis" (9).

In her essay "Women's Time" (which was published in the same year in which Lyotard's *La Condition Postmoderne* was published), she proposes a view of feminism as a three-stage process. Kristeva associates the historical development of women's movement in the twentieth century with the three positions girls can assume at the Oedipal stage, as they enter the social order. Kristeva notes that each stage of the development of the feminist movement has been characterized by the predominance of one or the other of these three positions or modalities. According to this conception, the first stage of feminism with its egalitarian demands and attempts to secure women's social and political rights within the existing social order can be connected with the paternal modality – the girl child's detachment from the pre-Oedipal mother and the subsequent identification with the paternal order or the order of patriarchal values. About these attempts to claim equal access to the symbolic order Kristeva says:

The difficulty presented by the logic of integrating the second sex into a value system experienced as foreign[is] how to detach women from it and how then to proceed through their critical, differential and autonomous interventions, to render decision-making institutions more flexible. (202)

If during this first phase, women attempted to be integrated into the status quo (the male symbolic order) the second generation of feminists rejected it for a separatist women's culture. Kristeva associates this stage with the maternal modality, in which women retain attachment to 'the maternal' or 'the semiotic'. According to her, the second stage where femininity is extolled in the name of difference is Utopian and to an extent dangerous for women because for individual women over-identification with the pre-Oedipal force is risky as it can lead to madness and even to suicide.

Kristeva associates these stages with different ways of thinking about time. The first stage with its conformist politics in which women are integrated into the symbolic order is associated with linear time, whereas the second phase with its separatist politics in which women reject the symbolic order represented by the patriarchal discourses altogether is associated with cyclical time.

Refusing both these phases as paranoid counter-investments produced by women's exclusion from the socio-symbolic construct, 'women's Time' proposes a new time-phase which balances the two extremes of the symbolic and semiotic dispositions. At this threshold phase, which is an inter-textual dialogue of unconscious semiotic desire with social symbolic meaning, the very dichotomy between masculine and feminine is

identified as metaphysical. Whereas the first and second stages share a tendency to fix female identity, the threshold phase, urged by Kristeva conceives identity as unfixed, always in process and always incomplete:

In the third attitude which I strongly advocate – ‘which I imagine?’ – the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two vital entities may be understood as an opposition belonging to metaphysics. What can ‘identity’; even social identity’ mean in a new theoretical and scientific space, where the very notion of identity is challenged? (209)

At this theoretical space, the cultural features of both femininity and masculinity become the condition of all sexual identities. The play of “difference and deferral are celebrated as the basis of all subjectivities. Identity is continually assumed and immediately called into question. Thus sexual identity is exposed as in process, as not fixed. This subject-in-process as Kristeva calls it, goes beyond the ideological fixity of an autonomous, universal, gendered subject by overcoming the sexual opposition masculine/feminine and the epistemological opposition between knowledge and ignorance.

It is here at this new conceptual space which transcends the fixity of sexual identity and the binarism inherent in the essentialist versions of sexual difference, we can locate the third generation of feminism in the context of the postmodern condition. Kristeva has been careful with the issue of the space from which women may represent themselves as they attempt to articulate the subversive potential of a marginal discourse. According to her, feminists who intend to raise the subversive resistance should be vigilant not to repeat the habit of patriarchal discursive practices in lodging women in the

position of the marginal. Kristeva opines that feminists who intend to raise the subversive resistance should be vigilant not to repeat the habit of patriarchal discursive practices in lodging women in the position of the marginal. Kristeva has been careful with the issue of the space from which women may represent themselves as they attempt to articulate the subversive potential of a marginal discourse. The efforts to explore and articulate these spaces occupied by the marginalized sections including women are very important while addressing the questions of power and value which necessarily involve certain centralizing principles of self, gender, class, race etc. as these efforts expose the ways in which the 'other' is pushed to their silent and invisible peripheries.

It is this same space which is being explored by Gynesis, a process or movement envisaged by Alice Jardine in *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*. (Jardine uses the word modernity to refer to what is termed as postmodernism in the U.S.). According to her, the postmodern crisis in legitimation "has brought about within the master narratives of the West, a vast self-exploration, a questioning and turning back upon their own discourses, in an attempt to create a new space or spacing within themselves" (25). Jardine continues:

In France, such rethinking has involved above all, a re-incorporation and re-conceptualization of that which has been the master narrative's own non-knowledge, what has eluded them, what has engulfed them. This other than themselves is almost always a 'space' of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control) and this space has been coded as feminine, as woman." (25)

For Jardine, modernity in philosophy and literature is definable as the attempt to articulate the spaces of the marginalized or the retrieval of those who are relegated to the margins in a movement which she calls as ‘Gynesis’- a process of questioning and rethinking brought about by the collapse of the master narratives of the West. Jardine stresses the promises of such an enterprise in *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*:

To give a new language to these other spaces is a project filled with both promise and fear.... for these spaces have hitherto remained unknown, terrifying, monstrous; they are mad, unconscious, improper, unclean, non-sensical, oriental, profane. If philosophy is truly to question these spaces, it must move away from all that has defined them, held them in place: the Man, the Subject, History, Meaning. (73)

For Jardine, Modernity or postmodernism represents an attempt to take those terms which are “not attributed to Man. The spaces of the en-soi, the other, without history – the feminine.” (72). But within ‘Gynesis’, the ‘feminine’ signifies not woman herself, but those spaces which could be said to conceptualize master narrative’s own non-knowledge, that area over which the dominant narratives have lost control.

It is this sense of fluidity of the subject envisaged by the Kristevan ‘subject in process’ or a sense of ‘becoming’ which is being carried forward by Judith Butler in her theoretical notions of ‘Gender Trouble’ and ‘gender as performance’. These concepts can be seen as fertilized by Julia Kristeva’s subject-in-process and Butler obviously reached her postulations as part of her critical enquiry into Kristeva’s theories. In her influential

book titled *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler conceives gender as a product of improvised performance. For Butler, both sex and gender are constructed and no sexual or gender identity exists prior to the self-conscious “expression” of gender. in the form of performance. According to the argument put forward by Butler in *Gender Trouble*, “gender proves to be performative – that is constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though it is not the doing of a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed.” (25). Gender is not one *is*, but it is something that one *does*. It is a verb rather than a noun. It is a *doing* rather than a *being*. Gender is an act or a sequence of performative acts. Collapsing the supposed distinctions between the sex and gender, Butler argues that there is no sex that is not always already gender.

Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (33)

The fluidity and mutability of subjectivity and the sense of identity are not apolitical, but provide infinite possibilities for feminists to undertake the emancipatory

politics without lapsing into essentialism. Postmodern feminist thinkers like Jane Flax acknowledges such possibilities as she explains in *Disputed Subjects*:

It is possible to imagine subjectivities whose desires for multiplicity can impel them towards emancipatory action. These subjectivities would be fluid rather than solid, contextual rather than universal and process oriented rather than topographical. Emancipatory theories and practices require the mechanics of fluids in which subjectivity is conceived as processes rather than as a fixed, atemporal entity locatable in a homogenous, abstract time and space. In discourses about subjectivity, the term ‘the self’ will be superseded by discussions of ‘subjects’. The term “subject(s)” more adequately expresses the simultaneously determined, multiple and agentic qualities of subjectivity. (93)

It is from these premises that I examine various strategies of subversion and revision employed by Angela Carter in order to destabilize the established notions of knowledge and subjectivity transmitted by patriarchal discursive practices. In the latter half of twentieth century, feminists who work in the field of art and literature have begun to use aesthetic practices involving playful irony, parody, fantasy, self-conscious exaggeration, fantastic/Gothic fragmentation etc. These feminist writers and artists resorted to the problematization of androcentric historical knowledge and constitution of subjectivity in order to dismantle the patriarchal ethos which rules the world and if a careful analysis of these strategies is undertaken, we can forge links with the possibilities of the processes envisaged by Kristeva’s notion of the Subject-in-process, Butler’s theory

of gender as performance and Alice Jardine's *Gynesis*. The critique of foundationalism and essentialism implicit in the above-mentioned theoretical postulations regarding gender and subjectivity as well as these destabilizing strategies highlight the potential of the insertion of the local and the limited, the multiple and the provisional, the ex-centric and the marginalized into the discourse. Different patterns of subject formation and knowledge formation can be explored by feminists in order to fulfil their political aims of dismantling the structures of patriarchy.

Intertextual and parodic representational strategies have offered feminist writers and artists an effective way of working within, yet challenging dominant patriarchal discursive practices. Janet Wolf writes in *Feminine Sentences* on the destabilizing effects of strategies of subversion which make possible the direct engagements with androcentric discursive practices:

Postmodern interventions, apart from anything else, achieve what a more separatist, alternative, women-centered culture could not: namely engagement with the dominant culture itself. By employing the much cited postmodern tactics of pastiche, irony, quotation and juxtaposition, this kind of cultural politics engages directly with current images, forms and ideas, subverting their intent and (re)appropriating their meanings, rather than abandoning them for alternative forms, which would leave them untouched and still dominant. (88)

An invigorating and imaginative playfulness associated with a wide range of conceptualizations of difference has started to fertilize feminist writing which assimilates

a sense of the importance of destabilization of the present structures of discourses and embodied projections of alternative futures. It is precisely this kind of attempt that was undertaken by Angela Carter in her anti-realistic fictional works. Carter largely pirates past literature and other discursive practices in order to revise and recast them from the point of view of the “Other”. Carter revises myths, folk tales, past literature celebrated as the canon and all other discursive practices belonging to the popular traditions including the theatre and films. Her works are intertextual patch works which expose the contradictions, gaps, silences and the en-soi, of the patriarchal culture. What we encounter in her fiction is the attempt to insert the marginalized, the eccentric/ex-centric and the suppressed into discourses and culture. Let me elaborate a little bit on the politics of intertextuality and parody as they are the greatest weapons used by Angela Carter in her guerilla warfare against patriarchy.

It was Julia Kristeva who coined the term ‘intertextuality’ (as part of her effort to synthesize Saussurian Semiotics and Bakhtin’s Dialogics) and made it widely available in cultural studies. Kristeva, whose realm is that of the Semiotics, explains intertextuality as the process of ‘the passage of one sign-system to another, in ‘Revolution in Poetic Language’:

This process comes about through the combination of displacement and condensation.... It also involves an altering of thethetic positions – the destruction of the old position and the formation of the new one. The new signifying system may be produced with the same signifying material; in language, for example, the passage may be made from narrative to text. Or it may be borrowed from different signifying materials: the transposition

from a carnival scene to the written text for instance... The term intertextuality denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign-system(s) into another. (111)

In her formulation of the theory of intertextuality, Kristeva highly relied upon Bakhtin's idea of dialogism. According to Bakhtin, there is no utterance without relation to other utterances, and dialogism is the term which he uses to designate the relation of every utterance to other utterances. In 'Word, dialogue, and text' Kristeva elaborates Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. Introducing Bakhtin, she writes:

Writer as well as 'scholar', Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of the texts with model where literary structure does not simply exist but is generated in relation to another structure. What allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is his conception of the literary word as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context. (35-36)

The multi-textual space where several discourses meet is termed as 'the intertextual space' by Kristeva:

Each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read.... Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The

notion of intertextuality replaces that on inter subjectivity, and poetic language is read as its double. (36)

But this mosaic or the 'intertextual' to which every text belongs, is not to be confused with some original of the text. As Barthes puts it in "From Work to Text", "The intertextual in which every text is held, itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find out the sources, the influences of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas"(160).

This is not to say of course, that a study of intertextuality has nothing to do with what has come 'before'. Intertextuality is a network of everything that has come before and is there now. Intertextuality calls attention to prior texts in the sense that it acknowledges that no text has meaning without prior texts. It is a space where meanings intersect. Jonathan Culler explains this in *The Pursuit of Signs*:

Intertextuality leads us to consider prior texts as contributors to a code which makes possible the various effects of signification. Intertextuality thus become less a name for a work's relation to particular prior texts that a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture, the relationship between an text and the various languages or signifying practices of culture and its relations to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture. (103)

Intertextuality is not simply a reference to earlier texts, but is a manipulation of those texts as well. According to Kristeva, a writer can participate in history only by means of Intertextuality. The historical dynamics of the literary system is Intertextuality motivated and Intertextual relations establish the specific historicity of texts. Kristeva continues with her explanation in 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel':

By introducing the status of the word as minimal structural unit, Bakhtin situates the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer and into which he inserts himself by rewriting the text. Diachrony is transformed into synchrony, and in the light of this transformation, linear history appears as abstraction. The only way a writer can participate in history is by transgressing this abstraction through a process of reading – writing that is through the practice of a signifying structure in relation or opposition to another structure. History and morality are written and read within the infrastructure of texts. The poetic word, polyvalent and multi-determined, adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture. (36)

Drawing on Bakhtin, Kristeva argues that it is the ambivalent nature of Intertextuality which gives the text its historicity. The term 'ambivalence' implies, for Bakhtin and Kristeva, the insertion of history/society into the text and of this text into history. Writing becomes a reading of the anterior literary corpus and the text becomes an absorption and a reply to another text.

As she explains the concept of ‘ambivalence’, Kristeva refers to parody, which is a favourite mode of Bakhtin. Kristevan Intertextuality subsumes parody as one of its forms.

... [T]he writer can use another’s word, giving it a new meaning while retaining the meaning it already had. The result is a word with two significations; it becomes ambivalent. This ambivalent word is therefore the result of a joining of two sign systems..... the forming of two sign systems relativizes the text. Stylizing effects establish a difference with regard to the work of another – contrary to imitation (Bakhtin rather has in mind repetition), which take what is imitated (repeated) seriously, claiming and appropriating it without relativizing it. This category ambivalent words is characterized by the writer’s exploitation of another’s speech -without running counter to its thought - for his own purposes, he follows its direction while relativizing it. A second category of ambivalent words, parody for instance, proves to be quite different. Here the writer introduces a signification opposed to that of the other’s word. (44).

Bakhtin’s analysis of parody provides us with a further sense of Intertextuality dialogism. According to Bakhtin, if someone introduces somebody else’s words into his or her utterance, the present utterance assumes a new interpretation, leading to a clash of two intentions within a single discourse, thereby making the statement problematized. Parody, for Bakhtin, is an instance for such double voiced discourses which use someone

else's discourse for conveying aspirations that are hostile to it. While using someone else's discourse. About such discourses he writes, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*:

... [P]arody introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one. The second voice, once having made its home in the other's discourse, clashes hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims. Discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices. (193)

In a parody two different texts are brought together in an oppositional relationship and the parodied language is suffused with a tone of voice which implies an alternative point of view to the apparent truth of the original. This dialogic construction of two voices interacting within the words of a single utterance produces a crucial effect for Bakhtin. It relativizes language. In *The Dialogic Imagination* Bakhtin speaks about the liberatory potential of parodic-travesty forms:

Parodic- travesty forms... liberated the object from the power of language in which it had been entangled, as if in a net; destroyed the homogenizing power of myth over language; they freed consciousness from the power of the direct word, destroyed the thick walls that had imprisoned consciousness within its own discourses.... (336).

Intertextual / dialogic parody constructs a cynical linguistic distance between the two voices or perspectives, causing them interrogate each other's truth, thereby refuting either's claim to unitary, uncontested 'Truth'. Parody, brings in a whole array of

associations of the past text, but at the same time, distances itself from the past text effecting a critical dissociation.

In the context of late twentieth century literature, fictional texts which reject all-encompassing, absolute and timeless Truths produced by the Master Narratives, are often presented in the form of intertextual parody and pastiche. The general mixing-up of texts and discourses, from all periods of the past as well as from the multiple social and linguistic fields of the present, is probably the most characteristic feature of what can be called 'the postmodern style'. Postmodern texts use intertextuality as an intellectual strategy for appropriating the past – for problematizing knowledge precipitated by the representations of the past. In *The Politics of Postmodernism* Linda Hutcheon views intertextuality as a formal manifestation of the desire to rewrite the past in a new context. According to Hutcheon, postmodernist intertextuality neither repudiates nor simply ironizes the past; nor does it simply reproduce the past as nostalgia. Instead postmodern fiction reveals the past as always ideologically and discursively constructed. In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon makes it clear:

Parody often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality – is usually considered as central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders. For artists, the postmodern is said to involve a rummaging through the image reserves of the past in such a way as to show the history of the representations their parody calls to our attention.... But this parodic reprise of the past of art is not nostalgic; it is always critical. It is not ahistorical or dehistoricizing; it does not wrest past art from its original historical context and reassemble it into some sort of

presentist spectacle. Instead through a double process of installing and ironising, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from continuity and difference.

(89)

In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon shows that postmodern parody does not lack the 'satirical impulse' and is not apolitical or ahistorical by citing the examples of the parodic yet individual voices of Salman Rushdie and Angela Carter. (90). In her opinion, irony associated with postmodern intertextuality lends it a political and historical dimension. Hutcheon emphatically points towards the double - coded politics of parody. Irony makes the intertextual references a vehicle for taking our attention to the entire representational processes. Parody does not erase the context of the past representations it cites, but by means of the ironic distancing, always reminds one of the facts he or she is inevitably distanced from that past context now. Even though it is part of a continuum, there is also the ironic difference. Postmodern parodic revision uses and abuses intertextual echoes from established and recognizable previous texts, inscribing the powerful allusions taken from them and then subverting that power through irony.

Ihab Hassan who offers a catena of the aspects of postmodernism in *The Postmodern Turn*, also speaks about intertextual parody's relationship with the past and the present. Hassan includes parody under the category of postmodernist Hybridization. Parody is at first listed together with what Hassan describes as other forms of the 'mutant replication of genres' such as travesty and pastiche and then he goes on to give a more positive view of it as constructive by arguing the cliché and plagiarism ('playgariasm' as Raymond Federman punned) parody and pastiche, pop and kitsch, enrich re-presentation

(170-171). According to this view, image or replica may be as valid as its model. Hassan goes on to substantiate this:

This makes for a different concept of tradition, one in which continuity and discontinuity, high and low culture mingle not to imitate but to expand the past in the present. In that plural present, all styles are dialectically available in an inter-play between the Now and Not Now, the same and the Other. (171)

Postmodern fiction's use of irony and paradox signals a critical distance within this world of representations, promoting questions not about 'the truth', but 'whose' truth prevails. Intertextual parody of canonical American and European classics provides scope for appropriating and reformulating with significant change the dominant, white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, Euro-centric culture. Even though such parodic interventions reveal a kind of dependence on the canon, by its use of the canon, they prove to be instruments of rebellion through the ironic abuse of the canon or authorized forms of discourses.

It is the political potential of such a resistance which is being taken up by the feminist writers who utilize postmodern intertextual strategies to subvert the canonical modes of representing women which always ensured the privileging of the male. The question 'whose story is it and whose truth?' is particularly pertinent for them because of the acute marginalization of women. The need to challenge the accultured models and established ways of representation is intensely felt by feminist writers and postmodern parodying becomes a useful tool for them for doing this. The parodic use (or abuse) of

male representation of women and their desire is a favourite strategy of the postmodern feminist writers. As Hutcheon rightly observes in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, “Produced by discourses which often sustain male privilege, feminine desire-its satisfaction, its objects may need rethinking especially to consider what Catherine Stimpson calls as ‘heterogeneity’. But first, those male discourses need confronting, challenging, debunking. This is where the work of feminist artists is important” (140-141).

Such a stand results from the contemporary feminist insight that the stories we tell about truth, construe the Truth. Postmodern parodic strategies can be deployed by feminist writer in order to deconstruct conventional images of women. Through the reworking of old stories of truth and the invention of new forms of language for doing so, it is the world as well as the words that will be transformed. These rewritings thus turn to be not only literary but also political. When Linda Hutcheon writes about the political efficacy of parody, in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, she makes this clear:

As form of ironic representation, parody is doubly coded in political terms; it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies. This kind of authorized transgression is what makes it a ready vehicle for the political contradictions of postmodernism at large. Parody can be used as a self-reflexive technique that points to art as art, but also to art as inescapably bound to its aesthetic and even social past. Its ironic reprisal also offers an internalized sign of certain self-consciousness about our culture’s means of ideological legitimation. How do some representations get legitimized

and authorized? And at the expense of which others? Parody can offer a way of investigating the history of that process. (97).

It is such a task taken up by Carter in her fiction with all its political density. Her project is to re-inscribe or re-insert the excluded and the marginalized into the spaces from which they were ousted or repelled to the margins. While she is undertaking such a project, she uses not only intertextuality and parody but also the judicious employment of subversive strategies like the Gothic/ the Fantastic, the carnivalesque and body politics. All these strategies reflect Carter's preoccupation with the affirmation and celebration of the "Other". Theoretical concepts related to these strategies are discussed in the respective chapters.

Carter's engagement with these subversive strategies is part of her project of representing and celebrating the "Other", the outcast and the marginal. Her subversive play is to restore the silenced sections, the power to speak. For this she merges different genres, high and low, elite and the popular. She traces the textual and social ruptures and her corpus is full of grotesque characters and freakish identities. The above-mentioned strategies make her texts a space for the fractured and the omitted and their potential for decentring the fixities of power structures contributes a lot for her political intentions. In the coming chapters I examine the ways in which Carter uses these strategies to undermine power and its ramifications in patriarchal, capitalist societies.

Chapter 3

Demythologization / Remythologization: Contesting False Universals

I owe everything to dreams... I work a lot on the level of myths, as much as on that of dreams. In reality, myth was that which took the place of analysis in former times... one never questions enough the traditions of interpretation of myth, and all myths have been referred to a masculine interpretation. If we women read them, we read them otherwise. That is why I often nourish my texts, in my own way, at those mythic sources. (Helen Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*)

I believe that all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice. I'm in the demythologizing business...How that social fiction of my 'femininity' was created by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing...This investigation of the social fictions that regulate our lives – what Blake called the 'mind forg'd manacles' – is what I've concerned myself with consciously since that time. (Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line")

Cultural myths actively participate in the process of constitution of individual subjectivity and largely contribute to the processes of constructing individuals as gendered subjects. During ancient times, when myths originated from popular imagination, springing up directly and spontaneously from the people, they were close to nature. They retained the vigour, spontaneity and freshness of people's natural relationships with each other that were not constrained by the impositions of power hierarchies. In those primitive times, myths were invested with vitality and there were free and uninhibited representations of what is natural. The myths precipitated by the primitive world were closely related to the natural world and most of these which involved sex, incest and cannibalism were metaphors for natural phenomena like fertility including agricultural yield. But later, when the ruling sections of society started to seize and hijack myths to serve their narrow and constricted interests related to power, myths began to be vehicles of dominant ideologies which seek to maintain the hegemony of the privileged sections of the society. The greatest misuse of cultural myths can be traced in the case of gender dimensions of the relations of power in society. In bourgeois conformist and patriarchal societies, cultural myths are used to a large extent to regulate and suppress women's desires and aspirations and to check their growth as individuals.

The revision and re-appropriation of all the culturally produced forms like myths, symbols, legends, fairy tales etc. which underlie our visions of ourselves as gendered subjects is one way in which contemporary women writers subvert culturally conditioned gender inequalities. Using the modes and tones of subversion and revaluation, recuperation and celebration, some women writers of the postmodern era undermine the tyranny of the male myths which seek to oppress women. For them myths are the short

hand symbols representing gender and power relations. Even though dominant cultural myths do not necessarily reflect the authentic experiences of real people, these myths are cunningly applied to all to foster the qualities or motivations that the authorities want or expect from them in order to secure the interests of the elite and ruling classes and sections. Rediscovering and re-interpreting the myths which participate in the cultural construction of gender is a powerful way to discover how women have been misrepresented and constrained. They should either be deconstructed and denounced or rewritten and reclaimed. As Barthes writes in *Mythologies*, “One can conceive of very ancient myths, but there are no eternal ones for it is human history which converts reality into speech and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language”(10). Myths play a very important role in naturalizing the interests of the hegemonic sections and if the hierarchical nature of power relations including those related to nature is to be dismantled, these myths are to be rewritten or retold. That is why Barthes says, in “Myth Today” that “The best weapon against myths is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an artificial myth” (135).

This is precisely what is being done by Angela Carter. She counters myth with myth. In “Notes from the Frontline” she says, “I am in the demythologising business,” (70) and she boldly undertakes the demythologization process in her works because she believes that, as she puts in *The Saedian Women*:

Myth deals in false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances.

In no area is this more true than that of the relations between the sexes. All the mythic versions of women, from the redeeming purity of the virgin to

that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsense; and consolatory nonsense seems a fair definition of myth anyway. (7)

Subversion, a strategy which constitutes the main impulse of Carter's works, manifests itself partly in a dislike of all myths and stereotypes which sustain patriarchal structure. That is why she constantly writes against forms of knowledge which constrict visions within the language of the dominant culture. She invests the world of fairy tale, myths, religion and the spiritual, with the power of magic and imagination which explode those established images and the old representations which actively participate in the cultural production of femininity. As Carter herself has written in "Notes from the Frontline", "I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (69).

By rewriting the old cultural myths and reclaiming the women of power, devalued, and demoted in a patriarchal world, and by asserting the powers of alternative visions as real, valid and celebratory, Carter is reinvesting the world with the powers of the denied and denounced. The repressed powers of those marginalized sections are brought back to life with vigor and vitality with a purpose of undermining the structures of power hierarchies in society. Carter herself had made bold declarations about the demythologizing tendencies which work as a decisive propelling force of her writings. While making such declarations, Carter refers not only to the foundational myths which play a fundamental role in carving out human relationships but also all those understandings and narratives that are connected to power which acquires the status of myths, as they serve the purposes of the political, social and economic interests of the hegemonic sections of the society.

In the earlier stages of Carter's literary career, it is the analytic and demythologizing impulse which is predominant, whereas in the last stage of her career she reveled in re-mythologization, recuperation and celebration of women's experiences and potency. *The Magic Toyshop*, *Heroes and Villains* and *The Passion of New Eve* examine the cultural production of gender attributes (especially the production of femininity) and women's subordination. In her later works, it is the celebratory and utopian elements which gain prominence. *The Bloody Chamber*, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* explore possibilities of change which can be precipitated through a specifically female energy. Thus, her career is a movement from the analytic to the celebratory, from demythologization and deconstruction to re-mythologization and reconstruction.

In the initial phase, Carter's main preoccupation is with the injustices related to patriarchy, the cultural production of gender especially femininity and the myths and institutions which serve to maintain male supremacy. In *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie is one of those adolescent heroines of Carter who give her ample scope to analyse femininity and female subordination as cultural constructs. Angela Carter often investigates ironically the ways in which adolescent girls develop a sense of their gendered identity culturally, their sense of the world being mediated and conditioned by patriarchal images of popular and high art. In "Notes from the Frontline" she notes further, "This investigation of the social fictions that regulate our lives - what Blake called "mind-forged manacles-is what I have concerned with consciously," (10).

Melanie, the fifteen-year-old beauty, the protagonist of *The Magic Toyshop* undergoes this process of construction of her gendered subjectivity, adopting the limited

stereotypical images offered by high culture, advertising and pulp fiction to form her adult life. In the opening part of the novel, Melanie is seen to be posing in front of the mirror, “She also posed in attitudes, holding things. Pre- Raphaelite, she combed out her long, black hair... A la Toulouse Lautrec, she dragged her hair sluttishly across her face. She contrived a pale, smug Cranach Venus with a bit of net curtain. After she read Lady Chatterley’s lover, she secretly picked forget-me-nots and stuck them in her pubic hair” (1). She continues her efforts of cultivating femininity, preparing herself for the would-be bridegroom in her fantasies. “She gift-wrapped herself for a phantom bride groom. She could almost feel his breath on her cheek... Venice or Miami Beach” (2).

The poses she takes up are derived from patriarchal images of women. From the Pre-Raphaelite impressionist postures in front of the mirror, Melanie moves on to imagining herself as an avatar of Lady Chatterley, the famous heroine of D.H. Lawrence’s much celebrated, sensational novel. Her version of sexuality is in fact mediated by and modeled on the versions projected by popular women’s magazines and Hollywood images of the bridegroom whose teeth are clean and who “husks darling” at her. Looking into the mirror, the images she sees are those previously inscribed there by male authors, painters and girls’ magazine. Melanie’s subjectivity has been shaped by her cultural heritage, her socialization and the overbearingly patriarchal world she inhabits after the death of her parents. The workings of her adolescent imaginings are thus directed by her fantasies associated with her future roles as lover, wife and mother. Carter’s intertextual use of myth, images and symbol taken from artistic and popular cultural representation excites us to perceive how both high and popular culture, breed

and sustain certain myths of subordination and oppression at the class, gender and social levels.

The dominant myth deconstructed or reworked in this novel is the biblical episode of the Garden of Eden. Carter herself acknowledged the strategic use of the myth of the Garden of Eden in the novel. During the specific night in which Melanie loses her parents in the air crash, being unaware of the accident, Melanie decides to utilize her parent's absence for transgression and ventures into the garden of her house, wearing her mother's wedding dress which is too loose for her. In that wedding gown, Melanie tries to climb the Apple tree, goes up to the branches and rips her dress. This episode in the garden is suggestive of the adolescent girl's awakening sexuality and her fantasy of having sexual experience. Melanie's act of climbing the apple tree is metaphorical. The apple tree in that garden becomes her tree of knowledge. In Freudian terms, the act of climbing a tree in dreams suggests sexual intercourse. Melanie sees a purring cat sitting at the centre of the tree which inspires her to be naked and she gets out of the wedding dress. Being naked, Melanie feels awkward and vulnerable and tries to cover her body with her long hair. Eve-like, she stands on the branch of the tree and suddenly, the cat jumps on her and the dress neatly placed on the branch gets ripped and its hem gets smeared with Melanie's blood. The ripping of the wedding dress and the blood stain on it suggest the breaking of hymen during the first sexual intercourse. This episode marks Melanie's loss of innocence and her Garden of Eden. Melanie becomes "horribly conscious of her own exposed nakedness" and in her awareness of her nakedness, we can trace an echo of Eve's realization of her nakedness after her temptation and consumption of the forbidden fruit.

When she hears the news of the plane crash which took away the lives of her parents, Melanie starts blaming herself for tragedy - the air crash and the unexpected and untimely death of her parents. Once again, the Apple tree becomes her tree of knowledge as she starts to feel guilt. She, the woman, like the mythical Eve, takes up the responsibility of the guilt and the subsequent tragedy or fall. Carter, in the novel, reworks motifs and episodes from the biblical story of the temptation of Eve and the subsequent fall, thereby illustrating the primacy which cultural and religious myths exert over subjectivity. Carter, through the subversive reference to the biblical myth, exposes the self-perpetuating nature of patriarchal structures and institutions and the tyranny and injustice involved in myths propagated by patriarchal cultures.

In the next section of the novel, Carter in a mood of subversion, foregrounds the contradictions between the romantic images of femininity reproduced by culture and art, and the harsh realities of sexual violence which is at the centre of patriarchy. Being orphaned by her parents' death, Melanie, with her brother and sister, becomes destitute and goes to her only relative Uncle Philip who is a tyrant, as there is no other way for them. In his house, Melanie is dragged out of her fancies and fictions to the cruel realities of life. Bereft of her cozy home, she lands up in the macabre world of the puppet master Uncle Philip. Her too romantic fantasies about the lover, "made up out of books and poems she had dreamed of all summer" ends up in the harsh fact of her predatory lover she gets at Uncle Philip's house - unwashed, Irish Finn with his squint, and his "insolent, off-hand terrifying maleness, filling the room with its reek." (46). The roles to which Melanie is introduced in her uncle's macabre world of life-like puppets, include wood nymph, bride and victim of rape. In representing them, Carter highlights the limitations of

the roles allocated to woman in the patriarchal family unit. Melanie finds herself entrapped against her will, in the conventional roles allotted to women in male-dominated societies. While in bed with her lover Finn, with her little sister Victoria playing in the room she feels like she and Finn, “might have been married for years and Victoria, their Baby.” (177). Involuntarily, she finds herself slotted into the traditional roles of wife and mother. In the same way, one day when Uncle Philip is absent, Finn occupies the place usually taken by Philip at the dining table, Victoria greets him as ‘Daddy’. This implies that the seat of power goes with the male, the father.

At the same time, there are suggestions of subversive role-reversals in the novel. Finn makes it a practice to peep at Melanie while she is undressing through a hole which he made on the wall. This act of voyeurism calls attention to the power exerted by the male gaze which is used as a practical means by men to establish their authority over women. But Melanie responds with indignation with the intension of safeguarding her privacy and uses the peephole to spy Finn back as an act of retaliation and resistance. There, she sees him through the hole, walking on his hands. This becomes a bold act of defiance to the conventional pattern and an instance (even though momentary) of role-reversal. She becomes the observer, and he the observed. He, in his odd, topsy-turvy position becomes the freak and the spectacle, while she, in her straight position becomes the norm.

Another powerful subversive feature in the novel is the enactment of the myth of ‘Leda and the Swan’ in the puppet theatre of Uncle Philip. Melanie is compelled to take the role of Leda to the plywood swan made by Uncle Philip. In Western elite art, there are many repeated re-descriptions of the myth of Leda and the swan, which legitimizes

the male God's unquestionable rights to sexually assault those women who become the objects of his lustful desires. This myth suggests that women are fortunate if they get a chance to have sexual contact with the God and carry his seeds, even if the act becomes loathsome and repulsive because of the bestial force involved in it and the lack of consent from the part of woman. (Zeus's rights to rape are taken for granted and he descends to the 'lucky' dames who become his objects of desire in various forms - as a bull to Europa, a swan to Leda and a shower of gold to Danae). The traditional representation of the rape scene in the myth which imagines a magnanimous, gentle and powerful swan being caressed by a Leda, full of rapturous adoration is subverted and satirized by Angela Carter. The swan created by Uncle Philip becomes a slapstick production by its absurd and cumbersome form and terrifyingly phallic appearance with its 'long neck made of rubber which beats and sways with an unnerving life of its own' (167). The grotesquely ridiculous appearance of the 'plywood puppet swan' debunks the divinity, glamour and regalia of the incarnation of Zeus (Zeus is the King of Gods) in the form of swan, "On came the swan, its feet going splat, splat, splat' (167). The subsequent rape also is mocked. The absurdity of the male-centered imagination of western civilization, which pictures a Leda who languorously accepts the rape, is brought to light by actualizing the horror and brutally involved in the act of actual rape, "Melanie felt herself not herself. With her mouth full of feathers, she screams. The huge swan subsumes Melanie, it made a lumpish jump forward and settled on her loins. The gilded beak dug deeply into the soft flesh. The obscene swan mounted her" (167). The violence involved in the sexual assault is being highlighted here. Uncle Philip's compulsion on Melanie to act out the role of

Leda is fused with incestuous overtones and the puppet Swan's rape of Leda is a vicarious sexual assault of Philip on Melanie.

Similarly, the episode in the pleasure garden, the scene of the couple's first kiss is pictured as a sexual assault with all the romance plucked out of it. The romantic motions of heterosexual love are challenged by pointing towards the inherently destructive nature of male sexual desire. Finn's sexual desire becomes synonymous with a desire to make Melanie submit entirely to his will. And she responds with disgust and horror, "Finn inserted his tongue between her lips, searching tentatively for her own tongue inside her mouth. The moment consumed her. She choked and struggled, beating her fists against him. Convulsed with horror at this sensual and intimate connection, this rude encroachment of her physical privacy, this humiliation" (Carter, *Magic Toyshop* 106). Initially, Melanie is full of resentment for Finn for his shabby appearance, his stink and coarse manners. But later His warmth of affection and sensuousness attract her. Finn is pictured as an icon of male sexual vitality – he is being compared to the mythical Pan and a lion poised to kill. At first, Melanie finds his initiative to establish a relationship as an invasion or intrusion but later she starts to see him as her partner and ally in her efforts to escape from the tyrannical world of Uncle Philip. The initial resentment gives way to attachment because of Finn's grace, energy and tenderness. Her initial distrust for the Irish trio –Margaret and her brothers Finn and Francie melts away by the warmth shed by them. Shedding her initial despise for the red-haired, musical Irish family, Melanie starts to develop a harmonious relationship with the trio and starts to see them as her benefactors. Melanie finds their world of music and resistance as a bright world with an eerie light, whereas Philip's world was very much dark with brutal enforcement. Thus, by

the peculiar treatment of both the situations, Carter indirectly reveals that, the roles adopted by men and women are not rigid but flexible in fact. They are open to change.

“The puppet” is a powerful image used frequently by Angela Carter to denote the passive existence of the subordinated sections of the society, especially of women who accept the prescriptions of the powerful. In her review of Carter’s writing titled “From Coded Mannequins to Bird Women”, Paulina Palmer traces the connotations of the image of the puppet to the ‘the coded mannequin’, the metaphor Helen Cixous employs to represent “the robotic state to which human beings are reduced by a process of psychic repression” (183).

The image of the puppet also refers to the malign, unknown forces of the macabre manipulation of the oppressed sections, including women, which stand for the centres of power in society. In *The Magic Toyshop*, the puppet microcosm of Uncle Philip stands for the sinister ways in which he wishes to manipulate his empire-the private micro-world of western family unit. Within the power structures of patriarchy, women’s position is equal to that of the puppets operated by the patriarchal figure of the toy-maker within the structures of the toyshop. Uncle Philip the maker of these puppets, takes on the role of a particularly despotic patriarch who prescribes the behavioural patterns of the entire family, while Melanie, his orphaned niece and Margaret, his wife are reduced to positions of powerlessness of the puppets where ever he is present. (Even in his absence, his presence haunts them.) The relationship between the puppet and the puppet master is important to Carter because for her it is a sharp symbol of the control exerted by a patriarchal culture on women and the roles available to them in the context such forceful repression.

It is in Margaret, Philip's dumb wife that the pathos associated with the metaphor of the puppet as a representation of powerlessness, reaches its highest peak. Like his puppets, she is unable to speak. She loses her speech on the day of her marriage with Uncle Philip. On the very first day of Philip's entry into her life, she loses her subjectivity and autonomy. Under the despotic rule of Philip, in her speechless condition, she becomes 'a tabula rasa, a lack, a negation, an absence' as Gilbert and Gubar put it in *The Mad Women in the Attic*. Wrapped herself in the 'miserable grey dress' typifying ultimate dejection and with the stiff silver collar he made for her Margaret is the victim of the patriarchal repression of the worst kind, ("The necklace was a collar of dull silver, two hinged silver pieces knobbed with moonstones which snapped into place around her lean neck and rose up almost to her chin so that she could hardly move her head" (112). Margaret's physicality as well as sexuality is stifled and constrained by uncle Philip who only 'barks brusque commands at her' (124). The sight of the uncomfortable state of Margaret with her necklace increases Philip's appetite at the dining table, while poor Margaret strains to eat.

But while this is the situation at the surface, Angela Carter challenges and undermines the callousness of male-centred family by depicting the subterranean activities going on in the house, performed by the Irish trio, Margaret and her two brothers. On her first night at the Toyshop Melanie discovers them playing Irish music and dancing in the kitchen around the fire. Melanie feels that the vigorousness and vitality she saw in their merry-making would ward off her from the pervasive evil spirit of the patriarchal world. They are the "red people" who through their magic exorcise the lost freedom for her, "Not four but three angels.... All the red people lighting a bonfire

for her, to frighten away the wolves and tigers of this dreadful forest in which she lived.” (Carter, *Magic Toyshop* 122). The Carnavalesque spirit shown by the Irish trio in their ‘underground’ activities undermines the patriarchal control of Philip. Their secret music and dance is an attempt to retain their autonomy and creativity.

The guerrilla warfare fought by the Irish trio - a strategy through which carter subverts the rigidity of patriarchal authority - gains utmost intensity when the readers along with Melanie, come to know about the secret, incestuous relationship between Margaret and Francie. Here Margaret’s silence is transformed from ‘a sign of innocence, purity or passivity’ to a mysterious but potent act of resistance. Her relationship with her brother turns to be an act of ultimate defiance against Philip’s authority - Her silence containing all potential sound, this is to her, the greatest act of autonomy. When Philip sees Margaret embraced by Francie, her lost voice comes back, “Struck dumb on her wedding day, she found her old voice again the day she was freed” (Carter, *Magic Toyshop* 197). It is the day on which she makes herself responsible for the fire which destroys the toyshop in the closing part of the novel. In the final scene of the novel, Margret and Francie are shown about to murder Philip with an iron bar amidst the flames which burn down his toyshop. Thus, it is Margaret, who at first seems to be the passive victim, who sabotage the patriarchal order. Angela carter, uses her female character’s silence- a characteristic traditionally identified with women by patriarchy - to subvert the patriarchal standards. This technique echoes the French Feminist critics who take up the Lacanian concept of the lack as the most significant feature of female creativity.

As in the beginning, The Garden of Eden scene is being re-enacted at the end of the novel also. But this time, Eve is not alone; she is accompanied by her Adam. If in the

opening pages we encounter the biblical myth to allude to Melanie's sexual awakening, in the last part of the novel, the real fortunate fall occurs as Melanie and Finn manage to escape from the sinister world of the patriarchal figure Uncle Philip's toyshop. The reader returns to the theme of Eden with the elemental pair Adam and Eve represented in the form of Finn and Melanie. Everything perishes in the fire set by Francie and Margret, but Melanie and Finn find themselves in the Garden of the ruined house, "At night, in the Garden, they faced each other in a wild surmise" (Carter, *Magic Toyshop* 200).

Thus, in *The Magic Toyshop*, in a fairly subtle and covert way, Carter challenges what the patriarchal social order has represented. At first analysing women's position by revising tropes from mythology and psychoanalysis, she later subverts these received notions.

Most of the heroines of Carter's novels including Melanie are adolescent young girls who undertake their rite-de-passage in life. From the innocence associated with their lack of experience they venture out to the world of experience and wisdom. In these female bildungsroman, we see female characters undergoing the experiences of female subordination, which give them an understanding about their position in society and through their resourcefulness and intelligence, they overcome their suppressed situations and boldly assert themselves in this process of self-recognition. This self-assurance becomes their capital, and through their newly found agency, they seek and realize their modes and ways of escape from the clutches of tyranny of patriarchy. In this way, they are the subject-in-process as their subjectivities are in the process of evolution, in the process of becoming. Situated in the cusp of childhood and adulthood they represent the 'in-between'. With fluid and mutable subjectivities, they undergo a series of

transformations which finally prepare them to be fully developed individuals who have control over the decisive aspects of their lives.

The Passion of New Eve which was conceived as “a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity” according to Carter, is an anti-mythic novel which deconstructs mainly the myth of the Creation of Eve. It takes up material from the myths of Oedipus, Tiresias, Lilith, The Hollywood Screen Goddesses and many more also. The events of the novel take place in an unspecified future, where urban civilization is collapsing. The novel portrays the saga of Eve. Evelyn’s journey into the ramifications of the meaning of gender in society. Evelyn starts such a metaphorical journey from a post-apocalyptic America as a man who has imbibed the ideals of masculine dominance from the framework of patriarchy. In the city of New York which has dwindled into a nightmare of chaos, he keeps a sadomasochistic kind of relationship with Leilah, a black prostitute and leads a life characterized by sexual excesses. He is shown as a male chauvinist and in the initial part of the novel, we see the graphic presentation of his attitude to women. Evelyn who regards women as inferior beings and sexual objects treats Leilah as a slave to gratify his desire, but quite paradoxically he is infatuated by the glamorous images of the Hollywood Screen Goddess, Tristessa, who, for him represents the unobtainable ideal. His sexist attitudes are made the butt of ridicule by Carter. Being bored and tired of his affair with Leilah, Evelyn decides to leave the city and sets out a journey through the surrounding deserts. Closely studying the nature of Evelyn’s torrid love affair or his oppressive relationship with Leilah, the narrative of the novel proceeds to Evelyn’s experiences of castration and re-modelling as New Eve - he is being captured by an underground commune of feminist guerrilla fighters led by a matriarch, ‘The Mother’ and

in her chamber called Beaulha, Evelyn undergoes a surgery and becomes a trans-sexual. The Mother is a parodic figure of a matriarchal super woman and she views Evelyn as her material for experimenting with the creation of perfect womanhood. Evelyn is being renamed as 'Eve' and the New Eve learns how to become a woman. There, in Beulha, Evelyn undergoes a process of psychological conditioning to build up femininity by watching pictures of Madonna and suckling mammals.

Escaping from the clutches of this futuristic matriarchy, Evelyn lands up in the hands of Zero, the polygamous, crazy poet who keeps a harem of docile wives and there, as one of the inhabitants of the harem he/she suffers the humiliation and ignominy of being the wife of a ruthless patriarch. This makes Eve or Evelyn understand the sufferings and humiliations faced by wives in patriarchal societies. Eve/ Evelyn's period of incarcerations in the harem of the local tyrant Zero gives him first-hand knowledge about the situation of women in a patriarchal society and provides him an insight into the bitter and agonizing experiences of women within the iron fists of male supremacy. The brutish patriarch is named as 'Zero' purposefully by Carter to emphasize the impotence underlying the inflated phallocratic culture.

Zero then accompanies Evelyn, with the whole members of his harem to trace Tristessa, the actress, the embodiment of tragic beauty- a curious combination of extreme beauty, sorrow and loneliness – who has been his obsession throughout his life since his boyhood. On their expedition to trace Tristessa, they reach a glass palace where they locate Tristessa amidst the pile of Gothic décor, lying in a coffin, surrounded by wax effigies kept in coffins. To their horror, they discover the secret of Tristessa – the

irresistible and ravishing beauty is not a female at all, but a male impersonating the role of a female.

Discovering this, Zero and his wives make arrangements for a mock-wedding and compels Tristessa to rape Eve. Together they kill Zero and his clan by spinning them in Tristessa's spinning glass palace. Eve along with Tristessa continues the journey of self-revelation through the desert. Both of them explore the newly-found sexuality of the other and fell in love with each other as they make out the fact that both of them together constitute Thyresius, the hermaphrodite. Then unfortunately, a group of teenage desert mafia shoots at them and Tristessa dies. Eve is saved and she continues her journey alone and encounters Leilah with whom Evelyn as a man had a parasitical relationship. Recognizing the evil dimensions of the chauvinistic attitude Evelyn had as a man by this time, Eve has shed it and extends the hand of love and friendship to Leilah. Now Leilah's name has been changed to Lilith, after the rebellious character from the myths and in this new incarnation, she is a vagabond Guerrilla fighter, one of the disciples of the Mother. There they meet with an old lady who is grotesquely caked with too much make-up and living upon cold vodka and tinned food and defecating in the bushes behind her deck chair. Evelyn is further taken by Lilith to the cleft of a rock which gets metamorphosed into the uterus of time. Guided by Lilith, Eve is symbolically reborn as she moves through the increasing warmth and depth of the subterranean space. Emerging from this underground experience onto a beach, Evelyn desires to accompany Lilith in her fight along with her fellow rebels but as she is found to be pregnant with a progeny of indeterminate origin, she is asked to stay back. Taking a boat, the New Eve sails away with bright expectations of a baby who would not be a prey to wicked gender ideologies.

In this novel, Angela Carter undertakes a close observation and demonstration of the imbalanced gender relations existing in society and points reassuringly towards a future, where the atrocious nature of gender relations would vanish forever. Through various episodes of Evelyn's picaresque kind of journey aspects of sexual dominance and submissiveness are explored in many of its extreme and excessive manifestations. The events which happen in Eve's journey is deployed by Carter to demonstrate and deconstruct the myths associated with the gender differences. The distinction between biological sex and culturally constructed gender is foregrounded. As the title indicates, the metamorphosis of Evelyn into Eve is an act of demythologizing the biblical account of the creation of Eve whose passion led to the 'fall of man', the anti-women nature of which continues to contribute a lot in the suppression and subordination of women in patriarchal (especially western) societies. The biblical Eve is created out of Adam's rib and Carter's Eve is created out of a chauvinistic male's body.

The novel has references to Lilith also as Leilah changes her name when she takes up the role of a guerrilla fighter waging the war of liberation. Lilith is a mythical character who stands for rebelliousness from the part of women. Lilith is a figure from Jewish mythology envisioned variously as Adam's first wife and a sexually-wanton demon of the night who steals away babies. Some of the stories from Jewish Apocrypha envision Lilith as the first wife of Adam made from the same soil from which Adam was made. According to the Jewish book Alphabet of Ben-Sira which entered Europe from the east in 6th century, Lilith was the first wife of Adam, made at the same time from the same clay (Sumerian Ki) with Adam. As soon as the creation took place, Adam and Lilith started to bicker as Lilith refused to sleep and serve under Adam, they being the equals.

When Adam pressurizes Lilith to lie underneath him she refuses. When Adam tried to force Lilith to the “inferior position’, she rebelled and flew away to the sky and in the air copulated with many demons and gave birth to more than hundred offspring a day. God sent three angels to coax her to come back to Adam, but Lilith firmly refuses, leaving no other option for God than creating a second wife for Adam, this time not from the same clay, but from his ribs.

In Carter’s novel *Lailah* assumes the name of Lilith when she becomes a fighter for liberation to show the libertarian spirit which she imbibes in her new guise. She recognizes the injustice implicit in the role allocated to her by patriarchy as a submissive whore who passively accepts the sadistic and oppressive invasions of her body by men. Realizing her real role in society, Lilith becomes ready to throw away her complying nature and adopts a rebellious position and it is she who teaches the New Eve new lessons of equality and dignity. The mythical Lilith’s stern positions to safeguard her rights are being repeated by Leilah / New Lilith and she imparts new lessons to Eve in this regard.

Carter obliterates the myths of femininity by questioning the essentialist perspectives which eternalizes gender roles at two levels in the novel – in the metamorphosis of Evelyn into Eve and in the revelation of reality associated with *Tristessa*, the idealized version of femininity incarnated from the silver screen. Evelyn’s transformation from a male chauvinist to a benevolent woman occurs through two different processes. He undergoes surgical operation in which his genitals are removed, a fully functioning vagina and ovaries are implanted and breasts are augmented. But Carter stresses that simply biological transformation would not suffice for the New Eve to fit

herself to the frame of conventional image of woman in patriarchal society. The subsequent training to acquire the attributes of dependence, passivity, masochism and the desire to nurture which are labelled as intrinsic qualities of women should be imparted, if Eve is to be accepted as a woman. Carter is pelting stones at the prejudices and partialities of the male-dominated culture by demonstrating the role of cultural conditioning in carving out women's passive and secondary status in society. To be "feminine" is a pre-requisite for women to live in the patriarchal society. As she makes it clear that anatomical surgery alone would not be enough but psychological conditioning is also necessary to "construct" women, she points towards the artificial and constructed nature of the categories of gender.

In revealing the enigma of the immaculate beauty of Tristessa, Carter once again exposes the tricky ways of construction of femininity. Tristessa is the object of Evelyn's infatuation and she is worshipped by male spectators for her image as the epitome of highly romanticized female suffering. This inflated image is punctured when she is discovered to be a male impersonator masquerading as a glamorous lady. Here Carter makes fun of the naivety of the easily-gullible film-goers who raise fanfare for the tinsel stars they adore. The cinema audience's addiction to customary fantasies associated with feminine beauty and sexuality and the male actor's desire for impersonating femininity with the aid of make-up and costume are easily sufficient for creating a screen Goddess. Through the references to the reality associated with Tristessa as a product of male fantasies, Carter shatters once again the reality effects created by the cultural construction of gender through conditioning.

Another plane which facilitates discussion on gender roles is Leilah's transformation into Lilith. The black prostitute who preferred to be a passive sexual object in her relationship with Evelyn becomes an active agent of revolution. In the activist's garb, Leilah thwarts her objectified condition and sheds her passivity, narcissism and masochism. Becoming one of the followers of the Mother, she participates in the struggle related to women's emancipation. In this role, she exhibits leadership qualities which are usually considered to be the prerogatives of the male. Leilah attains autonomy, independence and agency. Gathering the capacity for action and aggression as the time demands, Leilah becomes an individual who can change the course of the society as well as the course of her individual life.

Through the detailed depiction of the changes which Eve and Lilith undergo in their lives, Carter demonstrates the subjectivity in process. Both Eve and Lilith are women in the process of becoming. The masquerade performed by Tristessa also raises certain ideological issues related to gender and subjectivity, as it challenges the essentialist notions of femininity and masculinity. Eve and Tristessa Together constitute Tiresias and they illustrate the Butlerian position of gender as performance since their gender is never fixed or specified and conceived as an act of performance. Their gender and subjectivity are in the process of evolution. The progeny created out of their alchemical union also is a being with indeterminate gender. In the case of Lilith, she shirks the passive roles allocated to her as a female and adopts active masculine roles, thereby proving that femininity and masculinity are not all fixed or permanent but effects of performance. All the characters in the novel perform their gender roles and there is enough scope and space to underline their mutability.

Carter's penultimate novel, *Nights at the Circus* undertakes a project of both demythologizing and re-mythologizing in its effort to fly in the face of patriarchy through its bird-woman heroine Fevvers. It liberates the New Woman from the old conventions, re-visions the world and reserves women's space (s) within it. Fevvers's transcendence of the limitations imposed by her gender through her potential for flight is metaphoric and suggests the possible ways of emancipation for women. Flight suggests power and freedom, not a docile escape. Morag Shiach who wrote a commentary on the works of Helen Cixous elucidates on Cixous's views on the importance of flight for women:

The gesture that characterizes the relation of women to the cultural is one of flying and stealing (volor). Women, Cixous argues must steal what they need from the dominant culture, but then fly away with their cultural booty to the 'in-between', where new images, new narratives and new subjectivities can be created. (Shiach, *Cixous* 23)

Fevvers, the bird woman is the typical representation of the 'in-between', being half-bird and half-woman. This 'Cockney Venus' is the embodiment of several cultural myths which define women for us. *Nights at the Circus* once again reworks the Leda and the swan myth, which she has made use of in *The Magic Toyshop* earlier. Fevvers is the offspring of a divine or supernatural union. She may be the hatched progeny of Leda impregnated by the swan, the Cockney 'Helen of Troy'. She may be one of the Sirins of Russian Mythology – a happy variant of Greek Sirens- who allure men through their songs foretelling future joys. Men who hear their songs will forget everything and tend to follow them blindly. This is what happens to Walser the inquisitive journalist who is

eager to know her Truth. Walser gets so captivated by her beauty, voice and vision that he blindly follows her.). She is the ‘Winged Victory of Samothrace’, a marble Hellenic sculpture of Nike, the Goddess of Victory, and this sculpture featuring a winged human body is considered as one of the greatest masterpieces of Hellenic art. In her book *Monuments and Maidens*, Marina Warner writes about the power of Nike’s statue, “The figure of Nike... cancels time’s inauspicious vigil on her subject’s lives; she materializes as form in art the point at which the destiny of a single person converges auspiciously with time... She has become conscious of our passage into the future.” The first name of Fevvers is Sophie, the name of the Goddess of wisdom. Worldly- wise, intelligent and well-read Fevvers, the combination of Sophie and Nike, is equipped to analyse the past, understand the present and carve out the future. Various mythological characters coalesce in the character of Fevvers and she inherits the positive qualities represented by these positive mythical figures.

But Carter is very much aware of the fact that the myths are always manipulated for securing the interests of the privileged – men in the case of patriarchy – in unequal societies. The writers, artists and sections who participate in the process of ideological formations and society’s ‘common sense’, distort and misrepresent myths in order to sustain male supremacy in patriarchal history. For example, writers like W.B. Yeats who indulged in over-idealisation and idolization of women (especially Maud Gonne) used Myths like Leda and the Swan to present over-romanticized, masculine versions of femininity and gender relations. In *Nights at the Circus*, Carter taunts Yeats by intertextually referring to his deployment of myths in “Leda and the Swan”, “The Circus Animal’s Desertion” and the Byzantine poems. In the novel, she undertakes an ironic

critique of the power games played through transplanting myths and symbols to late nineteenth and twentieth century situations, attaching universal value to the ideas conveyed through these myths and symbols. As we go through various experiences encountered by Fevvers in her life, we come across many references to Yeatsian images and symbols which have mythical associations. Lorna Sage comments in this regard in her study on Carter's fiction titled *Angela Carter*:

The image of the woman with wings has served throughout the centuries as a carrier of men's meanings, and at the turn of the century in particular this time-honoured icon had a new lease of life. W.B. Yeats, for instance, circles around her in some of his most urgent visionary moments, not only in the poem *Leda and the Swan* but also in 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'Byzantium' where a golden bird symbolizes 'the artifice of eternity'. These poems were written a bit late for the new century's dawn, but it was certainly Yeats's fin de siècle fascination with time's turning points, the magic intersections between history and myth (human and divine) which led him into such speculations. (47)

Yeats's poem "Leda and the Swan" which is centred round the audacity of God – not simply God, but king of Gods – cast its shadows in *Nights at the Circus*. As part of her project of deconstructing the male versions in her novel, Carter takes her cue from the line "Did she put on his knowledge with his power?" Fevvers, through her knowledge establishes her power as a reply to the humiliations suffered by generations of women. By applying her wisdom and resourcefulness, she handles the perils encountered by her in her life's path deftly and emerges victorious. In Ma Nelson's brothel, Fevvers the kid, painted white all over her body, poses herself as cupid with bows and arrows, the white

paint indicating not only cupid's position as an angel but the chastity and associated virtues expected from a girl child. Next in Madam Schreck's museum of female monsters, she is one of the 'tableaux vivants' of women in the 'profane altar' where punters came to worship, helping to re-enact different perverse male sexual fantasies. Then, she is being caught by the Duke, who wants her to become the celebrated golden handiwork of W.B. Yeats's poem 'Sailing to Byzantium' – the golden bird perched on the golden bough, embodying artifice and artistic permanence. For the Duke, women are art pieces and his collection includes woman as Aeolian harp. Fevvers is turned into a precious golden bird to be placed on the empty golden bough of a golden tree in an empty golden cage. Reminding one of the Leda and the Swan myth once again, there is a swan on top of the cage and there is an ice swan downstairs, which melts parallel to the dripping out of Fevver's time, and as Fevvers manipulates the Duke's own sexual desire to escape from captivity, the ice swan completely melts out, parallel to her escape, marking the climax with its wet crash at her exit. W.B. Yeats once again comes to the novel, deconstructing artistic and mythic representations in the reference to the poem 'The Circus Animal's Desertion' in the description of Fevvers' and Lizzie's retiring room as "the lumber room of femininity, this rag and bone shop of the heart."

Fevvers's first attempt of flight at Ma Nelson's whore house is compared to the fall of Lucifer in the bible. "Like Lucifer I fell. Down, Down, down, I tumbled being with a bump on the Persian rug below me." Like Lucifer who rebelled against God, Fevvers is endowed with an indomitable will to fight against subjugation of women. Like Lucifer who rebelled against God, the father for securing his rights, Fevvers is invested with the revolutionary ardour for fighting for the rights of women. Fevvers represents the causes

upheld by the suffragette movement which protested against patriarchy and argued for the rights of women in society. She is, like Lucifer, a fallen angel who rebelled against centres of authority to safeguard rights and dignity.

Through the character of Fevvers, Carter questions the received notions of femininity as she represents the Free Woman who is wise enough to take decisions for herself. Located within the matrices of both fact and fiction, she is a combination of the contradictory versions of women as virgin and whore, angel and witch, fact and fiction. Combating subjugating myth with liberating myth, Carter experiments both demythologization and re-mythologization in *Nights at the Circus*.

Along with her deconstruction of the myths of femininity used by patriarchy to keep women in subordination, Angela Carter undertakes the deconstruction of the Mother figure as the embodiment of selflessness and sacrifice. The myth of Motherhood, for Carter, is another 'consolatory non-sense' cunningly used by the patriarchal society to make women compliant and docile. During the 1960s and 70s, when the energies of the suffragette movement were in the air, many of the feminists used to attack the mother figure as the tool of patriarchy, accusing her of taking a key role in taming her daughter to fit into the mould carved out by patriarchy. Mothers often serve the interests of the male-centred system by channelizing their daughters' socialization to limit them to the subordinate roles. It is highly paradoxical that mothers opted to become the agents of patriarchy by preparing their daughters for a life of inequality. Mothers' role becomes pivotal as they try to hold back the girl child's desires to be a powerful, autonomous self-directed, energetic and productive human being.

Carter shares this feminist hostility towards the mother figure who takes a lead role in socializing her daughter as the upholder of the patriarchal status quo. In her personal life Carter had many reasons to despise the mother image cherished by patriarchy. Like many other children of her generation, Carter also had to undergo the experiences of evacuation and the subsequent enforced separation from her mother. Even in her state of infancy, she was dislocated from London to the coal-mining village called Wath-upon-Deane in South Yorkshire, where she had to live with her imposing and patronizing grandmother who never let Carter's mother herself to grow into an autonomous individual. Although Carter developed a strong bond with her grandmother later, during the formative period of her life, her grandmother remained as a disturbing presence for her. Carter describes her grandmother's role in her mother's and her own life in one of her earlier autobiographical writings titled 'The Mother Lode' which was included in *Nothing Sacred*:

My maternal grandmother seemed to my infant self as a woman of such physical and spiritual heaviness she might have been born with a greater degree of gravity than most people... she effortlessly imparted a sense of my sex's ascendancy I the scheme of things, every word and gesture of hers displayed a natural dominance, a native savagery, and I am very grateful for all that now, although the core of steel was a bit inconvenient when I was looking for boyfriends in the South in the late fifties, when girls were supposed to be as soft and as pink as a 'nursuree'. (8-9)

Carter continues to describe her grandmother's disciplinarian attitude which put her mother under repression:

Her personality had an architectonic quality; I think of her when I see some of the great London railway termini, especially St. Pancras, with its soot and turrets and she overshadowed her own daughters, whom she did not understand my mother who liked things to be nice; my dotty aunt. But my had not the strength to put even much physical distance between them, let alone keep the old monster at an emotional arm's length. (9)

Carter found her mother as "ever-infantilized" by the "old monster", the grandmother "who nagged her daughter's apparent weakness". (9). Carter's mother considered her mother's death "as a great blow since the umbilical cord had been ill-severed" (13).

Inheriting her mother's domineering nature, Carter's mother also, with her middle class, orthodox values, put certain restrictions upon her adolescent daughter. She, even, restrained Carter from reading fiction, considering fiction as something which would vilify her daughter. So, when she undertook the job of writing novels, she had to settle some accounts – not directly with her mother or grandmother but with the system which makes mothers tools or agents of patriarchal repression of girls. Mothers and grandmothers in her fiction are deftly and quickly got rid of. (In her rewriting of "The Little Red Riding Hood" tale, the wolfish grandmother of Red Riding Hood who reduces her possibilities of growth is killed and disposed of by the smart girl.)

Most of the female characters in the Carterian oeuvre are orphans or motherless. In almost all novels written by her, there is the absence of mothers who assume the role of the tamer who prepares the girls according to the demands of the unequal system of power in patriarchal society. Some characters experience the loss of their mothers at an early age. In *Shadow Dance*, Morris's mother gets killed in an air-raid during war times when he was a kid and there is no mention about the mothers of Ghislaine and Honeybuzard. In *The Magic Toyshop*, the teenaged Melanie loses her parents in the airplane crash, leaving Melanie and her younger siblings orphaned. Marianne, the heroine of *Heroes and Villains* also is motherless as her mother had already died heartbroken at the event of the brutal killing of her son. In *The Passion of New Eve*, all characters are shown as individuals without a father and mother to take decisions for them. But in this novel, there is an inflated Mother figure with four tiers of enormous breasts on her body, a caricature of the over-idealized image of the mother projected by patriarchy. Apparently, she resembles the Mother Goddesses of the Mary Daly variety with her black and archaic looks but ends up as a burlesque variant. This Mother is Crater's contempt towards the In *Nights at the Circus*, Fevvers is hatched out of the egg, and nothing is known about her actual parentage. She was received by Ma Nelson who runs a brothel as a new born child left in a basket amidst broken egg shells. In the brothel she gets many foster mothers, mainly the incredible Lizzie, the surrogate mother who accompanies her throughout her adventures as a faithful friend. In *Wise Children*, Dora and Nora are motherless bastards who were never acknowledged by their father. Pretty Kitty who was believed to be their biological mother died at child birth is suspected to be a fiction made

by their Grand Mother Chance in order to cover up her the shame of giving birth to children by herself as an old woman.

Acutely aware of fact that the role of the myth of motherhood in the patriarchal paradigm is related to discipline and power, Carter erases the mother image from her novels. This epistemological or metaphorical matricide is one of the subversive features of her novels.

There is the exception of the mother of the bride in “The Bloody Chamber” who discards the conventional mother’s docility and subordination. Through that character, Carter subverts the meek and docile image of the mother catered by patriarchy. Here, the young bride who gets entrapped in the gruesome castle of Blue beard (her husband’s palatial mansion which harbours a secret chamber hiding the dead bodies of the previous brides of him) is rescued by her mother who transcends the conventional image of the woman especially that of the mother. She is the tamer and killer of the tigers which trespass into her village from the adjacent woods. Mounting on a stallion she comes with all the power and vigour of the avenger which is traditionally the role allocated to men.

The depiction of the surrogate mothers in her novels also challenges the notion of biological mother as the embodiment of care and consideration towards the offspring. In *The Magic Toyshop*, Margaret acts as a surrogate mother of Melanie who provides emotional anchorage for Melanie. But initially, Margaret’s role is that of the cowed, subordinated wife silently suffering the shameful subjugation she undergoes in her life. Later the readers along with Melanie are exposed to the fact that she cherishes an incestuous relationship with Francie which acts as a subversive act of resistance from the

part of Margaret. Towards the end of the novel Margaret's rebellion in which Uncle Philip's toyshop is burned down, gives a new life to Melanie also.

In *Nights at the Circus* also we see the trope of surrogate motherhood. The bird-woman Fevvers's parentage is completely unknown and she was born without a belly button which suggests the absence of an umbilical cord which nurtured her as an embryo. Fevvers speaks about the mystery associated with her origins to Walser the journalist who interviews her:

Hatched by whom, I do not know, Who laid me as much a mystery to me
sir, as the nature of my conception, my father and mother both utterly
unknown to me, and, some would say, unknown to nature, what's more.
But hatch out, I did, and put in that basket of broken shells and straw in
Whitechapel at the door of a certain house, know what I mean? (20)

She was hatched out of an egg as it was evident from the broken pieces of egg shell which surrounded the infant Fevvers who was left at the doorsteps of Ma Nelson's whore house in a basket by anonymous beings. At that brothel, Fevvers get many mothers, especially Ma Nelson, who takes over the infant's responsibility and Lizzie who becomes the most dedicated foster mother cum confidante for Fevvers. All the inhabitants of the brothel provided motherly care and affection to Fevvers:

In a brothel bred, sir, and proud of it, if it comes to the point, for never a
bad word nor an unkindness did I have from my mother's but I was given
the best of everything and always tucked up in my little bed in the attic by

eight o'clock in the evening before the big spenders who broke the glasses arrived. (22)

Lizzie, the foster mother of Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus* does an excellent job of mothering as she provides unfettered and whole-hearted support to Fevvers in developing herself into a fully developed individual. As a feminist and political activist, Lizzie is well-aware of the vicious workings of the patriarchal society and because of the same reason, her approach is totally opposite to that of the conventional and conservative mother who becomes the agent of patriarchy in subjugating women. She never places herself as a hindrance in Fevvers's organic growth but accompanies her in her adventures as an accomplice.

In her last novel *Wise Children*, the twins Dora and Nora are orphans as their mother Pretty Kitty died soon after their birth and Melchoir Hazard, the very pillar of the legitimate theatre who gave the illegitimate progeny to Pretty Kitty never acknowledged them as his daughters. In the absence of biological parents Grandma Chance takes charge of their upbringing. The twins take her surname as theirs, becoming the Chance Sisters of the illegitimate theatre of the vaudeville. But towards the end of the novel, Perry, Melchior's twin brother makes a comment which makes the twins as well as the readers to suspect the veracity of Grandma Chance's narratives on the existence of Pretty Kitty. Whether Kitty is a fiction forged by Grandma Chance to cover the shame of herself becoming pregnant at that age is the question remains in the air. Anyway, Perry gifts the twins with a pair of twins to take care of in the final scene of the novel – twins produced by Gareth, their half-brother who has joined the ecclesiastical orders taking vows of celibacy. The novel ends at the moments of rapture the gift provides to the Chance sisters

at the prospect of the opportunity they got to bring up the new born infants. As they return home with two bundles of joy and energy, the septuagenarian sisters declare themselves as both father and mother of the little ones.

Through the disposal of the conservative, biological mothers and through the portrayal of a few surrogate mothers who carve out positive opportunities for their foster daughters, Carter actualizes her proclaimed attitude to the patriarchal institution of motherhood. She attacks the traditional and archetypal images of motherhood and severs the mothering from biological relations. “Mother is as mother does,” Nora remarks in *Wise Children*. Grandma Chance, whether she is their biological mother or not, never let them down and made them feel safe and sound like a house of their own. Through Nora’s words and the perfect mothering done by the surrogate mothers in different novels, Carter dispenses with any relationship between biological maternity and mothering. For her mothering is also a performance. Similarly, the mother or the woman as a meek and weak, passive subject also is eliminated through the colourful portrayal of a bold mother like the mother of the bride in *The Bloody Chamber*. She straddles the boundaries of gender role demarcations – she shoots tigers, rides on horses and plays with pistols.

In *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter undertakes a metaphorical extinction of the archetypal mother figure who is the embodiment of suffering and sacrifice. Descending through a cleft in the rocks to the underground abode of the Mother, aided by Lilith, in the last part of the novel, New Eve finds the Mother as “a figure of speech” which “has retired to a cave beyond consciousness” (Carter, *Passion* 184). By erasing out the possibilities of connecting motherly affection exclusively to biological relationship and by showing other planes of motherly nurturing which has no connection with the womb

giving birth to the child, Carter undertakes the annihilation of the “eternal and universal” image of the mother and maternal instincts. At the same time, she does not dismiss the mother wholly, as there are possible spaces for maternal feelings outside the womb and the umbilical cord in her fiction. Thus, by proving the fictional nature of the assumptions that the maternal instincts are intrinsic to biological mothers and are connected to the physical or anatomical specificities of the mother, Carter dispenses with one of the debilitating myths which constrain women – the myth of motherhood.

By exposing the constructed and performatory nature of gender, Carter problematizes the received assumptions of roles allocated to men and women in patriarchal societies. During the initial stages of her writing, she depicts the brutalities inherent in the frame work of patriarchy by detailed references to women’s oppression including rape. In the later stages of her career, she undertakes a more affirmative kind of exercise – demythologization and subversion are done followed by a re-mythologisation which pints towards a bright future which will realize the mission of enabling and equipping women to fight against the darker forces of patriarchal system and to break the chains which keep them under bondage.

Chapter 4

Double-coded Politics of Intertextuality and Parody

We now know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author – God) but a multi-dimensional space where a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.... the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.

(Roland Barthes, “Death of the Author,” 146)

Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon a new reading of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode. (Angela Carter, “Notes from the Frontline,” 69)

Feminist writers frequently embark upon writing with a self-conscious project to revise the ideological assumptions created by the patriarchal culture and to undermine and delegitimize the centrality of patriarchal representations. Parody, rewriting and re-

presenting woman is one tool offered by postmodernism to feminist artists. Postmodern parodic representational strategies prove to be helpful for them to point towards the power of such cultural representations to form historical knowledge. By ironically contextualizing these representations, postmodernists problematize historical knowledge by engaging the history of art and the memory of the reader or spectator in a re-evaluation of aesthetic forms and contents through a reconsideration of their politics of representation. Parody becomes a way of ironically revisiting the past.

Among all the feminists who deploy such postmodern intertextual and parodic strategies, Angela Carter is one of the most adroit. As Pam Morris writes in *Literature and Feminism*, her fiction becomes “one of the most triumphant examples of a woman writer’s engagement with male literary language” by being “a brilliant tapestry of parodied snatches from every conceivable form of novel: Dickensian eccentricity and comedy, Zolasque realism, hard-boiled. American detective fiction, travel narrative, popular sentiment and romance” (156).

Carter’s fiction is an intertextual patchwork that undertakes a thorough search of all sources of historical knowledge which worked to constitute men and women as gendered beings. In reworking established texts and discourses, what she undertakes to do is to give free expression to female desire and sexuality which gets suppressed in the originals. Of all such re-workings, her revision of the fairy tales deserves special-mentioning. Fairy tales work in such a way as to pass on the collective ‘wisdom’ of the past to the present generations and therein reflect the myths of sexuality under patriarchy. Angela Carter’s feminist use of postmodernist parody in her rewritings of ‘Bluebeard’ and ‘Beauty and the Beast’ in *The Bloody Chamber* expose the inherited sexist

psychology of the erotic.” The stories that compose *The Bloody Chamber* are the products of Carter’s feminist rewriting of the patriarchal plots, discursive practices and perspectives that inscribe gendered roles in traditional fairy tales. Carter’s effort is to restore speech to the subordinated or silenced female and to explore the realities associated with female desire and sexuality. (The parodic re-working of fairy tales by Angela Carter is examined closely in another chapter.)

According to many critics, Angela Carter’s specificity as a novelist can be located mainly in the most extensive and effective utilization of intertextuality in her work.

Linden Peach observes in her book on Angela Carter:

Carter’s novels frequently, explicitly and implicitly, refer to mythology, the Bible, European and English literary works. Renaissance drama, fairy stories, European art, film, especially *Goaded* and *Bundle*, opera, ballet, music and psycho – analytic and linguistic theory... Indeed, Carter’s voice as a novelist is located, even though it is difficult to uncover, in the intertextuality of her work. (18).

The skilful and dexterous use of intertextuality and mixing of frameworks contribute a lot to the subversive quality of Carter’s fiction. Linden Peach observes that the intertexts had been exploited in Carter’s writing as part of a general scepticism about frameworks:

Her novels often exploit the creative possibilities in shifting between different frames of references and in subverting the cultural forms and traditions which structure our thoughts, perceptions and actions. Whereas

the early works are, to employ Kristeva's viewpoint a 'mosaic de citations', the intertext in subsequent novels is often more clearly the totality of a particular cultural or literary tradition. Eventually, intertextuality become not so much a characteristic of her writing but a boldly thematised part of it (19).

Carter herself acknowledges her predilection for the reworking of the old texts in many of her writings. According to her such a parodied revisit and intertextual references lend her sufficient chances for obliterating the conceptual frameworks established by conventional value systems. In 'Notes from the Front line' she makes it explicit when she speaks about her habit of frequently "putting new wine in old bottles", hoping that "the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (69).

Carter's "Bristol Trilogy" which marks the early phase of her career – *Shadow Dance*, *Several Perceptions* and *Love* – largely exploits surrealistic images and Gothic motifs from the past texts, as she plunders inherited forms and frame works. At Bristol University Carter was fascinated with French Symbolism, Sur-realism, and Dadaism, all of them exerting influence upon her. There, she studied the surrealists Alfred Jarry and Andre Breton and at the same time, her interest in Shakespeare and medieval literature also flourished in the fertile soil of the university. Bristol Museum with its surrealistic art pieces served as a treasure trove for Carter. She began to use images and tropes from sources as disparate as medieval allegory and films of Fellini in her works to meet her purpose of transforming the ways in which people think about themselves. In her early novels, she makes use of several ironic quotations, themes and motifs from Chaucer, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Jonathan Swift, William Blake, Mary Shelly, Marquis de Sade,

Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Dostoevsky, Lewis Carol, and Bram Stoker. Carter was very much aware of the political implications of parodic use of quotations to reconnect representational strategies of the present with those of the past, in order to critique both.

‘The Bristol Trilogy’ was particularly influenced by Euro-American Gothic mode and German Romantic Tradition. The grafting together of these two, works out a dialectics of two modes i.e. ironic comedy and romantic gravity. Carter pursues themes and motifs from nineteenth century American writers, (especially Herman Melville and Edger Allan Poe) and German Romantic tradition. The transposition of nineteenth century romantic tropes to the late twentieth century provides scope for a critique of representations of both periods. A range of different frameworks provide different ways of approaching and pursuing issues such as gender identity and desire and the myriad intertextual references provide different pointers as to how they should perhaps be read. The apparent realistic feel created by these novels, bearing tumultuous psychic mechanisms working within them, offers one way of looking at things but it is disrupted by and in turn, destabilizes a combination of American Gothic and Freudian, Jungian and even object-relations psychology.

In *Shadow Dance*, Honey Buzzard who likes to wear false nose, false ears and plastic vampire teeth along with his habitual dark glasses appears as a comic version of the Gothic villain and Morris is a parodic adaptation of the German Romantic hero pursued by the guilty secret of some terrible past deed. Morris, after a failed one-night stand with Ghistaine, asks Honey Buzzard to teach her a lesson and accordingly, Honey-Buzzard rapes her slashes her face with his knife. Coming back from the hospital after the

healing of the wounds with monstrous scars on her face, she chases Honey Buzzard reminding us of ‘the Bride of Frankenstein’ and of Dracula. Finally, Honeybuzzard kills Ghislaine in the cellar of a house, near a plaster crucifix of Christ. The horror which arise out of the depiction of the ways in which women are objectified or seen as ‘flesh’ and ‘meat’ [flesh denoting sensual pleasures and meat as signifying economic objectification] is heightened by its ironic juxtaposition with Christ’s crucifixion which evokes the archetypal situation of transformation into a superior being through suffering. In *Shadow Dance*, many surrealist influences can be traced in the form of allusions to Salvador Dali, Luis Bunuel, Andre Breton, Georges Bataille et al.

In *Several Perceptions* by means of intertextuality, Carter evolves a collage, non-linear way of constructing fiction which presents a plethora of different possible perspectives. Joseph, the protagonist’s wall which is covered with the photographs of different historical contexts, can very well represent the kind of intertextuality which is present in the novel:

There were some pictures tacked to the wall. Lee Harvey Oswald, handcuffed between policemen, about to be shot, wild as a badge. A colour photograph, from Paris Match, of a square of elegant houses and, within these pleasant boundaries, a living sunset, a Buddhist monk whose saffron robes turned red as he burned alive. Also a calendar of the previous year advertising a brand of soft drinks by means of a picture of a laughing got in a white, sleeveless, polo-neck sweater sucking this soft drink through a straw. And a huge dewy pin-up of Marilyn Monroe” (9)

The ahistorical arrangement of these photographs echoes Carter's use of intertextuality in this novel. This kind of arrangement lends a new spatial and temporal relationship to the different frameworks which are thus arranged, thereby creating a new context in which the reader might view them in a different way.

Several Perceptions in which the protagonist who suffers from death instincts, makes use of intertextual references to T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, in order to highlight its main theme of the failure of the imagination to rejuvenate the spiritual wasteland. The novel contains references to the Burial of the dead, the London Pub, and the hanging man of the Tarot packs. Joseph, whose suffers from acute suicidal mania if the hanging and Mrs. Boulder who identifies him with the hanging man reminds us of Madame Sosotris who searches for the card of the hanging man. The references to the tarot card of the hanging in the novel become ironic that Mrs. Boulder speaks about the Tarot card when Joseph fails to satisfy her sexually.

In the case of *Love*, with its 'icy treatment of the mad girl', Carter herself acknowledges in its after word, that she wanted it to be a modern-day demotic version of the 19th century novel, *Adolphe*. But as she puts it, it is very difficult for anybody to spot the resemblance after she had "macerated the whole thing triple – distilled essence of English provincial life"(Carter, *Love*, 113). Another important text which is intertextually evoked in this novel is Edgar Allan Poe's poem titled 'Annabel Lee'. The protagonists of the novel are named as 'Annabel' and 'Lee' and intertextual references to this poem in the novel help to intensify the novel's concern with the subject of narcissistic desire. Elaine Jordan writes about Carter's preoccupation with this subject in her article "Dangers of Angela Carter," "One knowledge or exploration Carter does genuinely offer

is of narcissistic desire, self-pre-occupied fantasies which interfere in the possibility of relation between people who are other in themselves, not just projection of each other's desires". (121). As she explores the realm of "narcissistic desire", Carter has taken up two of the major themes of Poe's poetry: excessive subjectivity and the negative aspects of the human psyche. Poe's poem 'Annabel Lee' might have provided Carter a stimulus for thinking about the relation between the expression of love and 'destruction' and 'negativity' (which according to Freud bore links with destruction. As Linden Peach notes:

As such love embarks upon a difficult area of exploration for... thinking about negativity and its outer boundaries calls into question the very existences of boundaries. Carter's novels suggests that when we allow for 'negativity' with in the model of our psyche, we can no longer rely on the conventional boundaries between, for example, 'love' and 'destruction' or 'care' and 'the infliction of pain'; nor assign to logic and sequence their traditional priority in an explication of human behaviour. (68)

Love intertextually evokes Hawthorn's nineteenth century novel *The Scarlet Letter* also. Annabel gets Lee tattooed in Gothic script, circled by a heart and this reminds one of the punishments given to Hester Prynne by the puritan elders – to wear the letter 'A' (for adultery) embroidered on her gown. Like Hester's 'A', Lee's tattoo also seems to 'throb and burn him' Linden Peach writes thus about Carter's rewriting of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Through her rewriting of *The Scarlet Letter*, Carter exposes the patriarchal bias of Hawthorn's novel and traces its interest in revenge and the way revenge can affect both its victim and its perpetrator. The way in which Annabel stares sadistically at the tattooist's working on Lee's chest to draw the heart, reminds one of the cold and revengeful gaze of Roger Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter*. Here Carter is exploiting the potential of horror story for the exegesis of guilt. Here, the victim is Annabel, who was the wronged one and she is being shown through the moral framework projected in the novel by Hawthorn. Annabel, who becomes a cold-hearted monster appears as thoroughly disturbing because knowingly or unknowingly she resorts to a revenge which required a knowledge of human feeling to perfect it. (66)

In the 'Bristol Trilogy,' Carter uses the device of intertextuality to make a collage-effect, blurring up boundaries existing between genres and texts. In these novels she often refers to two or three frameworks for the same referent in the same paragraph. This kind of eclectic mixing is part of her subversive project. In *Shadow Dance*, when Morris enters the cellar of the house where Honey Buzzard kills Ghislaine, he is simultaneously compared to a character in a nursery tale and to a protagonist in a Greek tragedy. In *Love*, while Carter introduces Lee, she tells the reader that he 'looked like Billy Budd or a worker hero of the soviets, or boy in a book by Jack London'. The juxtaposition of two or three disparate representations like these brings in new associations which create a sort of subversive effect. By plucking out these representations from their usual cultural and spatio-temporal frame works, Carter creates

a new spatio-temporal sequence in which each of these representations undergoes a subversive transformation. The intertextual mixing up frameworks and tropes in the novels belonging to the 'Bristol Trilogy,' makes the readers study certain allusions, in the process of tracing particular references and makes them compare sources. In the process of recalling characters, tropes, plots, situations and conventions from old models of patriarchal, canonized texts and discursive practices, these novels, through their appropriation of old texts and discourses, attempt to challenge and transform the way in which we understand ourselves as gendered beings.

The Magic Toyshop and *Heroes and Villains* which represent the second phase of Carter's career, broadly utilize intertextuality to examine how the cultural representations of the past and the present, participate in the constitution of female subjectivity. *The Magic Toyshop* and *Heroes and Villains* deal with an adolescent girl's insertion into brutal patriarchal environs. In these novels Carter scrutinizes the ways in which patriarchy, through its cultural intertexts, shapes female subjectivity in accordance with its own interests.

In *The Magic Toyshop*, Carter undertakes a deliberately subversive reworking of three canonical texts to analyse the ways in which femininity and female subordination are constructed through the social and cultural conditioning of the girl child – the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale *The Sandman* and Freud's account of the psychic structures relating to the family unit (the primal scene, the oedipal configuration and the castration myth). Episodes and motifs from these three authoritarian texts of patriarchal enforcement of male superiority are taken and mixed up in order to expose the constructed nature of gender ideologies.

In *Magic Toyshop*, the heroine Melanie's mounting up of the apple tree (her tree of knowledge) in her mother's wedding gown, her transposition from the comfortable life which she and her siblings enjoyed at her parental home to the tyrannical world of Uncle Philip and the subsequent loss of her innocence broadly parody the story of the Garden of Eden. Carter pays an ironic revisit to this story, combining it with twentieth century psycho-analytical thought. The Biblical account of the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Adam and Eve, always played a prominent role in the construction of female subjectivity and restricting female sexuality. That is why it's revision proved to be useful for the feminist purposes of Carter. (In *The Passion of New Eve* also, Carter pursues her interest in revisiting this Biblical story as it examines the issue of cultural construction of femininity through its theme of transsexual experiences)

The ways in which Melanie gets trapped into the conventional family roles revoke the Freudian framework of structures relating to the family unit. From *The Sandman*, the motifs of the *puppet and the puppet-master, the double, and the eye* are taken for appropriation. Carter undertakes here a deconstruction of the patriarchal social hierarchy through an effective reworking and reinterpretation of motifs from Hoffmann's tale. In his psycho-analytic reading of the Sandman's tale, Freud concentrates on the issue of male fears of castration and the female puppet Olympia is relegated to the margins. Carter, in her story, makes the puppet central. The metaphor of the puppet and the puppet master in its inversion, exposes the ways in which the female is held in her position by the control exerted by patriarchal ethos. In Patriarchal cultures women are never allowed autonomy and their movement beyond the strictures created by the system are forcefully checked by exercising authority in a brutal manner. The puppet and the master who

controls it work as the most appropriate metaphor for undertaking a detailed demonstration of the working of the unequal power relations implicit in the patriarchal system. Various roles given to Melanie to act in her uncle's puppet theatre (the roles of wood-nymph, bride, the victim of rape etc.) are emblematic of the roles allocated for women in patriarchal societies.

Finn's squint, his habit of peeping at Melanie through the hole in the wall and his bee-stung eye, all refer to the motif of the eye. Finn's peeping at Melanie calls attention to the issue of the relations between power and the male gaze. To subvert this, Carter makes Melanie to spy back on Finn through the same peephole to find him in the old position of walking on his hands. Finn's bee-stung eye readily reminds one of the situations of the mutilated eye in Hoffmann's tale.

In the case of the motif of 'the doubles', the novel time and again repeats the notion of the predominance of the artificial double over the real-life original. To name a few, a portrait of a bull-terrier stands guard over the house, while a real one is absent and in the macabre world of Philip, the puppets which are artificial doubles obeying his instructions get more importance than his human relatives. Carter's introduction of this motif suggests the concept of the split-subject which challenges the unitary notions of identity and subjectivity, pointing to the possibilities of multiple identities and change they may contain.

Apart from these three texts *The Magic Toyshop* takes up images and motifs from Pre-Raphaelite and impressionistic traditions, soapy productions from Hollywood cinema and girl's magazines and D.H Lawrence as it depicts Melane's narcissistic appreciation

of herself in front of the mirror. The images from all these traditions go to make up Melanie's sense of the self or to be more precise, her sense of femininity. Her version of sexuality is derived from the representations from all these sources.

Another important reworking is the Leda and the Swan myth which has several versions in High art especially Yeats's much-celebrated poem. But Melanie's swan is a slapstick production and the glory of 'godly' rape which gets sanctified respect in the male representations is widely mocked. The ending of the novel is sprinkled with a lot of quotation that act as ironic reminders of a romantic past. Finn and Melanie confront each other in 'wild surmise' (a phrase taken from Keats's sonnet on Chapman) in a dark garden with shades of *Paradise Lost*. About the conscious hybridization in this novel, Gina Wisker notes thus in *Our Own Party*:

Carter's pastiche, her intertextual and palimpsest use of myth, image, symbol, literary, artistic and popular cultural representations in this realistic / Gothic tale confronts the reader with a tightly woven web of link and relation. We perceive at every turn how popular culture continually invest certain myths of subordination and oppression, both gender and race / religion related. (108)

In *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter uses cinematic and literary allusions to examine the ways in which our ideas are shaped by our culture and deploys pastiches of film sequences to reveal the maiming of women's subjectivity by the over-idealization of Hollywood screen goddesses. This novel becomes a blasphemous parody of Genesis. Carter's New Eve rewrites the biblical account of creation, focusing less on the details of

Genesis that on its consequences. The novel's central protagonist, another of Career's overdetermined ciphers, is at once a male egoist who must be reborn, a modern counterpart to the Bible's Eve, and a secular surrogate for Christ who undergoes kenosis in the desert and subsequently experience a technological version of the Passion. He is also a parody of masculinity, just as Leilah is a parody of stereotypical male fantasies about women. Zero, the poet is an exaggerated version of all the past masters of literature and art who promoted patriarchal values through their products or progenies, where as 'the Mother' is a parody of all those eulogized, yet hollow pretensions connected with motherhood and maternity. Exploring the tyranny of cultural myths including those of the Hollywood and the way they have affected lives of men and women (especially the ways in which they construe their sexuality), the novel broadly destabilizes our notions of masculinity and femininity as they are shaped by these cultural and literary discourses. As one of her characters remarks, life always imitates rotten art. As Andrzej Gazjorek puts it in *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After*:

In a text obsessed with the social construction of images (nursery tales, myths, religion, Hollywood, the mass media) and with their own pernicious effect, Evelyn's metamorphosis into New Eve entails less a biological transformation than a cultural one, for the experiences he undergoes, which lead him to disavow his earlier view of women as objects of desire and instruments of pleasure, are the result of misogynist violations of his person. Thus the subject, Evelyn, is punished by being turned into 'the object of all the unfocused desires that had ever existed in [his] own head'; is shown what happens when life parodies myth or

be[comes] it', and is purified by becoming 'a tabula rasa' [sic], 'a blank sheet', an 'unhatched egg'." (132)

The underground Space Age matriarchy, where Evelyn is turned into a woman through a mock-operation is named after William Blake's Beulah 'where contraries exist together'. Beulah's head is Mother, a black fertility goddess who 'has made symbolism a concrete fact, a self-constructed theology' (Carter, *Passion* 156). Mother, as her name indicates, is a broad parody of motherhood (She has four breasts and a swollen belly) which often gets idealized in mainstream cultural representations, thereby crippling the creativity of women. In the plastic spheres of Beulah, the new Eve watches slides of sucking mammals and videos of Madonna figures as part of her training to be a woman.

Escaping from the clutches of the mother, Evelyn or Eve encounters with Zero, the poet who is a ridiculous version of the patriarchal notions such as the ideal of paternity. Zero keeps a harem of slavish wives and years to fill the world with his progenies. But he proves to be sterile. Finally, we, along with the New Eve, meet the Hollywood icon Tristessa St Ange, who is the ultimate parody of male fantasies about women. Being a cinematic allusion, she dwells in a glass coffin, in her glass mausoleum, in the midst of waxwork corpses of film idols coffin, in her glass mausoleum, in the midst of waxwork corpses of film idols like Harlow, James Dean and Marilyn Monroe. This glass mansion obviously reminds one of Sleeping Beauty's castle. The hybrid imagery derived from fairy tales and filmdom is used effectively to show that Tristessa's screen image was a monstrous masquerade. Through the intertextuality in this text, Carter attempts at first to mark out the ways, people, especially women, feel about themselves

under the influence of cultural representations and then to precipitate changes in these ways.

*The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffmann*₂ is a grotesquely humorous parody of the dehumanization of intimate relationships occurring whenever they are exploited for material motives. This novel also is an example of Carter's deft grafting of various literary styles and references to examine contemporary cultural theories associated with subjectivity. The novel includes pastiches of Quest Narratives, James Bond movies and the genre of science Fiction. As Colin Manlove rightly observes in 'In the Demythologizing Business,' *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffmann*₂ uses a number of texts as its referents:

For its sources' or analogues' we can go to gothic fiction, which similarly dramatizes the unconscious in destructed narratives; to the work of De Sade and later Lautreamont's *Maldoror* (1869) for one mode of the released libido in the book in the shape of the amazing megalomaniac count; to E.T.A Hoffmann's *The Golden Plot* (1815) where a student Anselmus falls in love with the wonderful Serpentina, daughter of the magician of the imagination of Archivarius Lyndhurst, and thereby forsakes his former empiricism and his bourgeois betrothed Veronica (this being a direct parallel to the effect on Desiderio of the metamorphic daughter Albertiana of the wonder-making Dr. Hoffmann) to surrealist painting for numbers of the incredible images in the story, to Freud.....particularly for the idea that dream is a (disguised) fulfilment of a (repressed) wish, for the notion that the libido is continually in

rebellion against the really principle, and for his belief that our social integration depends on limiting desire till it becomes violently transgressive in tendency. Other influences include I.G Bailard, whose the Drowned World (1962) portrays in the landscape a journey backwards to deeper and more primal levels of the mind which is at least analogous to that of Desiderio, and certainly Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* for the centaur people who are so evidently a modification of Swift's Houyhnhnms." (149)

Nights at the Circus which deals with the life and adventures of Fevvers, the living legend Bird-Woman, 're-visions' the entire European traditions of representation, from the New Woman's perspective. Like several others of Carter's fictional works, *Nights at the Circus* also offers a skilfully contrived exercise in intertextuality – Shakespeare, Million, Poe, Ibsen, and Joyce are some of the writers to whom she alludes, with the effect of creating a polyphonic interplay of European cultural attitudes and moments. The voices of these writers interact in, to cite the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, a medley of 'paradoxically reconstructed quotations.' This medley mixes up or unites the serious and the comic, the high and low.

Interweaving materials taken from both the High and Popular culture. Cater underlines the traditions of representation, which obviously is done from a woman centred perspective & tissue of quotations, this novel deflates and debunks the inflated seriousness of male literary traditions by puncturing them with sharp irony for example, Walser, the American Journalist who gets fascinated with Fevver's fantastic being, delivers Hamlet's 'what a piece of work is man' soliloquy to an audience of studious apes

and this recitation is accompanied by the ‘Strong Man reaching orgasm ‘in a torrent of brutish shrieks’. By bringing together parodied snatches from numerous canonical texts, the novel invests other writer’s words with new meanings and mocks their pretensions to seriousness. The following passage will serve as an illustration of this intertextual nature of this text:

And once the old world has turned on its axle so that the new dawn can be dawn, then, ah, then! All the women will have wings, the same as I. Thus young woman in my arms, whom we found tied hand and foot with the grisly bonds of ritual, will suffer no more of it; she will tear off her mind forg’d manacles, will rise up and fly away. The doll’s house doors will open, the brothels will spill forth their prisoners, the cages, glided or otherwise, all over the world, in every land, will let forth their inmates singing together the dawn chorus of the new, the transformed. (Carter, *Night*. 338-339)

Here in this passage we hear echoes of Blake, Ibsen, Yeats, Joyce and others. The intertextual patch -work works to build up a burlesque of literary traditions. Apart from such a mixing up, the novel rewrites three well-known poems of W.B Yeats also- ‘The Second Coming’, ‘Sailing to Byzantium’, and ‘The Circus Animal’s Desertion’. Yeats’s idealization or idolization of women, especially Maud Gonne is ironically evoked in the novel when it makes Fevvers a combination of contradictory versions of woman. Through many references like the expression ‘this lumber room of femininity, this rag and bone shop of the heart’, the novel mockingly reuses the over-romanticized notions of

femininity as it was expressed in Yeats' poems. Even ideas related to the emancipation of women are unrealistically over-idealized in men's works. Male notions of women's position in society and their actuality as they get represented in the canonical texts written by male authors appear to be hollow, pretentious and hypocritical as the possibility of liberation in life remains as a harsh and dismal reality. Even Ibsen's deliverance of Nora from the frame work of conventional family structure is put into doubt here and that is why Lizzie, the foster mother of Fevvers reminds her of the difficulties and obstacles on such a path to liberation. In her icy cold remark on Fevver's dreamy proclamation of a liberated world, Lizzy reminds her foster daughter of the hurdles one has to pass through in realizing the dream of emancipation in real life, "It's going to be more complicated than that... this old which sees storms ahead, my girl. When I look to the future, I see a glass through the dark. You improve your analysis girl, and *then* we will discuss it." (339). Fevver's inflated speech on liberation suffused with allusions and references to the old masters of literature and the subsequent deflation of it by Lizzy's harsh retort on the actual situation of women and the possible perils in their journey to freedom is a brilliant example for Carter's attempt to destabilize the patriarchal discursive practices involving over-romanticisation and over-idealization, which are far away from actuality.

Wise Children is a reworking of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, taking the cue for its central issues of confusion of identities and the relationship between reason and imagination, logic and magic. In an interview with Lorna Stage published in *New Writings*, Carter speaks about her fascination for Shakespeare, who is 'in the tradition of Chaucer, and Boccaccio, ribald, magical and bricoleur':

I like *Midsummer Night's Dream* almost beyond reason, because it is a beautiful and finny and camp – and glamorous and cynical. It's not sophisticates like *Love's Labour's lost*. Which I think is Shakespeare's only attempt at a sort of campus novel. English popular culture is very odd, it's got some very odd and unrestricted elements in it. There is no other country in the world where you have pantomime with men dressed as women and women dressed as men, and everybody thinks this is perfectly suitable entertainment for children. It's part of the great tradition of British art. (187)

Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, involves scope for the blurring of boundaries of identities and it is this scope of the play which attracts Carter. *Wise Children* is a robust and ribald rewriting of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, intended not to rediscover the moral and transcendental dignity of that Shakespearian play, but to open its limits and shatter its frames. "There was much singing and dancing all along Bard Row that day and we'll go on dancing and singing till we drop in our tracks" (Carter, *Wise Children*) As Malcolm Bradbury observes in *The Modern British Novel*, "As in all pantomime – and Shakespearean theatre too – theatrical performance and impersonation open the Utopian forest of story out into cross dressing and the ambiguities of role and gender" (442).

In the title story of *Black Venus*, Carter rescues Jeanne Duval, Baudelaire's Black mistress from over-idealization and presents her as a home-loving black prostitute instead of an extra ordinary male ideal. The woman to whom history denied a voice is the subject of Carter's 'Black Venus' where as in Baudelaire's 'Black Venus' Poems she becomes

the object. In this short story, two discourses meet and clash – the poetic and lofty representation of male desire for woman as a sexual object carved out of the masculine erotic fantasies and the political language of female experience of such contexts. These two conflicting discourses meet and clash in order to expose the contradictions inherent in the history of (male) desire and the new story told by the hither-to silenced and suppressed woman provides scope to be critical of the discursive construction of gender and desire. Carter gives Jeanne agency and individuality. Baudelaire sees her only as an exotic mistress, symbol of corrupting sensuality, ‘black thighed witch’ whose function is merely to entertain him. But Carter represents her, by employing various registers, in her doubly victimized condition, robbed of her African heritage by French imperialism and even more demeaning, robbed of the unpretentious humanity by the poet’s fantasizing of her. Baudelaire’s beautiful poems are in a language which weakens her virility, distancing her from her own experience and leaves her speechless. Carter recaptures voice and space for her.

Carter’s presentation of the Black Venus consistently contrasts the language of Baudelairean decadent male eroticism with the bitter social reality of Jeanne Duval’s position as a black woman kept under male control and colonial authoritarian attitude. The iconography of male fantasies about woman as Muse as well as erotic object is put into question and the experience of woman as a sexual partner is explored in order to question the inflated male presentation of the woman as a passive sign of desire. The romantic or decadent male version is thwarted by the stark assertion of the reality of woman as an active partner. As Linda Hutcheon remarks in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, “Carter’s verbal text attempts to code and then re-code the colonized

territory of the female body. It is coded as erotic masculine fantasy, and then re-coded in terms of female experience. The text is a complex interweaving of the discourse of desire and politics, of the erotic and the analytic, of the male and female” (142).

Black Venus includes pastiches of different styles, from the poetic to the vulgar, creating a new kind of intertextuality through these witty and elaborate presentations of patchworks. If ‘Black Venus’ refers to the neglected aspects of Baudelaire’s relationship with his mistress which left a lasting impact on his literary career “The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe” remains as an annexure to the biography of Edgar Allan Poe as it provides the account of the relevance of his dead mother’s legacy.

Another story in the same collection “Peter and the Wolf” rewrites not only a revision of Prokofiev’s instruction of children but also a blasphemous rewriting of Genesis. In this version the girl suckled by the wolves opts to stay with them rather than joining the human race. The gulf between the human and the animal is made to appear as narrower than that between the perceived nakedness of male and female. The boy Peter at first gets shocked by the visible sexual difference of his wolf cousin and this experience prompts him to attain priesthood. But later, when he gets a second chance to see her in the role of a simple mother he is pacified and feels a kinship towards her.

In “Overture and Incidental Music to A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” also, characters and motifs are taken from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The suppressed subject of the plot of the play is being explored by Carter. The motifs re-worked in *Wise Children* are once again re-presented in order to deflate the unreal nature of patriarchal discursive practices. As Linden Peach suggests:

Carter suggests that the court of Oberon and Titania has been idealized over the centuries and that the original Court was a much less sedate place. Like the wind which Dora observes whips around backstage, Carter exposes what is hidden behind the scenes: the Golden Herm is an hermaphrodite - lusted after by Oberon who sees him / her as a boy – through which Carter pursues her interest in the blurring of sexual boundaries. In a carnivalesque spirit, Carter gives us the ‘reality’ – the fairies all have head colds – behind the English midsummer fantasy. (146)

Through a judicious mixing up of themes and motifs from different literary traditions, Angela Carter ‘re-visions’ them all from the perspective of the subordinated and the oppressed. While doing this, the method to which she resorts is essentially postmodern – at first inscribing and then subverting. We would be able to sabotage a system only by remaining within it and undermining it from within. Postmodern strategies offer suggestions for modes of transformation by providing a locus for the return of the displaced or the marginalized. Recycling the established and already recognized signs and re-positioning them in changed contexts, Postmodern parodic strategies often attempt to bring these subaltern sections back to where they belonged to once. Those sections which are driven out of the dominant structures of power and culture to the outskirts are once again being ushered in as insiders who share the spaces which had been theirs also.

Postmodern strategies like intertextuality and parody offer, thus, to Angela Carter (as a feminist writer), an effective way for working within and yet challenging dominant patriarchal discourses. The subversive potential of such interventions and appropriations of established, canonical patriarchal discourses, achieve what a more separatist,

alternative attempt could not undertake. Here, the direct engagement with the dominant culture itself provides opportunity for undermining that very culture.

Puncturing the old lies with the vigour of new lies made out of the recycling of these old lies themselves, Carter blasts down the edifices created by the canonized texts and discourses of male literary and cultural representation or expression. The hither-to marginalized sections which remained in the periphery or edges of literary and cultural texts of elite, patriarchal canon are elevated from objectified conditions to the position of the Subjects endowed with agential capacity, even though the contexts and grounds determining those subjectivities are changed constantly. The wild digressions and transgressions undertaken by Carter during the process of parodying old texts and tropes help a lot to topple down the rigidities of the patriarchal frameworks and assertions of gender roles or statuses. Weaving a magical carpet by boldly and freely tearing out threads and pieces from the old clothes of patriarchal discursive outfits, Carter takes us to the “Pantoland” where the constructed or performative nature of gendered identities and lived experiences (as they had been presented in the old literary and cultural texts which collude in exercising patriarchal authority) are cunningly exposed.

Chapter 5

Breaking the Old Mould: Feminist Re-visioning of Fairy tales

Ours is a highly individualized culture, with a great faith in the work of art as a unique one-off, and the artist as an original, a godlike and inspired creator of unique one-offs. But fairy tales are not like that, nor are their makers. Who first invented meat balls? In what country? Is there a definite recipe for potato soup? Think in terms of the domestic arts. This how *I make potato soup* (Angela Carter, "Introduction" to the *Virago Book of Fairy Tales*).

Fairy tales are primarily about power and possession and they actively participate in the process of reproducing and sustaining the gender ideology which is central to the patriarchal system characterized by unequal power relations. These tales serve as an important site for the cultural and social construction of the subject, reinforcing and promoting social norms by creating a space where social experience can be worked through, collectively possessed and made conscious. They participate in the process of constituting individuals as subjects in accordance with the interests of patriarchal capitalism and work in order to secure consent from people in naturalizing certain social conventions. The central issue of most of the fairy tales is power and possession and by

enforcing unequal power relations, they serve the purposes of the prevailing structures of power. As Patricia Dunker puts it:

The fairy tales are in fact, about power, and about the struggle for possession, by fair or magical means, of Kingdoms, goods, children, money, land and naturally, specifically - the possession of women. And even the fairy (more properly folk) tale itself, as the narrative art of the people, communally owned has been appropriated by the ruling class at a specific point in history, transformed, rewritten possessed (223).

In the case of the sexual politics which is central to patriarchy, most of the fairy tales participate in the process whereby the dominant sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex through the crucial part played by them in teaching patriarchal gender roles to both men and women. Moreover, the genre of the fairy tales is effectively used by patriarchy in order to regulate female sexuality. These tales compel the girls to be afraid of their own sexuality by highlighting the dire consequences of adolescent girls' budding sexuality and this helps the fairy tales in serving their ideological function of constituting female subjectivity as passive. As Dunker observes:

The fairy tales, the received collective wisdom of the past, ..., .., reflect the myths of sexuality under patriarchy have been and still are used as text books through which those lessons are learned. Thus the tale, especially the fairy tale, is the vessel of false knowledge, or more bluntly, interested propaganda. (223)

By presenting a picture of gender roles and prescribing conducts and codes of behaviour, fairy tales undoubtedly play a major role in forming concepts of gender for children. They illustrate how a person's sex influences the chances of success in various endeavours. Besides, these fairy tales have marginalized or stereotyped women by presenting limiting or negative images of them. Only two definitions of woman can be seen-the good woman who must be possessed and the bad woman who must be destroyed. The meaningful existence of both should be annihilated or nullified. As Ann-Cranny Francis observes, "The good women, the heroines are inevitably beautiful, passive and powerless, while female characters who are powerful are also evil and often ugly and-ill tempered." (85)

The patterns of treatment of girls and women in these tales - especially the angel/witch dyad- impose certain limitations on them. Female characters encoded with the ideological position of women are excluded from holding power in the ideological scheme of the fairy tales and accordingly are passive, objectified and positioned as prize or reward for consumption by an active male subject. Women who are powerful are to be doomed according to the scheme of fairy tales. Thus these tales not only reinforce the patriarchal construction of women solely in terms of gender (as women whose desires are fetishized in gender terms as men, sex, love, marriage and babies) but also simultaneously construct women as traitors to their own sex, class and race, as appropriate scapegoats for male anger, as victims who are to cater to the changing fancies of assertive men.

Reinterpreting the fairy tales is a powerful way to discover why and how women have been misrepresented and constrained and goes some way towards the development

of new representations, “dispensing with all the Virgin/whore, Eve/Lilith nonsense perpetuated in tales” (Wisker 109).

Through the parodic reworking of fairy tales, a feminist reading position is constructed which re-negotiates relationships of power. It enables the reader to construct a different subject position. The reading position constructed in these revisions of fairy tales opposes the existing hegemonic discourses and its constitutive subject position. By intervening in the process of interpellation of the subject by hegemonic discourses, the feminist revisions of the fairy tales attempt to undermine those same discourses.

It is this strategy of creating compelling narratives based on traditional fairy stories and then distorting them, which works in Angela Carter’s re-interpretation of fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber*. The stories that compose *The Bloody Chamber* are the products of Carter’s feminist rewritings of the patriarchal plots and perspectives that inscribe gendered roles in traditional fairy tales. Carter’s effort is to restore speech to the subordinated or silenced female and to explore the realities associated with female desire and sexuality. An analysis of the oppressive nature of patriarchal structures operating through the fairy tales and a consequent subversion of these very structures are undertaken by her in these re-workings. While the fairy tale format of the stories enables her to dissect women’s conventional role as an object of exchange, the motif of magical metamorphosis which it includes, gives her the opportunity to explore the theme of Psychic transformations liberating her protagonists from conventional gender roles. Through the juxtaposition of the conventional and the subversive, these re-workings present the obvious clash of registers and the text becomes an arena where discourses meet and clash.

Acutely aware of the ideological implications of popular narratives, Carter revises a number of fairy stories in her collection titled *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. Most of the stories which she rewrites can be found in Perrault – the stories of “Bluebeard’s Castle,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Beauty and the Beast,” the “Puss-in-Boots,” “Snow White” etc. Each tale is resonant of the folk mode from which it is derived and at the same time is a bold subversion of the bourgeois version. The instances of role reversals which herald the challenging of stereotypes of femininity are the exhilarating feature of these revisions. These re-workings help women to reclaim their stories by using the same form of conventional fairy tale narrative, both to expose their hitherto constrictive nature and to revitalize positive myths and images for women and reinterpret the male-defined negative or limiting images. Apart from all these, the most peculiar and important thing associated with these rewritings is the configuration of sexuality in them. The emphasis is upon an active female sexuality, which women have been taught, might devour them.

In most of the rewritings by Carter, we can see the projections of an active female libido and almost all of her fairy tale heroines (with the only exception of the title story) are sexually assertive. As Linden Peach observes, the stories are “not only an exploration of women’s sexuality but of the ways in which men have sought to control that sexuality, of how both men and women need to reconfigure their sexualities and of the commodification of women as ‘flesh’” (33).

The title story of *The Bloody Chambers*, is the first and the longest in the collection and is based on the tale of ‘Blue Beard’. The reference to the traditional ‘Blue Beard’ narrative easily evokes the images of a gruesome male with a blood-stained key

and a lot of secrets and a helpless dame who is his present victim. Perrault's narrative, the most authoritarian version of the Blue Beard's story, places the key as the central motif and women's curiosity which appears to be a crime as the central theme. Women are targeted as the primary receivers of a cautionary message involved in the story and this is all-the-more explicit in the moral attached to the story by Perrault which condemns women's curiosity.

And it is this plot which is unique in foregrounding the woman's fault and naturalizing the husband's behaviour which is subverted by Carter because there is enough room for a feminist re-reading in the pattern of the story. If we identify the forbidden chamber rather than the bloody key as the sign of disobedience as the tale's central motif, we can begin to see how 'Blue Beard' is not necessarily about the consequences of failing a test (will the heroine be able to control her curiosity?). Entering the forbidden chamber is a necessary ritual for the one who is undergoing the process of initiation. What is at stake, more than sexual curiosity (with the implication of the betrayal since it occurs behind her husband's back), is knowledge of her husband, of herself and in cultural terms, of sexual politics – and the test involves acquiring and using their knowledge clearly enough to triumph over death.

It is this possibility of an alternative suggestion that is taken up by Angela Carter in her revision of the story. The modern Blue Beard of Carter's narrative is a rich, handsome, middle-aged banker who can afford to many impoverished girls and dispose them when they show signs of disobedience. At the same time, he is a connoisseur of arts-of juvenile and sad pornography as well as five centuries of European high art. The atmosphere of the revised narrative seems fairly placed in the Gothic tradition: I secluded

castle with a lot of secret closets which hide unknown atrocities, a dame who is trapped in the castle by a sardonic hero-villain and a sadomasochistic relationship which exists between them. The style deliberately mocks Gothic romance and pornography. Certain features such as the heroine's admission that she finds her husband's objectification and violent treatment as sexually stimulating and the visually explicit reference to pornographic pictures he owns form a whole, which verges dangerously close to pornography. At the same time, it can be a pastiche of it. If the first half focuses on the sexual infatuation with the sadistic Blue Beard and with his attempt to accommodate her into his pornographic family life, the latter part foregrounds the theme of female community and sisterhood. It is Carter's favourite method to present graphically the oppressive effects of patriarchal structures, being faithful to the most minute details and then to subvert them, pointing towards the direction of change related to female collectivity. The graphic description of the Sadism of the male, complemented by the masochism of the female, is ironic and creates aversion in the readers against this model of sexuality. Moreover, the point of view is complex, and at times contradictory, one of the female victims. This woman-centred perspective, combined with the idea of female community and the wonderful denouement of the story with bold, feminist overtones (it is the mother of the bride who comes to rescue her from her demonic husband) asserts the revision as liberatory. The story breaks the mould by placing the mother/daughter dyad as a latent motif of the story and it is given a twist exploring the relationship between these two (mother and daughter) and allocating the role of the 'avenging angel' to the bride's mother, not to her brothers.

The beginning of the story parodies the excitement of the erotic anticipation as in a romance or pulp fiction:

I lay awake in the wagon — lit in a tender, delicious ecstasy of excitement, my burning cheek pressed against the impeccable linen of my pillow and the pounding of my heart mimicking that of the great pistons ceaselessly thrusting the train that bore me through the night away from Paris, away from girlhood, away from the white, enclosed quietude of my mother's apartment, into the unguessable country of marriage. (Carter, *Bloody Chamber* 3).

But at the same time, she imagines her mother's feelings, 'folding up and putting away all her relics, lingering over this torn ribbon and faded photography.' (BC 3) Then the bride considers her own position, "the world of tartiness and maman that now receded from me as if drawn away on a string, like a child's toy"(8). This description of the girl's imagination wonderfully evolves the sensation of pulling out of a railway station, but at the same time, it reminds us of the fort/da game of Freud, 'here and gone', the child's overcoming of separation from its mother by calling performance and language, signification into play. Then after some pages the girl herself exclaims, "Was it I who wanted this? Was it this I wanted?" (15). Then we come to understand the undercurrent of this poignancy and its effect.

I felt a pang of loss as if, when he put the gold band on my finger, I had, in some way ceased to be her child, in becoming his wife (Carter, *Bloody Chamber* 7)

But the mother of Bluebeard's bride never deserts her daughter. She is a strong, worldly-wise woman with a keen sense of the ridiculous. She has the wisdom to give her child the freedom demanded by sexual maturity. No passive fate seems possible for her daughter. Towards the end, it is she who incarnates as the rescuer of the girl who is about to be murdered by her husband:

You never saw such a wild thing as my mother, her hat seized by the winds and blown out to sea so that her hair was her white mane, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh, her skirts tucked around her waist, one hand on the reins of the rearing horse while the other clasped my father's service revolver and, behind her, the breakers of the savage, indifferent sea, like the witnesses of a furious justice. And my husband stood stock-still, as if she had been Medusa, the sword still raised over his head as in those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at the fairs On her eighteenth birthday, my mother had disposed of a man-eating tiger that had ravaged the villages in the hills north of Hanoi. Now, without a moment's hesitation, she raised my father's gun, took aim and put a single bullet through my husband's head. (Carter, *Bloody Chamber* 48)

Patricia Dunker appreciates this ending of the novel, as it introduces a hither-to unseen figure – the mother – in the position of the rescuer who never becomes one in traditional tales:

It is not the brothers who arrive armed with muskets and rapiers to save Bluebeard's bride, but a figure who never appears in fairy tales, the mother as traveling heroine. This is the mother who invests in her daughter's career rather than her price on the marriage market, and it is the mother's spirit, the courage incidentally of the Gothic heroines who pass unraped, unhanded down into the dungeons of the castle which accompanies her daughter to learn the truth of *The Bloody Chamber*. And the hand of vengeance against Bluebeard is the woman's hand, the mother's hand bearing the father's weapon. Only the women have suffered, only the women can be avenged. (Dunker "Re-imagining" 235)

Another important figure whose actions and presence alter the terms of the unequal conflict between male and female in the revised story is Jean Yves, the blind piano tuner, who loves the heroine not for her beauty, but for her single gift of music. The blind boy remains an ally and friend to her and their union turns to be a marriage of equality in the absence of the 'male gaze' which objectifies women and the domineering tendencies which are born out of it.

There are three 'wolf stories' in this collection, two of which are directly based on the Red Riding Hood' story. The original story of Red riding hood is one which has attracted much psycho-analytic speculation. Nicholas Tucker cites Erich Fromm in his *The Child and the Book*:

For Erich Fromm, the heroine is a girl on the verge of puberty — her red hood symbolizing the onset of menstruation — and so presented with the

problems of her budding sexuality. Her mother forbids her to stray into the woods, which for Fromm is a veiled warning about not losing her virginity. The Wolf however is male sexuality, rampant; his desire to eat Red Riding hood is symbolic of sexual intercourse. Little Red Riding Hood — for all her show of demure innocence — co-operates with the wolf, following his suggestions that she go deeper and deeper into the woods. But as Fromm concludes, ‘this deviation from the straight path of virtue is punished severely.’ Ideas of devouring and loving here have often been linked both in lover’s vocabulary and children’s fantasy and Red Riding Hood’s end also symbolizes the loss of virginity. (89)

There is an analysis of this story in a more Freudian way by applying the Oedipal theory. According to this interpretation, Little Red Riding Hood’s venture into the woods is her rite de passage to adulthood as she exchanges her childhood innocence for a wisdom that only the twice born can have. The wolf, according to this version, is the father’s sexuality and the sexual devouring of his own adolescent daughter is his true desire. The wood cutter who intervenes is the super-ego of the father which quenches the bestial ‘id’ impulses which lurk underneath and lead to such prohibited wishes.

The gender ideology which works within the sexual symbolism implicit in the tale, is more explicitly analysed by other interpretations like that of Jack Zipes. These readings find in the story the brutal insertion of Red Ring Hood into the patriarchal order as a result of the rape or the threat of rape posed by the wolf (i.e., male sexual desire) and the wood cutter, or in some versions the father himself is the patriarchal figure who rescues her from this threat:

Red Riding Hood is a parable of rape. There are frightening male figures in the woods — we call them wolves, among other names and females are helpless before them. Better stick close to the path, better not to be adventurous. If you are lucky, a good friendly male may be able to save you from certain disaster. (Zipes, *Don't Bet* 232)

The tale is seen by Zipes as a patriarchal fable, which demonstrates how the tales can be used in the cultural conditioning of women in order to circumvent confrontation with the male fears of active female sexuality:

In the case of the Red Riding Hood illustrations and the classical text by Perrault and Grimm, the girl in the encounter with the wolf gazes but does not gaze, for she is the image of male desire. She is projected by the authors Perrault and Grimm and generally by illustrators as an object without a will of her own. The gaze of the wolf is phallic mode of interpreting the world and is an attempt to gain what is lacking through imposition and force. Thus, the positioning of the wolf involves a movement towards convincing the girl that he is what she wants, and her role is what she wants, and her role is basically one intended to mirror his desire. In such an inscribed and prescribed male discourse, the feminine other has no choice. Her identity will be violated and fully absorbed by male desire. (232)

It is this gender politics which is subverted by Carter in her wolf stories *The Werewolf* and *The Company of Wolves*. The heroine of both these stories is an active,

assertive girl, who uses the tools of patriarchy, assertiveness and power (represented by her father's knife) to defend herself. In the woods, she chops the hand of the wolf and when she reaches her grandma's house, to her surprise, her granny is laid up in bed with fever and a severed right hand. She kills her were-wolf grandmother – the woman who through her co-option into patriarchy, becomes instrumental in inserting her granddaughter into that order as passive object. "Now the child lived in her grandmother's house; she prospered." (Carter, *Bloody Chamber* 25) Using the tools of patriarchy itself, the girl usurps the power and influence of the active subject which usually go with the male.

In her second version of the tale, "The Company of Wolves", Angela Carter transforms the tale, which as Jack Zipes has pointed out, is an expression of male fears of assertive sexuality, into a story of the sexual maturation and potency of a woman who rejects male domination. When the girl in this story starts into the woods, the space of desire, she is not frightened, but is confident as she is with her own sexuality. Carter notes that she begins her adventure, when her father is away, otherwise he might forbid her. At the, same time, "her mother supports her, her mother cannot deny her" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber* 141).

In the forest, she meets a handsome young man and feels a sort of attraction. Then they separate. He reaches the grandmother's house before her in the guise of a wolf and disposes of the lady. Then he disguises as the granny but the girl reaches there soon, recognised him and the threat posed by him.

Instead of being intimidated into passivity by the sexual potency of the aggressive male, and so being eaten like her granny, the girl asserts herself sexually and makes herself free from the wolf's domination:

“What big arms you have!”

“All the better to hug you with” Every wolf in the world howled a prothalamion outside the window as she freely gave the kiss she owed to him.

“What big teeth you have!”

She saw how his jaw began to slaver and the room was full of forest's Liebstd but the wise child never flinched, even when he answered.

“All the better to eat you with” The girl burst out laughing, she knew she was nobody's meat. She laughed him in the face, she ripped -off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing. (146-147)

Thus, the girl outwits the wolf, once again by taking the tools of patriarchy, “See, sweet and sound she sleeps in Granny's-bed, between the paws of the tender wolf.” (147) And they live peacefully together, as the wolf discovers that he possesses a capacity for tenderness. And eventually we reach the adult conclusion that a wolf is no more frightening than a “man with red eyes in whose unkempt mane the lice moved” (145).

The transformation or disarming of aggressive masculinity into tenderness is what we can see in “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” and “Tiger’s Bride” which are revisions of ‘the Beauty and the Beast’ tale. Mr. Lyon loses his power of aggression and becomes fully humane (51). It is the beauty who becomes the beast in both these tales. The metamorphosis of the male protagonist from the beast to the human and the transference of his feline, predatory sexuality to the female hero problematize our conception of masculine and feminine sexual behaviour which obviously has connotations related to power. ‘The Tiger’s Bride’ mocks the ethos of the marriage-market. The heroine is sold to the highest bidder but the bride shakes off her objectified condition through the active assertion of sexuality, “I, white, shaking, raw, approaching him as if offering the key to a peaceable kingdom in which his appetite need not be my extinction” (67).

“The Lady of the House of Love” follows the same argument by transforming a vampire *femme fatale* suffering from her destined immortality which feeds on humanity, into a girl whose death establishes her reality. The story rewrites the tale of ‘the Sleeping Beauty’ where the curse associated with the first shedding of blood symbolically refers to her puberty and the awakening of sexuality in her. This curse can be redeemed only through the kiss of the prince. The tale urges adolescent young girls to put to sleep their sexuality. The right to initiate sexual activity goes with the male and the girl should wait in passive stupor for his awakening kiss. The Lady of the House of Love enjoys the freedom demanded by sexual maturity, the freedom denied to sleeping Beauty by her royal parents when they seek to protect her from the fairy’s curse. “Because that is how I am, I desire” (Carter, *Bloody Chamber* 180). She is relieved from her immortality or

sleeplessness and becomes a human being as she ceases to be someone else's fantasy. "I am, because I can die like anyone else" (182).

The revision of the story of Snow White, "The Snow Child" is the most disturbing one with its incestuous overtones. As Snow White was the creature of her mother's desire, the Snow Child in Carter's version is the father's child, 'the child of his desire', who threatens to usurp the mother's place. Through the queen, Carter exposes the workings of masculine desires and fears - Either the love-child should be ephemeral as Snow or her Sexuality when matured will threaten the man. The queen mother offers the child's sexuality which blossoms in the form of a rose flower to her father and the Snow child is destroyed. The killing of the objects of desire is not killing of women, but a killing of masculine representations, in which some women collude.

Balancing desire with empowerment is the ultimate feat performed by Carter's characters in *The Bloody Chamber*. She rewrites the-patriarchal frameworks which work to constrict women's sexuality, there by challenging the process of constructing the female subjectivity as passive. Her heroines are always a girl of spirit, both an adventurous and a curious knowing subject of her own speculations and trials. What Carter undertakes is a reconfiguration of male and female sexual identities. This is precisely part of her feminist politics.

As we are destroying the structure of culture, we will have to build a new culture — non-hierarchical, non-sexist, non-coercive, non-exploitative — in other words, a culture which is not based on dominance and submission in any way. And as we are destroying the phallic identities of men and the masochistic identities of women, we will

have to create, out of our own ashes, new erotic identities (Dworkin 55). What Carter attempts in *The Bloody Chamber* is to develop a larger understanding of the many manifestations of desire — she examines not only the ways in which male desire confines the female, but also the ways ‘m which female desire colludes in erecting the golden cage. Then she shows how to shatter the cage by spreading the wings of desire and asserting its power, by challenging fixities and solid sexual identities. Out of the ashes of identities related to sexual polarities, new identities based on equality may emerge.

Chapter.6

The Fantastic/the Gothic: Marvels of the Unconscious

Madness were easy to bear compared with than truths
like this. (Bram Stoker, *Dracula*).

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* Jean Francoise Lyotard speaks of the twentieth century predilection for the Fantastic:

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. (81-82)

The Fantastic is the favourite mode of the postmodernists – especially its terror – invested forms. Fictions that straddle the borders of fantasy and facts proliferate. The dialogue between the normal and paranormal has become the order of the day. Genres of psychic grotesquery and anti-realistic flights are the dominant features of literature of late twentieth century. An interrogation of the ‘real’ and of monological forms of realistic representation gives rise to ‘alternative worlds’ or the paradigmatic structures of desire which erupt in genres like the Gothic.

The term 'Fantastic' eludes the final definition. Anything that violates what we consider to be normal is usually called 'fantastic'. Myths, fairy tales, surrealistic narratives, fantasies, utopias, the dream narratives - all are lumped together under this rubric. Tzvetan Todorov defines the fantastic as a moment of hesitation between the imaginary and the real. According to him, fantastic literature is deliberately designed by the author to leave the reader in a state of uncertainty whether the events are to be explained by reference to natural or to supernatural causes. The uncertainty is a response of the reader, a hesitation felt by someone who knows the laws of the real, but faced with an apparently supernatural event. According to this, the fantastic lies in the moment of hesitation based on the question of whether the unreal is actually there in which case it is uncanny, or whether it is clearly beyond the actual world in which case it is marvellous.

Todorov explains in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*:

In a world which is our world... there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions..... The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous... The possibility of hesitation between the two creates the fantastic effect." (25-26)

Todorov then elaborates certain conditions for the fulfilment of the fantastic:

The fantastic requires the fulfilment of three conditions. First the text must oblige the reader to consider the characters as world of the living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character... and at the same time, the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work.... Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations... The first and third actually constitute the genre; the second may not be fulfilled. (33)

Brian McHale, in his study on postmodern fiction, finds Todorov's version of the fantastic as an epistemological account and observes the uncertainty involved in it as epistemological uncertainty. In *Postmodernist Fiction* he writes, "The fantastic, for Todorov, is less a genre than a transient state of texts which actually belong to one of two adjacent genres: either the genre of the uncanny, in which apparently supernatural events are ultimately explained in terms of the laws of nature.... or that of the marvellous, in which supernatural becomes the norm... A text belongs to the fantastic proper only as long as it hesitates between natural and supernatural explanation, between the uncanny and the marvellous. Hesitation, or "epistemological uncertainty", is thus the underlying principle of the fantastic according to Todorov" (56).

McHale who proposes an 'ontological poetics for postmodernist works, asserts that the postmodern fantastic involves ontological hesitation,

The fantastic, by this analysis, can still be seen as a zone of hesitation, a frontier-not however, a frontier between the uncanny and the marvellous, but between this world and the world next door. Todorov is right of course, that for a certain historical period, running roughly from the rise of the gothic novel in the eighteenth century to Kafka's "Metamorphosis", a structure of epistemological hesitation was superimposed upon the underlying dual ontological structure of the fantastic, naturalizing and 'psychologizing' it. But in the years since 'Metamorphosis', this epistemological structure has tended to evaporate, leaving behind it the ontological deep structure of the fantastic is still intact. Hence the practice of an ontological poetics of the fantastic by postmodernist writers. (57)

Closely akin to these theories of hesitation are the post-Freudian theories of the fantastic as desire. Rosemary Jackson who terms the fantastic as 'the literature of subversion' finds that 'the fantastic exists in the hinterland between 'real' and the imaginary' shifting the relations between them through its indeterminacy" (Jackson, *Fantasy* 35). According to her fantasy "characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss" (3).

According to Sigmund Freud a happy person never fantasises, only an unsatisfied one enters into fantasies. In "Hysterical Phantasies and Their Relations to Bisexuality", Freud notes, "The motive forces of fantasies are unsatisfied wishes and every single fantasy is the fulfilment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality." Fantasy thus foregrounds desire and the imagery of the unconscious. Freud believed that unconscious

desires, forever straining to emerge into consciousness, were blocked by the censor, (the inhibiting function of the super ego or the moral sense) and could find expression only in disguised form after undergoing condensation, symbolisation, and displacement. Freud's idea of fantasy as wish-fulfilment is further extended by Lyotard in his article 'The Dream Work Does Not Think'. According to this, fantasy, "is a (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish" (Lyotard, *Reader* 21). In the same piece he says that dream or fantasy is the work of desire, not its language, "Desire does not speak; It does violence to the order of the utterance: This violence is primordial: The imaginary fulfilment of desire consists in this transgression, which repeats, in the dream workshop, what occurred and continues to occur in the manufacture of the so-called primal phantasm"(19).

Repression is the origin of unconscious desire. And desire is a generative system spinning metaphorical worlds out of the magma of repression. Literary fantastic also can be reckoned as the manifestation of desire and it embodies the hopes and aspirations of a culture or a particular sect of that culture. (The hopes and aspirations which are yet to be realised or which remain repressed.)

This is why women writers are particularly fond of the fantastic. The multiple varieties of this genre provide them ample scope for envisaging alternate worlds in which cultural codes which suppress and oppress them would not be viable. The ramifications of socio-cultural norms which hold women under repression would not necessarily be operative in the fantastic realms. As Patricia Waugh puts it in *Feminine Fictions*, "Given the acute contradictoriness of women's lives and sense of subjectivity, it is not surprising that many contemporary women writers have sought to displace their desires, seeking

articulation not through the rational and metonymic structures of realism, but through the associative and metaphorical modes of fantasy: romance, science fiction, gothic, utopia, horror” (171).

The privileged site of fantasy which hovers between the imaginary and the real gives the woman writer the chance to project possible worlds where their repressed desires can be fulfilled. This genre enables them to undertake such a task because its characteristic specificity is uncertainty, (be it epistemological as Tristan Todorov would have it, or ontological uncertainty as Brian McHale opines).

Malcolm Bradbury, in his review of the modern British novel finds Angela Carter among those women writers who chose the fantastic as their preferred medium. In *The Modern British Novel*, Bradbury observes, “Carter is one of several women writers whose works... made great use of the uncanny and the marvellous, the mirrored and the refracted, to break home fiction’s conventional borders and the safe house of its domesticity and challenge the fixity of women’s roles in fiction and in life. Gothic methods - gothic has long been a way to transgressive images - became important for doing this” (55).

The Gothic form of writing, is a specialised form of fantasy about past history and alien cultures which bears a meaning for its contemporary readers through a variety of cultural and political reflexes. The melancholic and macabre atmospheres of the gothic signal the disturbing return of the past upon present and evoke mixed response of terror and laughter. The origins of this form of writing can be traced in the poignancy and nostalgia felt by an age that had grown weary of Enlightenment rationalism, for a more

vigorous, primitive life. It originated as a specific reaction to certain features of eighteenth century cultural and social life with an Augustan attitude to life. In the twentieth century, gothic writings have continued to shadow the progress of modernity with counter narratives displaying the underside of enlightenment and its monotonous humanist values. Fred Botting takes note of the gothic's aversion towards reason in his study on this genre titled *Gothic*:

In gothic productions imagination and emotional effects exceed reason. Passion, excitement and sensation transgress social proprieties and moral laws. Ambivalence and uncertainty obscure single meaning. Drawing on the myths, legends and folklore of medieval romances, gothic conjured up magical worlds and tales of knights, monsters, ghosts, and extravagant adventures and terrors. Associated with wildness, gothic signified an overabundance of imaginative frenzy, untamed by reason and unrestrained by conventional eighteenth century demands for simplicity, realism or probability.” (3)

The Gothic methods serve a lot to subvert the rigid structures of social norms, socially- accepted behavioural patterns and customary practices. Providing sufficient space and scope for questioning the conformist morality, the Gothic is a form which celebrates transgression and the violation of set rules and regulations associated with the expression of desire and sexuality. Those figures who have been represented as malevolent, disturbed and deviant monsters are once again brought to the lime-light as the central characters and those who are excluded from the official culture and assigned

marginal status have begun to gain predominance over the more socially respectable characters. The monstrous characters have become less terrifying objects as they returned with a fascinating, attractive appeal.

The most important hallmark of the Gothic mode of writing is deliberate barbarity and archaism, as retaliation against the accounts which realism gives of the world. David Punter notes in his extensive study of the gothic titled *The Literature of Terror*:

At all events, the Gothic writer insists, 'realism' is not the whole story: the world, at least in some aspects, is very much more inexplicable-or mysterious or terrifying, or violent-than that. And furthermore, the gothic writer goes on, the problem of realism is that it assumes that in some simple sense we can as writers uncover and demonstrate laws of cause and effect; yet this is merely to simplify and distort, for the world is not most usefully or memorably explicable in terms of cause and effect. What the realist does, from this perspective, is to smooth out the moments of terror and vision which comprise experience and render them into a unitary whole. (407)

The gothic resists such wholesome attitude to life which smoothes out contradictions and realism's linear narratives which projects such an attitude,

...it (the gothic) rejects the account which realism gives of the world, it seeks to express truth through the use of other modes and genres-poetic prose, the recapture of tragedy, expressionist writing, the revival of legend, the formation of quasi-myths-in order to demonstrate that the

individual's involvement with the world is not merely linear, but is composed of moments with resonances and depths which can only be captured through the disruptive power of extensive metaphor and symbolism.”(408)

Rejecting the linearity of realistic narratives, gothic tales propose a non-linear narrative form with oscillations between the past and the present, the imaginary and symbolic, the familiar and the unfamiliar. These fragmentary and inconsistent narratives which are characterised by increasingly uncertain subjective states dominated by fantasy and hallucination are open to a play of ambivalence, a mechanism of limit and transgression that both restores and contests boundaries. Fred Booting observes in *Gothic*, “Gothic texts have been involved in constructing and contesting distinctions between civilization, and barbarism, reason and desire, self and the other” (20). In fact, these tales can be reckoned as projections of cultural fears and fantasies, with an element of ambiguity resulting from their inherent uncertainty. The fabric of the psyche is constantly brought into interplay with the outside world, thus disturbing the smooth progression of the teleology of events. As Punter states in *Literature of Terror* “Rather than jumping straight from an existent situation to a projection of its opposite, Gothic takes us on a tour through the labyrinthine corridors of repression, gives us glimpses of the skeletons of dead desires and makes them move again” (409). Even the loci of this literary mode, the gothic enclosures with their dungeons and trapdoors resemble the Freudian model of the mind, with the traps laid for the conscious by the unconscious and the repressed.

Freud himself, in his essay titled 'The Uncanny' states that the whole structure and mood of such fiction is a projection in heavily codified form, of deeply instinctual drives in the unconscious mind. He accounts for the recurrent motifs of this kind of fiction by seeing them, not as literary devices, but as projections of what he calls 'repetition-compulsion'- the primary activity of the pleasure principle which drives us compulsively to repeat experiences which we find pleasurable-acting here in repressed, inverted form. Thus, according to Freud, the effect of uncanny is created by the dynamics of evasion or repression by the conscious mind, of the instinctual drives of the unconscious. In Freud's opinion this kind of fiction is a distorted projection of repressed desires like the desire for the mother's womb, which according to Freudian lines, is the ultimate target of the unconscious.

Thus 'repetition compulsion' which is there, beyond the pleasure principle, uses traumatic neurosis to engage in increased apprehension, which lessens fright and hence is helpful in learning how to survive and survival is the key to life instincts. Repetition compulsion is a disturber of peace, an instinct for life. Herein lies the revolutionary potential of the gothic. It is often accused of as escapist Gothic is not a mode of escapism, but on the contrary, it "demonstrates the potential of revolution by daring to speak the socially unspeakable" (Punter, 417).

It is precisely this potential which attracts Carter and which makes it her preferred mode in most of her short stories and novels. She determinedly chooses the Gothic form to articulate the socially unspeakable. In her late twentieth century fiction, Carter effectively made use of the reversal of values and identifications occurring through the Gothic to demonstrate the impermanent nature of bourgeois patriarchal values. In Gothic

tradition, Otherness is brought to the centre stage. Sexual transgression, dark desires and fantastic deviances powerfully challenge the normative and prescriptive orders of conformist ideologies including patriarchy.

The Gothic methods serve a lot to subvert the rigid structures of social norms, socially- accepted behavioural patterns and customary practices. Providing sufficient space and scope for questioning the conformist morality, the Gothic is a form which celebrates transgression and the violation of set rules and regulations associated with the expression of desire and sexuality. Those figures that have been represented as malevolent, disturbed and deviant monsters are once again brought to the lime-light as the central characters and those who are excluded from the official culture and assigned marginal status have begun to gain predominance over the more socially respectable characters. The monstrous characters have become less terrifying objects as they returned with a fascinating, attractive appeal.

“We live in the Gothic times,” Carter wrote in the afterword to *Fireworks* which was later reproduced in *Burning Your Boats*, the collection of short stories written by her. Following this comment, she points towards the fact that genres which had been relegated to the margins of official culture had started to triumph over their hitherto glorified counterparts. Gothic figures and motifs which were consigned to a peripheral existence earlier have begun to gain more importance and visibility because of the growing interest in challenging the strict, prohibitive regulatory mechanisms operating in conformist societies. In her afterword to *Fire Works*, Angela Carter goes on to express her fascination for the fantastic - especially the gothic variety of the fantastic, “I’d always been fond of Poe and Hoffman-Gothic tales, cruel tales, tales of wonder, tales of terror,

fabulous narratives that deal directly with the imagery of the unconscious - mirrors; the externalised self, forsaken castles; haunted forests; forbidden sexual objects” (459).

Restrictive orders of rational utility and patriarchal morality are subverted by the Gothic. Carter records her observations on the Gothic in her afterword to *Fireworks*:

The Gothic tradition in which Poe writes grandly ignores the value systems of our institutions; it deals entirely with the profane. Its great themes are incest and cannibalism. Character and events are exaggerated beyond reality, to become symbols, ideas, passions. Its style will tend to be ornate, unnatural-and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the word as fact. Its only humour is black humour. It retains a singular moral function-that of provoking laughter.” (409)

Starting from *Shadow Dance*, the very first work of fiction written by Angela Carter, most of her short stories and some of her early novels like *Heroes and Villains*, *Love* and *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman* largely make use of Gothic situations and motifs. Charged by an invigorating energy of rebellion and liberation brought about by the political movements of the 1960s which challenged the aesthetic conventions, sexual prohibitions and social taboos of the conformist, orthodox society, Carter’s fiction celebrated “the Other” through an effective utilization of the Gothic motifs and situations. The debut novel *Shadow Dance* written in 1966 has a surrealistic, phantasmagoric provincial Bohemia of Bristol district as its locale. The characters in this novel are bizarre and the events are strange. As early as this first novel, Carter had that

special knack for the stylized presentation of familiar situations or incidents through which they acquire symbolic density with the dark and grotesque.

In *Shadow Dance*, Carter features an enigmatic and ghostly character named Honey Buzzard, who spends his nights in raking and plundering the ruined remnants of deserted buildings of London's backstreets and his days in seducing and tormenting lovers or enemies. He is the bosom friend (or alter ego?) of the protagonist of the novel - Morris Grey, a painter who miserably fails in establishing himself as a success. They are doing business jointly, scavenging in the abandoned mansions for goodies and running a junk shop together. The blonde and beautiful Honeybuzzard is a foil to the dark and brooding Morris in appearance, but his handsome appearance is deceptive. The sinister or macabre nature of Honey Buzzard is indicated in one sentence which describes him, "It was impossible to look at the full, rich lines of his dark, red mouth without thinking, "This man eats meat." Wearing false nose, false ears and plastic vampire teeth along with his habit of using dark glasses, Honeybuzzard appears as a parody of the Gothic villain. The villainous aspect of him becomes evident more and more as the novel proceeds forward.

Morris's status as the failed artist imparts a sense of insecurity in him. "He was a bad painter and knew himself to be a bad painter.... It was his secret, his fatal secret." Morris is weak and inactive, always shirking responsibility for his own actions. Even though he is married, he is very indifferent to his wife and is very critical of her obsession with her cats. A man without confidence either to articulate or enact his desires, Morris remains lost in his reveries almost all the time which often feature his fantasies of relationships with other women.

Once, a beautiful girl named Ghislaine prods his sense of insecurity during a brief sexual intercourse and Morris wanted to take revenge of her. Being incapable of doing anything to take vengeance against her in his own capacity, Morris engages Honeybuzzard to act for him. Honeybuzzard slashes Ghislaine's face with a knife. Ghislaine coming out of the hospital with a deep and severe scar on her face becomes a haunting terror for Morris. He is being haunted by guilt and falls a prey to recurrent dreams of Ghislaine being mutilated by him, "He dreamed he was cutting Ghislaine's face with a kitchen knife. The knife was blunt and kept on slipping. Her head came off in his hands, after a while, he cut her into a turnip lantern, put a candle inside and lit it through her freshly carved mouth. She burnt away with a greenish light." Ghislaine's scarred face acquires a bizarre quality which torments Morris internally as it embodies his guilt.

In the novel, Honeybuzzard is Morris's "double" or his alter-ego. The 'double' was a recurrent trope in nineteenth century tales of terror like Theodore Hoffman's "The Doubles" or R.L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which was used as a device to represent the reflected self or split personality. The trope of 'the doubles' was employed in some tales as two identities that are separated halves of one personality and in some others two identities represented as two quite separate people. In *Shadow Dance*, Honey Buzzard, the inseparable companion of Morris is depicted as the wish-fulfilling double of Morris. It is Honey who commits all the evil deeds and atrocities for Morris which Morris wants to commit, but dares not. Morris becomes more and more irrational and dishevelled after Honeybuzzard's entry into his life. Carter uses the trope of 'the double' as a means to dissect the workings of patriarchy and to highlight the plural and shifting nature of identities. As Lynden Peach puts it, "... it provides a means of challenging the

kind of binary thinking which distinguishes – too rigidly Carter suggests – between reality and imagination, masculine and feminine, legitimate and illegitimate, good and evil, or custom and taboo” (42). In twentieth century psycho- analytic theories, the word shadow is used to refer to the negative or evil aspects of the psyche. According to Karl Jung, the personal unconscious assimilates both positive and negative attributes from the collective unconscious and human beings have a tendency to project the negative attributes which are dangerous to be expressed directly through others. In Angela Carter’s *Shadow Dance*, Honeybuzzard plays the role of Morris’s ‘double’ or his ‘other’. Honey is what Morris wants to become in life and Honey does what Morris wants to do in his life. For Morris, Honeybuzzard is an image through which he tries to transcend his failures – artistic and sexual failures. It is through Honeybuzzard Morris gives vent to his negative feelings and desires. It is through Honey that he projects his suppressed desires in order to gratify them vicariously. The monsters in Gothic tales are the shapes into which such negative feelings like horror and terror are projected. Such projections of unconscious desires play a very important role in the formation of identities. Honeybuzzard, however dandy he appears outwardly, assumes a monstrous quality in being a vehicle or manifestation of the dark, violent and bizarre desires of Morris. His name itself implicates the duality in him and it embodies the contradictory nature of fears and anxieties lurking in the depths of the psyche which are central to the Gothic tradition - Distrust of the ego and fear of the id. He is ‘Honey’ and ‘Buzzard’ at the same time, carrying the Janus nature of characters configured by the Gothic tradition – beautiful, but terrific. He is half-cherub, half-devil. This duality gets reflected in Carter’s descriptions of Honeybuzzard’s appearance, “his high-held, androgynous face was hard and fine and

inhuman; Medusa, marble, terrible”; but he is also “the beautiful, terrible Angel of the Annunciation” and “a spectre, a mad man, a vampire” (136). The Gothic often explores the re-emergence of the id and the buried darkness from which it emerges and to which it should return. Honeybuzzard is the embodiment of these dark forces.

Morris’s insistence on Honeybuzzard ‘to teach Ghislaine a lesson’ is a result of his apprehensions about his virility and his sexual failure. These apprehensions along with the social discourses which participate in the valorisation of the myths of male supremacy upheld by patriarchy compel him to wreak vengeance against Ghislaine. Honeybuzzard’s physical mutilation of Ghislaine is an act of establishing male superiority which both Morris and Honey suspected to be threatened by Ghislaine’s responses related to the brief sexual intercourse occurred between her and Morris. It is an intentional act to legitimize male dominance over women and the rights of men to abuse women sanctioned within the framework of patriarchy.

Ghislaine also acquires a monstrous dimension for Morris after Honeybuzzard’s aggression on her. Before the physical mutilation of Ghislaine, Morris sees her as an idealized version of femininity imagined by patriarchy, “She used to look like the sort of young girl one cannot imagine sitting on the lavatory or having her arm pits or picking her nose” (2). Ghislaine, for Morris was an idealised version of womanhood, a vehicle of fetishistic fantasy before she gets mutilated. But after Honeybuzzard’s disfiguring of Ghislaine, Morris projects his guilt onto her and she becomes monstrous for him. He starts to see her as the “bride of Frankenstein” and his horror at Honeybuzzard’s heinous crime haunts him in the form of Ghislaine’s wounded face. Morris’s idealised and fetishistic fantasies associated with Ghislaine and his sense of humiliation related to

sexual failures clash in his mind and these internal contradictions haunt him through the scarred and scary face of Ghislaine. It is his sense of guilt which terrifies him as Ghislaine chases him both in reality and in his dreams. Among Gothic conventions, there is the oft-repeated motif of the villain pursuing the maiden. But Carter inverts it by making the dame the pursuer and the male the pursued. This role reversal is purposeful as it destabilizes the patriarchal patterns of gender relations. Moreover, there is the episode of a black cat, a constant ally of the witch, emerging out of the bushes spitting at Morris. The black cat is emblematic of the persecutions suffered by innumerable women in the name of witch-hunt for revolting against unjust patriarchal restrictions imposed on them. The act of spitting by the black cat is an act of resistance, an act of registering protest against the regulatory and suppressing mechanisms of patriarchy.

If Morris and Honeybuzzard represent split personality in the form of two separate individuals, Ghislaine, after mutilation, represents the duality implicit split personality in one individual. If Honeybuzzard, disfigured Ghislaine also is half-cherub and half-devil in her appearance, “When she laughed, half her face was that of a happy baby and the other half, crinkled up, did not look like a face at all” (Carter, *Shadow Dance* 153). Even before her mutilation, Morris regards her in terms of binarism: as a young and innocent picture book girl and as a shockingly rude lady. The first image, like the one side of her face is soft and supple while the other is shocking and disturbing. This Janus face reminds us of the binarism which is central to patriarchy and the angel-witch dyad which goes with the stereotypical representation of women by patriarchy. This duality expresses the contradictions inherent in the masculinised envisioning of women as objects, as either virgin or whore.

Towards the last part of the novel, when Ghislaine is being killed by Honeybuzzard in the cellar of the house, the Gothic atmosphere gets more and more intensified as Carter graphically describes the suffocating or stifling nature of the cellar, ‘It smelt most terrible – of damp, of rot, of excrement, of mice, of rats, of garbage, of age, of hopelessness, of uncleanness... of human physical corruption’ (133). We are familiar with the deep cellars and dungeons prolific in the Gothic writings, from where evil, diabolic forces emerge out – the cellars which are the locus of many wicked, sinister and macabre activities.

In *Several Perceptions*, the protagonist is Joseph Harker who, like Morris, is a permanent dreamer, completely immersed in the world of fantasy. He is a man of sorrows, a depressed youth who is endowed with a melancholic disposition. His surname Harker reminds one of the narrators of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. If Morris is being haunted by a woman with a scar on her face which reminds him of his part in the crime committed on her, Joseph is being haunted by death. He suffers from severe and terrible death instinct. Morris once contemplates on committing suicide but does not dare to attempt, whereas Joseph actually undertakes an attempt to kill himself. If Morris is engaged in junk trade, prodding and plundering the remnants of ruined buildings, Joseph is very close to death as an orderly in the hospital whose job is to clean blood, shit and amputated body parts. Fascinations for death looms largely in the background of the novel and dreams proliferate which necessarily involve fantastic situations. Dreams are the products of the protagonist’s attempts to deal with the negativity of his subconscious. In one of his dreams with reminiscences of “Little Red Riding Hood” story, we see Joseph as a child walking away from ‘Wolf Cubs’. The werewolf was one of the means

used by the Gothic tradition to represent the infiltration of negative elements from the collective unconscious to the personal unconscious. In another episode, we see a maniac running after Joseph with a knife in his hand. This maniac is nothing other than Joseph's own repressed urge for violence and destruction. Joseph, the child in the dreams runs for an asylum, to find refuge from the assaults of the wolf and the maniac, "bursts through the front gate and beat his fists on the nearest door" (Carter, *Several Perceptions*, 5). In another dream, Joseph is seen as destroying the heads of the flowers and the children. The dreams represent the suppressed fears and anxieties in Joseph's mind - his childhood fears which re-emerge and destabilize the coherence of the conscious mind. In one of the dreams, Charlotte, his beloved incarnates as one of the vampires of Dracula's castle. It is her departure from his life that prompts Joseph to undertake an attempt to commit suicide.

A picture of Charlotte was tacked over the gas fire. ...Her blond hair blew over her face which did not in the least resemble the face he remembered, since that face reincarnated in fantasy after fantasy, recreated nightly in dreams for months after she left, had become transformed in his mind to a Gothic mask, huge eyeballs hooded with lids of stone, cheekbones sharp as steel, lips of treacherous vampire redness and a wet mouth which was a mantrap of ivory fangs. Witch woman. Incubus. (15)

Very shortly after the beginning of the novel, the reader encounters Joseph's attempt to commit suicide, but he is saved and brought back to life. The rest of the novel is composed of his tedious and unenthusiastic truce with life. Utterly disoriented Joseph

moves through the drifting world of the counter-cultures - the haphazard, disorganized world of the hippies, the vagabonds, destitute, tramps and a slut with a family of “fairground people” (122). The members of this drifting and de-centred world of the counter-culture unite at a party arranged by an androgynous master of ceremonies, Kay, whose dying mother harbours a decaying mansion “a mausoleum ... full of tatty splendour.” (11) in which many miracles happen. A lady named Anne Blossom who is referred to as an ‘Iron flower’ (128), loses her limp and learns how to dance, Joseph’s cat gives birth to many snow-white kittens and suspending all hierarchies, the whole members of the party assemble together as a great commune.

The next novel in the Bristol Trilogy, *Love* also has got a touch of the phantasmagoric with it, as it explores the mental landscape of an insane person, a mad girl haunted by ambiguities and uncertainties. This novel which deals with a triangular love relationship is a curious fusion of the Gothic and the avant-garde and it largely drew inspiration from the poetic works of Edgar Allan Poe whose sensibility was charged with the spirit of the Gothic. In this novel, we can recognize traces of Poe’s peculiar sensibility reflected in the poems *Annabel Lee* and *The Raven*. Honeybuzzard of *Shadow Dance* reincarnates here as Honey (Lee) and Buzz. Carter, here splits the name Annabel Lee as well. Carter has taken up Poe’s fascination for the dark and negative aspects of the psyche. Annabel, the acutely introvert heroine of the novel is drawn into a love triangle which becomes perilous for her. Psychologically unstable with a terrible and incurable dread for society, she is a version of the damsel in distress, a stock character in the Gothic genre. She gets caught up in the meshes of the love- hate triangle where the other two axes are her lover and husband Lee and his half-brother Buzz. Lee and Buzz have a mad

mother and different fathers. Lee is the son of his mother's legally married partner, a railwayman who got killed while he was on duty. After the death of her husband, Lee's mother had to work as a prostitute to eke out a living and she gave birth to Buzz during this period and his paternity can roughly be traced to an American serviceman who was believed to be an American Indian. The two boys were brought up in South London by an aunt who had strong left-wing leanings. When Lee gets entry into Bristol University, the two brothers move to Bristol where they meet Annabel, a mentally unsteady drop-out. Annabel is a middle class girl from a protected environment who escapes into the disordered Bohemian life as an art student. Buzz discovers Annabel living with his brother in a flat and starts to influence her. Annabel starts to imitate Buzz and his undisciplined lifestyle.

Buzz, the illegitimate progeny becomes a prominent destabilizing presence in the novel. If Honeybuzzard is the shadow of Morris in *Shadow Dance*, Buzz is the shadow of his brother Lee who manages to access upward social mobility through his acquisition of university education and a secured job as a teacher in a grammar school. As Lee gets elevated to the middle class, Buzz remains as the 'shadow' of the middleclass Lee – the Bohemian, rebellious proletariat. Buzz becomes the shadow of Lee in another aspect also – there are subtle innuendos about homosexual relationship existing between Lee and Buzz. The complex interrelationship between the two half-brothers points towards homoerotic possibilities and there are many references and suggestions in this regard in the novel. Once Annabel makes love with Lee wearing the clothes of Buzz. Lee and Buzz dance together in another scene where they experience a kind of orgasmic ecstasy. In another episode, when Buzz is ousted from Lee's flat he asks, "Going straight?" (65).

The reply given by Lee to this question is suggestive of their intimacy, “I’m not divorcing you, for God’s sake” (66).

Carter makes it explicit in her afterword to the novel that her intention in writing this novel had been to rewrite Benjamin Constant’s novel *Adolphe* from the point of view of the female. In her afterword to *Love*, Carter says, “I was seized with the desire to write a kind of modern-day demotic version of *Adolphe*, although I doubt anybody could spot the resemblance after I’d macerated the whole thing in triple-distilled essence of English provincial life” (113). Annabel is the female counterpart of *Adolphe* and like him she suffers from her introverted nature. If it is *Adolphe*, the man who takes up the initiative for forging adulterous relationship in Benjamin Constant’s novel, it is Annabel, the woman who initiates extra-marital affair in Carter’s *Love*. Annabel’s alienation from the society is the result of the intense repression she suffered during childhood from the part of her parents. Being the single child of her family, she had no other option but to become the only daughter. Within the specificity of her family, Annabel as the single daughter had to remain as the daughter all the time and she never gets an opportunity to grow into fully developed adulthood. This accounts for her introverted nature. Annabel was caught up in the Oedipal triangle in her childhood and adolescence and this ends up in her entanglement in the love triangle.

In the opening page of the novel itself we encounter with Annabel’s world where the sense of the real is displaced by the sense of the unreal. The novel opens like this, “One day Annabel saw the sun and moon in the sky at the same time. This filled her with a terror which entirely consumed her and did not leave her until the night closed in catastrophe for, she had no instinct for self-preservation if she was confronted with

ambiguities” (1). Oscillating between the real and the unreal, Annabel is Carter’s version of the ‘doomed beloved’ of the Gothic as she is depicted as the carrier of madness and death. Annabel is seen to be in a dishevelled park, which had been “once a harmonious artificial wilderness”. In the messy park, Annabel is trying to trace the Gothic north, the ‘shadow’ of the south where she can try to recapture her mental poise. In the park, there is “an ivory covered tower with leaded ogive windows” (2). The park with its pillared portico and Gothic tower is a foreshadow of later withdrawal of Annabel into her own world. The enclosed tower which is a favourite locus of the Gothic writers serves as a metaphor for Annabel’s introverted nature. Being “a mad girl plastered in fear and trembling” (3), Annabel becomes somewhat like a broad parody of a Gothic heroine. Being a prey to visitations and nightmares, Annabel’s mental landscape is graphically explored in the novel, highlighting its terror-infested Gothic terrains. Annabel suffers from suicidal tendencies.

When she was two or three years old, her mother took her to shopping. Little Annabel slipped out of the grocer’s while her mother discussed the price of butter and played in the gutter for a while until she decided to wander into the middle of the road. A car braked, skidded and crashed into a shop front. Annabel watched the silver of glass ?ash in the sunshine until a crowd of distraught giants broke upon her head, her mother, the grocer in his white coat, a blonde woman with dark glasses, a man with four arms and legs and two heads, one golden, the other black, and many other passers-by, all as agitated as could be imagined. ‘You might have been killed!’ said her mother. ‘But I wasn’t, I was playing,’ said Annabel, no

bigger than a blade of grass, who had caused this huge commotion all by herself just because she could play games with death. (Carter, *Love* 85-6)

With the lunatic's inability to make distinctions or connections, Annabel plays games with death and these sur-realistic games are intertwined with naturalistic descriptions, making them all the more chilling. The descriptions of the party scene and the subsequent attempt of suicide by Annabel are couched in a bewitching tone:

Afterwards, the events of the night seemed, to all who participated in them, like disparate sets of images shuffled together anyhow. A draped form on a stretcher; blown out with a strong wind; a knife; an operating theatre; blood and bandages. In time the principal actors (the wife, the brothers, the mistress) assembled a coherent narrative from these images but each interpreted them differently and drew their conclusions which were all quite dissimilar.... (Carter, *Love*. 52)

Thereafter, the party proceeds with felicity, but during its course, Annabel sees her husband deceiving her and goes straight to the bathroom in order to commit suicide:

She went immediately to the bathroom to kill herself in private.

Fortunately it was unoccupied. After she locked the door, she remembered she should have borrowed one of Buzz's knives and stabbed herself through the heart. She was irritated to realize she would have to make do with an undignified razor blade but quickly cut open both her wrists with two clean, sweeping blows and sat down on the floor, waiting to bleed to death. She had always bled very easily. She guessed, however, it would

take some time to bleed to death. Her wrists ached but she was content as if she had won another game of chess by unorthodox means. (Carter, *Love* 54)

The novel is shrouded in a traumatic feeling and brings gothic horror from alien places to the very home and family of one's own. Keeping fidelity to minute details, with surgical precision, the novel traces the complications which occur in the relationships and amorous escapades in and out of the triangular love in which Annabel, Lee and Buzz are involved. What we confront with, in the novel is a descent into the inner, secretive chambers of the mind, a descent into a chaotic, fictive world of fearful imagination and morbid fantasies.

The suspicion towards the categories of civilization manifests itself in one recurring leitmotif in Carter's novels - the displacement of the heroines from somewhat civilized and sophisticated situations to poorer and more barbaric ones. This kind of regression into barbarity is often used by the Gothic writers to bring about an atmosphere of savagery and rawness of emotions. In *Magic Toyshop* and *Heroes and Villains*, there is the literal transportation of the heroines from comfortable and settled living conditions to more primitive ways and in *Passion of New Eve* in which the macabre city with labyrinthine streets and deserts act as substitutes for the gothic castles, there is the odyssey of the protagonist from the postmodern city to wild deserts, from the zeniths of modern civilization to sites where civilization is totally challenged.

In *Heroes and Villains*, we see the direct contradiction between the civilized and the barbaric. Its post-apocalyptic universe is neatly divided into the professors who

represent rational civilization and live in steel and concrete blocks protected by barbed wires and the marauding tribes of barbarians who live out in the open, roaming about the surrounding villages. This may sound as a cliché; One of the epigraphs to *Heroes and Villains*, which is taken from Fielder's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, endorses this, "The gothic mode is essentially a form of parody, a way of assailing clichés by exaggerating them to the limit of grotesqueness." Sharp-eyed and sharp-witted Marianne, one of the professors' daughters gets so much bored of the over-rationalized and impotent intellectual world of the professors, hates their community rituals including marriage, and loathes their self-referential language that she craves to escape out of it. Even from the very beginning the ennui experienced by her is highlighted. The novel begins like this, "Marianne had sharp, cold eyes and she was spiteful but her father loved her. He was a professor of history; he owned a clock which he wound every morning and kept in the family dining room upon a sideboard full of heirlooms of stainless steel such as dishes and cutlery. Marianne thought of the clock as her father's pet, something like her own pet rabbit, but the rabbit soon died and was handed over to the Professor of Biology to be eviscerated while the clock continued to tick inscrutably on. She therefore concluded the clock must be immortal but this did not impress her" (Carter, *Heroes* 1). The white tower made of steel and concrete in which Marianne lives with her father reminds one of the Gothic fortresses. After the axe-murder of her professorial father, Marianne chops off her golden coloured, plaited hair, burns his books, drowns his clock in the marshes and flees from her protective tower. Being fed up of the excess intellectualism of her father's clan, Marianne ventures out from that tower and the well-protected village of the professors into the realm of the barbarians and there she encounters with worse excesses. Actually,

Marianne helps Jewel, the barbarian, her brother's murderer, who gets wounded during one of his expeditions to the Professors' enclosure. Enthralled by his appearance – all decked up with jewels, feathers, and war paint – Marianne attends and assists him to escape by driving him out of the enclosure. But what Jewel does in return is to rape her to overcome his complex. Now, Marianne starts to see the world of the barbarians in less heroic terms. It proved itself to be just the other side of the coin. If the professors had a language system which can be deciphered only by themselves, the barbarians do not have any at all. The situation where the language is absent, is conceived like this; "Losing their names, these things underwent a process of uncreation and reverted to chaos, existing only to themselves in an unstructured world." (137). By means of their physical strength the barbarians make Marianne accept their demands. Although it was unwillingly, she first adopts evil, then totem and finally becomes the wife of Jewel. But gradually she seizes power by the pragmatic application of her superior intellect - wits tempered by female experiences and not affected by an over- abundance of rituals and superstitions. "I'll be the tiger lady and rule them with a rode of iron." (150). Marianne is a typical Carterian heroine who undergoes all the trials of the patriarchal society but manages to survive by the female's cunningness.

Heroes and Villains is a typical modern gothic, as it studies a time when barbarism becomes normality. The scene in which Jewel rapes Marianne is depicted after the gothic way. She runs away; he chases her and traces her on the top of a tree. Marianne puts up a fight, but loses it:

Afterwards, there was a good deal of blood. He stared at it with something like wonder and dipped his fingers in it. She stared at him relentlessly; if

he had kissed her, she would have bitten out his tongue. However he recovered his abominable self-possession almost immediately. She began to struggle again but he held her down with one hand, half pulled of this filthy leather jacket and ripped off the sleeve of his shirt, as he had done before when he had treated her snakebite. This repetition of action would have been comic had she been in a mood to hold the rag between her thighs to sop up the bleeding, a bizarre piece of courtesy.” (Carter, *Heroes* 77-78)

The atmosphere of black magic and necromancy, which looms large in the novel, lends it a phantasmagorical effect and the large scale fantasisation of the landscape intensifies it.

The Magic Toyshop which traces Melanie’s orphaned adolescence, her rite-de-passage into adulthood has the macabre world of the despotic Uncle Philip’s puppet theatre as its venue and this world is dark and sinister, with echoes of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s gruesome tale. Menace and Melancholy loom largely in the atmosphere as the intimidating tyrant Uncle Philip’s iron fists controls not only the grotesque, life-like puppets but also the other members of the family. The puppet is a recurrent Gothic image which denotes the manipulative control of the centres of power. The theme of the novel is the friction between freedom of identity and manipulative control exerted by the power-maniac. Gothic scheme of the predator antagonist and the helpless victim is being worked out in the novel as the diabolic Uncle Philip ruthlessly controls Melanie as well as his wife Aunt Margaret. The choker or the collar-like necklace which Philip makes Margaret wear is a Gothic image which suggests the stifling of her spirit by him.

Passion of New Eve which tells the story of trans-sexual experiences, becomes all too subsumed by the fantastic spirit, while it follows the labyrinthine paths of Evelyn's destiny. The protagonist of the novel Evelyn is a young man who goes through experiences of trans-sexualism. In the initial chapters we see Evelyn as the male partner in a sado-masochistic kind of sexual relationship. His affair with a prostitute Leilaha is portrayed in detailed manner in which he treats Leilha as a mere slave. Then he is forced to undergo a series of weird and fantastic experiences and becomes a woman through a mock-operation undertaken by an underground female community. But, it is not merely a story of sex-change. There we have the exaggerated versions of femininity (the mother) and masculinity (Zero, the poet, who keeps his harem of slavishly devoted wives.). It is the mother who conducts the mock operation to make Evelyn a woman. She is an excessive 'self-created' symbol of maternity with four breasts and a gigantic belly, while the other women are of only one breast- If she is a monstrous and mythical version of the feminine, Zero who dreams of instituting a totalitarian regime by reproducing his kind, is the monstrous and mythical version of masculinity. He is the demonic father who worships his own phallus and demands its worship by his wives. The excesses, an important hall-mark of the Gothic can be found throughout the novel and such purposeful inflations create a burlesque effect which acts as a powerful mode of subversion.

Of all the novels written by Carter, the most bizarre one is, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, which is a fantasy about fantasy. As Colin Manlove notes in the article 'In the Demythologising Business', "the whole book seems to occur on a metaphysical level that puts it beyond ordinary concerns, seems too to be self-contained, a fantasy that explores and is about the making of fantasy itself" (158). The novel is

conceived in the form of Desiderio's memories. Desiderio is given the charge of defending the 'positivist' city from the threats posed by phantasms of desire produced by Dr. Hoffman. Dr. Hoffman is a diabolic poet-physicist, the would-be emperor of dream technology, who yearns to demolish the structures of reason and liberate man from the chains of the reality principle for ever. He wages a 'guerrilla warfare' with the City of Rationalism and bombards it with disruptive unrealities, 'concretised desires.' "I lived in the city when our adversary, the diabolical Dr. Hoffman filled it with mirages in order to drive us mad. Nothing in the city was what it seemed- nothing at all! Because Dr. Hoffman, you see was waging a massive campaign against human reason itself. Nothing less than that" (11).

These assaults were resisted by the City under the leadership of the Minister of Determination, the embodiment of militant rationalism. A hard-core empiricist, the Minister of Determinations is determined to impose a clear boundary between the real and the imaginary and employs his police force against the invasions of Dr. Hoffman. He sends his police round to break all the mirrors because according to him mirrors disseminate false and lawless images.

Since mirrors offer alternatives, the mirrors had all turned into fissures or crannies in the hitherto hard-edged world of here and now and through these fissures came slithering sideways all manner of amorphous spooks. And these spooks were Dr. Hoffman's guerrillas, his soldiers in disguise who, though absolutely unreal, nevertheless, were (Carter *Machines* 6).

As Dr. Hoffman continues his guerrilla warfare against the city, the Minister of Determinations appoints Desiderio as his agent to protect the city from being ‘blasted to non-being by the ferocious artillery of unreason’. Desiderio undergoes the direct experience of Dr. Hoffman’s ‘first disruptive coup’ in which he transforms the entire audience in an operatic theatre into peacocks:

During a certain performance of *The Magic Flute* one evening in the month of May, as I sat in the gallery enduring the divine illusion of perfection which Mozart imposed on me and which I poisoned for myself since I could not forget it was false, a curious, greenish glitter in the stalls below me caught my eye. I leaned forward. Papageno struck his bells and at that very moment, as if the bells caused it, I saw the auditorium was full of peacocks in mu spread who very soon began to scream in intolerably raucous voices, utterly drowning the music.” (Carter *Machines* 16)

After this, Dr. Hoffman starts to transform the entire city by means of a series of seismic vibrations sent out by his gigantic generators: “Cloud palaces erected themselves then silently toppled to reveal for a moment the familiar warehouse beneath them until they were replaced by some fresh audacity. A group of chanting pillars exploded in the middle of a mantra and lamps until with night, they changed to silent of conquistadors sailed up like sad, painted chimney pots. Hardly anything remained the same for and the city was no longer the conscious production of humanity; it had become the arbitrary realm of dream” (18).

Then Desiderio begins his struggles to save the city from these assaults. He sets out an adventurous journey in order to find out Dr. Hoffman's secrets - a journey which turns out to be a metaphorical journey into his own unconscious, into a libido, the existence of which he strains to deny. The bizarre episodes of this journey become Desiderio's dream wrestling with his desire. He encounters a series of fantastic exhibits in a travelling peep show, which are termed as the SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD IN THREE LIFELIKE DIMENSIONS. These shows are highly erotic and are related to women's body. After that, in the wilderness Mansion of Midnight he meets the nymph Mary Ann who has got all the traits of a gothic maiden. He mates with her, during one of the moments of her sleep walking. Absconding from there, he takes refuge with the River People, who fosters a culture prior to literacy and the incorporation into capitalism. Dr. Hoffman's seductions cannot affect the River People because of the sheer force of their way of life. Desiderio's literacy proves 'more useful to them than their orality as far as their trade negotiations are concerned. So they plan to inseminate one of the girls of their clan by Desiderio and then to eat him up. Even though Desiderio feels an empathy with the river people due to his Indian origins, he senses danger and wakes up from this dream. Then he becomes a witness to the sexual perversions of a Sadeian Count in the House of Anonymity. After that he meets the Centaurs who take pride in their legacy as the descendants of the Sacred Stallion and observe ritual customs like tattooing horse shapes, in order to be horses themselves. In the meanwhile, he falls in love with Albertina, the beautiful daughter of Dr. Hoffman, and once dreams her as a 'black swan', which is ugly and yet marvellous, wearing a golden collar around its neck with the name

ALBERTINA etched on it. Finally, Desiderio discovers Hoffman's secret in his laboratory where couples endlessly copulate in wired cages.

The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman is unique in its kind in dramatizing the unconscious through disparate narratives. The readers experience an over-abundance of the imaginary, fabulous materials in this novel. In his article "In the Demythologising Business," Colin Manlove makes his observations on the fantastic nature of this novel:

... the work is very different from all her others, being so constantly metaphysical or at least abstract in its reach: here we deal not so much with connected narratives about people, but rather with symbols, with landscapes as projections of the unconscious, with a whole range of worlds from the bestial to the ascetic religious; only in this novel do we have a war which is not a physical but a mental one, whereby Hoffman is trying to de-stabilize order, empiricism and a priori notions of reality, by liberating each phenomenon into a mutating mass of alternative forms."

(149)

The novel is a series of alternative worlds, clashing with each other and within each of these worlds there is further fragmentation. We have here in the fairground, a series of abnormal beings like the bearded lady, Alligator Man, the Acrobats of Desire etc. The theme of the fantastic invasion and rationalistic resistance makes the novel the site of a literal agnostic struggle between the Cartesian cogito 'I think, therefore I am' and the Freudian / Lacanian cogito 'I desire, therefore I am.' This novel which is steeped

in the Fantastic / Gothic elements undertakes the dissection of the psyche, the dark, brooding forces of the unconscious and its never-ending battles with reason.

In *Nights at the Circus*, we have the most exuberant one of Carter's fantastic creations - the winged wonder, bird-woman Fevvers. Here also we witness Carter's fascination towards the primitive cultures - there are the Finno-ugarians, shamanism, Museum of Female Monsters etc. which brings associations with the primitive spirit reminiscent of the Gothic. But the novel as such is sunny and attempts to radiate light which dismisses darkness and the vicious shadows.

The short story collection *The Bloody Chamber* is an exemplar exemplum of Carter's fascination with the Gothic. As the title indicates, most of the stories in the collection have gothic locales. The title story has all the gothic traits with it - an innocent, helpless and tremulous bride, an aristocratic, despotic husband who is pictured as a rapacious vampire; a lonely and gloomy castle; and a hidden chamber of menacing secrets in it. Most of the other stories are set in bleak and remote high land villages where wolves howl 'they have cold weather and cold hearts.' These tales are abundant with Gothic images like moonlit forests, grave yards, lonely castles, secret chambers, guttering candles and howling of wolves in distant darkness. Most of the stories in *The Bloody Chamber* are re-writings of traditional fairy tales by Charles Perrault. The title story is a modern version of the tale of the Bluebeard's castle which casts a French aristocrat who takes pleasure in killing his successive brides and harbouring their dead bodies in a locked room in his isolated castle. The last one in the succession of his brides is a curious and inquisitive adolescent young girl who acknowledges the awakening sexuality in her body. The story largely exploits quintessential gothic motifs and settings especially the

mysterious and lonely castle which contains within it a locked chamber with bloody secrets. It is the heroine who, at first resembles ‘the damsel in distress, a stock character of the Gothic tales, narrates the tale and her tale begins with her expectations of conjugal bliss with his husband. But contrary to her expectations, her bridal chamber becomes a bloody chamber as her husband prefers a sado-masochistic kind of sexual relationship. (Her husband is named as The Marquis in the story which obviously reminds one of Marquis de Sade.) The marital bed room reflects the murderous intentions of the husband, “My husband, with much love, filled the room with lilies until it looked like an embalming parlour.” After the initial revels in love-making, the intelligent and inquisitive girl endowed with the power of feminine intuition, recognizes her perilous situation, becomes alert and sheds her passivity. Smelling something nasty and rotten in the atmosphere of the castle, she explores the castle, determined to find its secrets. Learning about the dangerous, locked chamber, she gets the answers to the enigma and the ultimate realisation of her situation urges her to act. She seeks ways to escape. In the traditional fairy tale, it is the bride’s brothers who appear as saviours, but in Carter’s story the avenging angel is the mother herself. Mounting on the horse, with her dress tucked up to the knees and holding a gun in her hand, the bride’s mother appears as the liberator. The aggressive and deadly Marquis dies at the hands of his bride’s mother, thereby ensuring the final victory for women. The bold and dynamic matriarchy displaces the traditionally established patriarchy, dispensing with all ideas connected with brothers, fathers and charming princes as rescuers.

This story abounds in Gothic props. The choker of rubies presented by the husband to the bride becomes a suffocating presence, foreshadowing the threats which

wait for her in future. “His wedding gift, clasped round my throat, a choker of rubies two-inches wide, like an extra-ordinarily precious slit-throat.” Having set the props or mis-en scene of a dark Gothic tale, Carter punctures our expectations through an unconventional feminist denouement, subverting the received notions of the saviour.

Other stories included in the collection also are couched in the Gothic atmosphere. In “Courtship of Mr. Lyon”, we see the transformation of Mr. Lyon who represents the beast of the ‘Beauty and the Beast’ story. The carnivorous Mr. Lyon who roars and runs on all fours, is tamed by the beauty and he learns to walk quietly by the side of her on his two feet. The metamorphosis is the result of Beauty’s devoted love for him. At first, we see him in his terror-incarnated form where he represents the dangers of sexual desire kept in isolation. Love brings the humanity in him to the forefront and his identity as a flesh-devouring savage animal gives way to humaneness. Another story “The Tiger’s Bride” also, re-vision the same “Beauty and the Beast” story in a different manner. Here also we see the carnivorous hero and virginal heroine. The tiger or the beast wins the beauty by covering his head and his beastliness by wearing a mask and a wig. When the girl reaches the tiger’s den, she finds the discarded robes –the mask, the cloak and the dressing gown- used by the beast to cover up his animalistic identity. The tiger appears in front of her as the tiger itself, “He will gobble you up. Nursery fears made flesh and sinew; earliest and most archaic of fears, fear of devourment. The beast and his carnivorous bed of bone and I...” (Carter, *Chamber* 67). This fear of devourment is a recurring trope of the Gothic. If in the story “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” the beast is turned into a gentleman, in “Tiger’s Bride” the bride or Beauty turns into a beast. As the tiger licks the beauty, her skin peels off and beneath that skin she is seen to be a tiger.

The story titled “The Erl-King” reminds one of “The Tiger’s Bride” as the male woodland spirit with a mane ‘the Erl-King’ who is a ‘heart-eater and blood-sucker, undertakes a peel off of his beloved – a female human being. He strips her to complete nakedness, but dresses up her again, desiring to entrap her in a cage. But the girl does not heed to this desire of his lover, but instead opens all the cages in which many birds were kept. As she lets the birds free, “they ... change back into young girls, every one, each with the crimson imprint of his love-bite on their throats.” ‘The crimson imprint of love-bite’ is obviously Gothic and the story is a cautionary tale which warns the women not to be passive receivers of male sexuality.

“The Snow-Child” which is often considered as the re-vision of ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs’ is a story of the Snow-Child born out of her father’s fancy for a perfect and pure virginal girl- child. The Count, the father dresses her up in the robes of his wife, the Countess and the Countess abhors it. The Countess expresses a desire for a rose, and as the Snow-Child picks a rose for her, its pricks wound her and she bleeds. The count then commits a very heinous act – he enters into sexual intercourse with the dead body of the Snow-Child, who is his own child. The Snow- Child melts and vanishes to the air but the rose has been turned into a carnivorous one, as it bites when the countess touches it. The rose becomes both the killer and the avenger for the Snow-Child. The fantastic elements and the Gothic situation in the story is highly disturbing as it is a thorough contrast to the story of Snow White.

The story titled “The Lady of the House of Love” bears many features of the Gothic within it. The central character of the story is a Countess, “queen of the vampires”, a somnambulist, “both death and maiden” whose castle is embellished with all

kinds of Gothic decor. She lives in the castle in the company of many ghosts and a caged lark. The countess, most of the time limits herself to a dark and dusty chamber and in order to make herself wanted she torments the lark. The Countess makes the lark sing about its caged condition without the possibilities of escape because it reflects her own entrapped and isolated situation. The blood-sucking Countess drinks the vital saps of those young men who happened to stroll into her territory, unaware of the dangers lurking within it. Countess has all the physical attributes of a perfect Gothic heroine – a femme fatale with serpentine beauty. But her beauty, as it is common in the Gothic traditions, is not real or natural. The fact that she is neither beautiful nor young becomes explicit towards the end of the story when she loses her vampirish qualities during her encounter with a chaste and intelligent young man, a bicycle tourist who is rational enough not to be afraid of her. This rationalist's sexual potency is intact as he is a virgin. With blonde hair and blue eyes, this young man has all the attributes of a Gothic female victim. His resemblance to the features of the Gothic female victim and the over-emphasis on his virginity are part of Carter's scheme of subversion. The handsome wandering hero "with the head of a lion" delivers the Countess from her predator condition. When she cuts her hand with a shard of broken glasses from her fatal chamber, he kisses her hand sucks out the blood from her hand. This becomes an act of exorcism as a role-reversal occurs – She loses her role as the blood- sucker, bringing her to the position of a human being. She is no more a vampire with ravishing beauty but a wrinkled old woman. Unable to bear the pain of being reduced to a normal human being, the Countess dissolves into air after opening the doors of the cage to set the lark free to fly towards the infinite sky. Using many motifs and situations from the Gothic mode,

Carter is at her best in subversion in this tale as it speaks between the lines a lot about sexuality, especially suppressed female sexuality. “I leave you as a souvenir, the dark, fanged rose I plucked from between my thighs, like a flower laid on a grave.” The Countess’s reference to the fanged rose (This reminds us of the biting rose of “the Snow-Child”) evokes ‘vagina dentata’ – a female genitalia with biting teeth so that the sexual intercourse would be injurious. This implicates her asexual life which manifests in the death-like situation of her lonely life. The story destabilizes many notions associated with sexuality (both male and female), chastity and virility.

There are three wolf-stories in this collection which are attempts to rework the traditional “Little Red Riding Hood” story which used to serve as a vehicle for cautionary messages for young adolescent girls. In the story titled “The Werewolf”, the wolf is the grandmother herself and the girl chops the paw of the wolf while she encounters with it in the forest. Later when she reaches the house of the grandmother, she recognises the overhanging threat or impending danger by identifying the chopped hand of the grandmother. Dismissing her grandmother / the wolf using her father’s knife once again, she inherits the property and she prospers. This story which highlights the need of being cunning, resourceful and courageous for women, is followed by another variant of the same story “The Company of Wolves”, where the girl tames the wolf in the guise of the grandmother through sharing the bed with the wolf and actively asserting her sexuality. The third wolf-story “The Wolf-Alice” is the most chilling among the three and bears the stamps of the Gothic to the maximum. In this story there is a girl who is brought up by the wolves as a wolf who howls and walks on all fours. The other character in the story is a Duke who eats corpses and casts no reflection in the mirrors is a typical predator-

Antagonist of the Gothic tradition. The Wolf-Alice is being sent to the shabby mansion of the carcass-eating Duke when the villagers get tired of her beastly presence. She is not frightened of the Duke as she is familiar with the ways of the carnivorous animals. When she sees him standing in the kitchen with a man's leg slung over his shoulders, she is not shocked because she is the Wolf-Alice. When she gets mutilated, Alice gains self-consciousness – she starts to recognize herself in the mirror and learns to handle the menstrual blood. (This intensifies the shock generated by the blood-stained story). Being aware of herself as a woman she starts to cover her naked body with the wedding gown of one of the brides the Duke had consumed, she follows the Duke to the graveyard. The Duke who excavates the grave to take the dead body out to eat gets shot by the husband of the dead bride. Wolf-Alice readily comes to the rescue of the wolf and as she licks the blood and the wound, the reflection of the Duke starts to gradually appear in the mirror which suggests his transformation into a human being. Although the tale ends in a positive note as it points out the possibilities of bringing out humaneness through love, the story in total is gruesome and bloody as atypical Gothic horror fantasy.

The story titled “The Loves of Lady Purple” included in the collection *Fireworks* also bears the Gothic elements in its body. The uncanny nature of the Gothic image of the puppets which was used by Carter in *The Magic Toyshop* is once again exploited deftly by Carter in this story. Lady Purple in the story is a life-like female puppet is a product as well as a vehicle of sexual fantasies of the puppet master. He pictures her as a nymphomaniac and when he ventriloquizes for her character, his voice become “a thick lascivious murmur like fur soaked in honey” and he defines her as “the petrification of a universal whore and had once been a woman in whom too much life had negated life

itself, whose kisses had withered like acids and whose embrace blasted like lightning” (257-58). The puppeteer who controls the automations of the puppet accuses her in front of the public as a torturer, a murderer, a spreader of diseases and an overtly- sexual being. But Her Lady Purple gets alive by night to wreak her vengeance on him during night. As the puppet master kisses her good night, Lady Purple “gains entry into this world by a mysterious loophole in her metaphysics” (265). She comes to life and kills him by sinking her sharp teeth into his throat like a vampire and simultaneously sets fire to his theatre, proclaiming the ending of a very hypocritical and despotic space where false notions of femininity are rehearsed.

These short stories with gothic settings are badly stained with blood and menaced with physical, psychological and sexual violence. Carter, in her early works, repeatedly depicted sado-masochistic tendencies and scenes of physical assaults like thrashings and beatings. And they are steeped in obscenity also. But as Walter Kendrick asserts in his article “The Real Magic of Angela Carter,” “Carter’s sex scenes are just as explicit as her violence and sometimes as violent. This is obscenity in the classic, Aristophanean sense: hilarious, violent, phallic, and treading dangerously on the verge of horror” (68). Some critics of Carter – Robert Clark, Susanne Keppler et al.– who are shocked at the monstrosity with which she describes sexual encounters find this as a negative stance. But Carter has her own intentions behind it, which never run against her avowed stand as a working feminist. She engages herself in the gothic diffusion of libidinal energies because she is aware that the libido is continually in rebellion against reality principle. As David Punter observes in *The Literature of Terror*, “Gothic fiction is erotic at root: it knows that to channel sexual activity into the narrow confines of conventionality is

repressive and, in the end, highly dangerous, that it is a denial of Eros and that Eros so slighted returns in the form of threat and violence” (411).

If somebody like Susanne Keppler, accuses Carter for this bleak eroticism and calls her a pornographic writer, Carter has her answers. In *The Saedian Women*, where she expresses her appreciation of Sade’s universe, she defines a ‘moral pornographer and thereby defends herself as well as De Sade, for overt statements of sexuality in *The Saedian Women*:

The moral pornographer would be an artist who uses pornographic materials as part of the acceptance of the logic of a world of absolute sexual license for all the genders, and projects the model of the way such a world might work. A moral pornographer might use pornography as critique of current relations between the sexes. His business would be the total demystification of the flesh and the subsequent revelation, through the infinite modulations of the sexual act, of the real relations of the man and his kind. Such a pornographer would not be the enemy of the women, perhaps because he might begin to penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distort our culture even as he entered the realms of true obscenity as he describes it. (Carter *Saedian Women* 19-20)

What Carter intends to do is to disturb the complacency of her readers with the present system and situation, with the present concepts of male and female sexuality. As David Punter asserts in *The Literature of Terror*, “To the dominant male-oriented ethos of Western society, love and sexuality display only an affirmative side: to the gothic

writers, they are the products and visible outcroppings of darker forces, and thus the gothic persists in trying to come to grips with their alternative forms – incest, sexual violence, rape – and in questioning the absolute nature of sexual roles” (411).

Incest is one of the oft-repeated themes of Carter. The story titled “The Earl King” from *The Bloody Chamber*, is very much disturbing as it represents a father’s sexual penetration of his daughter. The story which follows, “The Snow Child”, a revision of Snow White’s tale, also has incestuous overtones as the snow child assumes both the roles of the virginal girl and the corrupt queen according to the fancies of her father. If Snow White of the fairy tale was the embodiment of her mother’s desire, the Snow Child is her father’s. “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter” also is about incestuous relation between father and daughter. The early novel *The Magic Toyshop*, too has got the incest as an element in it - between Aunt Margaret and her brother Francie. In the last novel *The Wise Children*, Dora Chance entertains herself with an incestuous copulation with Perry who is her father’s twin.

The issue here is that of the taboo. In *Totem and Taboo* Freud examines the problem of incest in association with taboo which operates at the threshold between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’:

For us the meaning of taboo branches off into two opposite directions. On the one hand it means to us, sacred, consecrated: on the other hand, it means, uncanny, dangerous, forbidden, and unclean. The opposite for taboo is designated in Polynesian by the word *noa* and something ordinary and generally acceptable. Thus, something like the concept of reserve

inheres in taboo; taboo expresses itself essentially in prohibitions and restrictions. Our combination of 'holy dread' would often express the meaning of taboo." (821)

According to Freud, taboo is a territory of emotional ambivalence. It dialectically involves attraction and repulsion, adoration and condemnation. Freud asserts that the persistence of taboo is an evidence to the fact that the original pleasure to do the forbidden still continues among tabooed races. They therefore assume an ambivalent attitude towards their taboo prohibitions and in their unconscious, they desire to transgress them but they are afraid to do so just because the fear is stronger than the pleasure of transgression. (831)

Gothic fiction shares the emotional ambivalence of the taboo - especially the ambivalence about matters connected with sexuality. The gothic text's play with the tabooed is part of its project of transgressing the boundaries between the human and the natural, the civilized and the barbaric. The woman writer who opts for the gothic mode freely indulges in the tabooed practices like incest, as an expression of her rage against the burden of civilization which always privileges one section of humanity over another. Sigmund Freud writes in *Civilization and its Discontents* about the tendency of culture to set restrictions upon sexuality of human beings:

Even the earliest phase of it [culture], the totemic, brought in its train the prohibition against incestuous object - choice, perhaps maiming wound ever inflicted throughout the ages on the erotic life of man. Further limitations are laid on it by taboos, laws and customs which touch men as

well as women... Culture obeys the laws of psychological economic necessity in making the restrictions, for it obtains a great part of the mental energy it needs by subtracting it from sexuality. Culture behaves towards sexuality in this respect like a tribe or a section of the population which has gained the upper hand and is exploiting the rest to its own advantage. Fear of a revolt among the oppressed then becomes a motive for even stricter regulations. A high- watermark in this type of development has been reached in our Western, European civilization.” (784)

In the same section of the article, Freud speaks of women’s antagonistic attitude towards culture which relegate them to the background, “The next discord is caused by women, who soon become antithetical to cultural trends and spread around them their conservative influence- the women who at the beginning laid the foundations of culture by the appeal of their love. Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life... Woman finds herself forced to the background by the claims of culture, and adopts an attitude towards it” (783).

This is why Carter intentionally makes her female characters as sexually assertive. Carterian heroines are not delicate and naive, but smart and confident. As Walter Kendrick puts it in *The Real Magic of Angela Carter*, “Carter’s females possess a self-sufficient power, an absolutely inviolable integrity that renders male arrogance futile. And they are fiercely sexual beings, even her questing virgins” (79). By depicting bold and powerful women, Carter taunts Western Civilization’s conceptions of feminine decorum. And as a justification she adds, “A free woman in an unfree society is a monster” (Carter, *Saedian Women* 27). Liberated from their marginal status, the

monstrous others of the Gothic are no longer objects of hate or fear but they become alternative sites of identification, sympathy, desire and self-recognition. Transgression becomes a positive act as it involves subversion of spectral patriarchal prohibition.

The possibilities of the Gothic genre to explore the inner recesses of the psyche and the workings of the unconscious and the clash between the id and super-ego are exploited by Carter largely to expose the ways in which sexuality is put under check in the case of women. The Gothic motifs and situations are used by her to analyse the configurations of sexuality in both men and women and the subsequent hierarchies set up in relation to gender. During the first stage of her literary career, in the 'Bristol Trilogy' and *The Magic Toyshop*, Carter uses the Gothic elements to graphically portray the unequal power relations, especially those of gender and subsequently to subvert them. The dimensions of persecutions and torture implicit in such power equations characterised by inequality are demonstrated powerfully in a heart-renting manner so that the readers may feel the gravity of the injustice projected by conventional gender norms intensely. Such a recognition of the imbalance intrinsic to the gender arrangements within patriarchy may fill the readers with so much indignation and disgust that they would be prompted for resistance against such arrangements. Carter does not stop there, but goes on to subvert the customary expectations and ends up with fruitful revisions. Novels representing the second stage of her career, which are written in the Sci-Fi mode, featuring post-apocalyptic societies, are littered with many fantastic and Gothic experiences which tax the readers ability to distinguish between the real and the unreal. One goes through multiple ways of envisaging gender relationships and this provides

ample scope for brain-storming regarding the imbalanced nature of such relationships in the present and the possibilities of change in the future.

As far as her rewriting of fairy tales is concerned, her world, therein is crowded not with fairies and angels but with vampiric and monstrous beings who behave against the set standards of bourgeois conformist society. Being the embodiments of repression and rejection, these beings crave for love and their restlessness is emblematic of their want of love and affection. For example, the lady in “The Lady of the House of Love”, suffers from lack of companionship in her single and solitary life and when she is touched by the mercy of the bicycle tourist, it becomes too much for her to bear it. In “Courtship of Mr. Lyon”, “The Tiger’s Bride” and “The Wolf-Alice”, the savage and aggressive masculine principle is brought to tenderness and benevolence by the cool-headedness of powerful female characters endowed with bestiality. Sometimes, her vampires and monsters are endowed with humaneness and some other times their monstrous nature is tamed through love and affection, turning them into soft, tender and lovable creatures. The Gothic form enables Carter to establish female characters as active agents who knows how to assert their individual autonomy and sexuality. At the same time, her fiction problematizes the known and accepted notions of sexuality and the standards of morality approved by the conformist society. By graphically charting out, the operations of dark, suppressed desires and fears through her unfettered movements in the tabooed realms in her fiction, Carter succeeds in undermining the snobbish pretensions associated with the bourgeois society’s moral stipulations which participate in the process of construction of the gendered subjects – men as active and aggressive subjects and women as passive, victimized objects.

Walking the tight rope between fantasy and realism' Carter multiplies the narrative possibilities by producing a new kind of feminist writing- a writing which, even without out rightly refuting 'traditional' narrative logic, defies its limits through wild excursions into anti-realistic worlds. The possibilities of linear narrative are multiplied by producing a baffling accumulation that undermines the narrative logic of linear narrative by its very excessiveness. As we have seen, the gothic mode, which is the writing of excess and exaggeration happens to be Carter's favoured form. What she writes about Pantoland, in the story 'In Pantoland' from the collection, *Burning the Boots*, can be a self-conscious reference to her own fictional world.

In Pantoland, everything is grand- well, let's not exaggerate- grandish. Not like what it used to be, but then, what is not. Even so, all still brightly coloured - garish, in fact, all your primaries, red, yellow, blue. And all excessive, so that your castle has more turrets than a regular castle, your forest, is considerably more impenetrable than the average forest, and not infrequently, your cow has more than its natural share of teats and udders.
(Carter *Burning*, 382)

The disruption caused by the decentring strategies like terror and madness makes Carter's writing equal to what is termed as Gynesis by Alice Jardine. By bringing the other to the discourses and by creating sense of fragmentation in narration, Carter purposefully shatters the superficial poise of the text, thereby feminizing it. Carter's preoccupation with the process of becoming woman is not limited to her characters, and their subjectivities, but it manifests in the body of the text also. The world of dark,

repressed desires and terrors, taboos and tantrums depicted in her novels puts them into a process of becoming.

Carter exploits both the grotesque and fictional devices of the Gothic for brooding on violent modern sexuality. Her extravagant fictional works break down gender referents along with the fixed and stable forms by expanding our notions of what it is possible to dream in the domain of sexuality and gender and criticizing all dreams that are too narrow. And for this, she adroitly uses destabilization strategies like fantasy, narrative superfluity and protean transformations.

Chapter 7

Carinvalessque Subversion and Celebration of Feminine Energies

What a joy it is to dance and sing! (Angela Carter,
Wise Children).

Angela Carter's last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* are exhilaratingly mirthful as they retain the vibes of the carnival about them. With their freakish revels in the wild zones of culture, they bear within them what is usually termed as the 'carnavalessque' in literature. This chapter examines the attempts made by Carter to subvert the official and the legitimate through the processes of carnivalization in the above-mentioned novels.

The term 'the carinvalessque' obviously comes from Mikhail Bakhtin, the philosopher of 'becoming' who traced the polyphonic character of the novel, back to its historical roots in popular carnival practices and various verbal genres associated with it. Bakhtin was particularly interested in the interface between the official and the non-official and in *Rabelais and his world* and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, he discusses the concept of 'carnivalization' where the encounter between the official and the unofficial takes place.

The concept of 'carnivalization' has its origins in the social institution of the carnival, the synthetic pageantry, the festival of the folks characterised by freedom and laughter, opposed to the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture. Carnival embodied common people's aspiration for freedom from the rigidity of

the existing system and monotony of the official routine. People enthusiastically assembled at the carnival square eager to have a release from the shackles of order and sense, to enjoy a period of play and complete freedom. As Katherina Clark and Michael Holquist note in their famous commentary on Bakhtin, “Carnival celebrated the freedom that comes from inversions in social hierarchy, suspension of sexual restraints and the possibility of playing new and different roles” (251).

Carnival was the celebration of the non-official set against the dogmatism of official life and it brought with it the joy of change. It involved the radical inversions of social roles, categories and hierarchies. This topsy-turvy nature is the greatest specificity of carnival. In her article titled “Who Speaks for Bakhtin?”, Gary Saul Morson makes her observations on Bakhtin’s idea of the carnival, “Carnival travesties. It crowns and uncrowns, inverts ranks and exchanges roles, makes sense from nonsense and nonsense from sense. Its logic is the logic of the turnabout, of the ‘inside out’. It is the systematic parody of systems and points to the arbitrariness of all norms and rules” (12).

The importance of carnival lies in the unique sense of the world it projects – the carnival sense of the world characterised by ‘joyful relativity’ (a much-used term with Bakhtin) and ‘ambivalent laughter’. Everything gets relativized in the carnival sense of the world and people enter into unusual relationship among themselves. In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* Bakhtin speaks about the carnival’s potential for undoing social hierarchies:

The laws, prohibitions and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is non-carnival, life are suspended during carnival: What is suspended first

of all is hierarchical structure and all forms of terror, reverence, piety and etiquette connected with it, that is everything resulting from socio – hierarchical inequality among people (including age). All distance between people is suspended and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. This is a very important aspect of a carnival sense of the world” (122).

The political significance of the carnival arises from this transgressive potential, radical subversiveness and egalitarian attitude. The carnival involves scope for possible transformations. The desire for change from below acts against the stasis imposed from above. Being the festive celebration of the other, it lays bare the gaps and fissures in the one-dimensional systematic theologies, legal codes, normative poetics and class hierarchies.

In *Rabelais's World and Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin undertakes a detailed examination of the historical origins of carnival proper and its subsequent transmission into literature which is often termed as the process of carnivalization of literature. The social phenomenon of carnival has a history which goes back to ancient times. In *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin traces its roots to the festivities which occupied an enormous place in the lives of the broadest masses of Greek and Roman civilizations. During the medieval period carnival began to represent a second life of the common people which was set in antithetical relations to the first one i.e. the official life which is monolithically serious and gloomy and subjugated to strict hierarchical order. Compared to the official life which is “full of horror, dogmatism and piety, the other was the life of the carnival square, fresh and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the

profanation of everything sacred, full of debasing and obscenities, familiar contact with everyone and everything” (Bakhtin, *Problems*, 129-130).

In Renaissance the carnival became the dominant mode of cultural expression and played a central role in the life of all classes. Literature also began to be suffused with the carnival spirit and this can be seen in the works of Rabelais, Shakespeare, Cervantes et al. During this period, Carnival swept away many types of barriers and invaded many realms of official life including all genres of high literature bringing about a fundamental transformation in artistic presentation and world-view. “There occurred a deep and almost total carnivalization of all artistic literature. The carnival sense of the world, with its categories, its carnival laughter, its symbol system of carnival acts of crowning/decrowning, of shifts and disguises, carnival ambivalence and all the overtones of the unrestrained carnival world – familiar, cynically frank, eccentric, eulogistic – abusive and so on – penetrated deeply into almost all genres of artistic literature” (130).

Bakhtin finds the Renaissance as the ‘high point of carnival life’, but thereafter begins its decline with the second half of the 17th century. Along with the more stabilized political order, official culture became once more authoritarian and serious. A dissipation of carnival and the carnival sense of the world set in and carnival ceased to be a communal performance on the public square, handing over its place to the influence of already carnivalized literature. From then onwards, carnivalization became a purely literary tradition. (131) The transposition of carnival into the language of literature is what is called as the carnivalization of literature by Bakhtin.

Thus, carnivalized literature is literature which has the carnival spirit about it, bearing the characteristic subversions, parodies and decrownings of carnival proper. The aesthetics of such a writing is characterised by the 'joyful relativity' and celebrates the anarchic, body-based and grotesque nature of the popular culture, which gets expressed in the context of carnival with its masks and masquerades, fiesta and feasting, feast of fools, masks and identity games and symbolic inversions like cross-dressing. The residual carnival elements present in carnivalized literature gets reconstituted at interval throughout the course of literary history, as the dialectical response to the consolidation of 'official' monological literary genres.

For Postmodernist theorists like Ihab Hassan, as they trace the presence of the carnival elements in some of the literary works of the latter half of twentieth century, the term carnivalization becomes synonymous with the postmodern. In Hassan's opinion, as it is expressed in *The Postmodern Turn*, the term carnivalization riotously embraces indeterminacy, fragmentation, decanonization, self-less-ness, irony, hybridization etc. and "it further means 'polyphony', the centrifugal power of language, the gay relativity of things, perspectives and performance, participation in the wild disorder of life, the immanence of laughter. Indeed, what Bakhtin calls novel or carnival – that is antisystem – might stand for postmodernism itself, or at least for its ludic and subversive elements that promise renewal." (171) For Hassan, carnival is the true feast of time, the feast of becoming which involves change and renewal of human beings who "discover the peculiar logic of the inside out of the 'turnabout' of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crowning and uncrownings – a second life" (171).

Rejecting linearity, the carnivalesque contributes to the postmodern problematization of history, by its special version of time. In opposition to ‘official time, which presents a linear and teleological progression of events, carnivalesque time is conscious of ‘timeliness’ and crisis in the version of history, which it projects. The past is constantly brought into dialogue with the present, thereby destabilizing both. Unlike the historical time, this special carnival time flows according to its own laws and find ample scope for infinite possibilities of radical shifts and metamorphoses.

This sense of incompleteness and ‘becoming’ manifests itself in the problematization of the constitution of the subject also. Carnival envisages identity as performance, the subject as process. The carnival acts of mocking, clowning, cross-dressing etc evidently participate in the problematization of subjectivity.

The notion of identity as performance and subject in process involved in the process of carnivalization makes it attractive in the context of feminism. Even though Bakhtin remained silent on questions of gender, carnival’s potential for undoing social and conceptual hierarchies suits feminism’s political purpose of resisting monologic patriarchal authority. The characteristic topplings and inversions of the carnival sense with its curious combination of critique and indecency make it an apt tool for feminists. The capacity of carnival to disrupt and remake official public norms urges feminists to appropriate it for their purposes. The process of carnivalization proves to be helpful for them to change and reform the old images and concepts associated with femininity and masculinity. Clark and Holquist talks about the carnival’s potential for recasting old images in their commentary *Mikhail Bakhtin*, “He (Bakhtin) speaks of the renewal of old objects by a new use or new and unexpected juxtapositions, of the importance of

destroying the old images of things and looking at them anew, and the need to get a new sense of the words, things and concepts ... by freeing them temporarily of all semantic links and freely recreating them”(317).

The patriarchal images associated with gender identity are destroyed and new and positive images emerge instead. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin himself speaks of the positive attitude of popular tradition (from which the carnival derives) towards women.

The popular tradition is no way hostile to woman and does not approach her negatively. In this tradition (as indeed in the other) woman is essentially related to the material bodily lower stratum; She is the incarnation of this stratum that degrades and regenerates simultaneously. She is ambivalent, she debases, brings down to earth, leads a bodily substance to things and destroys; but first of all, she is the principle that gives birth. (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 240)

Here, the lower bodily stratum, with its destructive/regenerative quality, is privileged than the upper and the identification of women with this stratum is helpful for women in their emancipatory endeavours, because the lower bodily stratum carries a transgressive political potential through its carnivalesque levelling of the kinds of hierarchies upon which oppressive political systems including patriarchy are built.

But despite their enthusiasm for adapting Bakhtin's theory of carnivalization, the feminists express their serious reservations about it. Bakhtin's theory is often criticized for conceiving the carnival in an essentializing way, as something innately subversive

and oppositional and being a licensed form of release from social restraint, it often results in the reinforcing of the existing power structure. Feminists doubt the political efficacy of carnivalization, arguing that a temporary suspension of class and gender hierarchies in carnivalized texts does not necessarily mean the suspension of patriarchy. Even though Bakhtin's ideas about the subversive nature of the dialogic or carnivalized novel is valuable and revolutionary, it is slightly problematic in the context of feminism as the concept of the anarchically disruptive, diffusely subversive "other" becomes a little mystifying, as it overshadows the deployment of strategies of ideological resistance. So Feminists bear an ambivalent attitude towards carnivalization as it is evident that a naive application of the carnivalization would not suffice for the purposes of feminism. The notion of carnivalization cannot be appropriated Feminism without revision and recontextualization. For the carnival to be politically effective for feminists, it should be recontextualized in such a way as to dialogise the public realm by bringing the excluded and non-official into juxtaposition with the official. The subversive power of the carnival will be realized only by bringing it into dialogic relation with official forms as Clair Wills notes in "Upsetting the Public", "It is only by bringing the excluded and carnivalesque into the official realm in a single text that the public discourse may be altered..... it is Rabelais's ability to make use of official forms including new forms of scientific knowledge and festive forms which can raise carnival to as higher level of ideological consciousness" (132).

The carnivalesque text should make visible the dialogue between the official and the unofficial. The feminist's version of the carnival should be 'the carnival as hybrid – a mediation between high and low forms of culture rather than the other of official culture.

In fact, there is immense significance in the eruption of folk laughter into official and serious culture. Seriousness and folly should enter into an open dialogue so as to bring about changes in both sides.

This is exactly what is being done by Angela Carter in her later fiction. Her last two novels *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* are wonderful distillations of the carnival spirit and many of her earlier works use carnival motifs and situations. But in spite of her Rabelaisian sense of humour and Dionysian temper, Carter bears an ambivalent attitude towards Carnival. In an interview with Lorne Sage in 1992, Carter made it clear. Sage presents it like this:

Notwithstanding her pleasure in Bakhtin and her feeling that he's right to claim Dostoevsky as a polyphonous writer, she is characteristically sceptical about the vogue for the carnivalesque. It is interesting that Bakhtin became very fashionable in the 1980s, during the demise of the particular kind of theory that would have put all kinds of question marks around the whole idea of the carnivalesque. I am thinking about Marcuse and repressive desublimation, which tells you exactly what carnivals are for. The carnival has to stop. The whole point about the feast of fools is that things went on as they did before after it stopped. (188)

Carter recognizes carnival as a risky strategy and so in her works, bacchanalian revels are accompanied by rational and careful analysis. Carnivalistic anarchism is closely followed in by accurate pragmatism. She never takes carnival as simply oppositional but as an intermediary between the dominant and the marginal. But nobody

can ignore her interest in the popular tradition. It is difficult to overlook the dialogue which Carter makes in her works not only with narratives that predate the novel form (genres like myths, folklore, legends, fairy tales, travel narratives and other forms of oral traditions) but also with its twentieth century technological aids – the radio, T.V. and the film.

Carter's fiction is couched in a serio-comic vein and Bakhtin considers the entire realm of the serio-comical as the first example of carnivalized literature. In *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin acknowledges their characteristics like this, "Characteristics of these genres are a multi-toned narration, the mixing of high and low, serious and comic; they make wide use of inserted genres – letters, found manuscripts, retold dialogues, parodies of the high genres, paradoxically reinterpreted citations: In some of them we observe a mixing prosaic and poetic speech, living dialects and jargons" (108).

Most of these characteristics can be traced in Carter's narratives. In the last two novels the high and the low, the sacred and the profane, the serious and the comic are welded together adroitly. The dominant mood of these novels is the ambivalence of carnival laughter and their dominant locales are those of circus and the vaudeville theatre which obviously have got the touch of the carnival with them. As Brian McHale observes in *Postmodernist Fiction*, "Representations of circus, fairs, sideshows and amusement parks often function as residual indicators of the carnival context in postmodernist fiction" (174).

As early as in *Fire Works*, Carter shows the fairground as her favourite site. She finds it as a suitable locale to fulfil her predilection for the grotesque. In the story 'Loves

of Lady Purple' included in the collection titled *Fireworks*, she writes, "A universal cast of two-headed dogs, dwarfs, alligator man, bearded ladies and giants in leopard skin coin clothes reveal their singularities in the sideshows and wherever they come from, they share the sullen glamour of deformity, an internationality which acknowledges no geographic boundaries. Here the grotesque is the order of the day" (21).

In his introduction to *Burning Your Boats*, one of Carter's collections of short stories, Salman Rushdie rightly observes:

Carter's other country is the fairground, the world of the gimcrack showman, the hypnotist, the trickster, the puppeteer. 'The Loves of Lady Purple' takes her closed circus world to yet another mountainous middle European village, where suicides are treated like vampires.... while real warlocks 'practiced rites of immemorial beastliness in the forests.' As in all Carter's fairground stories, 'the grotesque is the order of the day...'

Lady purple is a female, sexy and lethal rewrite of Pinocchio and along with the metamorphic cat-women in 'Master'. One of the dark (and fair) ladies with unappeasable appetites to whom Angela Carter is so partial.

(xi)

And among all these ladies with 'unappeasable appetites', Sophie Fevvers, the bird-woman aerialist of *Nights at the Circus* is the most wonderful and amiable one. She is the 'winged Wonder', Victorian 'Cockney Venus', six foot two in her stockings. Courted by the Prince of Wales and painted by Toulouse-Lautrec, she is an *aerialiste extraordinaire* and star of Colonel Kearney's circus. Being hatched, not born, in parody

of the origin of Helen of Troy, this larger-than-life female acrobat is half- woman, half- Swan. It was the prostitutes of Ma Nelson's brothel who discovered her for the first time, newly hatched and abandoned, in a basket amidst broken egg shells, at the door steps of their whore-house at White Chapel. She is being brought up at the brothel by the benevolent Mistress of the House, Madam Nelson and Lizzie, her foster mother who accompanies her throughout her life. Once the brothel is disbanded, Fevvers joins the Museum of Women Monsters where she shares the company of weird women like Fanny Four-Eyes, the Wiltshire Wonder and others. Later she joins the Grand Imperial Circus as a trapeze artist, her potential for hovering in the air with the aid of her wings becomes highly useful for her and she establishes herself as the greatest attraction on the bill boards of the circus company. Unlike the lady purple, cat woman and the executioner's daughter (Carter's female characters in earlier works) who have a sinister quality about them, she is sunny and embodies playful exuberance. Full of female resourcefulness and wit, she is coarsely lively and lovely. She is the "Queen of ambiguities", "goddess of in-between states" "... virgin and whore, reconciles of fundament and firmament, reconciles of opposing states through the mediation of ambivalent body" (Carter, *Nights* 77). As the centre of attraction of the shows of Colonel Kearney's Grant Imperial Circus Company at London, Fevvers travels with it from London to St. Petersburg in the closing months of nineteenth century and from there they undertake a transcontinental journey towards Japan but on their way, their train is being obliterated using dynamites at Siberia by a band of social outlaws who wanted to take Fevvers as a hostage to exercise political pressure over the Tsars. Fevvers, a female picaro roaming around the world with her band of freakish clowns represents the world of the eccentrics who defy boldly the restrictions

imposed by the authority exercised by the official and hierarchical structures of social life. The artistes of the Imperial Circus have various features of strangeness about them: Mignon, the Ape Man's abused wife who is being beaten up terribly like a door mat, the tiger-taming Abyssinian princess, Buffo, the clown who loses his sanity during a performance et al., along with the apes who are capable of writing, Kearney's pig Sibyl endowed with prophetic qualities, constitute the world of the Circus which is a world of the eccentricities. Within this extravagant framework supplied by the locus of the circus, Fevvers functions as the fulcrum of diverse activities which involve different kinds of improbabilities and impossibilities.

The novel's temporal context is very specific and meaningful – the action takes place at the fag-end of the 1890s, suggesting the transition from one century to another. The end of the century setting of the novel anticipates the death of one age and the rise of another, emphasising its transformative and regenerative potential which is a hallmark of the carnival. “For we are at the fag-end, the smouldering cigar-butt, of a nineteenth century which is just about to be ground out in the ash tray of history. It is the final, waning, season of the year of Our Lord, eighteen hundred and ninety-nine. And Fevvers has all the *éclat* of a new era about to take off” (Carter, *Nights* 8). The characters of the novel undergo the experiences of the cusp, the moment of transition as “old world gives birth to the new one.”

Transcending the biological barriers between the state of being a bird and the state of being a human, Fevvers is an accurate example of the grotesque body. With the sprouting and spreading of wings on her shoulders, her body is the typical grotesque body, the body of the carnival. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin speaks of the

speciality of the grotesque body. For him, “the grotesque” is a covering term for the body that is capable of change through eating, evacuation and sex and this body is opposed to the static ideal represented in classical Great marbles. Clark and Holquist put it like this:

The grotesque body is flesh as the site of becoming. As such the key elements of the body are precisely those points at which it outgrows its own self, transgresses its own limits.... conceives a new second body, the bowels and the phallus.... Next to the bone and the genital organs is the mouth through which enters the world to be swallowed up.... All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic: It is with them that the borders between one’s own and other bodies and between the body and the world are breached.... The grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body’s limited space or into the body’s depths. (303)

In Bakhtinian terms, the grotesque body always relates to carnival time, which is free and becoming, because it shares the carnival’s approach towards space as something free, unconfined and constantly trying to transcend boundaries. For Bakhtin, the Grotesque body is the intertextuality of nature, of biology. The sense of ambivalence, incompleteness and becoming which is represented by the grotesque body is best expressed by Bakhtin’s reference to the terracotta figurines of Kerch depicting the “senile pregnant hags” which capture the striving for breaking the borders, typical of the grotesque body. Plant, animals and human body are interwoven on them as if giving birth to each other.

This is against the notion of a finished and stable world, but instead put emphasis on the sense of incompleteness, change and ambivalence. Clark and Holquist comment in this regard, “Just as the carnival enacts the intertextuality of ideologies, official and unofficial so the grotesque body foregrounds the intertextuality of nature. The grotesque is intertextually perceived at the level of biology” (304).

The grotesque body suggests the playful possibilities of corporeal fluidity. In size, she is of Gargantuan proportions – ‘a giantess’, ‘a big girl’, ‘six foot two inches in her stockings with a voice like clanging dustbin lids’ and ‘a face as broad and oval as a meat dish’. She has a Gargantuan appetite also. During Walser’s (a young American journalist obsessed with Fevvers) interview with her, she orders for sumptuous food, “... hot meat pies with a glutinous ladleful of eel gravy on each: a Fujiyama of mashed potatoes: a swamp of dried peas cooked up again and served swimming in greenish liquor” (Carter, *Nights* 21). She gorges and stuffs herself with ‘Gargantuan’ enthusiasm. Carter graphically presents ‘the spectacle of her gluttony’:

... [H]er mouth was too full for a riposte as she tucked into this earthiest, coarsest cabbies’ fare with gargantuan enthusiasm, she gorged, she stuffed herself, she spilled gravy on herself, she sucked up peas from the knife: she had a gullet to match her size and table manners of the Elizabethan variety... until at last her enormous appetite was satisfied; she wiped her lips on her sleeves and belched. (21)

Throughout the interview between Fevvers and Walser, she offers champagne to Walser, but drinks most of it herself. She drinks incessantly mugfuls of champagne

during the session of interview and by the end of it finishes off a case full of champagne bottles. After completing her stock of champagne, she starts to “pour pots of tea down her gullet”. The manner in which she adds sugar to her tea is an ample proof for her prodigious way of drinking tea, “She dispensed with measures and tipped the sugar into her steaming mug directly from a bag, in a stream” (47).

Apart from the epicurean immersion in eating and drinking, she belches and farts without inhibitions. Her gluttony and wild ways of eating and drinking along with her unabashed farting and belching challenge the notions associated with feminine decorum and etiquette. The upper- and middle-class values and manners associated with such bodily activities are put into trial through such blatant carnivalesque revels in them. Fevvers is fond of entertaining herself with all the activities connected with the ‘material bodily lower stratum’. In the Bakhtinian legacy, it is the lower bodily stratum, with its destructive/regenerative quality, which is privileged than the upper. The identification of women with this stratum is positive for them, because the lower bodily stratum carries a transgressive political potential through its carnivalesque levelling of the kinds of hierarchies upon which oppressive political systems (including patriarchy) are built. Carter graphically describes Fevver’s yawning with minute details, and finds it as a powerful subversive act as its power fills Walser with bewilderment:

... [S]he yawned. But not as a tired girl yawns. Fevvers yawned with prodigious energy, opening up a crimson maw the size of that of a basking shark, taking in enough air to lift a Montgolfier, and then she stretched herself suddenly and hugely, extending every muscle as a cat does, until it seemed she intended to fill up all the mirror, all the room with her bulk.

Walser, confronted by stubbled, thickly powdered armpits, felt faint: God!

She could easily crush him to death in her huge arms, although he was a

big man with the strength of Californian sunshine distilled in his limbs.

(Carter, *Nights* 57)

Dazed by the specificity and marvellous nature of Fevvers with her extra-ordinary physical form and verbal exuberance, Walser, the inquisitive journalist follows her closely. In the beginning, Walser was prompted by the patriarchal tradition of voyeuristic impulses in his quest for Fevver's 'truth'. He approaches her to have an interview with her as part of a project of a series of stories under the rubric "Great Humbugs of the World." Caught up in the web of feelings of insecurity caused by his own existentialist and ontological uncertainty, Walser seeks the "truth" behind Fevver's being. The leitmotif of the novel, "Is she fact or Is she fiction" haunts him. By the sheer intensity of his infatuation for her and the journalist's eagerness to have the scoop of a lifetime, Walser joins the circus company as one of the clowns and accompanies Fevvers and her team of circus freaks in their exotic tour through turn-of-the-nineteenth-century London, St Petersburg and Siberia.

The acts of masking and clowning which recur in this novel also point towards surpassing the boundaries set by nature. The mask and disguise constitute an important category of the carnival. Carnival and the grotesque bear the ambivalences and uncertainties with them as their characteristic features. They stress on the contradictions and relative nature of all kinds of discriminatory and hierarchical systems. The mask suggests transitions of identities, metamorphoses and transgressions. Sometimes they engage in violation of natural boundaries. As Clark and Holquist put it:

The mask which is ‘the most complex theme of the folk culture is connected with the joy of change and incarnation with joyful relativity and happy negation of uniformity and similarity; It rejects conformity to one’s own self the mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries.’ The mask is the very image of ambiguity, the variety, the flux of identities that otherwise, unmasked, are conceived of as single and fixed.” (304)

Mask and disguise lend a sense of fluidity to identity and put the subject in process. Identity becomes performance and the recognition of this fact gives freedom to the bearer of the mask. Walser enjoys this freedom when he wears the make up for the first time:

When Walser first put on his make-up, he looked in the mirror and did not recognise himself. As he contemplated the stranger peering interrogatively back at him out of the glass, he felt the beginnings of a vertiginous sense of freedom that during all the time he spent with the colonel, never quite evaporated; until that last moment when they parted company and Walser’s very self, as he had known it, departed from him he experienced the freedom that lies behind the mask within dissimulation, the freedom to juggle with being, and indeed with the language which is vital to our being, that lies at the heart of burlesque” (Carter, *Nights* 103).

Fevvers herself feels this dizzying sense of freedom of the ‘becoming’ self as she soars upwards with the wings. While she is spreading her wings and hovering in air, she defies not only the law of gravity but also the unwritten laws of the patriarchal society

which always remind a woman of her inferior position in the name of female decorum and discipline.

Everyone and everything in the carnivalesque world of *Nights* are referred to in terms of the celebration of festivity of the outcast – Ma Nelson is ‘the Madams of the Revels’, Buffo, the chief clown is the ‘Lord of Misrule’ and God himself is ‘the Great Ringmaster of the Sky’. In colonel Kearchy’s Circus, where Fevvers performs, life is a ‘ludic game.’

Another carnival dimension of the novel is its free amalgamation of the sacred and the profane. Carter creates a polyphonic terrain where scholastic allusions from canonical writers (Shakespeare, Milton, Poe, Ibsen, Joyce et al.) blend with the experiences of cockney culture. In spite of their whorish status and marginalized situation in life, both Fevvers and her foster mother Lizzie are well-read and Ma Nelson, the mistress of the brothel they lived owned a library of her own which was handed over to her by an elite customer. During Walser’s interview with Fevvers, Lizzie interferes to communicate their affection for Shakespeare, “‘We dearly love the Bard Sir’, said Lizzie briskly. ‘What spiritual sustenance he offers!’” (59). Fevvers herself amazes Walser by her references to Baudelaire:

“I put it down to the influence of Baudelaire, sir”

“What’s this?” cried Walser, amazed enough to drop his professional imperturbability.

“The French poet, sir; a poor fellow who loved whores not for the pleasure of it but, as he perceived it, the horror of it, as if we was, not working women doing it for money but damned souls who did it solely to lure men to their dooms, as if we’d got nothing better to do.... ” (Carter, *Nights* 41)

If the whole atmosphere of the novel is steeped in the joyful relativity, its grand finale, the ending of the novel, is crowned by the hilarity of the carnival laughter. It becomes contagious and every living thing in the universe takes part in it.

“The spiralling tornado of Fevvers’ laughter began to twist and shudder across the entire globe, as if a spontaneous response to the giant comedy that endlessly unneeded beneath it, until everything that lived and breathed everywhere was laughing.” (295) This gay and affirmative laughter has the regenerative quality of the carnival laughter about which Bakhtin speaks in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*:

Carnivalistic laughter is directed toward something higher – toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders. Laughter embraces both poles of change, it deals with the very process of change, with crisis itself combined in the act of carnival laughter are death and rebirth, negation (a smirk) and affirmation (rejoicing laughter). This is a profoundly universal laughter, a laughter that contains a whole outlook on the world. Such is the specific qualities of ambivalent, carnival laughter. (127)

Carnival laughter anticipates transformation and renewal and here the ‘New Woman’. Fevvers, through her laughter, professes a ‘New age in which no woman will be bound down to the ground.’ Fevver’s grotesque body suggesting the corporeal excess,

the ambivalence of her identity oscillating between the woman and the bird equipped for flight, the fluidity lent by her performativity – all these point towards her capacity for the production of a new world. She is the New Woman who spreads her wings of freedom and ‘hatches’ a New World, a New Culture and certainly a New Man. Paulina Palmer comments on the final tornado of laughter by Fevvers in her article titled ‘From Coded Mannequin to the Bird Woman’, “The novel concludes aptly on a note of carnivalesc mirth. In the penultimate paragraph, Fevver’s peal of loud laughter is described as uniting her in spirit with the whole cosmos, giving rise to a gust of universal merriment” (201). At the same time, she makes it clear that the function of Fevver’s laughter was more than merely festive. Palmer continues, “As well as irreverently mocking the existing political order, it is socially and psychically liberating. Bakhtin’s discussion of the subversive potential of laughter helps to explicate its various levels of meaning. He points out that laughter signifies “the defeat of power, of earthly kings and of all that oppresses and restricts... It liberates not only from external censorship but, first of all, from the great interior censor”” (201). Through that final assertion and affirmation of life and its regenerative capacities, *Nights at the Circus*, as a novel actively participates in the process of destabilizing the rigid and established notions regarding the hierarchical structure of society.

In tune with the penultimate novel’s thrust on the marvels of the abnormal, the last novel *Wise Children* highlights the romantic aura of the non-official, the illegitimate. Edmond Gordon, Carter’s biographer, writes about this novel:

Wise Children uses Shakespeare’s plays, and especially his comedies, to celebrate the plurality of English culture, and to wryly interrogate

distinctions between high and low, central and peripheral, legitimate and illegitimate..... The novel is crammed with identical twins, warring brothers, cuckolded husbands, substitute brides, errant fathers and triumphant returns from the dead. It is a splendidly busy, absurdly over-top burlesque of Shakespearean motifs. (373)

Wise Children is a richly comic tale of the tangled histories of two theatrical families– ‘the imperial Hazard dynasty that bestrode the British Theatre like a colossus for a century and half’ and its bastard ‘other’ Chances. It is populated with as many sets of twins and mistaken identities as any Shakespearian comedy, and celebrates the covert history of over a century of show business. The rambunctious narrator of the novel is ‘Left-handed’ Dora Chance, who with her twin sister Nora Chance is very active in the illegitimate version of the show business. The septuagenarian Dora starts to write her autobiography and when she sets to work on the word-processor, she finds that the energy of her vernacular language takes her away from the limitations of the word-processor and endows her with a freedom of expression which transcends the fixity of the mono-dimensional written word. Dora and Nora Chances are illegitimate in many ways: they are the bastard daughters of Sir Melchoir Hazards who never acknowledges them as his daughters and professionally, their field is not the legitimate theatre, but Vaudeville performances, the bastard progeny of the legit. Theatre. They started their career as dancing girls of the music hall, made brief appearances as extras in a Hollywood film on ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’ which proved to be a failure, and ended up in acting as nudes in strip- shows called ‘Nudes of the World’, ‘Goldilocks’ and ‘Three Bares’.

The century- spanning, continent-crossing yarn is condensed into the frame of events happening on one special day – April 23rd, being a special day as it is the feast day of St. George, the Patron Saint of England as well as the supposed birthday of Shakespeare. It is the seventy fifth birth day of the Chance twins too. It is also the day of the birth centenary of their father/ uncle Melchoir Hazard and his twin brother Peregrine Hazard, their uncle/father. Paternity is here, a slightly problematic matter. “It is a wise child that knows its father.” Thus goes the saying. But the Chance twins, Dora and Nora, have an ambiguous relationship with theirs. They live their lives on the bastard side of old father Thames, ‘wrong side of the tracks’, the South London, across the river Thames. They are the unacknowledged, identified twin offspring of the Thespian Shakespearian actor Sir Malchoir Hazard and the foundling ‘Pretty-Kitty’. They are “Chance by name, Chance by nature.”

When Dora opens her autobiographical narration, Dora and Nora are in utter confusion whether to go or not for their father Melchoir’s centenary celebrations. They got a last-minute invitation for the function and as illegitimate daughters; they could very well feel the unwantedness. The questioning of legitimacy seems to be central to *Wise Children*. If Dora and Nora Chance are officially known as the children of Peregrine Hazard, (the Falstaffian twin of brother Malchoir Hazard), they are in fact the illegitimate offspring of Melchoir Hazard. The respectable twins Imogan and Saskia Hazard, who are the legitimate daughters of Melchoir Hazard, are but biologically the daughters of Peregrine Hazard. With a family tree full of twins and the repeated pairing of illegitimate and legitimate, the novel establishes a parallel between family lineage and culture and embraces and celebrates the undersides of official culture. The search for true parentage

accompanied by disguises, false trials and improbable revelations, the novel is engaged in problematization of identity.

The novel addresses the question of legitimacy of art and cultural forms also. Dora and Nora make their way in the theatre of music hall, vaudeville, pantomime and movies, in antiphonal relations to the serious drama. Carter sees pantomime as ‘the carnival of the unacknowledged and the fiesta of the repressed’ and the novel tests the limits of serious literary heritage at the same time alluding to it. Malcolm Bradbury observes in *The Modern British Fiction*, “As in all pantomime – the Shakespearian theatre too – theatrical performances and impersonations opens the Utopian forest of story out into cross-dressing and the ambiguities of role and gender” (442).

The Rabelaisian character Perry or Peregrine Hazard embodies the spirit of the carnival. “He is not so much a man, more of a travelling carnival.” This proverbial “American sugar daddy” molests the pubescent Dora when she was only thirteen. He sees ups and downs in life, but whenever he gets money, he revels in extravaganza and enjoyments and being bounteous in benevolence, extends his hands to those around him. Red and rude, he is a randy who is adept in jumping out of the boundaries. He is a man of multiplicities and according to Dora he has given them, herself and Nora, multiple histories from which they could choose which they wanted. “He gave all his stories... we could choose which ones we wanted... but they kept on changing so.” Perry is a restless character with an enormous amount of travel lust with him and most of the time, his whereabouts remain unknown to others. All on a sudden, he will make his appearance at the least expected moment, amazing the world around him with magic and revelry. It is Perry who leads Dora and Nora to the phonograph and to the joy of dancing and singing.

(The oft-repeated refrain in the novel is “What a joy it is, to dance and sing!” and it runs throughout the novel as its leitmotif.). It is he who provides the happiest moments for Dora and Nora in their lives. He takes them to Brighton for a picnic when they were thirteen years old, giving them an unforgettable experience of fun and frolic. With a magician’s dexterity, he takes doves out of his handkerchief, makes a complete set of China and cutlery vanish after the picnic and plucks two cream buns from Grandma’s cleavage. His presence is exciting and his laughter is hearty and infectious and it is this laughter that is being inherited by Dora. This boundary buster radiates mirth and laughter and never cares for frameworks set up by the society. Towards the end of the novel, Dora reminisces her experience of having incestuous sexual relationship with Perry in the upstairs, during the birthday party of Melchoir , when they were ready to ‘fuck the house down’, Dora narrates this as it was reported by Nora, who was participating in the party downstairs:

There was just one ecstatic moment, she opined, when she thought the grand bouncing on the bed upstairs – remember Perry was a big man – would bring down that chandelier and its candles, smash, bang clatter and the swagged ceiling, too: bring the house down, fuck the house down, come (cum?) all over the posh frocks and the monkey jackets and the poisoned cakes and the lovers, mothers, sisters, shatter the lenses that turned our lives into peepshows, scatter little candle flames like an epiphany on every head, cover over the family, the friends, the camera crews, with plaster dust and come and fire. (Carter, *Wise Children* 220)

The ribaldry involved in the act of sexual intercourse between seventy five year old Nora with her dear uncle and surrogate father Perry who passed hundred long years on this earth is intentional as it serves to topple the official order built up and centred round the imposing patriarch Melchoir Hazard. The Falstaffian character Perry is the ‘other’ of Melchoir who keeps all those pompous postures of the ambassador of official culture. The event of this exotic physical union is recorded from the point of Dora’s twin sister in order to emphasise its shattering potential without losing its credibility.

The unexpected collusions and collisions with circus, music – hall, pantomime, T.V. game show, popular soap and Hollywood musical are the theatre of *Wise Children*. The novel asserts that the kind of joyous fecundity which it projects could be identified only on the wrong side of the tracks, ‘the side [of London that] the tourist rarely sees’. With a lineage of twins, *Wise Children* consciously creates confusion of identity and aired images chosen either for their contrast or for similarity are characteristic of carnival thinking. “Parodying doubles have become a rather common phenomenon in carnivalized literature.” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 127)

Wise Children not only challenges and upsets order but also celebrates the wild energies of the other and the illegitimate. Dora and Nora revel in their wrong sidedness and in a sustained manner they raise opposition and challenge to the monologic authority of the official and the legitimate. The patriarchal authority enjoyed by the Hazard dynasty of the legitimate theatre is bestowed upon by them by Shakespeare, the omnipotent presence and symbol of British official theatre. Shakespeare is emblematic of the national culture of England and the Hazards’ privilege of becoming ‘the greatest living Shakespearian’ lends them somewhat like an imperial status in the country. The Hazards

are considered to be ‘national treasures’ and their repeated rehearsals and enactments as Shakespearian kings or princes suffuse them with an air of inflated sense of superiority associated with the illusion of royal status they assume. Their enthusiasm in undertaking the mission of spreading the ‘Shakespearian legacy’ to ‘the end of the empire’, is couched in a kind of religious commitment which can be compared to that of the evangelists’ dedication to Christ and Christianity. But when the days of glories of imperialism and royalty came to an end, the regal posing of the theatrical family also started to sound as obsolete and irrelevant.

It is a fact that cannot be negated that Shakespearian theatre had played a crucial role in establishing the cultural hegemony associated with the imperial interests of Britain, serving a lot in colonising the minds of people of the colonised countries. But even though ‘the National Bard’ continues as an icon of English official culture, Shakespearean plays allow sufficient space for the outcast and the eccentric, always providing scope for subverting and destabilizing the official. Angela Carter was very much aware of this dialectic of Shakespearian plays. Edmond Gordon, Carter’s biographer notes in *The inventions of Angela Carter*:

Since the late eighteenth century, Shakespeare had occupied an almost sanctified place in English culture. He was the national poet, but more than that, he was a symbol of national identity – a concept that Angela tended to view as a means by which the culture of the ruling classes asserted itself over the rest... He was regarded as the bastion of high culture. Angela was deeply suspicious of this tendency, feeling that England’s greatest writer had been hitched to a particular (pompous, posh,

patriarchal) version of Englishness. Her mother's family had revealed how much more inclusive his works could be: 'All of them knew... (that) to love Shakespeare is a kind of class revenge.' (373)

There are spaces for bawdy dialogues, mistaken identities, issues of bastardy, masking and clowning in Shakespeare and *Midsummer Night's Dream* with its fabulous atmosphere, is a perfect example for the transportation into the alternate world. *Wise Children* is a broad re-writing of the tropes and motifs of 'Midsummer Night's Dream', a parody of its theme of mistaken identities and amorous escapades. Edmond Gordon, writes about this novel, "The novel is crammed with identical twins, warring brothers, cuckolded husbands, substitute brides, errant fathers and triumphant returns from the dead. It is a splendidly busy, absurdly over-top burlesque of Shakespearean motifs" (373).

Wise Children largely makes use of Shakespeare's later plays in order to demonstrate the hybrid nature of English culture, its mixing up of the high and the low, the sacred and the obscene, the central and the marginal, the elite and the groundlings and the legitimate and the illegitimate. Shakespearian comedies with their ribald humour are effectively used by Carter in her writings to celebrate the plurality, inclusiveness and liveliness of English culture. In *Omnibus*, a documentary prepared only one month before her death, Carter says, "Comedy stands for, you know, fertility, continuance, a sense of the protean nature of the world, of the inextinguishable, unappeasable nature of the world. The unappeasable nature of appetite and desire." This is precisely what is meant by the carnivalesque and *Wise Children*, the sprightly and sunny novel which is Carter's swan song is succulent with this spirit of the carnival. For Lorna Sage, *Wise Children*

opens up a 'carnival of the dispossessed', "When she made parenthood her theme, it was parenthood literary, literal and lateral, with twins as mirrors to each other, illegitimate histories, left-handed genealogies, a whole carnival of the dispossessed." (Sage, *Angela Carter* 54).

The ending of the novel also shares the suggestions of regeneration which go with the carnival. After the birth day party of Melchoir, Dora and Nora return to their home with two tiny tots – three-month-old twins presented to them by Perry. Excited by the prospect of bringing up these infants, Nora radiates her ecstasy, "Babies...! She said, and cackled with glee." This reminds us of the utterly carnivalesque image of the senile pregnant hag of Bakhtin who laughs as it gives birth to young ones. As they head towards their home with the pram holding the babies, echoes of the favourite refrain of Dora and Nora "What a joy it is to dance and sing...!" echoes in the atmosphere, building up an air of carnival mirth associated with the recognition of the continuation of life and its cycles. The life-affirming quality of the novel makes it obviously carnivalesque in nature and the bawdy, vulgar and funny way of telling the story of the intertwined destinies of the two families -legitimate Hazards and illegitimate Chances- essentially involves sufficient scope for carnivalistic laughter.

Both *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* are centred around performance – In *Nights* it is the circus and in *Wise Children* the theatre which provide the milieu for linking life and performance. The protagonists of both these novels are show-girls whose lives are defined by their position as spectacles, but still, they are not passive objects to be consumed by male gaze. They are active agents capable of positive action. They are wise and clever. They are the narrators of their own tales and thus occupy the subject

positions. By making Fevvers and Dora the narrators of their own tales, Carter confers upon these (and all) marginalized women the privilege of alternatively empowering authorial positions. They take up the rein of the narrative in their hands and assume power to direct the course of events. Instead of being mourners of their own precarious situations, both Fevvers and Dora uphold optimism and spread positive energy around them. They make their position as spectacles as a part of their conscious project of debunking the pretensions of high seriousness of the official culture upheld by patriarchy. For example, Dora's tongue-in-cheek references to the high-brow profiles of the Hazard family cleverly undermine their affectations and false pride. Dora, through her witty and obscene remarks on her father himself (who is the very 'pillar of the legit. Theatre) upsets his dignity and brings him to the floor. In spite of his pedantic, high-flown language and authoritative demeanour, Dora reminds us that he too was a man of faults and follies like the rest. In her narrative, she places him in the contexts of copulation and excretion in order to puncture his inflated sense of himself. Finally, there is the ritualistic uncrowning of the kingly figure Melchoir, who joins the tribe of the disrespected during the last phase of his life. Dora adorns him with the cardboard crown and this broad parody of crowning ceremony which takes place during the birthday party of Melchoir steals the last speck of royal grandeur from him.

Through her irreverent comments, Dora dethrones not only the head of the 'Royal Family of the Theatre' but also his wife and legitimate daughters. "The lovely Hazard girls... they used to call them. Huh; Lovely is what lovely does. If they looked like what they behave like, they'd frighten children."

The bird woman Fevvers in her turn amazes Walser, the questing journalist with the gift of gab, in *Nights at the Circus*. “What a performance!” Walser exclaims at her wonderful rhetoric and he becomes her fan because of her masterly felicity of speech. It is her responses in the interview with Walser that was termed by him as ‘wonderful performance’ and the fact that she is otherwise a performer, a performer by profession, is being forgotten for a moment. Being the principal narrators of their own stories, Fevvers and Lizzie become the weavers of their own fate. Anna Kerchy observes in her article on *Nights at the Circus*,

... [T]he grotesque *aerialiste*, the winged freak supported by a midget stepmother personifies the woman writer located in a marginalized female literary tradition of sister-texts, lacking anxieties of influence or authorship, writing from within, yet subversively against the phallo-centric language of patriarchal literary institution and canon, providing “the voice of a fake medium”, a parody of essentialist and exclusive phallic language and *écriture feminine* alike, from her unstable, heterogenous, yet solid, located position. (193)

The narrative of their tale of survival is being delivered by Fevvers with the help and support of her politically-conscious foster mother Lizzie and both of them are eloquent and capable of powerful and graphic description. Walser’s reduction or extinction of his personality in front of their verbal dexterity is presented by Carter in a brilliant manner, “He continued to take notes in a mechanical fashion but, as the women unfolded the convolutions of their joint stories together, he felt more and more like a

kitten tangling up in a ball of wool it had never intended to unravel in the first place; or a sultan faced with not one but two Scheherazades, both intent on impacting a thousand stories into the single night.” (Carter, *Nights* 43). Comparing Fevvers and Lizzie to Scheherazad, Carter highlights the female survival tactics of strategic utilization of telling tales. With their multidimensional narrative which bears many sub-plots, they bring the male ego of Walser to the floor and make him lie flat there at their heels.

Her voice. It was as if Walser had become a prisoner of her voice, her cavernous, sombre voice, a voice made for shouting about the tempest, her voice of a celestial fishwife. Musical as it strangely was, yet not a voice for singing with; it comprised discords, her scale contained twelve tones. Her voice with its wrapped, homely, Cockney vowels and random aspirates. Her dark, rusty, dipping, swooping voice, imperious as a siren’s (47).

Completely taken over by Fevver’s wit, verbal felicity and performatory potential, Walser undergoes a process of redefining himself. He experiences a kind of mental destabilization or break down. As Bakhtin points out in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, in carnivalesic situations, such experiences of mental transformations (abnormal states of mind including mental break down, split personality, dreams etc.) may be useful for the individual as they provide ‘an insight into the dialogical attitude of man to himself’ as they ‘contribute to the destruction of his integrity and finalizedness’, thereby, ‘helping him to become a different person’. (96,122). Such opportunities of psychic transformations help the individual to transcend the limitations imposed by a sense of fixity and finality attached to his or her definition of one’s own self. During Walser’s interactions with the most resourceful personality of Fevvers, his masculine ego goes

through a process of complete deconstruction and a subsequent reconstruction which becomes very fruitful as Fevvers chooses him as the “New Man, fitting mate for the New Woman.” (Carter, *Nights* 281) Walser’s experience of redefining masculinity becomes impregnated with suggestions of positive reconceptualizations of gender relations in terms of equality.

The purposeful positioning of herself as a spectacle by Fevvers provides sufficient scope for ironically pointing towards the ideological interpellation of women as objects to be gazed at. Through the melodramatic presentation of herself as a spectacle, Fevvers undermines the patriarchal notions of women as passive objects of male gaze. What is undertaken by Fevvers (and through her Carter herself) is the feminist political act of puncturing the spectacle from within, puncturing the conventional inflated image of women as show pieces or fetish.

Look at me! With a grand, proud, ironic grace, she exhibited herself before the eyes of the audience as if she were a marvellous present too good to be played with. Look, not touch.

She was twice as large as life and as succinctly finite as many object that is intended to be seen, not handled. LOOK! Hands off!

LOOK AT ME!

She rose upon tiptoe and slowly twirled round, giving the spectators a comprehensive view of her back: seeing is believing. (Carter, *Nights* 13)

This kind of calling attention to one's own status as a spectacle bears the effect of a double summersault and contributes substantially to nullify the ignominy of being reduced to the position of a passive victim to the powers exercised by patriarchal, masculinist gaze.

Anna Kerchy emphasises the effect of the self-burlesquing narrative presented as the simulacra of a spectacular performance, *Nights at the Circus's* narrative is constituted (and constantly self-deconstructed) as a spectacular performance, a tricky play, a subversive seduction, a naughty book flying with the quivering wings of the giantess aerialist Fevvers, embodying the grotesque, winged, wayward woman-writer w(e)aving her whim, transgressive body-text." What Fevvers undertakes through her theatrical overdoing of femininity as spectacle, its broad and farcical mimesis (or mimicry) is a subversive play to unsettle the composure of the patriarchal gaze through the self-mocking, ironical and inverted repetition of the schema of patriarchal gaze. It is a repetition with a difference which helps her to inflate first and then to puncture the idea of woman as spectacle. It is part of her 'confidence trick' played on her audience. She, at first garners their confidence and then defrauds them by taking them out of their complacency with the existing status-quo of "being looked-at-ness". As a winged aerialist, as a skilled trapeze artist, she hovers above the heads of her spectators or voyeurs and she gets an upper hand over them as she looks downward upon them. This makes them dwarfish or diminished as they are left with no other option but to look up at her with awe. Moreover, during Walser's interview with Fevvers many a time, she puts him under discomfort through her powerful gaze. "She subjected Walser to a blue

bombardment from her eyes, challenge and attack at once, before she took up the narrative again”

This does not mean that Fevvers is free from the aggressive male gaze. As Wendy O’Brian writes in her article on *Nights at the Circus*, “Fevvers also finds herself several times under the threat of male violence, most particularly at the hands of Rosencruetz and the Duke. Fevvers is continually subject to masculinist gaze, but she insists that this is not an appropriating gaze, and that her identity is determined on her own terms rather than through the discourses of linguistics, nomenclature or taxonomies of science.” But Fevvers is damn sure about herself and the male gaze cannot upset her or be a tool for exerting male power over her. Through assuming a spectacle’s role purposefully, Fevvers undermines her beholder’s intention of making her their captive. She makes use of her role as a polychromatic spectacle to put all those who gaze at her under her charm. This deliberate act of assuming spectacularity is a cunning way to undermine or subvert the edifices of power built up on the foundation stone of the male gaze. Anna Kerchy notes in *Body-Texts in Angel Carter’s Fiction*, “Fevvers subverts her spectacularity to her own ends; ambiguous, ever-changing she can never be pinned down as a trophy of the male Collector, she resists the final meanings desired by journalist Walser aiming to decode her as a great humbug of the world. She looks back laughing and contemplates her being a spectacle with a wink.” (165).

Both *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* make use of carnivalized language for thwarting the monologic authority of the privileged and monopolized language of patriarchy. Both Dora and Fevvers as the principal narrators as well as principal characters of their respective stories, through their heterogeneous, multi-layered

narratives challenge the authoritative, canonical/official discourses. Their social position as representatives of marginalized sections and their transgressions or border-traffics shake the firmaments of the upper class hypocritical values and their impingement on the so-called decencies through their playful and jovial language of the fair peppered with smut and sugared with hearty laughter gives a good slap on the cheeks of the snobbish pretensions of the 'gentry'. The polyphonic ambivalence and the jovial vulgarity which characterise these novels are obviously features of the carnivalesque and the affirmation and celebration of life undertaken by these novels shed positive energy to equip one for qualitative change in life.

Chapter 8

Body as a Site for Struggle and Resistance: Corporeality and Feminist Politics

Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin? (Donna Harroway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs").

In patriarchal societies, there is a practice of identifying the male with culture and the female with nature and nurture, always privileging the former as the representative of culture which is the crucial site where relations of power are defined, delineated and sorted out. This dualistic identification - man: culture, mind / woman: nature, body - is an undercurrent of patriarchal society's conceptualizations of gendered identities. As Sherry Ortner opines in her essay 'Is female to male as nature to culture?', this kind of identification emerges from the tendency to place an exaggerated emphasis on women's reproductive capacities and to see woman as limited solely to her womb and breasts (Ortner, *Woman* 67-87). In the 1970s feminists raised the slogan, "Our Bodies, Our Selves" and this slogan contained the political movement's anxieties associated with the issues of control over one's body and identity. Contemporary women writers respond largely to the identification of women with the realm of nature and the body. They strongly challenged western cultural tradition's denial of women's opportunities to experience their own body. In patriarchal culture, women's bodies were kept invisible with the only exception of the works belonging to the tradition of the female nude produced by male artists. In them woman's body was too idealized to bring out the

objective realities associated with it. Feminist artists and writers of the late twentieth century boldly undertook the project of challenging the sense of ideal and perfect female body and its boundaries represented by the classical female nudes and openly dealt with the bodily processes. They granted visibility to women's bodies and to the bodily fluids associated with them, which transcended the boundaries of the perfect, classic bodies of the nudes and resisted the sense of closure represented by those bodies. But, while exploring the different manifestations of the female body and its specific functions, the feminist writers' responses vary and they differ widely in their treatment of such themes. While, some of these women writers find the identification of women with their bodies as detrimental to women's life and creativity, some others make it a weapon to strike back in their fight against the phallographic system.

Accurately aware of the debilitating effects of culturally conditioned femininity and female body as well as the empowering possibilities of subversive alternatives like grotesque female bodies and remodelled corporealities, Angela Carter treats the identification of women with nature and the body in a variety of different ways and explores the potential of this motif to the maximum extent possible. In the fictional works representing the early phases of her literary career, she conveys to her readers a sense of moral horror and indignation at the rude and callous subjugation of women through assaults on their bodies including the brutality of rape. In the latter period of her career, she started to take up body and associated desires as weapons to fight against patriarchal repression and restriction. The best example for Carter's exploitation of the possibilities of subversion of this motif through fantasy and the grotesque is her exquisite delineation with the details of the body as a woman gets transformed into beast in the story "The

Tiger's Bride". Through her deft dealings with such possibilities, she destabilizes the apparent poise created by patriarchal dualistic ordering principles, often shocking the readers out of their complacency with such identifications.

Carter undertakes an astute analysis of the relations between female body and femininity and challenges the so-called associations with female body and femininity and the role of materiality of the body in deciding sexuality. In novels representing the initial stages of her career, Carter dealt with the objectified condition of female body and its struggles - the ignominies and degrading it encountered, the assaults it suffered including rape. Carter is very adroit in describing things and situations in a graphic manner keeping fidelity to details. Her depiction of the humiliations and physical violence inflicted on women's bodies in her novels, may, at first create an impression that she resorted to the same sadistic pattern of pornographic writings by male writers or the over-romanticized versions of sentimental novels in women's magazines. But at the next moment the reader strongly experiences the subversive energies resulted from the powerful impulse for resistance and retaliation. As Anna Kerchy puts it, "In Carter, the body constitutes a site and a source of autobiographical knowledge. It is a surface upon which the heroine's lives are ideologically inscribed and subversively re-inscribed. It is a textual engine that (de)composes their representation of the selves." (Kerchy, *Body Texts* 86)

In her first novel, there are episodes of physical violence inflicted on Ghislaine, the principal female character by Honeybuzzard and it is Morris, his friend who prompts Honeybuzzard to undertake such assaults. Spending a disastrous night with Ghislaine Morris comes to know about his impotency. Being a failure both as an artist and a lover, Morris wants Honey to teach Ghislaine a lesson and Honeybuzzard who is very diabolic

in his character undertakes the task entrusted to him by his friend. He slashes Ghislaine's face with a knife, leaving a permanent terrific scar on her face. Ghislaine after her return from the hospital becomes a sight of horror and starts to haunt Morris both physically and psychologically – she appears in his nightmarish dreams in all the ferocity of a Gothic vampire. Ghislaine's transformation into a source of fear after the mutilation is a concretization of the revenge upon the horrible act of Honeybuzzard. But Honeybuzzard does not stop there; he continues with a policy of persecution, rapes Ghislaine and kills her in a cellar.

In Ghislaine's case, her body with the scar on it becomes emblematic of resistance and revenge, a punishment for Morris, a moral retribution for his immoral act. The meaning of Ghislaine's existence varies thoroughly after the mutilation. If she has been hitherto a victim for the predator's hunting, now, after the slicing of her face, she is no more the victim, but the predator, itself. Even though this transposition is temporary in Ghislaine's case, it is a suggestion of a powerful alternative which brings about an equilibrium as far as the equations of power are concerned. Her body, which served earlier as a site for victimization, becomes a site for struggle and resistance also. Morris gets terrorized by her presence and by the nightmares associated with her, whereas Honeybuzzard is determined to deliver him from Ghislaine's haunting. As part of this game, Honeybuzzard rapes Ghislaine and kills her.

Rape is a recurrent theme in Carter and her depiction of the physical and psychological torments of the victimized woman - or rather the survivor? - of rape, is structured with an intention of setting fire to the indignation and anguish of the readers so as to raise the level of common sense of society to be sensitive to such issues. Her

feminist political position made her susceptible of such atrocious situations and prompted her to think and act to find out solutions to avoid such vulnerabilities. Carter's fiction is a relentless fight against such malicious crimes perpetrated against women and hence her detailed depiction of them.

The mutilation of Ghislaine in the graveyard and the subsequent killing of her near a crucifix in the cellar of a neglected house by Honeybuzzard are part of the project of 'body horror' the novel envisages. These tortures played on the body point towards another motif repeatedly used by Carter in her works – the process of 'meatification'. In *The Saedian Women*, Carter remarks emphatically, "The strong abuse, exploit and meatify the weak." (140). In the 60s, critical examination of the distinction between 'flesh' and 'meat' was a recurrent theme in the fields of arts and literature. In *The Saedian Women* Carter explains the distinction between flesh and meat, "The word 'flesh', in German, provokes me to an involuntary shudder. In the English language, we make up a fine distinction between flesh, which is usually alive, and typically, human: and meat, which is dead, inert, animal and intended for consumption." (137-8). The horror generated by Honeybuzzard's meatification of Ghislaine through her mutilation, rape and murder gets accentuated with his contemplation on taking her pornographic pictures on the crucifix and selling them. The significance of the meat/ flesh trope which gets embodied in the novel can be further explained by another passage from *The Saedian Women*, "Sexuality, stripped of the idea of free exchange, is not in anyway humane; it is nothing but pure cruelty. Carnal knowledge is the infernal knowledge of the flesh as meat" (141).

The Magic Toyshop begins with Melanie's ecstasies and anxieties related to her newly-pubescent body. The very first line delivers a discovery associated with the body, "The summer she was fifteen, Melanie discovered she was made of flesh and blood" (1). Then Carter goes on to describe Melanie's body as a new found land, "O, my America, my new found land. She embarked on a tranced voyage, exploring the whole of herself, clambering her mountain ranges, penetrating the moist richness of her secret valleys, a physiological Cortez, da Gama or Mungo Park" (1).

For hours she stared at herself, naked, in the mirror of her wardrobe: she would follow with her finger the elegant structure of her rib-cage, where the heart fluttered under the flesh like a bird under a blanket, and she would draw down the long line from breast bone to naval (which was a mysterious cavern or grotto) and she would rasp her palms against her bud-wing shoulder blades. (Carter, *Magic Toyshop* 1)

While describing the adolescent girl's excitement about her and her exploration of newly awakened sexuality, Carter ironically refers to the renaissance practice of using the rapture of the colonial explorer as a metaphor for the body. The implicit irony and satirical tone lend a subversive force for this description. Here, Melanie, the teen aged girl who stands for the colonial explorer who has control over the navigation. After the initial excitement, Melanie starts to experiment with different identities she may be able to assume as per the prescriptions of the patriarchal society. Many images and frameworks gathered from different art and cultural discourses are worked out by Melanie while she imagines many possible identities which she can assume in the future.

She regards herself as a Pre-Raphaelite, who combed out her hair to stream straight down from a centre parting holding a tiger-Lily from the garden under her chin and as a model for Lautrec, wearing her hair like a slut across her face sitting down in a chair with her legs apart and a bowl of water at her feet. (Carter, *Magic Toyshop* 1). At the next moment, she visualizes herself as a smug Cranach Venus with only a net curtain to cover her. What Melanie tries to recreate is the images of women created by those male artists within the patriarchal frame of art.

Art that projects images of the female body within the patriarchal cultural framework, in most cases tries to produce a peculiar kind of visibility for women – a visibility with which the male dominated system is compliant with. This kind of visibility is centred round the images of the passive, yet lascivious woman inviting male attention and advances. Art histories of centuries contained only images of women in a passive or objectified condition, as it was observed by John Berger in his *Ways of Seeing*. The idea of womanhood created by such representations, through their repeated performances, establishes certain patterns for women which are debilitating to them. Such artistic representations of womanhood and female body, which operate within the sphere of culture, overspill from that sphere to the social sphere where they get infiltrated into the consciousness of people, both men and women, and permeate the common sense of the society. In *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie is “interpellated as a feminized subject” as she gets entrapped in the debilitating discursive practices of patriarchy which desire to limit women to their bodies in their objectified condition of the ‘thing to be gazed at’, to be used or consumed.

Patriarchal art and culture, while offering women's bodies that specific kind of visibility congenial to the demand of the unequal relations of power, keep a blind eye to the objective realities associated with those bodies. The specificities of female bodies and the physical functions related to these bodies are never addressed by literature and arts associated with patriarchal culture. That is why the feminist writers kept it as a major one among their agenda to give visibility to the corporeal functions of the female body. In *The Magic Toyshop*, Carter, within the short span of a paragraph, compresses the whole corporeal processes related to the women's body. "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. And during this time, to climb a tree might provoke a miscarriage." (Carter, *Magic Toyshop* 20). Menstruation, pregnancy, gestation, embryo and miscarriage – all are included within one or two sentences. Carter as a woman writer who recognizes the cunning ways of patriarchy's cultural politics, grants visibility to the corporeal functions of women's body, the objective realities of female body that had been denied visibility by patriarchal culture.

With a clinical recognition of the adverse effects of patriarchal cultural discourses on the formation of identities in the case of women, Carter in her novels satirizes such conventions and ridicules the inflated and unreal nature of such internalizations. The heroines including Melanie participate in the subversion of cultural myths of femininity by recording signs and symptoms of their own recognition and knowledge of the illusory or performatory character of 'femininity.' Melanie bears her body and performs her gender in a manner which is pleasing to patriarchy in the first part of the novel, but within

the macabre world of her uncle's puppet theatre she recognizes the absurdity and futility of the patriarchal myths of femininity and the 'feminine body' and recognizes the fact that they had been debilitating and dangerous for her. Then, she starts to abandon her reverence for such lethal entrapping within the structures of patriarchal ideology.

Here, we tend to acknowledge the relevance of Judith Butler's view of gender as performance. Butler opines in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, "Identity is performatively constituted by the very "expression" that are said to be its results." (24-25). What she means by "expressions" is the discursive practices and representations. Bodies behaving in certain patterns convey some messages associated with gender. "As this is the way this specific body behaves, it is a woman's body." Bodies pass statements on their gender through clothing, mannerisms, speech and language. Wearing particular signs or bearing the body in a particular manner becomes the use of a language to declare one's gender and the important thing here, is that this language must be something society and culture recognize as belonging to or characteristic of a woman. The manners and bearing of the body should fit in with what is accepted and recognized as belonging either to men or to women as the case may be.

Femininity and masculinity thus become constructs of discursive practices thrust upon the body to ensure patriarchal hegemony. Both femininity and masculinity are not natural or innate essences of male or female body, but these attributes which are mutable are inscribed on male or female body by the normative practices of patriarchy which are external to the physical structure called body. Gender norms are inscribed on the bodies to maintain the status quo of existing power structure. The flaunting of these norms leads

to their destabilization as the artificiality implicit in these gender attributes become too explicit and visible.

Butler's 'gender trouble' is at its best in *The Passion of New Eve*. In this novel, Carter problematizes to a very large extent, body and its correspondence to sex and gender as cultural constructs. The novel thematises trans-sexualism and transvestitism. The novel begins with Evelyn, an English professor's fantasies about a glamorous Film star named Tristessa de st. Ange who used to enact roles of suffering women, "Tristessa's speciality had been suffering. Suffering was her vocation. She suffered exquisitely" (Carter, *Passion* 3). She who incarnates as the embodiment of suffering is the same erotic shimmer on the screen. Settled in New York as an English professor, Evelyn gets charmed by Lailah, an exotic, African American nightclub dancer and indulges in excesses of sexual relationship with her. While in bed, Leilah is only a vagina for Evelyn and in his imagination, he copulates with the Hollywood Goddess Tristessa. Getting bored of his relationship with Leilah when she gets impregnated by him, Evelyn desires to shirk the responsibility off his shoulders and escapes into an adjacent desert area. There, Mother, a parody of motherhood with four huge breasts who leads a futuristic feminist commune captures Evelyn, emasculates him through clinical surgery, removes his penis and testicles and implants a vagina, ovaries and a well-functioning womb within his body. The transsexual Evelyn or New Eve is trained to be a good woman by imparting cultural lessons to her through films which feature Tristessa, as the embodiment of elemental femininity, paintings by masters featuring women in passive, reclining positions and slides of mammals suckling their offspring. After undergoing a series of perilous experiences in the desert, Evelyn / Eve reaches Tristessa's glass

Mausoleum where her body is embalmed along with many wax effigies kept in coffins. The eternal beauty Tristessa's reality is exposed as a transvestite. She has been a male impersonator acting as a female. The novel envisages an alchemical union between male to female Eve and female to male Tristessa.

The novel embodies what Judith Butler meant by gender trouble. Tristessa, who was Evelyn's obsession from his childhood itself, remained as the icon of romantic imagination and heart throb of generations. The alluring beauty of this star who epitomized romantic female suffering is discovered not to be a woman, but a male impersonator who desires to appear as a female – the drag as Butler puts it. This masquerade of the male impersonator which results from his desire to appear as feminine, along with the expectations of the easily gullible fandom, and the corresponding make-up and dress, work in order to construct an “ideal woman”. This is highly ridiculous and the readers are made aware of the absurdity of the embodiments of such fantasies or sexual desires.

Overabundant with spectacularly freakish bodies, *The Passion of New Eve* is engaged in self-ironic textual performances so as to explore the transgressive potential of subverting ordered systems via overturning hierarchies, violating boundaries and resisting closure. The novel presents an array of freakish bodies, resisting disciplined, closed homogenized nature of the classical body envisaged by the conceptual systems of patriarchy. Producing what is termed by gender trouble and narrative-identity confusions, the novel challenges the unitary notions of gender, fixed, defined and prescribed by patriarchy. Evelyn, the chauvinistic male is transformed into a female through a ridiculous mock operation and this process is compared to a mathematical procedure -

Subtraction of male genitals and addition of a fully developed womb, ovaries and a vagina. If Evelyn is a transsexual, Tristessa is a transvestite. Tristessa is Tiresius, a drag, a female impersonator. The Mother's body is highly grotesque as the huge, black body reminiscent of some archaic Goddesses, harbours for pairs of enormous breasts. Zero, the poet in his turn has only one leg and one eye. Thus, the novel is littered with many grotesque, freakish bodies.

Anna Kerchi comments on the delirious nature dealing with corporeality in the novel:

As the novel unveils the grotesque agony of 'becoming woman,' the cacophonous text is cruelly torn apart by contradictory but fatally embracing narrative voices. Male impersonator, mock-feminine, self-reflective feminist or transgender (parading transvestite or transsexual autobiographical) voices "become legion" decomposing the body-text. They re-enact semiotized, painful, psychosomatic disorders and corporeal deformations resulting from the subject's violent engendering and producing misconceived images of self-distorted bodies and selves. (97)

The Passion of New Eve becomes "a feminist tract" as it is described by Carter herself because it "presents a femininity which is simultaneously a spectacular performance and painful entrapment" (Kerchy, 97). In the novel, almost all female characters are mutilated with socially constructed myths of femininity, and the proliferation of these mutilated, fragmented and muted female bodies expose the injustice and meaninglessness implicit in such myths of femininity. Through the physical mutilation involved in the process of

emasculatation and implantation of female organs within Evelyn's body, it is made grotesque. It is in the process of becoming something else.

The novel undertakes not only a gendered rewriting of the grotesque body but also an exercise of correlating sex and gender with the corresponding specificities of topography. As Evelyn proceeds through his metaphoric journey to the recognition of meanings of gendered identities, he/ she moves through different fantastic topological spaces or landscapes which correspond to the fetishized, freaked and fractured female body parts, the one-dimensional male body and abject corporeal waste fluid from the body including menstrual blood. Nicoletta Vallaroni undertakes a brilliant reading of the novel in "The Body of the City – Angela Carter's *The Passion of the New Eve*", in which she observes the correspondence between the body/ gender and landscape. According to her, the four different topological spaces - the postmodern city of New York, Beulah, Zero's town and Tristessa's glass palace – correspond to the specificity of the sexed/gendered body which operates within that particular landscape. Such a study based on the correspondence between body / gender and landscape is highly relevant in the context of a novel on bodies and gendered identities.

Evelyn begins his narrative from Britain from where he comes to New York to accept the job of a university professor, and Britain, with its obsession with order and discipline, embodies the mono-dimensional, homogenous nature of his ego-centered male identity. The reader learns not much about his past except his deep adoration for Tristess, the transcendental beauty who enacts eternal sufferings on the screen. Evelyn's infatuation for Tristessa makes him describe her as "pure mystification" and her existence as "only notional." For him, she is "beautiful as only things that don't exist can be." This

sense of the unreal stays with Evelyn, when he comes to New York, the postmodern, chaotic, rat-infested city. The labyrinthine structures of the landscape of New York City and its unintelligibility correspond to the enigmatic nature of Tristessa's body and gender. Shortly after his arrival at New York, Evelyn comes into contact with Leilah, the black dancer and as he was intoxicated with lust, follows her and establishes a parasitical relationship with her. Being a girl of African origins, she is described not as a person, but as an abstraction or fetish referring to her body or her sexualized physical nature.

“Negritude, the state of Darkness,” (Carter, *Passion* 10), “the profane essence of the death of the cities” (14), “her tense and resilient legs” and “fetishistic heels six inches high.” Related to this physical structure of Leilah, New York is described as “black”, “acid yellow”, “mineral green”. Evelyn finds the city as dark like Leilah, “It was then an alchemical city. It was chaos, dissolution, nigredo, night” (16). The city of New York becomes not only a metaphor for the enigma associated with Tristessa but also becomes a representation of the dark, the chaotic, the alchemical presence of Leilah which makes it a space of liminality. The colour scheme of black and darkness corresponds to the body of Leilah and the nature of sado-masochistic sexual relationship existing between Leilah and Evelyn. The monochromatic nature of the landscape covers everything in dark shade, both physical and psychological, suggesting incomprehensibility and impossibility of clear comprehension. As Nicoletta Vallaroni states, “In the process of giving a definite – but never conclusive – shape to our vision of Utopian cities, we may posit an analogy and contiguity between the physical body of a person and the urban body of a city. Thus, we may read the signs in the urban space as we read wrinkles on the skin” (2).

Later Evelyn gets repugnant of his relationship with Leilah, wants to shirk off his responsibility in the matter of her pregnancy and realizes the impossibility of fully accepting “the dying city” and subsequently leaves it. Abandoning the city, he ventures into the desert, as part of his quest for freedom and identity. The desert becomes the representation of his present lack of sexual interest and the subsequent physical aridity. Evelyn’s search for freedom takes him finally to Beulah, the abode of a gynocratic society. A close observation on the structure of Beulah reveals that its basic architecture is defined in gendered terms. Beulah, the abode of an underground female commune characterized by a rigidly feminist separatist stand, is structured as a womb. “Beulah,” says Evelyn, “lies in the interior, in the inward part of the earth” (47). Both from the psychological and physical point of view, Beulah with its resemblance to the womb, is the appropriate place for Evelyn’s rebirth. Chromatically Beulah shares the colour of the eurus. Vallaroni observes, “Beulah’s typical atmosphere is not pure darkness, but rather shadowy, the kind of twilight which allows shapes to be seen in outlines, as in dreams. In a phantasmagoric atmosphere like this, reality gradually fades away, together with the patriarchal logic of the metropolis”.

Beulah reproduces the symbolic meaning of the place for Evelyn – It is the mother’s body for him. The interiors of Beulah are organized as a simulacrum of the uterus, with crimson-coloured lighting and fixed temperature of the womb. Prior to the surgery performed by the Mother, Evelyn gets safe protection from the possible dangers of the outside world, like an embryo within the womb of its mother. The first stage of Evelyn’s transformation into a woman is performed inside Beulah, the structure of which reminds us the body of a pregnant woman. This specific space which is cave-like and

labyrinthine, corresponds to a complex physical and psychological pattern which is not at all linear. The labyrinth, fragmentary, complex, self-reflexive, and multivocal like the city but built on the basis of diverging principles, it differs from the labyrinthian metropolis in that it is built on the basis of a conscious project of a radical reversal of both the structure and meaning of patriarchy. If contradiction is a consequence of deterioration of rationality, it is the structuring principle of the Utopian space in the case of Beulah. As Vallorani suggests,

Metaphors of the body and of human physical processes define a space that is openly gendered. Referring to the ritual of cannibalism, the female principle has swallowed the male reality in the bowels of the earth to suggest the image of a female body as large as the city itself. And from this body, Eve, physically a woman and psychologically a man, will make a clean start on another journey. (15)

But although Evelyn has become a woman physically, psychologically, her conversion to womanhood is yet to be completed. She is in the state of becoming, at the threshold. Evelyn is acutely aware of the liminality of his identity. "I have not yet become a woman, though I possess a woman's shape" (83). Evelyn/Eve acknowledges the fact that he/she is no more a man, but yet to become a woman. He is in the in-between state.

Continuing his/her quest for an identity, Evelyn once again sets out for his journey through the desert. Once more, the desert suggests the absence of any possible fertility serves as a metaphor for the protagonist's condition of being a hybrid creature

with no memories and no shared experiences: “a tabula Rasa, a blank sheet of paper” (83). It is evident that he/she should undergo more trials and at Zero’s harem he /she undergoes the third painful ritual associated with the process of “becoming woman.”

Zero’s palace appears to be something which perfectly represents the patriarchal despotic set up. Opposite to the nature of Beulah, which reminds one of dark, shadowy space of the womb, Zero’s town is characterized by dazzling light which never allows possibilities of incomprehension or obscurity. Everything in that space is monologic, homogenous and self-evident. Zero’s rape of Eve and the subsequent insertion of Eve into the brutal system of the tyrannical patriarch occur in dazzling sunlight which makes everything visible in Zero’s town which represents male rationality. “In the ruins of an old chapel, under the sagging roof of corrugated iron, Zero kept his pigs” (95). The term ‘chapel’ conjures up the image of a sacred space, which is however inhabited by pigs: not holy priests but filthy animals. This is highly subversive.

From the tormenting and humiliating experiences inflicted on his body at Zero’s harem, Eve reaches the glass mausoleum of Tristessa and there he finds an identical, yet antithetical position of Eve’s own in-between-ness - two sexes existing in the same body. A Hollywood icon of feminine beauty who enacts the role of the eternally suffering woman, Tristessa is revealed to be a product of the fantasy associated with sexual desires of male fans. Tristessa is emblematic of the androgyne, of the contradiction inherent in the contiguity of two sexes existing together in the same body. At this point, both Eve and Tristessa undergo the complex emotions of being in the in-between state and in their subsequent love making, they resolve the pain of such in-between, ambivalent positions.

The conjugal union of Eve and Tristessa which obviously bears ritualistic dimensions and their continuous engagement in constantly shifting gendered performances indicate a movement to a plane where gender performance and gender essence are never closed or fixed, but mutable and interchangeable. Body, then becomes a cauldron where desires are burned and churned. The union of Eve and Tristessa gives birth to a progeny of indeterminate origin which is the pure essence of ideal love based on a sense of equality.

The treatment of body as a vehicle for inscribing and enacting the gendered role is what we see in *The Passion of New Eve*. The transvestite Tristessa and the trans-sexual Evelyn enact or perform all the clichés associated with femininity available within the frame work of patriarchy and their artificial and magnified enactments of femininity exposes the nonsensical nature of these clichés. Their over-identification with the feminine is a self-ironic and artificial act of the patchwork bodies which are perishable. Tristess undertakes the enactment of femininity self-consciously, whereas Evelyn undertakes this unwillingly. In both cases, theirs is Butlerian performance of gender identities and their bodies are being inscribed by their gender. The drag queen Tristessa who is a man impersonating woman appears as the epitome of the feminine because being a man he can enact the patriarchal concept of the feminine in its ideal form. This is the Gender Trouble in its extreme.

In *Nights at the Circus*, Carter presents the Giant Bird-Woman Fevvers, as the paradigm of the grotesque. Six foot two inches tall, she is a giantess and breaks all the expectations about the body perceived from a patriarchal frame. She crosses the boundaries of the concepts related to body and her body straddles the borders between the

bird and the woman. This excites Walser's curiosity as her body does not conform to the expectations about the image of the 'woman' with which he was conditioned. Fevvers's body does not belong to the classical body envisaged by Bakhtin, but it is the grotesque body of the Carnavalesque with its freakish frame of the bird woman. Having the corporeal specificities which transcend the boundaries of the received notions of a woman, Fevvers gets ample opportunity to put the romantic notions femininity into crisis.

This advantage gives her chances for uninhibited operations of bodily functions. She gorges with the gluttony of a giant, belches and farts freely. She is not at all worried about the lady-like etiquette and sophistication. Her body's in-between-ness lends it more freedom to transgress, to cross over boundaries – boundaries existing between the decent and the vulgar, the high and the low, the official and the unofficial.

By vocation, Fevvers is a performer and the raw material she has got with her is her freakish and exotic body. What Fevvers does to establish her career is to call the attention of the public to the difference or Otherness of her body. Her distinction or mark of Otherness is the mutant protuberances on the back of her shoulders which makes her an angel and a monster at the same time. She is born (or rather hatched out of an egg) without a naval on her body. Fevvers's body becomes special as it has no belly button and as it has sprouted two well-developed wings between her shoulder blades. Hers is the grotesque body posited by Bakhtin, against fixity and closure of the classical body. The grotesque body is heterogenous, mutable and subversive of the pyramidal structures of power existing in society. In their commentary on Bakhtin, Katherina Clark and Michel Holquist explain the nature of Bakhtinian grotesque body like this:

The grotesque body is flesh as the site of becoming. As such the key elements of the body are precisely those points at which it outgrows its own self, transgresses its own limits.... conceives a new second body, the bowels and the phallus... Next to the bone and the genital organs is the mouth through which enters the world to be swallowed up.... (303)

The grotesque body's relationship with the outside world and other bodies is organic and mutable.

All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic: It is with them that the borders between one's own and other bodies and between the body and the world are breached... The grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths. (303)

The freakish, grotesque body which has been hitherto restricted to the margins ventures to the centre by acquiring and asserting autonomous alterity as it is endowed with the controlling voice. Here also the abnormal asserts itself as the norm. The conventionally excluded grotesque transforms itself into a powerful disrupting force which overthrows the edifices of official culture.

Fevvers cleverly exploits all the possibilities of such a multi-dimensional, flexible body. Her mutant and grotesque body transcends all the myths of femininity propagated by patriarchal cultural myths. This 'larger than life' heroine, who is often called as 'giantess', is adept in overdoing everything, magnifying her bodily actions to the

maximum extent possible creating a burlesque effect. She eats with a Gargantuan avarice like “a wild beast’s repast” (Carter, *Nights* 22, 53), drinks all kinds of beverages with relish. Her yawning blows up the surroundings, “with prodigious energy, she opens up a crimson maw the size of that of a basking shark, suddenly and hugely, taking in enough air to lift a Montgolfier” (52). Her seductive glance at Walser is also amplified as there is “such a swish of eye lashes that the pages of [Walser’s] notebook rustled in the breeze” (48). She laughs in such a big way that “the echo of her sassulations spread in the world in a magnetic wave” (294). She boldly expresses and asserts her bodily needs and desires and her carnal energies often frighten men. Her sensuousness and sensuality are uninhibited and openly expressed. Fevvers is a creature made of flesh with sweat and appetites, belches and farts.

Being the “Queen of ambiguities, Goddess of in-between states” (81) she amalgamates the contradictory versions of stereotypical representation of womanhood – angel / witch and virgin /whore. She is the “New Woman” who performs all the contradictory versions of femininity at the same time. Fevvers purposefully makes her irregular body a spectacle. Fevvers flaunts both spectacularity and femininity in order to expose the artificiality and constructed character of herself as a female subject and a vivid spectacle. The grotesque and transgressive body is endowed with a subversive potential which can easily create a destabilizing effect. This effect is amplified when it is presented consciously and purposefully as a spectacle.

The rapt attention paid by Carter to the anatomical features of Fevvers which proved to be a pre-requisite for her aerodynamics is noteworthy. She goes into minute details in Fevvers’ explanation of her wonderful but awkward physical structure:

My legs don't tally with the upper part of my body from the point of view of pure aesthetics, d'you see. Were I to be the true copy of Venus, one built on my scale ought to have legs like tree-trunks, sir; these flimsy little underpinnings of mine have more than once buckled up under the top-heavy distribution of weight upon my torso, have let me down with a bump and left me sprawling. I'm not tip-top where walking is concerned Sir, more tip-up. (Carter, *Nights* 44)

The contradiction inherent in the body of Fevvers which is marvelous, but inconvenient is the fulcrum about which the whole story revolves. The oddity of her body is uncomfortable for Fevvers, but at the same time it lends her certain privileges. She can behold her spectators from above, while she hovers in air and thus she is placed in the position of the gazer. In sex, she is privileged with the scope of having the missionary position – the woman-on-top position.

As far as the representation of sexuality (especially of women) is concerned, Carter is at her best. Her depiction of expression of sexuality and sensuality is excellent and exuberant. In her works, Carter explores the bodily desires of women which often get suppressed in real life and in discourses. The septuagenarian Dora's unabashed account of her sexual experiences in *Wise Children* is *exemplar exemplum* of Carter's frank delineation of bodily desires and sexual energies. Here is an instance from this novel, describing Nora's love making in the sleeper train:

Nora's Tony wasn't as you might say, in our class, he travelled third, so Nora would tippy-toe down the train and climb up to his upper berth,

behind the green baize curtains; they did it for hours in there, she said, like snakes. Once he'd got it in her, they never moved, they let the train do all the work. CHOO-choo- choo-choo, CHOO-choo-choo-choo. The engine would get up steam, the pistons go faster, faster, faster, until:WHEEEEEEEeeeeeeee.... (Carter, *Wise Children* 118)

Conveying onomatopoeic impressions, this description conveys the intensity of the erotic performance of the body with wonderful felicity.

The grand finale of the novel in which Dora copulates with Perry in the upstairs of the building where birthday party goes on is a rare piece of representation of sexuality in all its vigor and power. (The description of this event is quoted in one of the previous chapters.). The Chance twins' return to their Bard Street home with their new bundle of joy reminds the readers of the pregnant hags of Kerch. The hag's body's mutative potential is utilized here. But Dora's sexual potency at this age is astonishing, so is Perry's, his hundredth birthday.

Carter's exquisite presentation of erotic performance is at its best towards the ending of "Tiger's Bride." The bride meets her tiger-like(?) bridegroom at the most basic and private realm:

He will gobble you up.

Nursery fears made flesh and sinew. Earliest and most archaic of fears, fear of devourment. The beast and his carnivorous bed of bone and I, white , shaking, raw approaching him as if offering, in myself, the key to a

peaceable kingdom in which his appetite may not be my distinction.

(Carter, *Bloody Chamber* 67)

The girl is liberated from the status of object, and discovers herself as the beast, as energy rather than the object of energy. The tiger, the carnivore licks her with extreme love and as he licks off her outer skin completely, she is revealed to be a beast. The carnivore is being tamed and the woman is turned into her beastliness. The description of licking by the tiger is excellent:

He dragged himself closer and closer to me, until I felt the harsh velvet of his head against my hand, then a tongue, abrasive as sand paper. He will lick the skin off me!

And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur. (67)

Taming the carnivore (the aggressive male) through assertive sexuality is a favourite pattern for Carter and in this case female sexuality acquires beastly power and vigour. Beneath the outer skin of civil disciplining, there lurks the beast in all its savage beauty.

Carter in her novel uses the multiple dimensions and possibilities of the body. Adept in the representation of sexuality and bodily cravings, she places materiality of the body above any intellectual affectations. Pure, raw sexuality for Carter suggests love in

its best form. The pungency and power with which she narrates sexuality transcend the frigidity and deadness imposed by the regulatory mechanisms of patriarchy. Carter is in the forefront of the array of women writers who intentionally play with the body and its myriad pleasures and pain as part of privileging the 'flesh' over the 'mirror'.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

In the previous chapters, I have examined in a detailed manner the ways in which Angela Carter deploys certain strategies of subversion and re-vision in order to destabilize the patriarchal discursive practices. These are not mere techniques or tactics, but intellectual strategies which evolved out of her deep awareness of the operations of power in society, especially the unequal relations associated with gender arrangements. Carter's proclaimed political stands manifest themselves in these strategies, as her fictional works are artistic statements of these political positions. The strategies which I examine in this thesis are de/remythologization, intertextuality, re-vision of fairy tales, use of Gothic and fantastic motifs and situations, carnivalization and the strategic use of body politics. All these strategies fracture or decentre the pretensions of seamlessness and eternal nature of the patriarchal notions of subjectivity and put the meta-narratives propagated by the powerful sections into crisis.

Carter always straddled the borders and her borderline traffic is part of her political commitment of representing the marginalized sections of the society. Marginality, otherness and the liminal are not only represented but also celebrated and carnivalized in order to upset the arrangements of power by the hierarchical or pyramidal structures of patriarchal capitalist society. In this thesis, I have scrutinized the multiple ways in which Carter subverts the status-quo related to unequal relations of power in such societies.

In her fiction, Carter demythologizes the cultural myths produced and precipitated by the high and elite culture and re-mythologizes with re-imagined popular myths which have the spontaneity and freshness of organic experiences of the subaltern sections especially women. With a predilection for the fantastic, she skilfully exploits the subversive potential of the fantastic and the Gothic, playing with the reader's hesitation between their sense of the real and the unreal. Her enthusiasm for the carnivalesque provides sufficient opportunity to relocate the margins through the celebration of the energies of the repressed and the freakish characters and grotesque bodies.

Almost all of the novels written by Carter can be brought under the genre label *bildungsroman*, tracing the growth of her female heroines into worldly-wise responsible women. Most of her heroines are young adolescent girls who are being initiated into adulthood. They go through their *rite de passage* to the world of experience. They are female picaros who set out for a journey of self-awareness. They are women-in-process whose subjectivities are never fixed or finite, but always in the process. But they are endowed with agential capacities and know how to weave their own fate. They boldly take the tools and weapons of patriarchy and use them at the right place, at the right time.

In Carter's later novels, the protagonists tell their own tale. Evelyn tells the story of her genesis, the story of deep gender trouble created by the drag Tristessa and the trans-sexual Evelyn. The result of their sexual union is a progeny of indeterminate origin. Fevvers, the bird-woman narrates her life history with wonderful felicity. Dora delivers one century's family history peppered with smut. Their self-conscious narratives mockingly criticize the rigidities of gender roles working in the society. The exaggerated or augmented versions of their affectations mockingly reveal the performatory nature of

gender. They are their own authors. These autobiographical narratives provide these protagonists agency to resist the regulations of not only patriarchy but every kind of power associated with the pyramidal structure of society.

The topographical specificities of the novels of Carter also point towards “Otherness” as they feature settings which occupy the peripheries of the official culture. In *Shadow Dance*, the main locale is the junk shop owned by Morris and Honeybuzzard; in *The Magic Toyshop*, it is the macabre puppet theatre and toyshop of Uncle Philip which serves as the main venue. *Love* and *Several Perceptions* have abandoned open spaces like badly maintained parks and museums as their backgrounds. In *Heroes and Villains*, Marianne burns down the well-sheltered castles of the professors and flees to the forest where the barbarians live. *Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffmann* hosts many fantastic places which lie outside the city. In *The Passion of New Eve* the rat-infested New York City is shown in a futuristic dilapidated condition and most of the action takes place in the vast deserts. Eve also escapes from the city and undertakes her journey through the desert lands. In her penultimate novel *Nights at the Circus*, circus ring is the main locale and in the last novel *Wise Children* it is the vaudeville, the illegitimate variant of the theatre. In her short stories we see fair grounds, puppet theatre, brothels, Gothic castles, and the wilderness providing the appropriate settings for their thematisation of “Otherness”. Carterian *oeuvre* is filled with liminal settings and peripheral spaces.

Carter’s literary career is a movement from the coded mannequins to bird-women as Paulina Palmer traces it. In her early novels, she portrays women’s entrapments in the myths of femininity and the brutal operations of patriarchy are depicted in all its violent

ferocity. In her later fiction, Carter undertakes bold experiments with the ways in which women can liberate themselves from their bonded situations. They revel in the diffusion of feminine energies and their sexual desires are no more repressed or constrained. Carter's re-visioning of the cultural myths precipitated by patriarchy is exhilarating and they necessarily project emancipatory impulses. At times she simply erases the demarcations and differentiations of patriarchy by blending elements of the so-called masculinity and femininity in the same individual.

Carter's feminist re-writing or revision of fairy tales is brilliant in its attempt to turn aside the affected innocence of fairy tales. Fairy tales and nursery rhymes which pretend to be value-free collections of innocent amusements for children are diabolic in imposing restrictions upon them. They actively participate in the process of propagating and sustaining gender ideologies which serve the purpose of patriarchy. Carter shatters the dualistic concepts related to gender and she exposes the vicious nature of the stereotypical representation of women – the angel-witch, virgin/whore dyad. In her adult fairy tales, women are not passive objects, but active agents. They cunningly respond to their situations to overcome possibilities of entrapment. They reject patriarchy's restrictions related to gender roles like the pistol-toting, horse-mounting mother of the young bride of *The Bloody Chambers* who reaches in time for rescuing her daughter.

After the introductory section comprising two chapters, in the fourth chapter titled "Demythologising / Remythologizing: Contesting False Universals", I have traced the clever ways with which Carter undermines the cultural myths transmitted by patriarchy to check the mobility, growth and sexuality of women. The iconoclast in Carter is at her best in debunking the great myths of Western culture including the myth of genesis and

the fall of 'Man'. For Carter, myths are "consolatory non-senses" used to dull the pain of existence and they deal with "false universals". She deconstructs the myths associated with virginity and motherhood which impose difficult hurdles on women to realize their real selves or to actualize their ambitions in their lives. In Carter's *oeuvre* we seldom see the redeeming mother. She dispenses with the idea of motherhood as the embodiment of dedication. Almost all of her protagonists, except the bride in the title story of *The Bloody Chambers*, learn the ways of the world in the absence of their mothers. They are either orphans or motherless.

In the fourth chapter titled "Double Coded Politics of Intertextuality and Parody", Carter's fictional works are scrutinized closely to find out traces of past texts and the effect of rewriting with a difference. Carter's texts which are sprinkled with erudite allusions and references open up the issues of identity and gender through strategies for countering those established terrains of patriarchal discourses on sexuality, gender and class. The provisional nature of these texts with the form of the montage / collage construction of their juxtaposed subtexts bears semblance to the postmodern enterprise of problematizing historical knowledge gathered through the monologic patriarchal discursive practices and the notions associated with subjectivity. Carter's fiction is an intertextual patchwork that undertakes a thorough search for all sources of historical knowledge which worked to constitute men and women as gendered beings. In reworking established texts and discourses, what she undertakes to do is to give free expression to female desire and sexuality which gets suppressed in the originals. Recreating knowledge produced out of masculinist discursive practices, Carter positions her fictional works in a larger context, exorcising the past, in order to recast it so as to

point towards a different future. What can be known of the recorded and researched past created out of the androcentric narratives, is not only considered unscrupulously but also imaginatively reconsidered.

The fifth chapter which explores the re-visionary possibilities of Carter's feminist reworking of fairy tales is titled as "Breaking the Old Mould: Feminist Re-visioning of Fairy Tales." Fairy tales are about power and possession and they actively participate in sustaining the existing power structure, especially the patriarchal privileging of the male. Moreover, the genre of the fairy tales is effectively used by the patriarchy in order to regulate female sexuality. Carter deconstructs the stereotypical representation of women, the angel/ witch dyad of the fairy tales and her female characters are active agents, not passive objects. Her effort is to restore speech to the subordinated or silenced female and to explore the realities associated with female sexuality. It is the strategy of creating compelling narratives based on traditional fairy tales and then distorting them, which works in Angela Carter's re-vision of fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber*.

In the sixth chapter titled "The Fantastic/ The Gothic: Marvels of the Unconscious", the subversive possibilities of the fantastic and Gothic tropes, motifs and situations are perused. Carter makes great use of the uncanny and the marvellous in her novels to transcend the limits imposed by domestic ideology on women and to challenge the roles allocated to them. Gothic methods with their terrains of terror and taboo provide sufficient scope for transgression and subversion. In her fiction, Carter in a very powerful manner, demonstrates the inversion of values that occurs through the Gothic genre. In the Gothic tales Carter otherness takes centre stage: The abnormal becomes the norm. Sexual transgressions like incest, dark desires, fantastic deviances and vampiric seductions

subvert the restricted norms of patriarchal morality. The abandoned castles with unknown terrors and bloody secrets lurking within them and the persecutions which go with the dark forces are favourite situations of Carter. Her predilection for the unconscious manifested in the form of the bizarre and the phantasmagoric is demonstrated by me in a detailed manner.

In the seventh chapter titled “Carnavalesque subversion and Celebration of Feminine Energies in Carter’s later Novels”, I have examined the deployment of carnivalesque features in Carter’s corpus in the light of Bakhtinian theory of the carnival. The circus, fair ground and popular theatre are Carter’s favorite locales which provide ample scope for carnivalization. In *Nights at the Circus* the setting is the circus and in *Wise Children*, it is the vaudeville theatre. Both these topological contexts bear the carnivalized atmosphere. The tropes of the Carnavalesque such as the grotesque body, masking and clowning are largely used in *Nights at the Circus* where the bird-woman Aerialist Sophie Fevvers with her grotesque body and cool confidence envisages a new world of freedom and equality. In *Wise Children*, the strategy of pairing with a family lineage of twins and the tricky and confusing family history involving illegitimacy related to bold amorous escapades bear the features of carnivalisation. This playful creativity goes into the revisions and subversions of the myths which participate in the process of perpetuating the patriarchal structures of society. At the same time, the readers are constantly reminded that it is ‘radical fiction’, not ‘authentic history’ as *Nights at the circus* mockingly insists. The self-conscious spectacularism and amplified shows of femininity mocks the patriarchal assumptions of femininity.

In the eighth chapter titled “Body as a Site for Struggle and Resistance: Corporeality and Feminist Politics”, I have analysed the specificities of Carter’s treatment of the bodies. For Carter, the bodies do matter. In an unabashed but judicious manner of treating the corporeal, Carter transgresses the norms of decorum prescribed by patriarchy for women. For her, body becomes a cauldron where infernal desires are burned and churned. The political dimensions of corporeality are exploited by Carter in an adroit manner. In her novels, one can see wounding and mutilations as well as celebrations of the body. Her literary corpus is littered with grotesque bodies and freakish characters – Bird-woman, alligator man, Werewolf, the she-man, Tiger ladies, vampires, hag seductress and many more. The transgressive, carnivalesque potential of such representations are exploited to the maximum extent possible.

Carter’s characters and their experiences expose the workings of the cultural construction of gender and mock the dichotomous, binary nature of patriarchal concepts of gender. In my study, I have sufficiently explored and exposed Carter’s fascination for ambivalences and ambiguities. Her female protagonists are in the state of becoming. In some cases we see amazing amorphous nature in them. Many of her characters occupy the space of the androgyne, the in-between state. The characters who exhibit androgynous qualities and the blurring of boundaries of gender, inevitably question the false claims and assertions of patriarchy. Evelyn and Tristessa, the characters from *The Passion of New Eve* are *exemplar exemplum* of such gender trouble. Her novels experiment with numerous possibilities of liberating the subject from disciplinary constraints imposed by patriarchy’s prescriptions of gender roles. Her fantastic and freakish heroines undertake bold attempts of transgressions, while they tame their male

partners with their love, affection and wisdom of the world. Carter's Little Red Riding Hood makes the wolf sleep peacefully in her arms, where as in another version, she eats up the Werewolf grandmother, the embodiment of gender ideologies. Bird-woman Fevvers provides the best example for such smothering of male egos as Walser, the inquisitive journalist gets captivated by her charm and unique personality that he joins the circus as a clown. At some other occasions, Carter offers different alternatives. She makes it clear in *Tiger's Bride* that 'tiger won't lie down with the lambs because he won't acknowledge any pacts that won't be reciprocal' and hence, the lamb must learn to ride with the tigers. In Carter's world, the lambs learn to run with the tigers and often overtake them in running and in some cases, they succeed in winning the tiger's confidence through love.

The self-conscious performances made by the Carterian heroines are part of their confidence trick to exploit the gullibility of the society around them in order to assert their voice and presence. The purposeful spectacularity and shows of amplified femininity exhibited by Fevvers can be seen as a perfect example of her playing the confidence trick on both Walser and her spectators. This ironic play is part of their project of debunking the regulations of a system which underestimate them. The issue of gaze is a concern for Carter and many of the Carterian heroines are capable of gazing back with deep faith in their power. Their cool confidence helps them to overcome strictures and transcend limitations imposed on them by patriarchy.

Carter is eclectic in using her intellectual strategies of subversion and revision to resist and combat with the clandestine operations of patriarchy. It is impossible to be blind to this eclecticism while we undertake a serious study of her works. She gathers up

whatever weapons she gets to fight back the tyranny of the pyramidal structures of power and tries in a very committed manner to liberate herself and other women from the limiting roles allotted to them. She tries whatever way she finds to go beyond the regulatory mechanisms of the hegemonic sections. Her deep concern for the ramifications of power in society and with the possibilities of breaking of fetters provides her with the boldness to undertake myriad ways of dealing with gender identifications carved out by male-centred edifices of power.

The decentred nature of the subversive strategies employed by Carter and her attempts to bring in and celebrate the liminal, the contingent, the fractured, the omitted, the silenced, the repressed and the outcast into her narratives, save them from being part of the normative, homogenous, one-dimensional narratives fostered by the andro-centric culture. These strategies and attempts make her participate in the process which can be termed as Gynesis. The plurality, heterogeneity, multiplicity and the organic exhilarations of her texts help them to participate in Gynesis. Her effort to deal with the terrors, tremors and anxieties of the unconscious contribute a lot in making the subject dispersed in the body of the text. It is quite paradoxical that Carter who provides active agency to her female characters, undertake the project of deconstructing and decentring the subject at somewhere else.

Carter's *oeuvre* is rich in variety and they keep meanings in many layers. Different discourses blend and clash in her texts and her multiple subversive strategies are highly resourceful for anybody who is conscious of the wicked ways of the conservative, restrictive and tyrannical operations of patriarchy. There is wide scope for a more detailed exploration of these strategies in the future because Carter was a writer

who walked ahead of her times. In our contemporary world situation, where power exposes all its tyrannical and devilish avarice, Carter, the benevolent witch with her cauldron of unconventional and iconoclastic narratives would be helpful to exorcise the megalomaniac agents of power. I hope kindred minds of the posterity will undertake the mission of ransacking this treasure trove for positive goals.

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