DANCE OF SHADOWS: GROTESQUE REALISM IN THE NOVELS OF ANGELA CARTER

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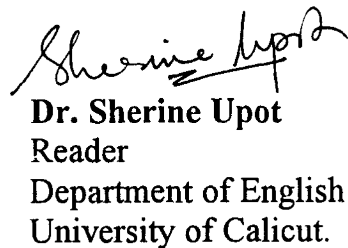
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis titled **Dance of Shadows: Grotesque Realism in the Novels of Angela Carter** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is a record of the bona fide research carried out by A. Sugatha Kumari under my supervision and that no part of this thesis has been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma or any other similar title before.



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis titled **Dance of Shadows: Grotesque Realism in the Novels of Angela Carter** is a record of the bona fide research carried out by me and that no part of it has previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or any other similar title.

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CONTENTS

Preface

Abbreviations

Chapter 1	**Introduction**	1 - 29
Chapter 2	**The Estranged World: *Shadow Dance, Several Perceptions* and *Love***	30 - 72
Chapter 3	**Myth, Magic and Patriarchy: *The Magic Toyshop* and *Heroes and Villains***	73 - 115
Chapter 4	**Demythologizing Patriarchal Constructions: *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Passion of New Eve***	116 - 164
Chapter 5	**Carnival of the Dispossessed: *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children***	165 - 216

Conclusion 217 - 228

Select Bibliography 229 - 238

6

Preface

The aim of this study is to examine Angela Carter's novels and analyse her efforts in the creation of a hyper-reality through the employment of the grotesque genre.

The arguments in this thesis are drawn together in five chapters. The introductory chapter provides a detailed study of the grotesque as a genre. Apart from tracing the various meanings, which the term "grotesque" has come to acquire through the years, the chapter also provides a survey of the history of the "grotesque" as an art form. It is here that the two distinct types of the grotesque are introduced. The characteristic features of the grotesque against which the works are to be analyzed are gathered in this chapter. There is a discussion of the three phases in Angela Carter's oeuvre. The substance of her views on society and literature is also expounded in this chapter.

The works written by Angela Carter in the sixties are studied in two separate chapters. They are grouped not according to their chronological order but considering their similar environment and thematic implications. The second chapter titled "The Estranged World" studies three novels, *Shadow Dance* (1966), *Several Perceptions* (1968), and *Love* (1971).It explores the darker realms of the human psyche and the presence of the mysterious, impersonal forces that transforms life on earth into hell.

The third chapter – “Myth, Magic and Patriarchy” analyses, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and *Heroes and Villains* (1969). The analysis brings to light the evils of patriarchal power structures and Carter’s use of the grotesque in challenging the canons of such a power structure.

The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman (1972) and *Passion of New Eve* (1977), studied in the fourth chapter titled "Demythologising Patriarchal Constructions", have a science fiction milieu and a picaresque mode of narration. The examination of these novels exposes the dangers involved in giving a free rein to one’s desires. The novels also explores the question of gender identity.

The fifth chapter titled “Carnival of the Dispossessed” considers Carter’s use of the carnivalesque to a subversive end by analyzing the colourful and rollicking novels *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991). Here the focus is on Carter’s application of the carnival grotesque form in assailing existing notions about the prominence of cultural symbols.

The “Conclusion” summarises the previous chapters. This section collects the inferences drawn from the arguments presented in the analysis. This part also provides a commentary of the observations made in the treatise.

Though Carter loved to experiment with styles and to explore new worlds of narrative possibility, with regard to the grotesque one could trace a line of continuity in her novels. Thus, the reflection of the grotesque sensibility, which we find in the first novel may be seen recurring through the later novels as well.

ABBREVIATIONS

DH	-	*Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*
ED	-	*Expletives Deleted*
HV	-	*Heroes and Villains*
L	-	*Love*
MT	-	*The Magic Toyshop*
NC	-	*Nights at the Circus*
NS	-	*Nothing Sacred*
PNE	-	*Passion of New Eve*
SD	-	*Shadow Dance*
SW	-	*The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*
WC	-	*Wise Children*

Chapter 1
Introduction

The grotesque as a genre has perplexed and fascinated generations of scholars and critics over the ages. The concept of the grotesque in recent times is markedly different from what it stood for in earlier ages. Like other literary terms denoting categories and modes of writing, the grotesque too has suffered drastic distortions in its application. In the distant past the grotesque represented either the principle of disharmony or was relegated to the cruder genres of the comic. The contemporary tendency, however has been to view the grotesque as an ambivalent concept which incorporates a violent clash of opposites. It is regarded as an expression of the problematical nature of existence. The grotesque provides a new dimension to the all-pervading pessimism of postmodern literature. William Van O' Connor's words suggest that the grotesque has now come to be regarded as one of the relevant modes of representation: "The grotesque has developed in response to our age, to atom bombs and great social changes" (6).

Any thoroughgoing discussion of the grotesque would not be complete without an inquiry into the historical development of the term "grotesque". A detailed account of the historical development of the term "grotesque" and its development into a full-fledged literary mode may be obtained through a

study of the works of Thomas Wright, Geoffrey Galt Harpham, and Frances K Barasch. Even before its emergence as an art form or before the invention of the term "grotesque", the genre was prevalent in an incipient form in ancient Greece and Rome. The followers of the Greek God of Wine, Bacchus, were supposed to indulge in what have retrospectively been thought to be "grotesque" revels. In early Greek drama, the actors of tragedy and comedy were said to have worn masks that were exaggerated caricatures of the individuals being satirized. During the early Christian period of Roman culture, the grotesque existed as a form of art, though not known at the time by this term. It began to acquire the connotations of the present term only with the discovery of the ancient frescos of Augustan Rome in the sixteenth century, which initiated the re-entry of the grotesque in a formal manner into art and literature. These frescos inspired several painters and an imitation of these paintings followed their discovery. The main characteristic of this style of painting and sculpture was the interweaving of plant, animal, human, and fantastic architectural forms. These imitations soon came to be called "grotesque" from "grotta" meaning "underground cavern" where the frescos had been found. In the early period of its evolution "grotesque" only meant "ornamental style". However as this style included bizarre combinations such as stems with oddly shaped leaves and volutes, dainty flowers topped by little figures and stems supporting half-figures crowned by human or animal heads, it came to be known as the "grotesque". These forms were the fragments of

the immense world of grotesque imagery which existed throughout the periods of antiquity and continued into the Middle Ages and the period of the Renaissance.

From murals and frescos, the grotesque style found its way into Roman and Greek caricatures and plays. The grotesque style in plays then spread to Italy and France. In seventeenth century France, the inclination towards the grotesque was revealed in its puppet plays and the marionette opera. The medieval French mysteries manifested the grotesque style with the mingling of subjects, languages and the introduction of characters like the devils. The interest in the grotesque in art came to England from France in the eighteenth century with the introduction into England of French mysteries, marionette plays, operas and comedies. With the extension of the term "grotesque" into literature it started to take on a broader meaning. Thus, a taste for everything that was not natural and a need to pull away from the bonds of classical poetics caused artists and writers to take easily to the flexible and all encompassing repertoire of the grotesque. Gradually grotesque came to mean, "pleasing although irregular" (Barasch 117). The grotesque irregularities, eccentricities, and deformities in literature began to be seen as elements producing a rich, varied, and mysterious pleasure.

However, the entry of the concept of the grotesque in art and literature was not easy or smooth. It received tributes and censure at the same time.

Even in the Augustan Rome where it was first believed to have existed as an art form, the style was severely criticized. Wolfgang Kayser in *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* cites the comments of the Roman writer Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, writing during the reign of Augustus on the new style of combining human, animal and vegetable elements in the same painting:

> [...] such things, however, never existed, do not now exist, and shall never come into being. For how can the stem of a flower support a roof or a candelabrum bear pedimental sculpture? How can a tender shoot carry a human figure, and how can bastard forms composed of flowers and human bodies grow out of roots and tendrils? (20).

The classical-minded Vitruvius was outraged by the deliberate disregard of the principle of imitation or realistic reproduction of the familiar world and by the violation of the laws of nature and proportion. This has been the general attitude towards the grotesque particularly during periods of time where classical notions of art and literature have prevailed. It was considered to be in vulgar taste to indulge in the use of grotesquerie. Then simulation of the classics and compliance to ancient rules alone were considered the means of representing nature. The advocates of classical poetics held the grotesque style, which subverted these notions, in low esteem.

From the point of view of the classicists, the "grotesque" was irrational, in bad taste, obscene and immoral. People were cautioned against grotesque behaviour of all sorts. Fantastic figures or grotesques like goblins, fairies, chimeras, things that were unnatural came to be described as "shadowy beings" (Barasch 129), and writers were warned against the temptation of using these in their works.

In spite of the attacks on it and the periods of suppression it suffered, the grotesque style prevailed and flourished in art and literature, surviving to the present age, as the passion in favour of it was stronger than that against it. Grotesque comedy and other forms of grotesque entertainment in the ages following, demonstrated the essential need of humankind for these crude forms of pleasure. Barasch observes that the "tea kettle" theory applies to all these forms: "That man needed to let off steam, that he needed comic relief from the monotony of work and from the strict obedience to his masters which had to be practiced the remainder of the year" (15).

It is worthy of note that the grotesque mode in art and literature tends to be prevalent in societies and ages marked by conflicts. Hence, it is no accident that the grotesque has become the favoured mode in world literature in the present age. The German playwright Friedrich Durrenmatt regards the grotesque, as the only legitimate contemporary genre:

> Our world led as inevitably to the grotesque, as it did to the atom bomb [. . .]. The grotesque however, is only a sensuous expression, a sensuous paradox, the shape of a shapelessness, the face of a faceless world; and just as our thinking seems unable to do without the concept of paradox, so is art, our world, which survives only because there is an atom bomb: in fear of it (qtd. in Kayser 11-12).

The Medieval and Renaissance grotesques were purely humorous and joyful. They were directly related to folk carnival culture and based on the principle of humour. Though the carnival spirit and grotesque imagery continued to remain even through the years of suppression, it lost its ties with folk culture. Having become a literary genre, the grotesque underwent certain changes. When the grotesque genre was revived during the Pre-Romantic and Romantic ages, it underwent a radical transformation in meaning. The most important transformation was that of the principle of laughter. Laughter ceased to be joyous and regenerative, and took on a sinister and destructive tone. The world of the grotesque thus divorced from its humorous aspects became terrifying. It became a metaphor for a world that had become alien all on a sudden. With this transformation, the grotesque that had already acquired the status of a literary genre began to exist in two different forms: the "terrible grotesque" and the "playful grotesque". However, in both these forms, the elements of the other can be seen. We can see the elements of

either terror or pathos in the playful or carnival grotesque and the elements of laughter in the terrible grotesque. Irrespective of the fact that it is terrible or playful, the grotesque is a reaction against cold rationalism, official authoritarianism and a rejection of that which is considered to be supreme and ideal. Contemporary writers use both the terrible grotesque and the playful grotesque to expose the hidden realities of life. A review of writing on the grotesque will help us see how the grotesque began to be considered a valid and meaningful concept and also aid us to draw together the characteristic features of the genre.

Twentieth century awareness and appreciation of the grotesque are indebted to the critical insights of S.T. Coleridge and John Ruskin. In his, "Lectures on Shakespeare" Coleridge says that, when words or images are placed in an unusual juxtaposition, we have the odd or the grotesque. This "oddity" or "grotesqueness" is a false kind of humour according to Coleridge as it is designed merely for the sake of achieving the unusual. However, Coleridge suggests two classes of grotesque comedy depending upon the motive of the artist. One was sublime, the other trivial (260-62). His perception of certain transcendental qualities in humour enabled later critics to see the potential sublimity of the grotesque and to perceive within fantastic comedy the idea of the soul. It also helped at arriving at a deeper understanding of the satirical grotesque as a "protective device" shielding deep human terror and high moral indignation.

A different line of thinking from that of Coleridge's evolved among the romantic anti-classicists. They defended the juxtaposition of the beautiful and the ugly, the serious and the comic, reality and fantasy, all of which were thought to constitute the grotesque. John Ruskin's views on the grotesque presented in his *The Stones of Venice* reflected the new attitudes of the anti-classicists. Coleridge's opinion about the grotesque as mere oddity was reversed and this made it possible to give a moral and aesthetic approval to the so-called low forms of literature like burlesque and caricature. Ruskin defines the grotesque as a comic genre in which the mixing of the ludicrous and the fearful is achieved. Depending on the predominating elements, Ruskin classifies the grotesque into the noble and the ignoble:

> It is one thing to indulge in playful rest, and another to be devoted to the pursuit of pleasure: and gaiety of heart during the reaction after hard labour, and quickened by satisfaction in the accomplished duty or perfected result, is altogether compatible with, nay, even in some sort arises naturally out of deep internal seriousness of disposition; this latter being exactly the condition of mind which leads to the richest development of the playful grotesque; while on the contrary the continual pursuit of pleasure deprives the soul of all alacrity and elasticity, and leaves it incapable of happy jesting capable only of that which is bitter, base, and foolish (241).

According to Philip Thomson, the most prominent and widely prevalent Romantic notion of the grotesque is expressed in Victor Hugo's preface to his play *Cromwell* (1827). A large part of it is devoted to a discussion of the grotesque as the characteristic mode of modern art. Hugo insists that the grotesque is everywhere, creating the formless, the terrifying on the one hand, and the comic on the other. Thus, he associates the grotesque not with the fantastic but with the realistic, making it clear that the grotesque is not just an artistic mode or category but exists in nature and in the world around us (16).

Walter Bagehot in his essay "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; or, Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry" gives a forceful description of the grotesque mode in literature, though he does not totally approve of this style:

> This art works by contrast. It enables you to see, it makes you see, the perfect type by painting the opposite deviation. It shows you what ought to be by what ought not to be; when complete, it reminds you of the perfect image by showing you the distorted and imperfect image (353).

He calls Browning a master of this style but is not appreciative of it, as he believes that poetry must be pleasing. Bagehot's views also points to the realistic nature of this mode of writing:

> Mr. Browning possibly [. . .] will say that these grotesque objects exist in real life, and therefore they ought to be, at least may be, described in art [. . .]. He is the most of the realist, and the least of an idealist, of any poet we know [. . .]. Again, Mr. Browning evidently loves what we may call the realism, the grotesque realism [. . .] (360).

G.K. Chesterton also makes this point in his book *Robert Browning* (1903). Chesterton asserts that the grotesque helps us in presenting a true picture of the world without falsifying it. The grotesque makes us see the world in a new form, from a fresh perspective. Though it may appear to us to be a strange and disturbing perspective, it is nevertheless a valid and realistic one. Chesterton looks at the grotesque in three ways, as a reflection of the real world, as an artistic mode and as the product of a certain kind of temperament (149-154).

A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art by Thomas Wright is mainly a general survey of the evolution of the grotesque in art and literature. Wright refers to the "grotesque" as a fantastic invention, which combines horror and mirth. The grotesque that he examines is predominantly of the comic or sportive type. At the same time, he does not ignore the elements of horror, fearsomeness, malice and ugliness, which belong to the terrible grotesque. According to Wright, caricature and

grotesque are not synonymous terms specifying synonymous ideas. The first word always incorporates the sense of ridicule, the second refers to the fantastic or excessively ugly and comic.

The Grotesque in English Literature by Arthur Clayborough summarises the views of many writers on the grotesque from the early ages to the twentieth century. It is important for the way it also deals with the works of Swift, Coleridge and Dickens as writers of the grotesque. Clayborough observes:

> Coleridge employs the grotesque, in the form of the strange, the exotic, the preternatural, approvingly, as an echo of the infinite. Swift employs the grotesque, in the form of the absurd, the preposterous, the ridiculous, pejoratively, as a symbol of stupidity and vice. Dickens has a foot in both camps, so to speak, and the image of the man with the pudding in his hat reflects the fact (233).

Clayborough posits that Dickens saw it as his task to show us the ordinary world in a new and exciting way, in all its wild grotesque and fanciful aspects. He combines the factual and the wonderful in a number of ways to make the world of fact seem strange, and exciting. Clayborough finds this ability of Dickens to present realistic characters and incidents in a constantly fluctuating tone resulting in an effect of alienation, which Kayser speaks of as the

essential criterion of grotesque art. It is chiefly because of his characters that Dickens is considered to be a grotesque writer (225-241).

Geoffrey Galt Harpham's observations while discussing Flannery O'Connor's works point to the realistic nature of the grotesque. O'Connor was committed to realism and so produced works, which were anchored both in the visible world of reality and in the invisible world of reality. Her consciously fashioned diverse and discordant art is an attempt to render a total realism that takes into account the antithetical worlds in which human existence occurs. According to her a novelist's business is to reveal the operations of the far within the near (186).

The grotesque became a topic of considerable aesthetic analysis and critical evaluation with the publication of Kayser's book. Kayser applies the word "grotesque" to the different realms of the creative process, to the work of art itself and to its reception. The fact that the grotesque can be applied to these three different realms indicates that it has the making of a basic aesthetic category. To Kayser, the grotesque is primarily the expression of man's failure to orient himself in the physical universe. He arrives at a definition of the grotesque and summarizes its features by analysing the works of writers like Bonaventura, Jean Paul, E.T.A.Hoffman, Edgar Allan Poe, Wieland etc. Kayser concludes that the grotesque is an expression of the estranged or alienated world. It is an attempt to call forth and control the

inhuman, demonic elements of the world, which he refers to as the "It". Kayser isolates two basic types of the grotesque: the "fantastic" grotesque with its dreamy world and the "satiric" grotesque with its play of masks. Though Kayser does not altogether rule out the presence of laughter in the grotesque, he finds no freedom and gaiety in it. The laughter, which originates on the comic borders of the grotesque is filled with bitterness and takes on the characteristics of "malicious" or "satanic" laughter.

Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal concept of the grotesque is expressed in the works *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and his World.* According to Bakhtin, the grotesque is essentially physical, referring always to the body and bodily excesses and celebrating these in an uninhibited, outrageous but essentially joyous fashion. The essential principle of grotesque is degradation, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual and ideal. What the grotesque presents is a picture far removed from the ideal. Laughter is the main principle that orders the Bakhtinian grotesque which is also called the "carnival grotesque". The carnival grotesque has nothing to do with terror. The grotesque here liberates man from all inhuman or alien power through the principle of laughter. Laughter in Bakhtin is gay and joyful and possesses a liberating and regenerating power. The carnival, which celebrates temporary liberation from the established order, incorporates the grotesque images of the "material bodily principle".

This survey of the history and meaning of the grotesque leads to the conclusion that it is difficult to capture the essence of the grotesque in a single sentence. Since its inception, new and varied forms of the grotesque have evolved continuously. The grotesque takes on new meanings and connotations with each new form. To each succeeding generation of artists, this ludicrous, funny, sometimes terrible, sometimes repulsive concept has meant something different. However at the centre of each of these meanings is the negation of classical harmony and form. The modern theme of man's search for meaning in a disordered and confusing world has preoccupied almost all the important writers of the present age. The most prevalent, effective means of expressing this theme is perhaps the grotesque mingling of the ludicrous and the terrible, the use of incongruities, and the juxtaposition of a low comedy of sordid realities with the serious and the ideal. The common perception that human experience is beyond logical ordering has always given writers of all ages a freedom to express their moods and impulses, to produce forms, which, with respect to conventional ideas of their world, were irrational and grotesque. Barasch expresses his opinion about the modern grotesque thus: "The modern grotesque, despite its varied forms, could be understood as an eternal device to protest against terror and to shield man from the deep inner anguish of his human condition in a world turned upside down" (164).

The Grotesque in modern criticism according to Barasch most often refers to the highest level of serious comedy in any age and to the most widely used vehicle for the expression of ideas in contemporary literature. The works of authors like Harold Pinter, John Barth, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Gunter Grass show the extent to which the grotesque has become a favoured mode in world literature. The new meanings suggested by the grotesque in the course of its evolution can be traced in the works of the members of the "Theatre of the Absurd". Karl S. Guthke describes the "Theatre of the Absurd" as the "Theatre of the Grotesque Absurd": "The grotesque is by and large, the outward appearance of the absurd, that is to say: the disorienting perception of the absurdity of the world expresses itself in the modern "theatre of the absurd" by means of distortion of reality which is grotesque" (qtd. in Barasch 159). The world of the "grotesque-absurd" is uncanny and demonic, and pictures an absurdity of cosmic dimension with weird and fantastic happenings.

It may be helpful to summarize the characteristics of the grotesque from the preceding survey in order to enhance a better understanding of its functions and purposes. The outstanding characteristic of the grotesque is the element of disharmony. In fact, it was the only striking element present, when the grotesque first emerged as an art form in the frescos of ancient Rome. In the earlier periods after its introduction to literature, the tendency was to view the grotesque either as a 'low comic form' or as one dealing with

the realms of the uncanny and the mysterious. The recent tendency is to view it as a mixture of both the comic and the terrifying in a way that is not readily resolvable. The essence of the grotesque in fact lies in this unresolvable nature of its elements leading to a conflict of incompatibles. It is a generally agreed upon view that the grotesque is marked by the elements of exaggeration and extravagance. These elements in turn lead to abnormality in a work, exacting varied reactions from its readers. Conservatives may dismiss it as tasteless; others may find it horrifying and still others funny. These features prompt the view that the grotesque is "the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response" and that it is "the ambivalently abnormal" (Thomson 27).

The distinctive impact and the sudden shock, which it is capable of producing, has caused the grotesque to be used as an aggressive weapon. This function is mainly carried out through its satirical and burlesque contents. The shock effect of the grotesque may also be used to confuse and disorient readers, to jolt them out of their smug existence, startle them sharply from their conviction that everything is fine with this world. It compels them to perceive the world in a manner different from that to which they have been hitherto accustomed. Both the terrible grotesque and the carnival grotesque carry out this function.

Leonard Feinberg makes valuable observations about the connections between the grotesque and the satire. The grotesque becomes a very strong tool used by satirists, since pseudorealisms are so essential to satire. The vehemence of grotesque satire makes readers feel that the satirist is stepping beyond the boundaries of decorum. The reason for the extreme reaction from the writer is that he sometimes feels the ugliness of the real world so unbearable, the discordance of life so frustrating, that only an excessive reaction seems possible. In satire, even repulsive elements are made enjoyable. We see the same old world, but from a new perspective. The satirist thus shocks the reader out of his complacency and dullness by exposing the ugly, sordid reality lying beneath the gaudy surface. The details are shown not for the sake of being different, but to expose the inaccuracy, sentimentality, or hypocrisy of the conventional attitude towards these details.

Feinberg gives a list of satirists from art and literature. The cartoonist Charles Addams is regarded as one of the most successful modern exponents of the grotesque. Breughel, Bosch, Cruickshank, Dali, and Max Ernst are a few from the list of artists who are the practitioners of the grotesque mode. The 'Theatre of Expressionism' and the 'Theatre of the Absurd' are grotesque by definition. Dickens, Swift, Nathanel West, Evelyn Waugh, Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, Gunter Grass are some of the writers from among his long list of satirists who use the grotesque to express their ideas (63-72).

In the terrible grotesque, something which is familiar and trusted is suddenly made strange and uncertain. Thomson says that this effect of the grotesque can be summed up as "alienation" (59). The grotesque becomes the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the alienated physical universe. Kayser sums up the nature of the grotesque in the expression: "The grotesque is the estranged world" (184). The function of the grotesque according to Kayser is to subdue the demonic aspects of the world: "In spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces which lurk in and behind our world and have power to estrange. The darkness has been sighted, the ominous powers discovered, the incomprehensible forces challenged" (188).

The carnival-grotesque forms too exercise the same function through the principle of laughter. It is directed toward "something higher – toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders" (Bakhtin *Problems* 127). Degradation is the essential principle of carnival laughter. It liberates the world from the prevailing point of view, from conventions and established truths. Bakhtin observes: "This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists and to enter a completely new order of things" (*Rabelais* 34).

Freud has made valuable observations about the nature of laughter in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. He observes that we derive extraordinary pleasure from caricature, parody and travesty when they are

directed against people and objects that remain in a position of authority and are in turn respected. Thus they become techniques of degradation of the sublime (261). It is the same principle that is at work in carnival laughter as well. The carnival laughter directed at sublime things degrades them and makes them earthier.

As mentioned earlier the laughter in the grotesque is ambivalent also. Bakhtin too does not rule out the ambivalent nature of laughter in the grotesque. According to him it is not always free or liberating. There is an element of the horrifying, the disgusting or the pathetic, which undercuts the amusement. Nevertheless, obversely it can also be said that the comic side of the grotesque reduces the intensity of horror and pathos. It may be said that it is a category of black humour that we confront in the grotesque. This would suggest that the grotesque serves to expose the terrifying and pathetic aspects of existence, making them bearable and less harmful through the introduction of a comic perspective. The essential paradox of the grotesque is seen in this point: "it is both liberating and tension-producing at the same time"(Thomson 59-60).

The paradoxical nature of the laughter in grotesque is expressed by Wilson Knight in his analysis of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The pathetic and the ridiculous are so intermingled that they give rise to a clash of emotions. He observes that the humour in *King Lear* is "the demonic grin of the

incongruous and absurd". Smiles and tears are most curiously interwoven to give rise to a grim humour. This does not minimize the pathos but redoubles it.

Mathew Winston's views regarding black humour are of relevance here. He distinguishes two major manifestations of black humour – absurd black humour and grotesque black humour. While the absurd black humour leaves the readers with a feeling of pleasure, grotesque black humour leaves both the characters and readers thoroughly shaken. It gives more emphasis to blackness and diminishes the humour. The protagonist is treated more harshly and involves the reader's emotional responses to a greater extent. The madman is a central figure in grotesque black humour. His irrational thoughts and mannerisms give rise to humour but his ability to create a chaotic and disjunctive world is frightening. The disordered world where the funny and the frightening merge into one another recreates the sense of uncertainty in the readers themselves leaving them bewildered and disoriented. The readers find themselves in the same confused and problematical situation as the characters (282-84).

The grotesque has stood the test of time, emerging as an aesthetic category, a specific genre. It lends new drive to the postmodern psyche's search for a more flexible ordering of a disordered world. In Angela Carter's works, the grotesque has a revolutionary and subversive function. Carter

finds the established norms and trends in society and literature insufficient to express or protest against the trauma of contemporary life. The "grotesque" becomes the answer to her search for a new mode to voice her inner anguish and to sublimate it.

Like most postmodern narratives, Angela Carter's fiction too resists any kind of classification. However, when we talk of strategies and techniques, there is a clear-cut leaning towards the grotesque in her works. The first aspect to strike a new reader is the subversive nature of Carter's novels. She was a non-conformist, a "born subversive", as Margaret Atwood describes her in her obituary on Carter. Carter's creative career has been a fervent attack on reality, as we traditionally understand it.

Angela Carter believes that fiction has certain functions to fulfil. All fiction, she says, exists on multiple levels. So if we want to read a moral into a story we may, or if we want to read it as a piece of pure entertainment, we may too. She feels that writers have a responsibility towards society. They must use their writing to voice their differences and their agreements and to express their ideas. However, she is not for the idea that reading a novel must make the reader a better person in some way (*ED*. 9).

Though each one of Carter's novels is independent in itself, they are closely related in theme and style. This affirms the postmodern nature of her writing. It may be helpful for the purpose of the study to adopt the

threefold division of Carter's works adapted by Lorna Sage in her authoritative study of Carter's writing for the *Writers and Their Works* series. The first phase that Sage marks "Beginning" contains the novels *Shadow Dance* (1966), *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *Several Perceptions* (1968), *Heroes and Villains* (1969), and *Love* (1971). The second phase is called "Middle" and includes *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), and *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). The third phase titled "Ending" includes *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991).

From her first novel to the later ones, there is a clear shift in mode from the terrible grotesque to that of the playful grotesque or the carnival grotesque. However, the transition is not regular and methodically executed especially in the first phase. The novels which make up the first phase are predominantly terrible in mood, though they are interspersed with the carnivalesque. Marc O'Day labels *Shadow Dance*, *Several Perceptions* and *Love*, as Carter's "Bristol trilogy" a term that Lorna Sage too concurs with (Sage 22). The gloom, the anguish, and the characters' propensity for a tragic life make these novels similar. The characters live in a terrifyingly grotesque world of psychic dissociation. The remaining two novels of the first phase have an out-of-the-world, dream-like setting. Two ruthless patriarchal figures control the characters here. In the novels of the second phase, the terrifying aspect of the grotesque more or less recedes and the slant towards the playful grotesque or the carnivalesque begins to be apparent. In the last and the

penultimate novels, we see only the pure liberating spirit of laughter. The disgusting and terrifying qualities of the grotesque vanish altogether in these novels to make way for the carnival grotesque. The intelligence, rich humour and inventiveness of Carter's writing are more explicit in the works of this latter part of her career.

John Bayley's words in his article on Angela Carter in *The New York Times Review of Books* underscore her postmodern identity:

> Although she is an enterprising and versatile writer, always exploring fresh themes, there is about all her novels a strong element of continuity, even communality, which may remind the reader of the claim often made for postmodernist art as a "single ongoing sub cultural event" that does not distinguish between intimacy and togetherness, any more than between high art and pop art (9).

Thematically her novels explore the status of women in a patriarchal society. She questions the nature of her reality as a woman. She believes that the ideas of femininity prevalent in the society are only a "social fiction" created by means outside a woman's control and passed off as the real thing. Carter gives voice to her contention about myth in *The Sadeian Women:* "All the mythic version of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother are consolatory nonsense; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyhow" (*SW* 5).

Carter became committed to demythologising this and many other social fictions about femininity. To Anna Katsavos's question, what exactly she means by "demythologizing business", Carter answers thus: "[...] I'm basically trying to find out what certain configurations of imagery in our society, in our culture, really stands for, what they mean, underneath the kind of semi religious coating that makes people not particularly want to interfere with them" (12). Carter tears away the deceptive coating under which myths hide in order to expose their true nature before the readers.

Paulina Palmer identifies an antithetical impulse in Carter's writing. On the one hand, it is festive and utopian, and on the other, analytical and demythologising. The earlier texts are demythologising whereas the later ones present utopian elements. The themes that occupy Carter at the first stage, are: gender and its construction, the cultural production of femininity, male power under patriarchy, and the myths and institutions that serve to maintain patriarchal power structures. In later texts she treats themes relating to liberation and change in personal as well as social life. There are also representations of acts of resistance against patriarchy (*Coded Mannequin* 179-80).

Carter defies the humanism that marginalizes women and treats them as commodities. She made earnest attempts through her works to demythologize the symbolic value of women as "[. . .] a myth of patience and

receptivity, a dumb mouth from which the teeth have been pulled" (*SW* 5). The implications of such subjects as oppression of women when presented in a conventional, realistic manner are lost on the reader who is likely to accept it as natural. Carter adopted for this purpose a mode of writing which baffled both the ordinary reader and the critics. She wrote novels which probably unknown to her drew succour from the grotesque tradition. The grotesque in Carter's novels serves to subvert received social and sexual myths.

Some of Carter's views on writing are given expression in an interview given to John Haffenden and in the introduction to *Expletives Deleted.* She feels that it is fundamentally important for a writer to have an intelligent awareness of society. A writer should get out and look around for as much experience as possible. She looks upon every event that she encounters in her life as possessing the potentiality for retelling. Carter believes that the novel has certain role in helping to explain experiences and in making the world comprehensible. Angela Carter is often criticized for creating highly stylized novels that downplay form and mimesis. But she defends her inclination for creating novels with dream-like settings: "If dreams are real as dreams, then there is a materiality to symbols; there is a materiality to imaginative life and imaginative experience, which should be taken quite seriously" (Haffenden 85). She agrees that her fictional world is not exactly a mimetic copy of the world. Yet most of her works are set in the milieu familiar to her. She believes that a book should give pleasure to the reader. A good writer,

according to Carter, is one who can make the reader believe that time stands still. This justifies the presence of highly decorous elements in her novels. Nevertheless, the exotic surface of her novels hides within it many layers of ideas. The many layers of meanings that her books possess allow the reader to read them as pure entertainment or as systems of signification.

This study draws mainly upon the works of Kayser and Bakhtin for its tools of analysis. In the novel form, the grotesque appears mainly in the form of motifs, episodes, individual scenes and through characterization.

Among the most persistent motifs of the terrible grotesque listed by Kayser, is the mad man, the disintegrating city, the wax doll, human masks, balls or parties. According to Kayser, some of the important features of the grotesque are its disturbing abysmal quality, the monstrous fusion of human and non-human elements, the mixture of heterogeneous elements, confusion and the quality of the fantastic. Suddenness and surprise are essential elements of the grotesque. When the grotesque intervenes in episodes and scenes, there is a sudden transformation in the so far familiar world. The world is estranged and the character feels a sense of alienation. This estrangement is effected through the intervention of an incomprehensible and impersonal demonic force. The grotesque is the objectification of this force. Thus, the grotesque instils fear of life rather than a fear of death. Kayser calls this demonic force as "It", an impersonal force lurking in the universe. He

differentiates this from the psychological and cosmic "It". Once this demonic force is sighted and subdued, the grotesque fulfils its function (185).

Grotesque figures according to Kayser are of three different categories: 1) Those characters whose appearances and movements are grotesque but are not wholly bad; 2) Eccentric artists most of whom are distinguished by their odd outward appearance, strange and uncontrolled facial expressions and eccentric movements; 3) Demonic characters whose appearance and behaviour are grotesque. Their mere presence usually spells death and destruction. They tend to possess uncanny mechanical skills. The observations made by Gilbert H. Muller about the features of grotesque characters are of great significance to this study. The grotesque character according to Muller is fated, obsessed, driven by his demon. He is preoccupied with problems of sin, guilt and expiation. The grotesque character is automaton like. He may be one who is part of the absurd; he can also be a prankster, saint, fanatic, clown, moron, or a combination of these (23). The grotesque characters in Dickens's works listed by Clayborough also need be mentioned here. They are eccentric characters that are mainly of two types, the lovable innocent characters and the demonic characters. They serve the purpose of intensifying the values of the world about us and that of satirizing various social ills and vices (220-22).

Bakhtin's grotesque draws inspiration directly from the joyous, festive, democratic, popular culture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Bakhtin draws a parallel between "grotesque realism", which is a literary mode and the carnival, which is a social institution. To Bakhtin the grotesque is the expression in literature of the carnival spirit. He uses the carnivalesque to denote the whole of comic popular culture. "Grotesque realism" in Bakhtin is an expression synonymous with the carnivalesque (Todorov *The Dialogical Principle* 78). The most important feature in the carnivalesque is the material bodily principle with its images of food, drink, defecation and sexual life. The essential principle of "grotesque realism" or the carnivalesque is the debasing of all that is high. The images of the material bodily lower stratum, debase, destroy, regenerate and renew simultaneously. Like the laughter in "grotesque realism", these images are also ambivalent in nature. The carnival motifs of circus, side shows clowns, fools, feasts, decrownings, profanation, hierarchical inversion, carnival bonfire etc., combines with the motifs of material bodily lower stratum like drenching in urine and dirt, exposing the private parts, abuses and sexual excesses to form the concept of "grotesque realism".

The grotesque as a literary mode – both in its terrifying and its playful aspect – has the function of presenting things in a shocking but new light which exposes the invisible realities of life. This study is an effort to

analyse Carter's works on the basis of the theories stated above. Here, the word "grotesque" will be used in the general sense of the term. Wherever specification is needed, either terrible grotesque or playful/carnival grotesque will be used.

Chapter 2

The Estranged World: *Shadow Dance*, *Several Perceptions* and *Love*

According to Carl G. Jung, the eminent Swiss psychologist, human psyche is a part of nature and its enigma is as mysterious as nature itself. The existence of a conscious as well as an unconscious psyche implies the presence of two personalities within the same subject. It is the manifestation of a general consciousness, which is the common inheritance of mankind. However, in certain cases, under the onslaught of unchecked emotions this dissociation of personality within the subject threatens to fragment the psyche with the result that there is a loss of identity. When this happens people may begin to behave as possessed and altered by moods, or they may become unreasonable and unable to recall important facts about themselves or others. Neurotic symptoms like hysteria, certain types of pain and abnormal behaviour also are the ways in which the unconscious mind expresses itself (5-9).

Angela Carter's *Shadow Dance*, *Several Perceptions*, and *Love* deals with just such a schizophrenic world as revealed in Jungian analysis. The novels provide an insight into the dark and nightmarish realm of the human psyche. The characters in these novels suffer from a dissociation of the psyche and are impelled to live a cursed life. Madness and irrational violence rule the lives of the youth in these novels.

The landscape in all the three novels is a fictional variant of Bristol, the city that Carter was familiar with. The main characters here are victims of mental derangement. They have no control over their own actions, the repercussions of which result in self-estrangement and an estrangement from the world. Carter uses the grotesque mode of representation in these novels to draw attention to the predicament of modern man caught in the throes of the abnormal operations of a fragmented psyche.

Commenting on the radical changes in life styles that the Sixties witnessed, Carter has said: "mutability is having a field day" (*NS* 86). This statement conveys perfectly the overwhelming changes that came about in the lives of people especially that of the youth during the period. It was a time of emancipation, startling dandyism and sexual freedom. The Sixties' society was one where social and sexual groupings were disintegrating. It was a time of counterculture, which moved to the rhythm of pop and rock. The youth were anti-parent and anti-authority; they clothed themselves for pure affront to annoy the conventionalist. They decked themselves with iron crosses, Nazi helmets, necklets and earrings, wore their hair long and dyed it in all possible hues. Carter called them "perfect dandies of beastliness" (*NS* 88). These rebellious youth represented a real dissociation from society. The novels belonging to Carter's Bristol Trilogy reproduce this bohemia of hippies and beatniks.

Almost all the features of the terrible grotesque are seen in these novels. The overwhelming ominousness of the grotesque world in them, suggests the intrusion of "It", the impersonal and incomprehensible force. The abnormal characters in the novels are the manifestations of this alien inhuman spirit. The dismal atmosphere in these novels underscores the statement that, "the grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death" (Kayser 185). All the three novels are keen portrayals of decadence in the life of young people from all social levels. They meet with disorientation, destruction and death. Life is already hellish here and men are possessed by evil spirits who completely control their souls and subject them to agonizing experience. They make no effort to escape from this grotesque world but are carried away, and irrationally succumb to their terrible fate. These young people become hapless victims of their own "shadows".

In Jungian analytical theory, "shadow" represents the dark, nefarious side of human nature. It contains the hidden, the repressed and unfavourable aspects of the personality. The existence of this evil side of one's personality is generally revealed through dreams. The presence of the shadow is also exposed by means of impulsive and inadvertent words or acts. Unintentionally, evil remarks burst out from one's mouth, a malicious plot is hatched or a wrong decision is made, resulting in unpleasant repercussions one has never intended. The positive aspect of this negative impulse is that it helps man realize the existence in himself of those qualities that he has often

seen and abhorred in others. Attempts by the individual to recognize such negative impulses and qualities in himself will help him to overpower these dark forces (171).

Carter's first novel *Shadow Dance* exposes a terrifyingly grotesque world of psychic disorder where the individuals give in to the promptings of their "shadows". Honeybuzzard, a wildly seductive, funny but dangerous young man and his dark brooding friend Morris are the central characters of the novel. Ghislaine is their common girl friend who becomes prey to the caprices of the friends. The readers are taken into a bizarre world where the realities of contemporary existence conjoin with eerie, out-of-the-world happenings. The characters in this novel live a life of ennui. Yet the propensity of their lives to veer towards the grotesque evokes pity. They fall prey to a violence for which they themselves are largely responsible. These individuals discover at the moment of their supreme agony, that their world has been transformed suddenly by the intervention of mysterious forces. The central characters are inescapably pulled towards their own destruction by these unseen forces.

Morris, Honey, and Ghislaine are eccentric characters. They are grotesques in their own fashion. Morris and Ghislaine are perilously attached to Honey. This fatal helplessness exhibited by them evokes terror, pity and a

sense of the ludicrous. Analysing Flannery O'Connor's works, Muller makes this remark about the grotesque characters in her novels:

> The grotesques [. . .] are individuals who cannot erase the horror of their obsessions. Few images of peace and beauty populate their world, few are the interludes of order. Implicit in their behaviour are all the conventions of the grotesque – the nightmare world, the perversion, the satanic humour. These people wear their deficiencies of spirit as scars – as emblems of a world without order, meaning, or sense of continuity. [. . .] Obsessed with their own sins, with weakness, evil, and suffering, they turn inward upon themselves and act out their agonies in extraordinary ways (50).

This analysis of grotesque characters by Muller is perfectly applicable to the characters in *Shadow Dance*. Carter's characters live in a nightmare world; they are perverted and they are obsessed with matters which they realize will be their undoing.

Honeybuzzard is a demonic character. Honey is the manifestation of that impersonal, incomprehensible force which Kayser introduces as "It", bidding sway over the lives and behaviour of the people. As his name suggests, he is both as sweet as honey and sinister as the bird of prey, the buzzard. His name itself is suggestive of Honey's split personality. Honey has a beautiful face which one would associate with angels but his mouth is

described as disquieting, strange, and at odds with the cherub face: "It was an inexpressibly carnivorous mouth; a mouth that suggested snapping, tearing, biting, a mouth that was always half-smiling in a pretty, feline curve [. . .] how beautiful he was, and how indefinably sinister" (*SD* 56). Honey is both mad and capricious, an unresolvable character. His desire to keep changing his identity is a characteristic of his grotesque nature: " 'I like you know – to slip in and out of me. I would like to be somebody different each morning. Me and not me. I would like to have a cupboard bulging with all different bodies and faces and choose a fresh one every morning' " (*SD* 78). There are several instances in the novel where Honey's face is referred to a mask: " 'The bright face under the bright cap was a mask of nothing ' " (*SD* 59). This is significant in the light of Kayser's comment that the human face frozen into a mask is one of the most persistent motifs of the grotesque (183). The real Honey always hides behind the mask. Appearance and reality, truth and untruth, lie so mixed up in Honey that it makes him an enigmatic grotesque figure.

In Jungian analysis, all the four personifications of the unconscious psyche – the shadow, the anima, the animus, and the Self have both a light and a dark aspect. Of these, the dark side of the Self is most dangerous, as the Self is the greatest power in the psyche. It is the "inner guiding factor" of an individual. The unleashing of its dark side according to Jungian theory will lead to petrifying psychological changes in the individual causing him to form

megalomanic fantasies that possess him completely (163). Honey's addiction for power and his desire to control others just as he controls his puppets are evidences of his megalomanic propensity.

Honey's abnormal personality is seen reflected even in the arrangement of his room. It is a grotesque assemblage of weird objects. The decorative pieces in the room include a skull, a pickled foetus and a drawing, which is an obscene parody of the Nativity (*SD* 98-99). All his actions are disgustingly horrifying. Even his laughter has a sinister quality to it. In Honey's unconscious psyche, the negative side alone seems to have developed to a fatal proportion making him vulnerable to the machinations of the "It". The grotesque characterization of Honey Buzzard is the means by which Carter focuses attention upon the dangerous psychic states an individual may regress to, by being oblivious of the dark forces within him.

Shadow Dance is developed within the framework of psychoanalytical theory. Linden Peach observes that in this work, Carter adopts the double, which has been a persistent device for expressing the split personality in nineteenth century literature, one of the best examples of which is R.L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* In analytical psychology an individual is supposed to project the deeds he dare not commit, onto his double. In *Shadow Dance*, Honeybuzzard becomes Morris's wish-fulfilling

double (Peach 43). Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is given, as the best fictional example of "Dissociation" in Jung's analysis of the unconscious (7).

His mad obsession for Honey distances Morris from a normal life. Morris is drawn towards Honey even when he wants to get away. Morris looks upon Honey as his double:

> He's always seemed so essential to me, like a limb. You can't call your hand a friend, it's just there. And you don't bother to ask why it does things – pick things up, puts them down. And he was like my hand that belonged to me but I never understood how it functioned (*SD* 169).

It is this perilous fascination together with a sense of guilt that forces him at the end of the novel to go back to Honey who has already murdered Ghislaine. Morris blames himself for what has happened to Honey and the girl. He feels that it is his desire that Honey fulfils by murdering Ghislaine. Honey is Hyde, the other half of Morris's Jekyll.

Morris is not a demonic character like Honey. His obsession and his sense of guilt make him a grotesque character. He suffers from an inability to communicate, to express his affections and to be loved in return. Morris is also unable to fulfil himself creatively. He is a painter by profession but can never make himself into a successful one. He is a total failure as an individual. Morris's failure lies in his incapacity to interpret the impulses of

his “shadow”. He projects his guilt in mutilating Ghislaine onto her thinking of her as a vampire being, the victim turned predator. Morris fails to identify the vindictive disposition in him and instead runs away from Ghislaine who he thinks has come to absorb him into the chasm of her wound.

The return of the grotesquely scarred Ghislaine completely unsettles Morris. He lives in a state of constant fear. With the arrival of Ghislaine, the impersonal forces completely take charge of the world, which in turn becomes estranged for Morris. The novel’s narrative expresses Morris’s sense of estrangement from the world:

> At best of times, spring hurts depressives. Morris now stayed indoors a great deal, to keep out of it as much as he could. He was in hiding from the real woman [. . .] . He lived in a state of guilty fear, starting at sudden noises, frightened of shadows [. . .]. He was tormented by a recurrent dream [. . .] . He dreamed he was cutting Ghislaine’s face with a kitchen knife [. . .]. He tried to keep the next day, the new day, away from him as long as he could, staying in bed pretending to be asleep long after the troubled night was over (*SD* 39-40).

The world around him seems to turn against Morris. The inhuman, ominous forces invade Morris’s life both while he is asleep and awake, turning it into a virtual hell. This grotesque world creates a fear of life in him and Morris begins to contemplate suicide. Morris’s conscious disregard of the

suggestions of his dreams and his involuntary thoughts results in his failure to realize the negative side of his shadow. Consequently he too, like Honeybuzzard becomes the victim of the grotesque world.

Shadow Dance is also an examination of the workings of patriarchy, especially its treatment of women. Women are marginal in the novel. Morris's wife Edna is a true paradigm of the socio-cultural construct of woman as a meek, passive, non-entity. She has always accepted the authority of her husband without question: "Husbands were a force of nature or an act of God; like an earthquake or the dreaded consumption, to be borne with, to be meekly acquiesced to, to be impregnated by as frequently as Nature would allow" (*SD* 45). She believes that "marriage is for submission and procreation" (*SD* 45). Edna's protests and unhappiness manifest in the form of severe headaches. According to Jungian psychology, certain types of pain are symptoms of neurosis. Though she disapproves of the habits of her husband, Edna's submissive nature stops her from rebelling. The conflicting passions within her lead to a split in Edna's psyche that results in neurosis.

The sexist values of society which have always placed women in a subordinate position are critiqued through the grotesque presentation of Edna's character. She belongs to the group of lovable innocent characters who awaken both sympathy and laughter. They are marked for their silent suffering and their capacity to endure pain – both physical and mental.

Though she is the breadwinner of the family, Edna does not have the right to take decisions that concern the two of them. It is the plight of such women that Carter voices in *The Sadeian Woman*:

> Today, most women work before, during and after marriage. Nevertheless, the economic dependence of women remains a believed fiction and is assumed to imply an emotional dependence that is taken for granted as a condition inherent in the natural order of things [. . .] (*SW* 7).

It is Carter's purpose to expose and subvert such social fictions through characters like Edna. The only time Edna acts according to her will is to help another suffering human being. She brings Henry Glass, their neighbour who has gone out of his mind following the death of his wife, to her house. Edna cannot bear to see the misery of others. She even pleads with Morris to bring Ghislaine home. She is a compassionate woman but a misfit in this patriarchal world. Her actions evoke pity and also a sense of the ludicrous.

If it is Edna's sufferings and her meekness that make her a grotesque, it is her mad obsession with Honey that makes Ghislaine a grotesque character. When Ghislaine returns to the scene of her mutilation, it is not to avenge her oppressors as Morris mistakes her return to be, but as a slave to them. Ghislaine, who has become one with her identity as an object of male gaze, feels that she can have no existence if she ceases to be alluring to men. When all her boy friends avoid Ghislaine when she comes back with the hideous

scar on her face, she turns to Honeybuzzard, her oppressor, debasing herself and letting him resume his dominance over her. She literally crawls before him: ' "I've learned my lesson, I can't live without you, you are my master, do what you like with me, " ' (*SD* 166). Her absolute submission brings out the dangerous aspect of the Self in Honey. Possessed by megalomanic fantasies, Honey kills Ghislaine. Through this episode Carter seems to be sending warning signals to those women who erase their identity by transforming themselves into representations of male subjectivity.

Emily, Honeybuzzard's live-in companion, is a sharp contrast to Ghislaine and Edna. Emily's character allows us to see the grotesqueness of the other women characters and even that of Honey. Though she falls prey to Honey's charm and follows him to his weird world, she recovers her senses in time to reject him. When she comes to Honey's distorted world as his live-in partner, she is unperturbed by the bizarre surroundings: "Honey's room might have set a less level and equable girl off balance [. . .]. Emily, however, had no particular interest in her surroundings. She disregarded them entirely, making neither comment nor inquiry" (*SD* 98-99). Honey and Emily themselves are an incongruous pair – Emily, immaculately clean, Honey, disgustingly dirty. She earns Morris's admiration for her practical silent ways. She is referred to as strong, hard and looking like a boy dressed in girl's clothes. Emily's cool composed manner denotes the positive side of her animus, which is responsible for giving her the strength to cope with difficult

situations. Emily loses her equanimity only once. It is at the end when she comes to know that Honey has gone off with Ghislaine.

Almost from the very beginning, the novel pushes the reader straight into the realm of the terrible grotesque. The description of Ghislaine's once beautiful face, now mangled, provides the first glimpse into the grotesque in the novel:

> The scar had somehow puckered all the flesh around it, as if some clumsy amateur dressmaker had roughly cobbled up the seam and pushed her away, saying: 'I suppose it will do.'
>
> And now her face was all sideways and might suddenly at a too large a mouthful of drink or a smile too unwisely wide or a face splitting request for bread and cheeeeeese – leak gallons of blood and drown them all and herself too (*SD* 3).

Horror is certainly present in this passage, but there is also a shade of humour here. It is this problematic nature, which is an important factor of the terrible grotesque. While the immediate reaction would be to respond to the tragic fate of the unfortunate girl with a certain amount of horror and pity, the comic aspect of the description, its dark humour cannot be missed. However even the hint of laughter is cut short and transformed into a grimace, leaving behind a feeling of uneasiness. It may be difficult to resolve this conflict in response – laughter on the one hand or with horror, disgust or pathos on the other. Ultimately, the horror factor predominates, and the reader is left

bewildered and disoriented for a while. *Shadow Dance* is an unsettling novel with only a very slight element of the comic in it. This quality places it in the realm of the terrible grotesque.

The threatening presence of the impersonal force that lurks within the world ready to engulf and destroy it, is usually felt when Honey is around. He belongs to two worlds, the world of the real life and the realm of shadow. Even his jokes have a sinister quality. It is impossible to laugh at them with an easy conscience. During one of their nocturnal adventures, Honey and Morris stumble on the old waitress from the café. The old woman reminds Morris of the Struldbrugs, the nightmare immortals in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels.* The woman becomes a motherly presence in Morris's life. One of their nightly adventures takes Honey and Morris to the abandoned house where the woman lives as a squatter. In the darkness, the old woman shambles into the room and Honey who is in a mood for disastrous humour scares her almost to death: "Then Honey, possessed by some personal devil, darted forward spreading his billowing white sleeves like wings, emitting a high, piercing scream, a spectre, a mad man, a vampire" (*SD* 136). The old woman terrified by this apparition falls down twitching in a convulsion and loses consciousness. Honey remains unperturbed and even attacks Morris who wants to help the woman. Morris who is beaten up and subdued at knifepoint fears that Honey is capable of treating him in the same fashion he has treated Ghislaine. By means of the grotesque characters and incidents in the novel, Carter exposes

the dangers the Sixties' life of unlimited freedom has pushed the young people into.

Another grotesque incident that brings to the fore the dangers involved in the inordinate unfettering of the negative unconscious takes place during yet another nocturnal exploration by Morris and Honey. The fractured psyche of Honey is revealed in all its gruesome detail in this episode. Once in an abandoned house, when they come upon a ballroom Honey expresses his desire to dance. Morris takes the role of the man and Honey that of the woman. They imagine that they are dancing in some emperor's court in a bygone era. The tempo of the dance carries them away into a mysterious state of mind. The mood of gay abandon switches to one of dreadfulness. When the time comes for Honey and Morris to part, the environment changes with a terrifying suddenness. Honey who seems to have been transformed into a vampire being, clings on to Morris trying to tear at his throat with his teeth. A stunned Morris tries to shake him away: "In the grip of a panic terror, he exerted all his strength and again and again tried to fling the golden nightmare away from him [. . .]" (*SD* 93). The sudden intervention of horror and the unexpectedness with which the atmosphere changes, points to the grotesque nature of the episode. The impersonal demonic force that awakens within him compels Honey to act strangely. Honey and Morris experience the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces, which lurk in their world but find no way to liberate themselves. The readers are offered a vision of the

violent world of modern existence, which offers no harmony and order, but only portents disaster. The terrifying states to which the human psyche can fall, and the indication of the hostile forces lying in wait to destroy peace and harmony in the world alienate the readers, urging them to look at their surroundings and at themselves in a different light than what they have hitherto been accustomed to. Carter's intention is to undermine our worldview making us aware of the snags and perils involved in the seemingly normal lives.

Though very slight, there are traces of the carnivalesque in this novel. The first instance of this may be seen in the scene where Morris discovers that the old woman from the café is not dead. Apart from this scene, the gay, liberating and regenerative aspect of laughter that is also an intrinsic part of the carnival grotesque is almost completely absent in *Shadow Dance.* A satanic laughter predominates in the novel. We see extremes of horror mixed with ludicrous actions and images thus presenting instances of the terrible grotesque. The elements of the ludicrous or the comic in the novel create not mirth, but a rather disturbing, uneasy feeling. There are several instances of this in the novel. This is very evident in the café scene where Oscar an acquaintance of theirs explains to Honey and Morris how Ghislaine, upset at being cold shouldered by her friends, rubs a handful of sand from Henry Glass's window boxes on to her wound. The wound gapes and bleeds sending her back to hospital. Honey completely ignores Ghislaine's tragic story and

the implications of the news and reacts in a callous manner. The negative side of Honey's personality exposes itself in the insensitive and abnormal manner of his reaction. In the piece of news imparted by Oscar, the reference about Henry Glass's window box alone seems to attract his attention: " 'He's got window boxes, now, has he? ' " (*SD* 63). To the utter dismay of others, he further takes out a rubber worm from his pocket and starts laughing and fooling around Oscar, who is affronted. Honey's funny actions and laughter, instead of generating mirth, produce an uncanny feeling. Later when he receives a self-abasing letter from Ghislaine forgiving him, Honey is shaken with mirth whereas Morris feels thoroughly miserable to see him laugh. Honey is overwhelmed by the negative side of his unconscious so that he lacks qualities which make him human. Honey perceives others as jumping jacks and puppets who act according to his will. He is surprised when Morris feels sorry for others: " 'They are all shadows. How can you be sorry for shadows?' " (*SD* 86). Kayser's portrayal of grotesque character reveals the picture of a soul in the process of being estranged from itself and the world, and inevitably bound for destruction (143). Honeybuzzard is a perfect image of such a disintegrating soul.

The regenerative aspect of the carnival is presented in the scene where Morris meets the Struldbrug whom he thinks Honey has frightened to death. Morris, who is already burdened with the guilt of having brought on Ghislaine's terrible fate and the guilt of neglecting his wife, thinks that he is

guilty of killing the old woman too. He is relieved when he finds the old woman back in the café. Ecstatic with joy, Morris feels the whole place reflecting his happiness:

> The café exploded with joy. He could not help grinning away [. . .]. Deep notes of joy rang from the cream horns [. . .]. The ham rolls bounded like ecstatic piglets from their cellophane pens. The soft globes of artificial light crashed down like shooting stars .He thought he would go out of his mind with joy (*SD* 161).

This marvellous and funny description of the transformation of café food into animate objects radiating Morris's happiness is one example of Carter's taste for the playful grotesque or the carnivalesque. Another carnivalesque scene is the one in which Emily, annoyed at Honey, burns everything that belongs to him in a carnival bonfire. Carnival fire is destructive as well as regenerative. It destroys the old order and ushers in the new one (Bakhtin, *Problems* 126). By burning Honey's "grotesque finery", Emily is symbolically ridding the world of a sinister, ruthless being from the world of shadows. She is in fact destroying the past and rejecting Honey's oppressive masculinity.

When Honey completely succumbs to the dark forces on yet another occasion, it proves to be his undoing. In a derelict mansion, which looks strangely like a church with its crucified Christ and rosaries, Honey, power drunk and mad, murders Ghislaine. She had once written to him that she was

the daughter of a priest and that "it was a spiritual defloration" when Honey wounded her with the knife (*SD* 126). The murder of Ghislaine becomes a grotesque parody of the crucifixion. It is a profanation of all that is holy. This desecration of the place of worship is a predominant characteristic of the grotesque. Lorna Sage says: "[. . .] her father is an agent of the almighty, hence she becomes Honey's sacrificial lamb. In mutilating and destroying her he is profaning all that is (supposed to be) holy" (13). Morris seems to have recognized the implications of his dreams and the urgings of his shadow when he decides to say good-bye to Honey. Later when he finds the mad Honey inside the church-house, his guilt in Honey's action gets the better of him and he finds it hard to abandon Honey to his fate. At the end of the novel, Morris vanishes into the "shadow". This implies his ultimate surrender to the darker sides of his psyche and to the realm of the grotesque.

Shadow Dance, superficially is all about the relatively ordinary lives of some young people. The elements of the grotesque in the novel impart to them a terrible atmosphere that subverts the norms governing decent English society and English culture at large. The novel in its grotesque portrayals delves into the dark areas of the human psyche throwing light on the fact that even civilized man is threatened by neurotic dissociation.

Though the world in *Several Perceptions* too is overcast by the presence of shadows, the atmosphere is not as depressingly gloomy as it is in

Shadow Dance. The central character of *Several Perceptions* Joseph Harker is a university dropout. Like his biblical counterpart, Joseph is a dreamer, hopelessly unsettled in both mind and body. Like Morris in *Shadow Dance*, he is a misfit in this world. Morris contemplates suicide whereas Joseph attempts it. His attempt at suicide is foiled and the rest of the novel is about his making an unwilling reconciliation with life. Joseph is a schizophrenic ruled by his "grotesque-angel" which urges him to say and do bizarre things that get him into trouble. This grotesque-angel may be identified with the shadow aspect of Joseph's psyche. Joseph is also influenced by the female personification of his unconscious, the anima.

The anima too has a positive and a negative side. A negative anima can turn men into sentimentalists or make them as sensitive as women. The tricky ways of this anima can be seen in the neurotic pseudo-intellectual views that inhibit a man from getting in touch with life and reality. A man thus afflicted becomes so concerned and worried about life that he finds it difficult to live in this world (Jung *et al.*, 191).

Joseph Harker's negative anima makes him rather too sensitive for this world. His hypersensitivity prevents him from coming to terms with the harsh world of reality. When the novel begins, he is in penury as he has given away all his money to beggars. The inexplicable guilt that he carries and his obsession with death make Joseph a typical grotesque protagonist. Joseph

identifies himself with both Cain and Jesus Christ. He seems to be carrying the guilt of the sin of Cain and to be bearing at the same time the pain, suffering and sorrow of the world like Christ. Joseph has always reckoned Time as starting from the moment of the first murder. After his foiled suicide attempt, Joseph finds no reason for his "arbitrary resurrection" (*SP* 30). He tries to express his sense of anticlimax to his psychiatrist, Dr. Ransome: " 'I feel as if Pilate had ordered a last minute reprieve and I'd gone all through that for nothing ' " (*SP* 26). He realizes the presence of immense cracks in the structure of the real world; but is frustrated at his helplessness in sealing them. He strongly feels that collecting facts will enable him to keep together the crumbling world. Therefore, he keeps collecting facts like this in his scrap book:

> In Brazil home of much of the world's coffee, engines sometimes burned coffee beans for fuel rather than wood or coal when there was a coffee glut, another fascinating fact; Joseph ceaselessly grubbed out facts such as these if they might help to shore up the crumbling dome of the world (*SP* 3).

Both the cast and the narrative of the novel imitate the disorientation in the central character's mind. The motley company of hippies, tramps and whores in the novel reflects the hero's condition in its suggestion of a rambling lazy world. While only traces of the carnivalesque sensibility can be glimpsed in *Shadow Dance,* this novel is manifestly carnivalesque. The

Christmas party, given by the androgynous Kay becomes the main site of the carnival in the novel. In Kay's decaying mansion, various unholy miracles take place. The grotesque-angel in Joseph is overcome and the carnival ends, generating hope and dispelling gloom.

Dreams are the projections of unpleasant thoughts. Joseph is troubled by dreams during his waking hours and while he sleeps. His dreams are so vivid and his real life experiences so oneiric that he fails to distinguish dream from reality. Every minute of his lonely nights is filled with "dreams of fires quenched with blood and bloody beaks of birds of prey and bombs blossoming like roses with bloody petals over the Mekong Delta" (*SP* 4). Joseph's mind is a kaleidoscope where random, changing patterns are formed. He says: " 'Ransome said all I saw there was screened in glorious Kafkascope, only he didn't say so in so many words, of course' " (*SP* 35). The expression "Kafkascope" points to the fractured, absurd nature of his thoughts.

After the suicide attempt, his already unsettled mind is further unhinged. Joseph identifies the painful disorientation of his mind with the condition of the laughing cat that once belonged to Sunny Bannister. According to Joseph, the cat was run over by a car, which cracked its skull. Sunny scooped up its scattered brain in his hat and put it back into the skull. The cat was put back together but instead of laughing, it began to bark. The grotesqueness of the whole incident is a manifestation of Joseph's heated imagination. The

disorientation and the alienation that he feels are reflected in his weird dreams and hallucinations. This is a strong suggestion of the interference of the grotesque, which is, "primarily the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe" (Kayser 185).

The lack of order as well as a dismal and ominous mood suggests the grotesque quality of a landscape (Kayser 77). The town in which Joseph lives is a genuine grotesque landscape. Apart from reflecting the helplessness felt by Joseph, the town gives us a depressing picture of postimperialist England. The physical state of the town corresponds to Joseph's mental state. It is a rotting, disintegrating town, populated mostly by the maimed and the old, students and beatniks. Death, decay and boredom are the features of this grotesque landscape:

> It was a once-handsome, now decayed district [. . .]. Every where Joseph looked, he saw old people with sticks and bulging veins in their legs and skulls from which the flesh of their faces hung in tattered webs. [. . .] Many of the shops were boarded up, to let, or sold second-hand clothes. [. . .] Plaster mouldings of urns and garlands decorated upper storeys of rusticated stone and rosy brick where tufts of weeds and grass sprouted from every cranny and broken windows were roughly patched with cardboard, if at all (*SP* 9-10).

The imbalanced pattern of this grotesque world is aptly reflected in the statement about the harsh atmosphere in the pub. When Joseph, Viv and his mother enter the pub, it is bleak but peaceful. The old people are sitting sipping their drinks and talking in subdued tones, the young selecting songs from the jukebox and taking drinks at the fruit machine. However, by the time that Joseph returns from the lavatory in the pub, everything has changed: "There was a jagged atmosphere in the bar; things were happening without a sequence, there was no flow or pattern to events. Causation was still awry. Violence seemed suspended in the air, about to happen. 'It is a world of troubles' said the bar man gnomically" (*SP* 52). The violence, trouble and discontent prevailing among the young are very vividly portrayed in this scene. The nonconformist way of dressing of the rebellious youth and the atmosphere of suppressed violence give a sense of the Sixties' counter culture.

The other characters in this novel also blend easily into this bizarre world. The young and old alike are either without a home and parents, or deliberately separated from them. Joseph alone has both parents, but he can never reconcile himself to the atmosphere of his home. Annie Blossom, the lame girl who saves him, is an orphan brought up in a convent. Kay, the androgynous master of ceremonies, has lost his father in war. Viv is the son of a prostitute who has no idea who his father is. The admiral's daughter, the old lady who lives in the same house as Joseph, has lost her parents and home

in the war. Sunny Bannister, the old tramp who claims to have played his fiddle before the queen, has no one in this world. All these characters together with the other beatniks in the novel enlarge the picture of desolation and shiftlessness.

Joseph is offered the chance of a fine education but he throws it away choosing instead the job of an orderly in a hospital. His acts of patience and gentleness with the old and the dying alone appear to Joseph to be the real things that he does in his life. Everything else, his studies, his friendships and even his relationship with his family seem strange and alien to him. Joseph visits his parents once a year during Christmas. Even this is an ordeal to him as his home assumes a menacing presence. Extremely ordinary household objects like the TV cover, and showpieces scare him: "These things seem wholly threatening; the leather cover was a ravenous mouth smacking brown lips and the Dutch girl must use her little brushes and shovels as cruel weapon since there was no other use of them" (*SP* 7). Both his parents are pained and bewildered at the strange behaviour of their son.

Joseph's girl friend, Charlotte, a student of English at the University, has also left him unable to cope with his strange moods and ways. Whenever he looks at her photograph now, he sees the image of a witch woman, mouth dripping with blood, raiding battlefields to feed on corpses (*SP* 15). His

inability to orient himself in the physical universe pushes Joseph towards complete mental imbalance:

> [. . .] Joseph knew it was too late to save himself from shipwreck, though, so far, from day to day he managed to survive, hanging on to daily images of pain and fear at the hospital for some kind of daily bread [. . .]. He wanted to vanish , sleep /fade [. . .] he knew he would not survive much longer, the current took him nearer and nearer to rocks with teeth like sharks (*SP* 7, 9).

In a moment of utter despair, Joseph turns on the gas and tries to commit suicide. However, Anne Blossom, the lame girl who lives in the same house, foils the attempt.

After the explosion and his failed attempt at suicide, Joseph stops even the only sensible and real thing he has been doing. He refuses to work at the hospital. Joseph's "grotesque angel" becomes more active forcing him to do extremely bizarre things. One night he breaks into the zoo and frees a badger. He has always identified himself with the trapped badger going round and round impatiently inside the cage in the zoo. While clipping away at the wires of the badger's cage, he remarks to the androgynous Kay, "I tried to clip any way out of the cage of flesh but had a spectacular failure" (*SP* 59).

In another instance, Joseph sends a piece of excrement to the American President to show his vehement protest against the Vietnam War. The picture of the mutilated body of a small child in the hands of an American soldier is what provokes him to do so. The child's face is all covered with blood and the soldier's face bears a strange expression: "Now at less than Joseph's age, betrayed into murder, he accused the camera with a horrid surprise, bearing his victim in his arms, child and man both lopped trunks of mutilated innocence"(*SP* 83). Distressed by the sight and provoked by this into a mood of black humour, Joseph packs the piece of excrement securely in a whole pile of his Vietnam cuttings with the words "EAT ME" printed on it. He packs the picture of the soldier and the child also along with it and sends the parcel to the President of America.

Once, while standing in queue for their monthly national allowance, Joseph is piqued by Viv's indifference to everything that happens around them. Viv's philosophy of life is expressed thus: " 'I am only [. . .] a rich prostitute's son and not an intellectual like you by any means but I play my piano, I get my rations and I get by and that's what we all do, we do our turns, whatever they are then wham ! The show is over, good night ' " (*SP* 80). This complacent air is more than Joseph can stand. He thinks of all the old and the hopeless, and of Vietnam, the rice bowl of Asia being destroyed by bombs. He is angry with Viv. In a desire to outrage him, he asks:

> "Vivvy, do you love your mother?" he began with treacherous sweetness.
>
> "Oh, yes," said Viv sedately. "I' m quite sure of that, thank you, best mum in the world, bless her".
>
> Joseph crept crabwise against his friend, and, prompted by his angel, said: "What about fancying her? (*SP* 81).

Joseph's anger and disillusionment emerges in such startling ways. He has no control over his own words and actions. Joseph goes to a lot of trouble to free the badger; the air parcel rates of the Christmas gift to the American President takes away half his living allowance and the crude joke almost jeopardizes his friendship with Viv. But all this seems to him a very small price to pay for what he achieves. By listening to the urges of his "shadow", Joseph is able to astonish people into thinking, which indeed reflects the purpose of the grotesque mode as well. These bizarre, ambivalent incidents are created in the true spirit of the grotesque. While social realist works allow people to view the world with composure and accept everything as normal, the grotesque gives them frequent jolts so that they are compelled to change their worldview.

Joseph's grotesque angel provokes him into self-immolatory activities too. During one of his sessions with Dr. Ransome, Joseph who is provoked by the doctor's remark over his lack of heart, clambers onto the window ledge threatening to jump down and kill him. The same day he lowers himself into

the chill, dirty water of the pond in Ransome's garden. He lies there in the unbelievably cold water, biting his lips to avoid shivering. However, a large dog appears from somewhere and pulls him out of the water before he freezes to death. His sense of helplessness is what makes Joseph do such eccentric deeds.

Both Joseph and his psychiatrist fail to interpret his dreams and hallucinations. In Dr. Ransome's opinion, Joseph's sickness is "merely a failure to adjust to the twentieth century" (*SP* 63). In his nightmares, Joseph appears to himself as a maniac killing small children. In one of his dreams, he sees himself walking in a garden where tulips and smiling faces of children were arranged in rows:

> Along came a man in heavy boots and trampled down the flowerbed, both tulips and children; Juicy stalks and fragile bones went snap. Blood and sap spurted on all sides [. . .] . When the last child's head was irrevocably smashed, the murderer turned his face to Joseph and Joseph realized he was looking at his own face (*SP* 3).

In another of his dreams, Joseph sees himself as both a child pursued by a maniac and as the maniac himself. Joseph is continually surprised to find that in his dreams he is an ambiguous villain whereas in real life he is, "a big, fat, soft, stupid, paper valentine heart squeezing out soggy tear at the sorrows of

the world" (*SP* 5). He is surprised because he is unaware of the fact that the dreams are manifestations of the suppressed parts of his own psyche.

"Shadows" pursue him all the time (*SP* 39); the shadows are reminders of the patriarchal power lying low in his mind. All the young people in the novel who either are without parents or separated from them, hold their fathers responsible for giving them a terrible life. However, unlike Joseph, they have come to terms with their life. Kay still bears the guilt of the killings his father had perpetrated as a fighter pilot. Even then he tries to be happy in his own way. Joseph takes it as an affront when he finds Kay and Viv happy. He thinks that no one has any right to be happy when so many atrocities are going on in the world. Aidan Day remarks: "His alienation is from a governing order that sanctions the atrocities of the Vietnam War" (34).

Joseph comprehends and comes to terms with his condition only after he has an enlightening conversation with Mrs. Boulder. His reaction when he learns from Mrs. Boulder that "father" is only a "hypothesis" is like this: "Screw you Ransome, my father figure" (117). He realizes that all his problems lie in his inability to shake away the influence of the father figure. It is the rudiments of the oppressive patriarchy within him that are exposed through his dreams. As Aidan Day opines, Joseph commits a mistake by "looking to a father figure to solve the problems of a culture determined by father figures" (36). When he approaches Ransome he forgets that the

psychiatrist too is part of that culture. Now he is able to reject the father figure and break free from the guilt of Cain that he carries on his shoulders. Joseph blames the patriarchal power structure for betraying the young people into committing crimes. He believes that the old order of patriarchs sacrifice the young to maintain their power structure. The absence of a father figure to follow as an example of masculinity perhaps lightens the burden of life for Kay and Viv.

The playful or the carnival grotesque gains ground in the final chapter where many strange and pleasant things happen. Carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world. It exposes the relative nature of all that exists and brings about a completely new order of things. The carnival festivities express the hope of a happier future, of a more just social and economic order. (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 34). Kay's mansion becomes the site of carnival festivities that dispel the gloom and bring about hope of a better life not just for Joseph but for all present.

On Christmas Eve Kay throws a party at his dilapidated mansion. It is typical carnival with its colourful gay atmosphere:

> [. . .] in the hall, the walls were covered with mirrors which distortedly reflected the party goers in their gypsyish clothes of so many colours that, as they moved about, they seemed fragments in a giant Kaleidoscope kept continually on the turn

> by a child's restless hand or pieces of disintegrated rainbow (*SP*126).

The festivities in Kay's mansion become a joyful affirmation of existence. They are refreshingly iconoclastic. They oppose the official dominant culture and celebrate the counter culture of the hippies and the beatniks. The old order is destroyed and a new one established in the true spirit of the carnival. Kay overcomes his feeling of guilt and Joseph once again becomes friendly with Time and the world. He decides that he no longer needs his book of facts. Joseph learns to forgive everyone who is happy and be happy himself. The old man, Sunny, who always plays on an imaginary fiddle and boasts of being one of the best musicians under the empire, proves to be one. Kay buys him a fiddle as a Christmas present and Sunny plays it beautifully, adding to the festive mood. Mrs. Boulder who has had to struggle all through her life finds her life partner in Toussaint, an African, and decides to leave for the Ivory Coast with him. Viv, who had been offended by Joseph's behaviour, forgives him. He is happy that his mother is at last going to have a life that she has always dreamt of.

The greatest miracle of the evening happens when Anne Blossom, the lame girl, begins to walk without a limp. Anne, who has been ditched by her lover, is forced to give away her three-month-old baby. She had once fallen down a flight of stairs and been crippled. Kay, understanding that she has hysterical paralysis, urges her to walk without a limp. Kay's exhortations act

hypnotically on Anne and she begins to walk straight, "I'm all right again, she said. It wasn't a punishment for what I did" (*SP* 144). Anne throws the ring, which her lover gave her into the fireplace. She also decides to burn her little baby's lock of hair, which she has kept: " 'I'll burn that lock of hair, it's morbid to keep it. Oh, what a Christmas morning!' " (*SP*146).

Joseph goes back home to see his beautiful cat all ready to give birth. Once again Dr.Ransome's face appears out of the sky. Joseph has already realized the source of his trouble and no longer needs Ransome's help: " 'Don't come bothering me,' said Joseph. 'You are only an emanation, a soothe-me. A soothe-sayer. Go away and look after the sick people ' " (*SP* 147). The negation of his father figure is the final and complete freedom from the world of hallucination and nightmares to Joseph. When Joseph wakes up the next morning, his cat has already given birth to five kittens "as white as snow and beautiful as stars" (*SP* 148). The carnival comes to a close, dispelling gloom and promising new life and regeneration.

Love is the story of three young people caught up in a fatal love triangle. It has the same depressingly gloomy atmosphere of *Shadow Dance*. Lee and Buzz are orphaned half-brothers. An aunt in South London brings them up. Later they move on to Bristol where Lee studies at the University and becomes a schoolteacher. Buzz at the age of eighteen joins a hippie group and disappears to North Africa. By the time Buzz comes back, Annabel, an

art student at the University has started to live with Lee in the flat where the two brothers used to live. The setting is the same drifting world as that of *Shadow Dance* and *Several Perceptions*. Like *Shadow Dance*, here too, the girl who is the go-between meets with a tragic end.

Annabel's inability to cope with reality is the source of her hysteria. She comes from a middle class background which promises her a comfortable life. She leaves the protection of her parents' house, attracted by the bohemian life style of some young people. When she meets Lee, she has already attempted suicide in an effort to escape reality. Everything around seems to her to be diabolic and united in attacking her. Like Joseph in *Several Perceptions*, her failure to orient herself to the world around her drives Annabel to attempt suicide.

The women writers use the images of madness, schizophrenia and paranoia to express the inevitability of alienation in relations formed within the structures of a society which allow women only the position of the "other" (Waugh 11). The oppressive patriarchal structure of the middle class society alienates Annabel from it but bohemia too does not offer her any kind of emotional security. This is what eventually drives her to madness and death.

In *Love*, Carter explores and develops the concept of excessive subjectivity along the lines of twentieth-century psychoanalysis. Annabel has not developed a sense of self and from time to time she regresses to the state

of a child. She constructs a world of her own, populating them with creatures created out of her whims and fancies. Even Lee acquires different shapes in her fantasy world. Annabel is in fact projecting her phantasies onto Lee by creating and re-creating him in the shapes that her unconscious suggests. These projections acquire importance as they show that he is being destroyed by her (Peach 67).

Annabel's introverted subjectivity prevents her from taking a rational view of the world. Everything that she absorbs through her senses is objectified by Annabel and interpreted in her own fashion. Even Lee gets reduced to nothing more than a collection of coloured surfaces. Lee is objectified and studied by Annabel with the technical eyes of a connoisseur of art. She finds him interesting to look at as, "Canova's nude, heroic statue of Napoleon in Wellington house" (*L* 30). She cannot think of him as a young man with feelings.

As the only child of wealthy parents, Annabel is severely repressed by them. Even as a child, Annabel has been an introvert. She becomes more and more withdrawn as she finds it difficult to adjust to the norms of the society that she belongs to. The need to break away from her family's excessively conventional social pattern, leads her to attempt suicide. Even after she is saved, her pattern of thought does not change. She creates her own mythology with which she tries to make sense out of the incomprehensible

world. In her mythology every object takes on the shape that her subjectivity attributes to it. She also loses all sense of identity and time.

With Annabel's arrival, Lee's room, which used to be white, tidy, and empty, becomes claustrophobic. Annabel stares at the wall for hours on end going out only occasionally to do some sketches on her pad. Slowly she begins to transform the wall of the room itself into her canvas. The room, which has been a symbol of Lee's freedom, turns to a bizarre world, reflecting Annabel's heated imagination. The painter whom Annabel likes the most is Max Ernst (*L* 31), a surrealist painter, which explains for the presence of all the exotic creatures in her painting. Aidan Day remarks: "The problem is that it is the surrealist quality of Annabel's sensibility which lies at the root of her alienation from the continuities and linearities of ordinary life" (61).

Max Ernst's paintings have been of great interest to psychologists. Their effort to understand the secret code of chance arrangement in his and other painters' works revealed the predominance of the unconscious over the conscious. It is the evidence of a touch of schizophrenic obsession (Jung *et al.*, 301-02). Carter mentions Annabel's favourite painter's name to remind the readers of the dissociated nature of her psyche. Her fragmented unconscious reveals itself through the "workings of random chance so much prized by the surrealists" (*L* 34).

In the same manner as Honey Buzzard's room is a crystallization of his personality in *Shadow Dance*, Annabel turns Lee's room into a reflection of her dissociated psyche:

> The walls were painted a very dark green and from this background emerged all the dreary paraphernalia of romanticism, landscapes of forests, jungles and ruins inhabited by gorillas, trees with breasts, winged men with pig faces and women whose heads were skulls(*L* 7).

She spends most of her time in this cavernous, mysterious room. Annabel dares not go out since even very ordinary natural phenomena strike her with terror. Her inability to come to terms with mundane reality is reflected in her strange reactions. One day the sight of the sun and the moon in the sky at the same time fills her with terror so that she runs home to escape the horror of it. Her inability to orient herself in the world around her exposes the grotesque quality of Annabel's character.

Annabel is ruled by her own mythology. She has no notion of the real and the ordinary. She feels that she has the capacity for changing the appearance of the real world. In everyday things, her senses form a world of mythic, fearful shapes, the existence of which she is convinced. She always suffers from nightmares. She finds it difficult to reveal them even to her husband since he himself is often the principal actor appearing in many

hideous forms in them. Annabel's attempts to come to terms with life fail miserably when her parents force her to marry Lee.

The conflict between the bourgeoisie and the working class is evident in the wedding scene. The scene is highly grotesque with its mocking tone and the general air of preposterousness. Annabel's parents who look so important are in ludicrous contrast with the drunk, shattered bridegroom and the best man, his brother who looks "fresh from a visit to the tomb of Edgar Allan Poe"(*L* 36). Though they find the company very disgraceful, Annabel's parents go through the ordeal as if condescending for their daughter's sake. Lee behaves as if he is doing something terribly tragic and irreparable. He is convinced that his dead aunt must be accusing him for betraying himself to the bourgeoisie. The thought makes him so sick that he goes to the lavatory and vomits. The false superiority of the middle class is exploded when the working class is represented as overcome by nausea. Carter identifies the British middle class as the superego and the working class as id. She posits that the orgiastic riotousness of the working-class culture is an inversion of the bourgeoisie culture of repression (*NS* 167).

Even after they live together for a few years, Lee fails to understand Annabel. He tries to take Annabel's other worldliness in his stride:

> Her apparent indifference to the world outside her own immediate perceptions had ceased to hurt Lee [. . .]. They had

> lived together for three years but still, when he was with Annabel, Lee was like a lone explorer in an unknown country without a map to guide him (*L* 8-9).

His experiences with Annabel are so "grotesque and unnatural" (*L* 40) that he doubts if they are real or figments of his imagination. Annabel has strange moods, which vary from time to time. Even during their most intimate moments, she remains so blank, staring at him all the time that Lee finds it unnerving. Annabel is like a child who is extremely possessive about its things. Once while playing chess she hits Lee for taking her queen. When Carolyn, a student at the university takes Lee from her, Annabel slits her own wrists to punish them both. Afterwards she makes Lee tattoo her name on his chest to mark him out as her private property. Sometimes Annabel is seen standing before the mirror practicing Lee's smile. After her recovery from her second attempt at suicide Annabel ventures out wearing Lee's smile on her face.

Though Annabel is an eccentric and enigmatic personality to Lee, Buzz, Lee's half-brother shares a curious companionship with her. Buzz too, like Annabel is unbalanced in mind. Annabel's psychiatrist tells Lee that Buzz and Annabel suffer from a condition of mutually stimulated psychotic disorder (*L* 60). Annabel's insanity is self-destructive and Buzz's is diabolic. They often go out together and come back with their hands full of stolen goods. Both share a talent for stealing.

The lives of the two brothers have all the trauma and tribulations of lower class existence woven into them. Buzz, who is the son of an American service man, believes that his father is an American Indian. His mad mother's delusion that Buzz is touched with the diabolic deforms his development. This makes him feel that he is fated. His feeling that he is fated and his strange obsessions point to the grotesque element in his character. In the flat where they live, their rooms reflect their personalities. Buzz's room is dark and smells of incense and chemicals. The walls are pasted with numerous photographs. After Annabel's arrival, the subject of his photographs becomes Lee and Annabel caught by his camera in various poses. The room is packed full with objects, which include knives, carcasses of engines and tanks of chemicals. Buzz is a malign and perverse personality. His perversity is reflected in the odd assortment of things in his room. He has often attacks of paranoid hysteria.

When we come to the analysis of the grotesque scenes and incidents in the novel, the scene where Lee's mother goes mad acquires grotesque status because of the mingling of the pathetic and the ludicrous: "Their mother, forfeited her social personality in such a spectacular manner that she became a legend in the neighborhood where they lived" (*L* 9). On Empire's Day celebration at Lee's school when the celebration reaches its climax, Lee's mother, naked and painted all over with cabbalistic signs, bursts into the playground and falls weeping and writhing before him:

> There could be no mistaking her intention nor could her behaviour be explained in any other terms than the outset of a spectacular psychosis in the grand traditional style of the old-fashioned bedlamite. She progressed to unreason via no neurotic back alley way not let any slow night of silence and darkness descend upon her; she chose the high road, operatically stripping off her clothes and screaming to the morning; 'I am the whore of Babylon' (*L* 10).

Later when Buzz shows his brother the photographs of a terrified Annabel, Lee recognizes in her eyes the same expression he once saw in his mother's eyes. At that moment, he recognizes her strange behaviour for the streak of madness in her.

Annabel is alienated and estranged from ordinary life that she cannot comply with the day-to-day realities. Anything that does not act in accordance with her own mythology upsets her. Though Lee sacrifices his freedom for her sake, gradually she loses faith in him. Lee who has been a herbivorous golden lion in her system of images later on takes the form of a flesh eating unicorn and then an incubus. Annabel's frustrations once again generate suicidal instincts in her. She finds no other way to escape reality, which she finds so intimidating. The third time Annabel attempts suicide she is successful. Annabel who has a disastrous night with Buzz is wholly disappointed. She fails to fit in that experience anywhere in her mythology:

> When they embraced each other's phantoms, each in his separate privacy had savoured the most refined of pleasures but, connoisseurs of unreality as they were, they could not bear the crude weight, the rank smell and the ripe taste of flesh. It is always a dangerous experiment to act out a fantasy; they had undertaken the experiment rashly and had failed but Annabel suffered the worst for she had been trying to convince herself she was alive (*L* 94-95).

Annabel goes completely mad with this incident. Annabel's failure in her effort to create a comprehensible world out of her mythology convinces her that she is dead. Before she commits suicide, Annabel goes to a beauty shop and transforms herself into an exotic creature. It takes some time for Lee to recognize Annabel:

> [. . .] at first glance he did not recognize her [. . .] her black-rimmed eyes, sweeping lashes, arched brows, carmined lips and dark red finger nails were those of the earliest memories of his mother, before she took up a more flamboyant style of make-up .[. . .] No longer vulnerable flesh and blood, she was altered to inflexible material (*L* 103-04).

After turning Lee out of the house, she turns on the gas outlet. When Buzz comes looking for her, Annabel is already dead. Through Annabel's grotesque character, Carter exposes the follies of the middle class. She also

seems to be apprehensive about the potentialities of the innumerable cult movements, counter cultures and all those avant-garde movements, which lured the disillusioned youth out of homes and society into bohemia. The young people caught in the constant flux of ideologies remained in a state of bewildered enchantment. Christina Britzolakis says "the novel is concerned with the 1960s, and with the failure of emancipatory hopes which Carter associated with that decade" (178).

Commenting about her Sixties' works Carter says: "[. . .] I'm making a conscious critique of the culture I was born to. In a period like this of transition and conflicting ideologies, when there isn't a prevalent ideology, really all artists can do is go around mopping up" (qtd in Sage 13). The three novels analysed above express Carter's hopes as well as apprehensions about the overwhelming transformations in the society. With the means of the grotesque, she explores the sociological and psychological implications of these transformations in the lives of the youth. Except for *Several Perceptions*, the other two novels present a bleak picture. Carter seems to be suggesting that unlimited freedom will lead to total anarchy forcing the darker side of human nature to emerge. The Grotesque thus becomes the vehicle by means of which Carter exposes the sordid realities of life and reveals the helplessness felt by humankind before the presence of the mysterious forces lurking in nature to control and direct the lives on earth.

Chapter 3

Myth, Magic and Patriarchy: *The Magic Toyshop* and *Heroes and Villains*

The atmosphere of pain and gloom and the feeling of helplessness that pervade the novels dealt with in the second chapter continue in the novels being analysed here as well. However, unlike them, the two novels being discussed here dispel the atmosphere of gloom towards the end. The abysmal forces that lurk in the world to destroy peace and to make life hellish are identified in the end and subdued. This according to Kayser is the function of the grotesque.

The Magic Toyshop (1967) and *Heroes and Villains* (1969) are Carter's second and fourth novels respectively. Each of these novels is concerned with the life of a young girl forced to leave her familiar surroundings and live among strangers. Melanie, the fifteen-year old girl in *The Magic Toyshop*, is forced to move to London with her brother and baby sister to live with their uncle and aunt. Marianne in *Heroes and Villains* leaves the security of the city to join a nomadic tribe. In both these novels Carter attempts to subvert traditional patriarchal themes and imagery. Here she makes use of myth and folklore themselves for demythologising purposes.

When myths reinforce existing patriarchal structures, she uses them as tools to represent woman's imprisonment within that structure.

The Magic Toyshop tells the story of three orphaned children thrown at the mercy of their monstrous uncle, Philip Flower. He runs a toyshop, which is a grotesque world of puppets and toys. Paulina Palmer observes that Carter reworks the motifs from E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale *The Sandman* to deconstruct the patriarchal social hierarchy. By making the motif of the puppet central to her novel, Carter treats the relations between puppet master and puppet to denote the control exerted by the patriarchal head of the family on the women in the family (*Coded Mannequin* 184).

Melanie's "wedding to the shadows" (*MT* 77), exiles the three children from their comfortable home in the country to the dark sinister world of Uncle Philip in South London. One moonlit night Melanie tries on her mother's wedding dress while her parents are away in America. Melanie's adolescent curiosity to see herself in the wedding dress turns out to be an act of sacrilege. The same night her parents are killed in a plane crash on the other side of the Atlantic. Melanie believes that this is the punishment that has come upon her for the sin of violating the sanctity of her mother's wedding dress.

According to Kayser, the demonic force that lies in wait effects the estrangement of the world thereby transforming the world into a grotesque one. At the very beginning of *The Magic Toyshop,* we get the glimpse of the

grotesque world lying in wait to engulf Melanie's life. When Melanie ventures out of the house wearing her mother's wedding dress, the moonlit night seems to be sweet, still and beautiful. When she becomes slowly aware of her loneliness, she is suddenly gripped with fear: "She panicked. She was lost in this alien loneliness and terror crashed into the garden, and she was defenceless against it [. . .]. The garden turned against Melanie when she became afraid of it" (*MT* 18). The familiar and harmonious surrounding is alienated under the impact of unknown forces and Melanie flees the garden. The suddenness with which Melanie is estranged from the all too familiar surrounding and the horror inspired by it, are suggestive of the grotesque nature of the scene and the general nightmarish atmosphere of the novel.

The lack of order and an ominous mood are indicative of the grotesqueness of a landscape (Kayser 77). Philip Flower's toyshop and the living quarters with their black, hostile and ominous environment are true examples of grotesque landscape. The physical environment is conducive to the sinister nature of the master of the house: "Between a failed, boarded-up jeweller's and grocer's [. . .] was a dark cavern of a shop, so dimly lit one did not at first notice it as it bowed its head under the tenement above" (*MT* 39). Life inside the Flowers' house is appalling. An abysmal quality, which is integral to the grotesque, pervades the life in it. Nobody visits the Flowers. There are no friends, no newspaper, television set or even a radio. Melanie finds it all too much to bear. She sees her uncle as the "Beast of the

apocalypse", and, his house reminds her of Bluebeard's castle: "She felt lonely and chilled, walking along the long brown passages, past secret doors, shut tight. Bluebeard's castle. Melanie felt a shudder of dread as she went by every door'' (*MT* 82). Their Aunt Margaret and her two brothers, Finn and Francie are unwilling captives in the house. Melanie, her younger brother Jonathan and her sister Victoria too become part of this outlandish world.

The eccentric characters in this outlandish world supplement the picture of the grotesque. All the three types of grotesque characters listed by Kayser are present in this novel. While his eccentricities and sinister perversities make Uncle Philip a grotesque, it is their oddities, sufferings and weaknesses that make the Jowles a grotesque threesome. Philip Flower is a true reproduction of the third kind of grotesque figure, which Kayser lists in his study of the grotesque. The demonic characters whose appearances and behaviour are grotesque constitute this kind. Their mere presence spells death and destruction. They tend to possess uncanny mechanical skills (106). With his walrus mustache, growling expression and huge bulk, Philip's presence is stifling. Melanie feels that his mere presence at the table takes away the savour from the good food that her aunt prepares.

Aunt Margaret belongs to the first kind of grotesque character whose appearance and movement are grotesque. She also presents the "lovable innocent" aspect of the Dickensian grotesque which awakens our sympathy.

Margaret is a painfully thin woman with very red hair and eyebrows. She is said to have lost her voice on her wedding night. Margaret is described at several points in non-human terms. Melanie feels that her aunt is bird like: "Aunt Margaret was bird like herself, in her hither and thither movements and a certain gesture she had of nodding her head like a sparrow picking up crumbs. A black bird with a red crest and no song to sing" (*MT* 42). Again when Melanie once hugs her distraught aunt she wonders: "What is Aunt Margaret made of? Bird bones and tissue paper, spun glass and straw. [. . .] Aunt Margaret was as fragile as the first white shoots put trembling out by a bulb kept in pot in a dark airing cupboard" (*MT* 138). On their first day Aunt Margaret kisses Melanie good night, "taking her in a stiff, Dutch-doll embrace; her arms were two hinged sticks, her mouth cool, dry and papery, [. . .]" (*MT* 49). These descriptions about Aunt Margaret with a mingling of human and non-human features explain the grotesque quality of the character.

If Aunt Margaret has lost her voice, her elder brother Francie rarely uses it. On the rare occasion when he talks, his voice is said to creak through lack of use (*MT* 47). He spends most of his time shut up inside his room playing the fiddle. He belongs to the second group of grotesque characters listed by Kayser. He is an eccentric artist, with odd manners and eccentric movements. The fusion of human and non-human elements, which is one of the typical features of the grotesque style, can be seen in the portrayal of Francie. His movement is described as: " [. . .] a tower falling, a frightening,

uncoordinated progress in which he seemed to crash forward uncontrollably at each stride, jerking himself stiffly upright and swaying for a moment on his heels before the next toppling step" (*MT* 34). Like Margaret, Francie too is a "lovable innocent". He helps Melanie with his fiddling money when she wants to send Mrs. Rundle a Christmas present. It is Francie who discovers Melanie who has fallen unconscious hallucinating that she has seen a severed hand inside the kitchen drawer. His sweetness is quite unexpected and Melanie is overwhelmed: "[. . .] he was an Easter Island figure, ungainly and antique put together on another, earlier pattern than that of most men, so that you would not guess to look at him that he had a loving heart" (*MT* 121). He, like Margaret, uses his silence as a weapon against Uncle Philip. Finn is just the opposite of his brother. He too has eccentric ways and manners but unlike Francie he is extremely graceful. His movements are described as that of a ballet artist. Though not a thoroughly grotesque character, he has his own oddities. When the other two "red people" become part of the absurd world created by Uncle Philip, Finn tries to exert himself against the absurd. He is simultaneously a rebel and a victim.

Uncle Philip's household, with the toyshop at its crux surfaces as a "microcosm of patriarchal relationships" (Palmer, *Women's Fiction* 76). Philip is a grotesque parody of the patriarch. Violence is the hallmark of his grotesque world: "The violence in the house was palpable. It trembled on the cold stairs and rose up in invisible clouds from the thread-bare carpets"

(*MT* 135). Kayser's analysis suggests that chaos, mayhem and violence predominates the grotesque. Muller in his analysis of grotesques observes that when violence appears in the grotesque it is used to suggest the lack of any framework of order in the universe; it reinforces the element of the grotesque by working against the ideals of social and moral order in order to create an alienated perspective (77). The violence inflicted by Uncle Philip on the others in the household causes relationships to collapse. Philip engenders no love or respect in others – only terror.

The fact that Margaret is struck dumb on her wedding day strongly suggests the lack of voice that women have in the patriarchal world. Melanie too is warned by Finn to be silent in the presence of her Uncle: "And only speak when you're spoken to. He likes, you know, silent women" (*MT* 63). The grotesque piece of jewellery, the collar of silver designed by Philip is another form of oppression that Philip has invented in order to torture his wife. The collar, which comes almost up to her chin, painfully restricts her movements. When she wears it, she can hardly move her head or eat. Uncle Philip takes a perverse pleasure in watching Margaret nibble at her food. It seems to increase his appetite. Rather than an ornament to adorn her the collar becomes a symbol of total surrender to patriarchy. Margaret silently suffers all the atrocities heaped upon her by her despotic husband. He has almost succeeded in reducing his wife to a puppet acting out his commands with no voice to protest. Perhaps her silence is her way of protesting against

the patriarch. The voice she loses on her wedding night is regained on the day she gets her freedom.

In the family, Finn alone dares defy Philip's authority at least in small ways. Uncle Philip fears the disruption of the patriarchal set-up he has created in his house through the defiant gestures of Finn. The depiction of Philip Flower as a satanic character and the peculiar way in which the eccentric Finn reacts can be regarded as a kind of protest against the tyranny of patriarchy. Paulina Palmer looks at Uncle Philip's household as "the arena of the Oedipal conflict between father and son" (*Women's Fiction* 76). The power struggle between Uncle Philip, and the two men in the household is overtly expressed only between Uncle Philip and Finn. Their rivalry causes Finn always almost to be physically abused by Uncle Philip. He is beaten up for even small mistakes. The first time Melanie meets her Uncle Philip, he is directing heavy blows at Finn for coming late for breakfast. But Finn who loves to annoy Philip laughs all the while he receives the blows. Finn's purpose is to rouse Philip so that he will murder Finn in his fury and be damned. Everyone in the household seems to be waiting apprehensively for the final blow: "She [Aunt Margaret] waited alone in the kitchen for her husband to kill Finn [. . .] Melanie expected it herself. Her uncle, in a fury, would lunge at Finn with a knife or a block of wood. Finn, sullen, vindictive, was forcing the killing blow to come to him" (*MT* 135). Carter uses these grotesque characters and the grotesque incidents in which they take part, to

bring to the fore the hidden realities about the patriarchal scheme of things. With the help of the grotesque, she explodes the myth that women alone come under the oppressive system of patriarchy. A patriarchal world is inclined to destroy everything that seems to pose a threat to its ultimate authority.

Tension existing between Uncle Philip and Finn reveals itself in all its ugliness every time the two of them engage in a confrontation. The violence becomes highly suggestive in the grotesque Christmas Eve dinner scene while Uncle Philip carves the roast goose:

> Old Scrooge Uncle Philip frowned when he saw it and plunged the carving knife into its belly so fiercely that the stuffing spurted on the best damask tablecloth [. . .]. He attacked the defenseless goose so savagely he seemed to want to kill it all over again [. . .]. The reeking knife in his hand, he gazed reflectively at Finn. For a moment, Melanie feared he had merely been trying out the fatal blow on the goose and now, action perfect, would use it on Finn (*MT* 160).

However, nothing unseemly happens, but Philip displays his loathing for Finn by serving him a very small portion of skin and bones. All the pleasure of the special dinner is taken away by Philip's mean gesture and gloom pervades the dining room.

The first puppet show that Melanie watches at Uncle Philip's puppet theatre turns out to be yet another grotesque scene of patriarchal violence that combines the horrific and the ludicrous. Though Finn is extremely happy whenever Uncle Philip allows him to control one of his puppets he always proves to be a clumsy puppeteer. This perhaps is due to Finn's unconscious effort to spoil the puppet show by exposing its mediocrity and thus to shatter Uncle Philip's vanity. In this particular episode the ceremonious manner of presentation and the tension undergone by the family clash with the ridiculousness of the whole show, transforming it into a grotesque one. The whole affair affects Melanie ambivalently. She finds it all ludicrous and at the same time horrifying. The family's apprehension proves true; something goes wrong and the puppets get entangled. Finn who is controlling them from above is sent crashing down from the heights of the puppet theatre. When he gains consciousness his loathing and revulsion is expressed in his words: " 'I wish you'd killed me', he said hoarsely to Uncle Philip. "If you'd killed me you'd be damned ' " (*MT* 132). Even when mounting tension prevails, funny remarks like, "Still entwined, the puppets threshed violently against each other as if over come with concupiscence" (*MT* 130), expose the ridiculousness of the show and excite laughter. All through the scene, remarks made in a lighter vein, contrast with the overall mood of the scene.

Kayser cites the reduction of human bodies to puppets, marionettes and automata, and human faces frozen into masks as one of the most persistent

motifs of the grotesque (183). This element may be seen throughout the novel. In his toyshop, Philip Flower sells monkeys made in the image of his wife and two brothers. Melanie too feels that she is being reduced to an automaton in her Uncle's house: "She was a wind-up putting away doll, clicking through its programmed movements. Uncle Philip might have made her over, already. She was without volition of her own" (*MT* 76). The bird in the cuckoo clock, for example, shows Philip Flower's skill as a toy maker as well as his grotesque taste in reducing live objects to puppets. The bird is a real cuckoo with a winding mechanism trapped inside its feathered breast. Melanie resents it: "There was a grotesque inventiveness, deliberate eccentricity in the idea of cuckoo clock that Melanie had never encountered. [. . .] She hoped the clock would break down so that she would not have to see the bird again; she did not like it" (*MT* 60). Philip's obsessions are his toys and his puppet theatre. He is capable of loving only his puppets and toys. His almost obsessive passion for them is revealed when he pitilessly pushes Finn down from the height of the puppet theatre for spoiling his puppet. He kicks the seriously injured, unconscious Finn on his stomach. But at the same time he keeps wailing mournfully for his puppet: " 'Poor old Bothwell! All his wires gone!' " (*MT* 133). He has the capacity to feel only for that which he can completely control. Melanie believes that her uncle resents her because she is not a puppet (*MT* 144). Philip's attempt to subordinate Melanie to a puppet reaches its climax in the "Leda and the

Swan" puppet show scene. The patriarchal system requires that the girl child be brought up in complete submissiveness with no strength of character. In a normal family set-up, the transformation of the girl into a puppet takes place so naturally that the vicious intentions behind it remain concealed. The sudden intervention of the grotesque in the novel reminds the reader of the folly of the complacent acceptance of things even within the family's seemingly secure atmosphere.

On entering Uncle Philip's house, Melanie seems to cross the threshold to an altogether different world. Like Alice through the looking glass, she reaches a grotesque world of bizarre objects and macabre incidents. She feels "withered and diminished" (*MT* 60). Nothing in the house is ordinary or expected. Everything is in conflict with the normal standards of life. From the Cuckoo clock to the life size puppet in Uncle Philip's puppet theatre, everything disgusts and scares her. The interpenetration of the familiar and the fanciful produces a particularly grotesque effect. Alienation, which Kayser speaks of as one of the chief criteria of the grotesque comes to the fore here. Melanie often finds herself juxtaposing the world that she has been forced to leave with the world that she is now in. It is this juxtaposition that brings out the depth of the grotesque here. Melanie finds the objects, people and the incidents, in the house so strange and different that she wants to run away from there: "She was too young too soft and new, to come to

terms with these wild beings whose minds veered at crazy angles from the short, straight smooth lines of her own experience" (*MT* 136).

At home, Melanie used to spend hours in front of the mirror. She looks at herself with a subjectivity shaped by the male images of women. Looking into the mirror, the images she sees are those previously inscribed there by male authors, painters, and women's magazine writers. On reaching Uncle Philip's house, control of her identity is taken over by Finn and her Uncle (Mills *et al.*, 135). Like any other girl subtly tuned and groomed to the tastes of the masculine world, she sees herself as an object of sexual attraction and desire. Nevertheless, she looks at herself not as a prey but a predator, her bait being her charm and sexuality with which she is to lure her prey. However, once she reaches the confines of her uncle's house she loses even this faulty subjectivity. Philip's house, "[. . .] is a world with no mirrors and books" (*MT* 103). Melanie begins to see herself as others see her. Her picture, which Finn draws, looks like "an asexual kind of pin-up" to her: "She realizes that he did not see her precisely as she saw herself but feels that it could have been much worse" (*MT* 154).

Slowly but steadily Melanie becomes part of the grotesque world but tries hard to keep her senses though she cannot keep her identity. She discards her romantic dreams about a phantom lover, fancy home and glamorous living. Melanie loses all the freedom she enjoys at home. She is not allowed

to wear trousers, read books, or even talk loudly She is without any will of her own. This is her initiation into the ways and manners of a patriarchal set-up. Melanie learns that in Uncle Philip's world she and Aunt Margaret are "poor women pensioners, planets round a male sun" (*MT* 140).

Jean Wyatt observes that *The Magic Toyshop* describes the lures and pressures exercised to seduce and coerce a girl into accepting the limitations of femininity and remain as a castrated silenced object. She goes on to say that it also offers an alternative, which upsets the power structure in the form of Finn, a young man who refuses to exercise the mastery his gender offers him (60). In her attempt to resist patriarchy, Melanie takes sides with Finn, the only one in the family who openly defies Uncle Philip's authority. Finn always comes to Melanie's help whenever Uncle Philip talks rudely to her. But his male arrogance is something that she despises. Though she dislikes Finn for his highhanded ways with her, she looks at him as a benefactor. However, according to Palmer this counterposes yet another issue in relation with the patriarchal set-up – the role of woman as an object of exchange. Melanie is forced to seek refuge from one man in the hands of another (*Coded Mannequin* 187).

When Finn comes to Melanie, after destroying the puppet Swan, miserable, and shattered, seeking comfort, Melanie is able to realize that they are both " [. . .] equals and in the same boat – their experience ran parallel"

(*MT* 173). Once she has this awareness there is no question of Melanie being delivered from the hands of one domineering male into the hands of another. Finn's refusal to rape Melanie earlier and now his admission of vulnerability are suggestive of a future where there will be no gender hierarchy. His promise, " 'I shall respect your youth and innocence, Melanie, Never fear that' " (*MT* 193), shows Finn's readiness to forgo the privileges of masculinity. There is hope for a life of lateral relationship for Melanie.

The re-enactment of the "Leda and the Swan" myth is Melanie's rite of passage to womanhood. Sara Mills observes that Carter's use of the Leda myth demonstrates her awareness of the role mythology has in emphasizing patriarchal structures and the conventional relationship between sexes (137). The Leda myth reinforces the supremacy of the male sex and the passivity of the female sex. The grotesqueness of the scene serves the purpose of demythologizing and thereby subverting the cultural construct of phallic supremacy. It demonstrates how Carter uses myth itself to assail myth.

Melanie's romantic images of femininity and her desire to become an object of male gaze make her vulnerable to the manipulation of her Uncle. She hates her Uncle Philip and his hideous puppets. Nevertheless, when he chooses her to be Leda against his puppet swan, she is pleased: "Melanie would be a nymph crowned with daisies once again; she saw her as once she has seen herself. In spite of everything she was flattered" (*MT* 141). On

seeing a small sylphide in the toyshop, she imagines herself in that costume. Now when she gets the opportunity to enact it she is highly pleased. As the show begins, the grand music played by Francie clashes with the commonplaceness of Philip's show. It makes Melanie laugh in spite of herself and feel superior to Uncle Philip's mediocrity. Philip's grandiloquent rendering of the scene clashes with the clumsy, funny movements of the Swan to make the whole show farcical: "It was a grotesque parody of a Swan; Edward Lear might have designed it. It was nothing like the wild, phallic bird of her imagining. It was dumpy and homely and eccentric. She nearly laughed again to see its lumbering progress" (*MT* 165). But when the swan starts moving towards her, Melanie is terrified: "Like fate or the clock, on came the swan, its feet going splat, splat, splat. [. . .] All her laughter was snuffed out. [. . .] she felt herself not herself [. . .] the mocked up swan, might assume reality itself and rape this girl [. . .]" (*MT* 166). Uncle Philip's voice reads out again: " 'Almighty Jove in the form of a swan wreaks his will'. [. . .] the swan made a lumpish jump forward and settled on her loins". Melanie's terror reaches its climax. She tries to thrust the swan away from her: "The gilded beak dug deeply into the soft flesh. She screamed, hardly realising she was screaming. She was covered completely by the swan but for her kicking feet and her screaming face. The obscene swan had mounted her. She screamed again" (*MT*167). Jean Wyatt posits that Carter revises Freud's theory that it is the recognition of her anatomical lack that inculcates the sense

of inferiority in the girl. Oedipal socialization itself is shown by Carter as the process through which a girl is stripped of "[. . .] her active impulses, her agency, and indeed her subjectivity, reducing her to the feminine object required by a patriarchal social order" (66).

When Melanie opens her eyes after a gap of consciousness, she cannot recognize the faces around her: "Yet she still felt detached, apart. [. . .] The company round the tea-table was as alien and distorted as its miniature in the witch ball" (*MT* 168). Melanie is transformed to an object alienated from herself and her surroundings. The suddenness, surprise and the protagonist's feeling of alienation again emphasise the grotesque characteristic of the scene. The Grotesque is operational here in discomposing an accepted order. The myth of Leda, which is held up as an episode of phallic supremacy, is used as a vehicle to voice Carter's protest against gendering. By making the Leda story look ridiculous and horrifying, Carter shows how myths are misrepresented and manipulated for the stakes of the patriarchal society. It is as if her passage to womanhood requires from Melanie a "symbolic loss of virginity to an all powerful Phallic male" (Mills *et al* 175).

The phallic symbol is again reduced to ludicrousness through Finn's account of the disposal of the Puppet swan. Finn chops up the swan and takes it out to be buried. But the swan's neck refuses to be chopped up and he carries it out hiding it inside his raincoat. Finn describes the incident thus:

> It kept sticking itself out of my raincoat when I buttoned it up to hide it and it kept peering around while I was carrying it [. . .]. It must have looked to a passer by as if I were indecently exposing myself, when the swan's neck stuck out. I was embarrassed with myself and kept feeling to see if my fly was done up (*MT* 173).

The overstated importance of the phallic symbol is deflated here and reduced to merely an obscene spectacle. It serves as an image of castration, making fun of the phallocentric myths through which the superiority of the male sex is asserted. Carter believes that myths are "consolatory nonsense" and her effort has been to explode them through her works.

Apart from grotesque scenes and characters, the novel also contains other elements of the grotesque. Just as one of the characteristics of the grotesque is the presenting of human beings like automatons, another characteristic is the presenting of mechanical objects as animate (Kayser 183). The geyser in Uncle Philip's bathroom is described as a monstrous creature:

> Aunt Margaret defied the banging, popping gangrenous, gas-flaring monster of the bathroom geyser all for Victoria's sake, to give her a bath in three inches of suet-green, brackish, warmish water, which took ten minutes to trickle from the geyser's brutish snout into the tub. Melanie thought Aunt Margaret was exceedingly brave to dare the rusty, maniacal geyser and to light

> it, against its wishes, and force it to spew out hot or fairly hot water (*MT* 116-117).

Melanie's discovers several grotesque paintings in Finn's cupboard. One is a horrible picture showing Uncle Philip being grilled in hell:

> It was a hell of leaping flames through which darted black figures. Uncle Philip was laid out on a charcoal grill like a barbecued pork chop. He was naked, gross and abhorrent. His flesh was beginning to crack and blister as his fat bubbled inside it. His white hair was budding in tiny flames. Besides him stood a devil in red tights with horns and a forked tail. He held a pair of red-hot tongs in his hands with which he was tweaking Uncle Philip's testicles. [. . .] The devil had Finn's former, grinning face. The inspiration of the whole was Hieronymus Bosch (*MT* 154).

The reference to Hieronymus Bosch (1450? –1516), shows Carter's interest in the grotesque tradition. There are also references to Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll whose writings carry elements of the grotesque. Paulina Palmer's observations about Carter's introduction of motifs from E.T.A. Hoffmann's tales also point to Carter's awareness of the grotesque mode. Hoffman is considered by Kayser as a master in the composition of grotesque scenes (71).

Dreams and hallucinations are the other grotesque motifs found in the novel. Melanie has a strange dream in which she becomes Jonathan, her

brother and goes on a strange voyage. Jonathan has a passion for model boats and ships. The dream proves to be prophetic as she finds in the morning that Uncle Philip has already taken Jonathan to a gathering of model boat enthusiasts. In another instance, Melanie has a strange hallucination where she finds her fingers taking the roles of the members of a family: "She flexed her hand, and obligingly, the family performed a brief dance for her. Then she was horrified" (*MT* 162). Melanie feels that she must be going crazy. The fantasizing of the severed hand inside the kitchen drawer is another instance of the grotesque:

> It was pleasant to be in the kitchen and Melanie hummed to herself [. . .]. She opened the dresser drawer to put away the knifes and spoons. In the dresser drawer was a freshly severed hand, all bloody at the roots. [. . .] 'I am going out of my mind,' she said aloud. 'Bluebeard was here'. [. . .] after a moment, her knees gave way and she slithered to the floor in a clattering hail of cutlery (*MT* 118).

This apparition aggravates the sense of alienation that Melanie feels in the house. There are several instances in the novel where Uncle Philip's house is referred to as a mad house. It is the intervention of the grotesque that makes the world seems like a mad house. Because of so much instances of the grotesque the readers cannot lose sight of the fact that they are in the middle of the reading of a grotesque text.

The last chapter of the novel is the scene of the final and complete reversal of hierarchical order. The terrible grotesque takes a backstage here and the playful grotesque or the carnivalesque takes over. Uncle Philip is not home and it is celebration time for the family. The dark, cavernous house takes on a festive air all on a sudden. There is feasting, laughter, symbolic reversal of authority, everything ending in the carnivalesque fire that consumes but renews the world. Melanie begins to feel the change the moment she gets out of her room: "Aunt Margaret's hair waved a red flag of joy. Uncle Philip had taken Jonathan off into the violet dawn to a gathering of model boat enthusiasts on a man-made lake in the Home countries" (*MT* 182).

The absence of the despotic patriarch seems to impart happiness even to the inanimate objects in the household: "The very bacon bounded and crackled in the pan for joy because Uncle Philip was not there. Toast caught fire and turned with a merry flame and it was not disaster, as he would have made it, but a joke". Finn takes Uncle Philip's seat at the head of the table where no one dares sit. Even Victoria the child realizes that it is the seat of the patriarchal head of the family: " 'Finn is Daddy,' said Victoria with fat satisfaction" (*MT* 183). They have an elaborate, lavish breakfast. It is time for festivity and feasting. Uncle Philip's chair gives Finn authority. He announces that they are not going to open the shop: " 'So we won't open the shop today. We'll have a party. We'll have a wake for the swan. With music

and dancing' " (*MT* 184). The news that the swan is destroyed at first shocks Margaret but seeing Francie's elation, she too softens. After food, even the washing turns out to be a carnival: "Then they all washed up together, giggling and splashing water at one another. It was a soap-sud carnival. The bubbles floated in the air and burst with wet, opalescent pops and Victoria rolled about the floor chasing them as they vanished" (*MT* 185).

The challenging of Uncle Philip's authority and its symbolic bringing down are reflected in every defiant act of the family members. Finn takes Uncle Philip's mug from the dresser and flings it at the cuckoo clock announcing: " 'Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I come of age today' " (*MT* 185). The destruction of the cuckoo clock is an open defiance of Philip Flower's "puppet microcosm" where even living beings are reduced to puppets. The upset mechanism of the cuckoo clock makes the cuckoo come out and chant unendingly. This amuses the brothers so much that they double up in carnival laughter:

> Melanie had never seen the brothers laugh so much. Francie sagged, a partially demolished tower, hooting and hiccoughing over the sink. Finn rolled on the floor, holding his stomach. Victoria caught the infection and went berserk, nearly tumbling off Margaret's lap with mirth (*MT* 185).

In carnival, laughter is the gesture of ultimate degradation of the high. It expresses hopes of a happier future; of a more just social and economic order

(Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 81). The laughter of Finn and Francie is an expression of challenge to Uncle Philip's authority and their hopes for a better future. Aunt Margaret too is inflicted by their laughter and ceases to be apprehensive of the repercussion that may follow Philip Flower's return.

Finn, who is always disgustingly dirty, decides to give himself a wash. When he comes out clean and fresh, he dazzles everyone. He is wearing Uncle Philip's white shirt. Nevertheless, even this does not affect Margaret: "She caressed his shoulder lightly and chalked. Nothing will be the same now" (*TMT* 186). This statement, which Margaret makes, is in the true spirit of grotesque realism. Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his world* states that the function of the carnival-grotesque among other things is:

> [. . .] to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from cliché's from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things (34).

The spirit of freedom that catches hold of the family gives them courage to do things they so far dare not even imagine doing. Melanie's delivery from the guilt of her mother's death is expressed in her act of giving her pearls to Aunt Margaret. Palmer observes that Melanie's giving away the pearls to Margaret is her courageous defiance of the patriarchal code of property

inheritance (*Coded Mannequin* 192). By doing so, she is subverting the patriarchal convention of handing down one's possessions to one's own children. Aunt Margaret who has never worn anything but her black and grey dresses wears Melanie's green dress. She discards the choker, the symbol of her submission to Philip and wears Melanie's confirmation pearls: "Aunt Margaret was lovely, young and lovely, and she chuckled and preened, such a happy bird flaunting new-grown plumage" (*MT* 189). Melanie in turn decides to wear trousers, which she feels she hasn't worn for ages because of Uncle Philip. She also comes to terms with the inevitability of having to spend the rest of her life with Finn. However, there is hope of a life on an equal footing with the man since Finn is willing enough to forgo his privileges as a male.

The feasting and singing ends in the ultimate denial of Philip's patriarchal supremacy. In the ultimate carnival gesture: "Francie and Aunt Margaret embraced. It was a lover's embrace, annihilating the world" (*MT* 193). Margaret's silence has not been a representation of her submission to her husband; in fact, it is a symbol of her angry revolt against his domination. Her silence hides the secret of the "red people": " 'That is our secret,' said Finn. [. . .] 'You know our heart's core, now, the thing that makes us different from other people, Francie and Maggie and I' " (*MT* 195). Uncle Philip returns to discover his wife in her brother's arms. The narratorial voice comments: "This was the final point to which time flowed; the steeple- chase in which they ran in red colours" (*MT* 196).

The time has arrived for the Jowles to wreak vengeance on the sinister Philip Flower who had turned their lives into a nightmare. Now that her husband discovers her secret and her defiance of his authority reaches its zenith, Margaret regains her voice: "Catastrophe had freed her tongue [. . .] with her voice; she had found her strength, a frail but constant courage like spun silk. Stuck dumb on her wedding day, she found her old voice again the day she was freed" (*MT* 197).

Uncle Philip in his mad frenzy smashes every article in the house before setting them on fire. He wants to trap the others like rats and burn them. In fact, with the house burning and Margaret and Francie looking for Uncle Philip with an iron bar the scene looks like the materialization of Finn's painting where he has depicted Philip burning in Hell. The fire, which burns down the house, is the carnival bonfire that renews the world. It has the capacity to destroy and regenerate. The old world order with its patriarchal oppressiveness represented by Philip is destroyed and a new world order with the promise of a lateral relationship between man and woman, represented by Finn and Melanie is in its wake.

Heroes and Villains too is a rite of passage novel like *The Magic Toyshop.* The female protagonist Marianne through an act of transgression willingly enters the world of the Barbarians. The novel is set in a post-nuclear holocaust world where civilization exists only in the well-maintained

cities of the professors. The nomadic Barbarians and the Out people are the other survivors of this world. Marianne, daughter of a Professor of History leaves the orderly, rational world of the Professors for the nomadic violent world of the Barbarians. As suggested by one of the epigraphs to the novel, Carter uses the grotesque to assail some of the utopian clichés like "the rational society, the Noble savage and patriarchal community" (Albinsky 132). Carter herself has mentioned in her interview with Haffenden that *Heroes and Villains* is a rewriting of Rousseau (95).

The supposedly rational society to which Marianne belongs is completely inhuman. It reduces human beings to a collection of data and facts devoid of desire, natural instincts, compassion or any such human feelings. Its excessive adherence to the strict codes of conduct set down for the society by its patriarchal founding fathers leads to a totalitarian regime. It is a rigidly patriarchal, hierarchical and so inevitably repressive society. There is a suppressed, but very strong vestige of class struggle among the communities of Professors, workers and soldiers who make up the so-called civilized society. The words of Marianne's father endorse the general unhappiness in the strict, oppressive regimentation exercised by the soldiers: " 'The soldiers are delegated to police us and protect us but they are developing an autonomous power of their own' " (*HV* 9). The cold-hearted reasoning of the soldiers only worsens the situation. Through her grotesque portrayal of the rational society, Carter subverts man's faith in it. A rational society has been

the answer to humankind's search for a remedy to cure all the ills that faces it. But, it is shown that excessive rationalism too will lead to a state of disharmony in the society. Marianne's society with its strong undercurrent of contention fits in perfectly with Kayser's description of the grotesque world in Wilhelm Busch's *Edward's Dream* (1891): "It is a world without heart without kindness or love [. . .]. In this world, from which mind and soul are absent, no intimate ties or profound relation exists between human beings" (199).

The orderly and seemingly peaceful life in the village is riven by strong undercurrents of violence and psychological disruptions. Sudden manifestations of these point to the grotesqueness of their world. The unexpected eruption of violence and instances of self-immolations among the professors and workers are the manifestations of their suppressed emotions: "Suicide was not uncommon among workers and professors when they reached a certain age and felt the approach of senility or loss of wits, though it was uncommon among the soldiers, who learned discipline" (*HV* 9). The soldiers who are strict disciplinarians and who totally lack feelings, control the community. The Professors and workers are forced to end their lives because of the mysterious ways in which the soldiers are said to handle the deformed and the mentally deranged.

Marianne too is affected by the inscrutable happenings in her society. It is when their nurse goes mad and kills Marianne's father, the Professor of History that she becomes aware of the hidden realities in her society. Marianne is disconcerted because she cannot find the reason behind these strange goings-on around her. Her agitation and feeling of helplessness and the cold-blooded rationalism of the soldiers are exposed in the conversation between Marianne and her uncle, a colonel in the army:

> 'She loved us when we were alive,' said Marianne without realizing what she was saying. Appalled, she corrected herself; 'I mean, when I was young.'
>
> 'She was seriously maladjusted,' said her uncle crashing his fist upon the table. 'She should have been subjected to tests and then operated upon.' He pierced Marianne with a shrewd, assessing glance, as if suspicious of her (*HV* 15).

A slip of the tongue on the part of Marianne is enough for the soldiers to suspect her of mental derangement. To escape from this world, Marianne runs away with a barbarian who comes to raid their village.

Like Melanie's act of transgression in *The Magic Toyshop,* it is an act of transgression that totally changes the world for Marianne. She walks into the ruins outside the boundaries of the village. Though the citizens have been forbidden to go beyond the walls of the village Marianne transgresses the limits. She gets punished for her act of transgression. It is while she is away

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exploring the ruins that their nurse in a fit of senile frenzy kills her father. While Melanie reacts by smashing everything in her room when she hears the news of her parents' accidental death, Marianne in an act of self-mutilation cuts off her hair. Since then her uncle, the colonel, and the others seem to regard her too as maladjusted: "[. . .] for nobody had trusted her since her father died. They had hidden knives and scissors from her and talked to her in soft, conciliatory voices" (*HV* 22). Since she runs away with the barbarian Jewel, she escapes from being operated upon and handled like a specimen for further studies. She once tells Jewel what the Professors may do to him if they capture him. She says that they would conduct a series of tests on him like the Rorschach blot test, introversion /extroversion tests; blood tests etc. and put him under surveillance:

> 'And everything you did or said would be observed and judged, sleeping and waking, everything, to see how you revealed your differences, every word and gesture studied and annotated until you were nothing but a mass of footnotes with a tiny trickle of text at the top of a page. You would be pressed inside a book. And you'd be lodged probably with psychologists and all the time you'd be a perfect stranger' (*HV*124).

The depiction of the extreme and offensive rationalism of the Professors' society, makes it appear absurd. With the sudden intervention of the grotesque in the rational world of the Professors, a feeling of helplessness is produced in

the readers as well. The grotesque perspective in a work intends to shake the reader's confidence in his worldview by depriving him of the safeguards provided by tradition and society (Kayser 61).

Marianne has always been fascinated by the Barbarians. But once she enters their world, she is disillusioned. She realizes that her father's observation has been right. Marianne's father, Professor of History says: "'Rousseau spoke of a noble savage but this is a time of ignoble savages' " (*HV* 10). Even after living for only a short while with the Barbarians her fascination ebbs: "Whatever romantic attraction the idea of the Barbarians might have held for her as she sat by herself in the white tower when her father was alive, had entirely evaporated" (*HV* 52). She now realizes that the exotic surface of the Barbarians' life is just a facade. Beneath it reside deprivation, illness and pain.

The grotesque becomes instrumental in bringing out the ugly, sordid, reality of the Barbarians' life. The Barbarians have set up their camp in an old mansion which has survived the holocaust. The first thing that strikes Marianne as she nears the house is the amount of refuse and the abominable smell surrounding it: "Marianne smelled a sharp stench of excrement and horses as they arrived [. . .]. Many dogs scavenged in an enormous midden of bones and liquid dung which spread out from the side of the house like a huge stain [. . .]" (*HV* 32). The disgustingly dirty living quarters of the Barbarians,

their life of deprivation and misery are enough to shatter Marianne's romantic conception about them. Seen reflected in this description of the Barbarians' camp is, the coexistence of "bizarre, ghastly, and repulsive elements, of the grotesque" (Kayser 79).

Even though Jewel, with whom Marianne runs away is the leader of the Barbarians, the power is wielded by Dr. Donally, a renegade Professor. He is both the mad scientist and the shaman. Donally is a sinister grotesque figure with his eccentricities and odd outward appearance. He is a giant of a man, wearing a black fur robe and many necklaces. His black hair frizzes out in a cloud down to his shoulders and his double-pointed beard is dyed scarlet on one side and purple on the other. He is drunk on the power he exercises over the Barbarians by exploiting their ignorance and their superstitious fear. Donally believes that fear is the only passion through which one can control a community. Mrs. Green, Jewel's foster mother, has no faith in Donally: " 'I don't trust the Doctor, I never have [. . .] . It'd be hell with your Dr. Donally running everything, real hell no respect for the old or nothing. Only tortures, mutilation and displays of magic' " (*HV* 39).

Donally finds an opponent in Marianne who is educated and civilized. He tactfully tries to take her into confidence at the outset by offering her power. He asks her to become the holy image of the Barbarians. He believes that religion is a social necessity and that the savages need a myth to live by.

He addresses her as "Our lady of the wilderness" and "The virgin of the swamp" (*HV* 50), and warns her to remain terrifying. However, Donally fails to impress Marianne who realizes that he is a charlatan. Marianne's refusal to fall for the temptation of power and the grotesque depiction of Donally become tools with which Carter subverts the faith in the cult movements and religious societies that thrived in the restless Sixties, promising deliverance through religion. While criticizing excessive rationalism, Carter also warns against giving in to the temptations of unreason in the name of faith. Donally is another version of the patriarch who uses a different strategy to remain in power.

The manner in which he handles his son is an evidence of Donally's tyrannical nature. The boy is always kept chained like a dog. He receives his food in a dish marked "Dog". His neck is all sore with the constant rubbing of the collar. He howls when he is in pain and yelps when happy. Donally says that he treats his son like a beast because he has disgusting habits. In truth as he himself admits to Marianne later he fears opposition from his son. Even when he makes Jewel a learned savage, he takes care not to teach him to read and write. He does this as a measure of self-defense. Donally fears that Jewel may usurp his place among the Barbarians. It is the fear of the loss of power that lies at the core of patriarchal subjugation in every community irrespective of its social status.

The patriarchal oppressiveness of the Barbarians is conditioned by Donally. The women in the clan, apart from Mrs. Green have no identity. Even Mrs. Green has no voice or authority over them. In the scene where Marianne is surrounded by Jewel's brothers, Mrs. Green's protest makes no effect on them. It is the arrival of Donally that saves her from being raped by the wild men. The Barbarians cower before his presence. He keeps them in a state of petrified submission. Nobody questions his authority. He uses the children and even grown-ups like guinea pigs to conduct his wild experiments. When a little girl dies in his attempt to convert her into "tiger lady" by tattooing her all over no one turns against him. He instils superstitious fear in the Barbarians and capitalizes on it. Donally is a grotesque parody of the patriarch who suppresses everything that poses a threat to him. Carter seems to declare that even a post-holocaust world will not be free of patriarchal oppression.

Donally invents a grotesque wedding ceremony for Jewel and Marianne in order to impress the Barbarians. He is aware that the only way to sustain the power structure he has created is through ritual and magic. Donally tells Marianne that she has no choice, it is either "marry or burn". He further asserts his words by showing her a medieval skull which carries a banner with the motto: "AS I AM, SO YE SHALL BE" (*HV* 63). Marianne succumbs to Donally's threats and marries Jewel against her wish. In the patriarchal world, even an outsider woman has no choice of her own. Though

they are afraid of Marianne because of the superstitious notions they have about the Professor women, she is not left alone.

Marianne is made to wear a crumbling wedding dress of some pre-holocaust period and is taken to the chapel:

> She was prepared for the unexpected; even so, the bizarre phenomenon of Donally took her by surprise. He was perched on the altar like a grotesque bird. He had donned a mask of carved wood painted with blue, green, purple and black blotches, dark red spots and scarlet streaks which covered all his face but for the bristling parti-coloured beard. He was robed from head to foot in a garment woven from the plumage of birds (*HV* 71).

The wedding rites invented by Donally are equally terrifying and ridiculous. Donally, weirdly attired, carries an adder in a basket. Marianne fears that he will conclude the ceremony by attaching the snake to her breast. The brothers who are standing behind Donally appear like nightmare incarnate with their painted face and jewellery. When Marianne, who looks like "an apparition of other world", is made to stand beside Jewel, Donally begins a long speech, which makes no sense to the Barbarians. Jewel marries her by putting a ring on her finger. The most terrifying moment comes when it is time for the

mixing of blood, another piece of ritual Donally invents for them. Jewel takes out a knife and offers it to Marianne who is terrified:

> She flinched involuntarily. His eyes snapped open; he grimaced and snatched at her hand. She writhed and struggled; she tried to shout but the drifting veil caught in her mouth and gagged her. Donally's talons gripped her arm and she ceased to struggle, helplessly gazing on as Jewel advanced the blade towards her wrist. He made a little cut in the flesh and few drops of blood oozed out (*HV* 73).

Though prepared for the unexpected, this gesture takes Marianne by surprise and she is suddenly gripped by terror. She seems to be losing her foothold despite all her brave efforts to survive the grotesqueness of the Barbarians' world. The eccentricities of Donally reach their climax after he mixes the blood of the bride and the groom: "Donally leaped high into the air, screamed loudly once and flung himself down among the, rushes, frothing and bubbling in a tremendous fit" (*HV* 73). The fit is something which he practices to perfection, in order to impress the Barbarians.

Marianne, who is forced to undergo her ordeal as "a mute-furious doll", burns the wedding dress at the end of the day. Carter sees a girl in her wedding dress as, "the supreme icon of woman as a sexual thing" (*NS* 89). The white dress which every bride is made to wear as an emblem of purity, is forced upon her by the patriarchal society. By burning it in a carnival bonfire,

Marianne challenges the old order, which looks at her as an object of sex, and thereby challenges the patriarchal system. Carter appears to be stating that even a nuclear holocaust is not enough to change male-female polarisation and male dominance. The proper comment about the whole ceremony lies in Marianne's words: " 'What a farce,' she said as unpleasantly as she could. 'How grotesque ' " (*HV* 77).

Just like Melanie in *The Magic Toyshop*, Marianne too is forced to take up roles against her will. Both the girls are subjected to male violence in many ways. When Melanie goes through the ordeal of symbolic rape, Marianne is in fact raped by Jewel. She is also subjected to near rape where all the brothers are involved. Both the girls use the same desperate device of obliterating their personality for self-protection. They pretend that they do not exist and that it is happening to some other girl. During Jewel's sexual assault Marianne remains impassive, not revealing the pain she feels. She is determined not to give him the pleasure of feeling superior to her. The act brings to her mind the brutal murder of her brother that she has once witnessed. Jewel admits that he raped Marianne to get over his fear of her. Moreover, he has to force her into marriage to subjugate her completely.

Feminists consider rape as a crime which illustrates the male urge to control and dominate women. The crime of rape illustrates the inequalities between the sexes and helps to perpetuate them. It also has the effect of

cementing the bonds between men and keeping women in a state of constant fear (Palmer, *Women's Writing* 84). Carter gives emphasis to the emotional impact rape has on women. She believes that more than the terror of physical hurt and humiliation, it is a fear of psychic disintegration or a disruption of the self that rules a rape victim (*SW* 6).

Another glimpse into the grotesque world of the Barbarians is provided by the scene where the brothers attack Marianne. It brings to light the helpless position of women in a male dominated society. Marianne is accosted in the kitchen by the six brothers, a few days after her arrival in the camp:

> The brothers eyed her circumspectly [. . .] . She glanced around; she was surrounded [. . .]. The atmosphere in the devilish kitchen splintered and jagged [. . .]. Firelight shadow monsters galloped along the walls. All gasped and came closer. Marianne [. . .] began to struggle and shout; at this, the brothers laughed but did not cease to crowd in on her. So she closed her eyes and pretended she did not exist. (*HV* 48-49).

It is the intervention of Donally that saves Marianne. She feels no fear when the brothers surround her, but only indignation. Her father's remarks about ignoble savages, are asserted once again. Jewel, the barbarian leader does nothing to stop his brothers, but in fact encourages them. The myth that education goes hand in hand with civilization is shattered in the case of Jewel

who is educated but remains a barbarian not just in appearance but also in behaviour. Education does not bring about any refinement of character in him as is evident from the way he treats Marianne. Education has in no way helped him to free himself from the tyrannical ways of his clan.

The encounter with the Out people and the subsequent punishment given to Precious, Jewel's youngest brother are the other glimpses of grotesque that we have in the novel. The Out people are mutants, the products of radiation. They are severely deformed having both human and bestial qualities:

> Amongst the Out people, the human form acquired fantastic shapes. One man had furled ears as pale, delicate and extensive as Arum lilies. Another was scaled all over, with webbed hands and feet. Few had the conventional complement of limbs or features and most bore marks of nameless diseases. Some were ludicrously attenuated, with arms and legs twice as long as those of natural men [. . .] (*HV* 110).

Marianne kills a warped man who attacks Jewel. He has short arms lacking elbows. His face is marked with a gigantic cicatrices and his nostrils are twin pits between his eyes. The warped man catches Jewel by his hair and is about to bite him with his fang like teeth when Marianne stabs him from behind: "He gurgled, oozed excrement and jerked back and forth. She stabbed him several times more [. . .] until the creature was no more than a

piece of abused flesh" (*HV* 107). Their abnormalities and monstrous appearance make these Out people grotesque. Jewel calls them "The phenomenon of man" (*HV* 110). Marianne feels that, they are not men at all. She kills the warped man not just to save Jewel but "out of blind repugnance only to obliterate what seemed to her a cruel parody of life" (*HV*110).

Monstrous creatures are included amongst the specific motifs of the grotesque (Kayser 181). Thomson too regards abnormality as an essential feature of the grotesque (25). The abnormal here is horrifying and disgusting and manifests the fate of man in a post holocaust world. The grotesque nature of the whole scene awakens the reader with the same suddenness with which the migrating Barbarians are attacked by the Out people. "Everything changed immediately" (*HV* 108). The invisible reality is exposed in all its rawness, to jolt the readers from their complacency: "Over and above the ridiculousness suggested by absurdity and distortion, the grotesque inspires a fear which grows out of the sudden recognition that man's position is precarious" (Kayser 154). This grotesque encounter with the Out people is a reminder of the instability of life on earth and is also a warning against playing dangerously with destiny.

Precious who is supposed to keep a look out for the Out people fails in his duty. He is sentenced to twenty lashes with a horse whip. The violence inherent in the scene, the estrangement effected by it, the references to masks

and the automaton like behaviour of Jewel, make it a grotesque scene. Donally makes even the whipping look like a ritual. The Doctor dons his wooden mask and feather robe before handing the horsewhip to Jewel. Donally realizes that his phallocentric cult can exist only if he exploits the superstitious fear of the tribe. He makes Jewel the instrument with which to subdue and control them. Jewel is forced to whip his brother against his own wish. Marianne finds that Jewel has become mechanical in the process of beating Precious:

> The whip whirred and thumped; Precious grunted at its impact, all in all a mechanical repetition of sounds, she saw that Jewel had become mechanical. He was nothing but the idea of that power which men fear to offend [. . .] frozen in the act of punishment, he was concealed within a mask which covered his entire body, a man no longer (*HV* 113).

Marianne has already recognized the chaotic nature of the Barbarians' life:

> Nothing was permanent nor was any one night in any way as the previous night had been [. . .]. Boredom and exhaustion conspired to erode her formerly complacent idea of herself. She could find no logic to account for her presence nor for that of the people around her nor any familiar, sequential logic at all in this shifting world [. . .] (*HV* 106).

This is truly the picture of a grotesque world, a world in the process of dissolution and estrangement. Kayser posits that the grotesque is primarily the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe (185). Marianne's sense of disorientation increases with the whipping scene. The protagonist sights the grotesque world, "which opens the view into chaos and deprives them of foot hold" (Kayser 59).

The awareness that both the repressive rationalism of the professors and the unreason of the Barbarians are not sufficient to set right the chaotic world, makes Marianne renounce them both. The lighthouse tower of the submerged city seems to be warning her against unreason: "Thus this tower glimpsed in darkness symbolized and clarified her resolution; abhor shipwreck, said the lighthouse, go in fear of unreason" (*HV* 139). She hopes to begin a new subspecies of man, which is a rational and fearless breed.

Donally, the breeder of unreason among the Barbarians, the demonic version of the patriarch is expelled. He proves to be a charlatan. The snake he carries with him, the phallic symbol around which he tries to create a mythopoeic culture of snake worshippers turns out to be a dead snake, stuffed with sawdust. The scene of expulsion of Donally is a carnivalesque scene signifying the downfall of the mighty shaman. He is made to look ridiculous and insignificant in front of the Barbarians who fear and worship him: "They found Donally lying on his back [. . .] Jewel stood beside him [. . .] and the

entire tribe had gathered in a wide, wonder-struck and apprehensive circle round the fallen figure of the shaman [. . .] It was like a parody of the performance of justice [. . .]" (*HV* 129). Donally tries all his oratorical skill to appeal to Jewel's affection for him and when that fails he tries to exploit his superstitious sense:

> 'You'll be alone without me,' said the Doctor to Jewel. 'All alone forever and ever.' Jewel kicked him [. . .].
>
> 'See how he treats his oldest friend' he declaimed to the wild gathering [. . .].
>
> He bent down and pronounced his farewell in such loud and oracular tones everyone in the camp would hear it.
>
> 'She shall have a vile child bed culminating in a monstrous birth and ultimately she will betray you in circumstances of unbelievable horror.' Lighting should have flashed but did not [. . .] (*HV*131).

Donally abandons his prophetic manner and instead implores childishly. Nothing works. He is unceremoniously driven away on a donkey in clothes covered with mud. Everything left behind by Donally is burnt in a carnival bonfire. "All that remained of Donally was dust and ashes" (*HV* 131).

When Jewel loses his life in the fight with the soldiers, Marianne who has already begun to feel the beginning of a sense of power, realizes that it is now time for her to exert it, otherwise she will not survive: " 'They won't get

rid of me as easily as that. I shall do every single thing I say [. . .] I'll be the tiger lady and rule them with a rod of iron ' " (*HV* 150). She already realizes the power of woman's voice, when she shouts back at the brothers as they try to silence her: " 'I shall not shut up,' She shouted. At that, to her astonishment, Johnny took a few scared backward steps and made the sign against the evil aye. She felt the beginning of a sense of power"(*HV* 144). The "mute, furious, doll" of the wedding ceremony has recognized the need to make her voice heard so that the patriarchal powers will stop their advances to make her totally submissive.

The heroines in both the novels are portrayed as courageous young women who react against the system that tries to turn them into mute puppets. The grotesque quality of the worlds into which they get trapped is sighted and the malevolent forces subdued. The grotesque mode employed by Carter reinforces her "demythologising business". Though the protagonists are forced to go through terrible experiences, theirs is not going to be an altogether bleak future.

Chapter 4

Demythologising Patriarchal Constructions: *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman* and *The Passion of New Eve*

The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman and *The Passion of New Eve* cast off the atmosphere of gloom to a greater extent than the two novels dealt with in the previous chapter. These two novels may be described as transitional works as Carter experiments more with the carnival grotesque mode in these novels. The landscapes, characters and the incidents are suggestive of the grotesque quality of the works in question. Nevertheless, unlike the previous works, which are predominantly terrifying, these two works are marked by the presence of the playful grotesque in them.

The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman and *The Passion of New Eve* are both studies of different social structures. Carter who has always attempted to subvert the notion of patriarchal societies is critical of matriarchal societies too in these novels. Even as the Minister of Determination and Dr. Hoffman in *The Infernal Desire Machines* try to impose a particular set of beliefs and ideas on societies controlled by them, Mother in *The Passion of New Eve* is no different. Hoping to free women from the clutches of patriarchy, Mother is in fact imprisoning them inside a different framework of ideology. Carter uses the grotesque for satirical

purposes in the two novels in question. Both the novels are narrated from a male-point-of-view, and are written in the mode of the picaresque narrative. Carter considered picaresque narratives as effective in making imaginary societies which teach us about our own society (Haffenden 95).

In a picaresque narrative, the picaro may be a true innocent knave, a trickster, a satiric observer or a victim. The picaro in his travel meets people whose knavery is exposed by their brutal treatment of him. The picaro may exploit the follies of the men whom he meets thereby demonstrating his own knavery and their folly. Alternatively, he is inherently corruptible so that he falls pray to the manoeuvres of the scoundrels he meets. Through the encounters of the picaro, the devious aspects of the societies that he enters are exposed and analysed. The picaro progresses towards a practical knowledge of life and at the end, he learns how to survive (Paulson 58).

The protagonists of the two novels go through varied experiences as they enter different societies at various stages in their journey. Both Desiderio and Evelyn have to assume a number of different identities. The protagonists in both the novels fall in love with a fantasy. They become disillusioned when they find the real nature of the objects of their desire. The privileged position enjoyed by both Desiderio and Evelyn as males are reversed in the course of the narratives. The follies inherent in them and their societies are brought to the fore through their encounters with different social groups.

From their wanderings they get greater insights into issues relating to society, culture and gender, which help them to emerge transformed from their adventures.

The Infernal Desire Machines begins with the picture of a city under dissolution, a very prominent motif of the grotesque. The world around them becomes alienated for the city dwellers when Dr.Hoffman, the mad physicist, disrupts the orderliness of their life with his bizarre experiments. Unable to withstand the estrangement, some of them commit suicide. The words of Desiderio, the hero of the novel reflect the sentiments of the whole city: " 'I lived in the city when our adversary Dr. Hoffman filled it with mirages in order to drive us all 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 ' " (*DH* 19). Though the changes brought over the city are hallucinatory, they are real enough to disrupt the reality of the life of the people: "Trade was at an end. All the factories closed down and there was wholesale unemployment" (*DH* 20). Dr. Hoffman the physicist is waging a war against reality. His endeavour is to replace reality with illusion. The Minister of Determination alone is the only one in the whole city who is not affected by the "Hoffman effect". He sends Desiderio, his young confidential secretary on the mission of tracing the sinister Doctor and killing him so that reason may be restored and their people saved from disintegration.

The changes brought about in the city by Dr. Hoffman's "eroto energy" have been at first imperceptible and very subtle. Then one day all on a sudden, he actualizes his disruptive coup. The audience in an opera house is transformed into peacocks. With this initial gambit, Dr. Hoffman begins his war against reason in earnest. Hoffman's experiments with reality are based on the principle that anything imagined can also exist. The city begins to be populated with images from the wildest possible dreams. The narrative captures the city's mood at this outrage:

> We were taken entirely by surprise and chaos supervened immediately. Hallucination flowed with magical speed in every brain. A kind of orgiastic panic seized the city. Those bluff, complaisant avenues in metamorphoses as a magic forest. [. . .] This phantasmagoric redefinition of a city was constantly fluctuating for it was now the kingdom of the instantaneous. Hardly anything remained the same for more than one second and the city was no longer the conscious production of humanity; it has become the arbitrary realm of dream (*DH* 17-18).

According to Kayser :

> The grotesque reveals that, constantly and without any provocation, we all are the targets of malicious powers. Especially our everyday world, the small, apparently familiar

> things in constant use, turn out to be strange, evil, and possessed by hostile demons who constantly swoop down on us (111).

This seems perfectly true of the city which Hoffman is trying to deconstruct. We are reminded of the fact that the seemingly peaceful façade of our life can be disrupted anytime by the intervention of the hostile forces lurking in the world. Desiderio's quest takes him through bizarre experiences and strange communities. Almost all the essential ingredients of the modern grotesque put forth by Kayser which are, the confusion, the fantastic quality, the alienation of the world and the terror inspired by the disintegration of the world are seen here (52). The presence of these elements constrains the reader to regard with suspicion the promises of technological advancement.

Desiderio, though a secret agent working to stop the doctor's advances, ends up being controlled by the doctor himself. He is led through a whole series of subcultures by the manipulation of Dr. Hoffman. From the moment that he starts from the city as a secret agent with the mission of destroying the Doctor, Desiderio comes under his control. Through his shape-changing daughter Albertina, the Doctor orchestrates the movements and actions of Desiderio. Desiderio falls madly in love with Albertina and is ready to follow her to the ends of the world. From the travelling circus he is taken to the river people, then to a brothel peopled with automata, to a society of centaurs and finally to the Gothic castle of the Doctor himself. In the laboratories inside the castle, Dr. Hoffman produces eroto energy from the secretions of caged

lovers with the help of huge generators. It is with this energy that the Doctor projects the visions of the unreal thereby creating chaos in the country. Later, the realization that Albertina is only her father's agent brings Desiderio back to his senses. He destroys both the Doctor and Albertina.

Desiderio's adventure takes him through the strangest experiences and brings him into contact with highly grotesque creatures like the freaks in the travelling show, the grotesque count, the centaurs and the hideous creatures at the House of Anonymity. The mysterious figure of Albertina distances Desiderio from the world. She appears to him in his dream sometimes as a girl with transparent flesh through which shows her heart, which is a knot of flames and at other times as a black ugly but marvellous swan with a gold collar on which is written Albertina.

Desiderio takes long to realize that the Doctor manipulates everything through the samples that the peepshow proprietor carries. The show, which is called the "Seven Wonders of the World in Three Life like Dimensions", is in itself, grotesque. The sinister looking castle in the beautiful semi-tropical forest, the wax figure of the headless body of a mutilated woman and the wax figures of the pair of lovers, all look life-like. They are the manifestations of the workings of a perverse mind. The peepshow proprietor who now carries Hoffman's set of samples claims that he once taught Hoffman physics at the University. The set of samples is the medium through which Hoffman

negates the reality of the world. The peepshow proprietor explains to Desiderio how they work:

> 'They are symbolic constituents of representation of basic constituents of the universe. If they are properly arranged, all the possible situations in the world and every possible mutation of those situations can be represented [. . .] . The symbols serve as patterns or templates from which physical objects and real events may be evolved by the process he calls "effective evolving". I go about the world like Santa with a sack and nobody knows it is filled up with changes' (*DH* 96).

Hoffman represents the capitalist control of desire through media. Hoffman's technologically transmitted images are equivalent to the ones projected by the mass media. The symbols he uses for evolving real events and objects offer endless options which in effect are as good as having no choice, a condition which eventually leads to a state of surfeit and boredom. (Jordan, *Enthralment* 32).

The images with which the media inundate human lives and how they lure and ensnare man in capitalist definitions of life, are revealed by means of the intervention of the grotesque. Sometimes sinister and sometimes marvellous images are sent from the doctor's machines to invade and disrupt the familiar world whereby the world is estranged and terror is inspired by the unfathomable. The apparently harmonious world represented by the Minister

of Determination is estranged under the impact of the dreadful forces represented by that of Dr. Hoffman, which break up and destroy its unity.

The readers too are shaken by the impact of the grotesque world exposed before them:

> The grotesque world is – and is not – our own world. The ambiguous way in which we are affected by it results from our awareness that the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of the abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence (Kayser 37).

By means of the grotesque portrayal of the Doctor's sinister machinations, Angela Carter warns us to be alive to the pitfalls and dangers involved in allowing our hopes and desires to be fashioned and controlled by media technology. Aidan Day observes that the world of desire let loose by the Doctor is a "true postmodern nightmare." Behind his efforts to liberate desire is his monomaniacal drive to control and direct fantasy (89).

Carter's commitment to feminism is revealed throughout the novel. In order to expose the cruelties perpetrated by men on women she exploits the grotesque mode of representation. The novel exposes how women are fashioned out of the fantasies of men making them just the projections of their desires with no will and voice of their own. Even in the matriarchal societies of barbarians and tribals they do not enjoy any privileged position. The

societies and counter cultures which Desiderio encounters during his quest differ vastly from each other in terms of cultural norms and social codes. However, they are identical in their treatment of women. Women are invariably marginalized, objectified and dehumanized in all these communities.

Desiderio is totally apathetic towards the atrocities perpetrated by the men on the women of these communities. Sally Robinson observes that Desiderio's inability to sympathize with these women arises from the fact that they are in fact projections of his own desire, his imaginings of what women are: "They are 'erotic toys', mutilated bodies, phallic mothers, castrating Amazons, who are all punished for the crime of being female". The text demonstrates how women are "produced" and not represented in a narrative of male subjectivity (104-05).

The womenfolk of the river people are outlandish and grotesque in their appearance and manners: "All the women moved in this same stereotyped way, like benign automata, so what with that and their musical box speech; it was quite possible to feel they were not fully human" (*DH* 73). The women also wear a great deal of paint on their faces masking their features, and thus concealing their identity as individuals.

The female figures that people the Sadeian brothel the "House of Anonymity" disgust Desiderio because they do not conform to his idea of

femaleness. He finds that they are no longer the pleasure giving, erotic toys of his desire but creatures grotesquely transfigured by the perverted desire of the Count. Desiderio remarks:

> This ideational femaleness took amazingly different shapes though its nature was not that of woman; when I examined them more closely, I saw that none of them were any longer, or might never have been, women. All, without exception, passed beyond or did not enter the realm of simple humanity. They were sinister, abominable, inverted mutations, part clockwork, part vegetable and part brute (*DH* 132).

The fact that the oppression of women is not an uncommon feature even among savage tribes is proved through the lives of women along the African coast. The females are all circumscribed and are "entirely cold and respond only to cruelty and abuse" (*DH* 161). The wives of the tribal chieftain bear the marks of physical mutilation:

> Many bore the bleeding marks of gigantic bites in their breast and buttocks. Some had a nipple missing, most were minus one or several toes and fingers. One girl had a ruby set in the socket in place of a lost eyeball and some wore false teeth carved in strange shapes out of the tusks of elephants. Yet all had been beautiful and their various disfigurements lent them an exquisite pathos (*DH* 158).

In the country of the centaurs too women are treated as though their calling is suffering: "The women folk are tattooed all over, even their faces, in order to cause them more suffering, for they believed women were born only to suffer" (*DH* 172). The ritualistic tattooing of their body is not just masochistic, but misogynistic. Desiderio is not appalled by the fact that the centaurs keep their women in low esteem. The women are made to toil very hard while the men lead a life of leisure. As a representative of a patriarchal set-up, oppression of women is part of his culture.

The fact that Hoffman works against a prevalent system does in no way differentiate it from the existing system in its treatment of women. Rather its immense potential to substantiate a world of fantasy perpetrates new and unimaginable crimes against women. The male figures in the text retain power over the female and put this power into play in their increased objectification of women. The power given to them by Hoffman's liberation of desire allows men to indulge in their pervert desires (Robinson 107-08).

Initially Desiderio's desire for a home and a loving family keeps him with the river people as Kiku. He forgets his mission and wishes to remain with them: "If I murdered Desiderio and became Kiku for ever, I need fear nothing in my life ever, any more. I need not fear loneliness or boredom or lack of love. My life, would flow like the river on which I lived" (*DH* 80). Being the son of a prostitute, Desiderio has never enjoyed the security of

family life. His desire for a home and family materializes in the idyllic life of the river people. The advantage he has over the river people is his learning which earns him their love and respect. But in a strange turn of events the same proves to be perilous. The river people lead a life steeped in myth and rituals. Anything that they cannot learn or understand is magic to them. Desiderio, highly impressed by the life style and rituals of the river people at first misses the signification of the overwhelming love and care they show for a total stranger like him. The story of the snake, the Fire-Bringer exposes the nefarious side of the community to him. The drunken narrator tells him how they killed the snake which knew the art of making fire, and ate it in order to acquire knowledge about "fire making". Desiderio is shaken by the implication of the story:

> I shook with terror and despair. I remembered a story I had read once in an old book about some tribe of Central Asia who made a point of killing and eating in their own country any stranger indiscreet enough to commit a miracle or show any particular sign of sanctity, for thus they imbibe his magic virtue (*DH* 91).

The sudden turn of events points to the grotesqueness of the whole affair. The beautiful idyll of the river people acquires a sinister and dangerous undertone for Desiderio. As in a jigsaw puzzle, the reason for all their curious behaviour falls in to place:

> All at once I filled in the suspicious gaps my lovely sentimentality has refused to acknowledge. Nao-kurai's air of furtive triumph after I had accepted his daughter; Mama's excessive cordiality; their suspicious eagerness to adopt me when they knew, I was really nothing but a feared, mysterious dweller upon the shore all time, [. . .] yet who owned the most precious, most arcane knowledge they could only gain for themselves by desperate measures. And I knew as well as if Nao-Kurai had sung it out that they proposed to kill me and eat me, like Snake, the Fire-Bringer, in the fable, so that they would all learn how to read and write after a common feast where I would feature as the main dish on the menu at my own wedding breakfast. I was torn between mirth and horror (*DH* 91).

Desiderio's mixed response to the event itself points to the grotesque quality of the incident. Hitherto familiar and safe surroundings take on an ominous significance, alienating Desiderio from it. The sudden estrangement fills him with a feeling of the ridiculous and the horrifying. Carter subverts the idea of social idylls and the idealized portrayal of pastoral life, both through the river people and the centaurs.

The centaurs are created in the fashion of Swift's Huoyhnhnms. The land of the centaurs is wonderful and dangerous at the same time. The region is spread with strange trees and plants. There are trees with poisonous stings,

with scaly trunks and which possess a fish like odour. There are cacti that give forth sweet milk and plants that lay eggs and cluck like hens. Here flora and fauna seems to have interchanged their functions. The centaurs' land and their life style are an emanation of Desiderio's vision of an ideal world. Under the Hoffman effect Desiderio's imagination helps generate the primitive Utopian pastoral of his dreams. He becomes aware of his role in generating this world only when the male centaurs rape Albertina:

> At the back of my mind flickered a teasing image, that of a young girl trampled by horses. I could not remember when or where I had seen it, such a horrible thing; but it was the most graphic and haunting of memories and a voice in my mind, the cracked, hoarse, drunken voice of the dead peep-show proprietor, told me that I was somehow, all unknowing, the instigator of this horror. My pain and agitation increased beyond all measure (*DH* 180).

The rustic simplicity of the centaurs, their primitive mode of cultivation and the tranquility of their life fascinate him so much that he begins to despise the world of human beings. In the new surroundings, Albertina too takes the shape of his desire and looks more attractive than ever to him: "She would come home in the golden evening, wreathed with corn like a pagan deity in a pastoral" (*DH* 187).

Desiderio, rapt in the heavenly life of the centaurs, fails to see the element of violence underlying their seemingly tranquil life. However, Desiderio's sense of complacency is shaken when he learns that the centaurs intend to practice their violent ritual rites on Albertina and himself. The hitherto tranquil, admirable world of the centaurs becomes increasingly absurd and fantastically estranged for Desiderio, giving rise to "a feeling of helplessness and disparagement" (Kayser 78). The centaurs come to know from their priest that the two strange creatures are sent by the Sacred Stallion to show his flock the fearful shapes they may come to if they do not follow his dogmas. As a gesture of atonement, they decide to nail Desiderio and Albertina with iron shoes, tattoo them all over and give them to the spirits. Desiderio realizes that the spirits are wild horses who will trample them to death. At the same time as Desiderio's desires begin to take the shape of nightmares, the Doctor's aerial patrol saves them. The grotesque twist given to the episode enables Carter to subvert the notion of the pastoral idyll and to lay stress on the need to put a rational restraint over one's desires. That our secret longings and strong desires will eventually materialize in some shape is a proven fact according to Jung. In his analysis of dreams he has given the examples of those who disregarded the warnings of their dreams and met with unpleasant experiences. What some of the dreams had told Jung was that the dreamer had a secret longing for such an adventure (35).

Just as Desiderio's longing for an Utopian pastoral wills the creation of the centaurs, it is the Count's desire for self-annihilation that brings into existence, the cannibal chief. The portrayal of the grotesque Count demonstrates how with the unleashing of the imagination and the freeing of desire from reason, evil and violence take charge of the human mind. The Count is the incarnation of perversity and cruelty. His account of himself reveals him as a megalomaniac and a libertine constantly in search of new forms of sadistic pleasure. He is both a sinister and a comic figure. The Count is an iconoclast of the highest degree. He goes against every accepted standard of behaviour. The terrifying as well as the carnivalistic aspects of the grotesque may be seen in his nature and actions. For example, when the Count stops to eat at an abandoned Church, the first thing he does is to urinate over the altar.

His perverted mind seems to imbibe energy from witnessing catastrophe. When he learns that Desiderio happens to get caught in a landslide but comes out unharmed, the Count expresses his regret at having missed the sight: " 'How I should have liked to have seen it! And gloried in the Wagnerian clamour of it all [. . .] the shrieks, the crash of rending stone. And little children dashed to smithereens by bounding boulders! What a spectacle! ' " (*DH* 122). Count is a voracious eater too. Desiderio comments on his eating habits thus: "Out of the basket came a feast [. . .] . The Count ate very heartily; indeed, he ate with a blind voracity that demolished the

spread so speedily the valet and I were hard put to it to seize enough to satisfy ourselves, although there was so much" (*DH* 125).

The Count's desecration of the place of worship by drenching the altar in urine, his gluttony and his sexual orgies make him a carnival-grotesque figure. Drenching in urine is the most popular form of degradation of the carnival. Debasement of all that is sacred and exalted is the fundamental artistic principle of grotesque realism (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 370). A glutton is the most fertile of the carnival grotesque images. In the act of eating, the body grows at the expense of the world. By devouring it the glutton makes the world a part of himself. It signifies man's triumph over the world (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 281).

The diabolic nature of the count is revealed during his visit to the Sadeian Brothel, the "House of Anonymity". The place excites him to a frenzy as he can perpetrate more hideous cruelties on flesh which is where he tries out his artistic excellence: " 'I have devoted my life to the humiliation and exaltation of the flesh. I am an artist; my material is the flesh; my medium is destruction; and my inspiration is nature' " (*DH* 126). True to his words, the striped girl whom he chooses as his partner for the night is left a mutilated, bleeding mass of flesh at the end of his brutal sexual orgies.

The grotesque depiction of the House of Anonymity, the inmates and the sexual orgies of the Count subvert traditional social codes. Carter opens a

highly disturbing world of gross perversities and abominable deformities before the readers. On entering the brothel, the Count and Desiderio are confronted by monkeys that have been turned into living candelabra and live chairs and tables, which are actually transformed animals. The Count and Desiderio are required to wear the special garb of the brothel, which exposes their genitals but covers their faces. From the furniture to the caged girls, the brothel is a world of grotesquerie. It offers the readers none of the voyeuristic pleasures which is generally got from a brothel scene. In contrast it incites the ludicrous and the horrifying, pointing to its grotesque quality. None of the girls in the brothel is fully human:

> They were sinister, abominable, inverted mutations, part clockwork, part vegetable and part brute.
>
> Their hides were streaked, blotched and marbled and some trembled on the point of reverting completely to the beast .[. . .] But, if some were antlered like stag, others had the branches of trees sprouting out of their bland forehead [. . .] . All the figures presented a dream-like fusion of diverse states of being, blind, speechless beings from a nocturnal forest where trees had eyes and dragons rolled about on wheels (*DH* 132-33).

The grotesque depiction of the house of pleasure exposes lust in all its hideousness and demonstrates how women are trapped in a male imaginary construct. The libertine unleashes his desire and imagination to concretize the

most perverted of his fantasies. The whole scene points to the danger of total anarchy that an uncontrolled liberation of the imagination can lead to. Here Carter's effort is also to parody pornography, which is meant for titillation and intended to give voyeuristic pleasure. Pornography never exposes the erotic violence committed by men upon women. Carter expresses her emotions regarding this very strongly in her study about Sade as a pornographer: "It is a great shame we can forbid these bleedings in art but not in life, for the beatings, the rapes and the woundings takes place in a privacy beyond the reach of official censorship" (*SW* 23). In her opinion, Sade is a moral pornographer, as he never creates an artificial paradise of gratified sexuality. She feels that in this sense Sade writes pornography in the service of women.

The Count tries to escape in a ship to Europe when pursued by his double, the black pimp. Desiderio too is forced to follow him. In the ship episode, the material bodily principle, the most important feature of grotesque realism plays a predominant role. The rudiments of these elements seen in the previous novels gain momentum in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. Even the diabolical Count transforms to a comical figure in the ship episode. Their ship is captured by pirates who kill all the sailors. For twelve days after they seize the ship the pirates remain silent, grave, and diligently practice with their swords. Their day begins with prayers and a strange ritual:

> Every morning, after prayers, the pirate leader removed the black loincloth which was his only garb and bent over on the

> poop in front of the altar while each of his men filed past him in devout silence, kissed his exposed arse and emitted a sharp bark of adulation [. . .] .Their fidelity to their lord was so great one could have thought each pirate was only an aspect of the leader, so that the many was one.[. . .] After this display or refreshment of fidelity, they practised with their swords (*DH* 150).

On the twelfth night, which happens to be a full moon day, they participate in a ritual drinking. After two rounds of drinks, all their pent-up passions are released in a drunken debauchery. They are miraculously transformed from grave, dutiful swordsmen to actors in a farce:

> [. . .] after a third round, they stripped off their loincloths and, one and all, embarked on a farting contest. They made the radiant welkin ring with a battery of broken wind. Exposing to the moon the twin hemispheres of their lemon-coloured hinder cheeks, each banged away as loudly as he was able, amid a great deal of unharmonious laughter, and soon they began to set light to the gascs they expelled with matches, so a blue flame hovered briefly above every backside (*DH* 153).

The function of the material bodily principle is to liberate objects from the snares of false seriousness, from illusions and sublimation inspired by fear. It frees the pirates from fear and subservience, allowing them to give a free play

to their pent-up passions. It also questions the nature of servile fidelity shown by subordinates to their superiors.

The Count encounters his double, the black pimp, once again in the person of the African tribal chieftain. The Count who in the manner of Don Quixote controls the sea and commands the storm to take them safe to land gets reduced to a quaking skeleton when he sees the cannibals. Here too Carter shatters the illusion of the social idyll through the example of the African people. The tribal chief's words are enough to expose the underlying violence in their social system:

> The customs of my country are as barbarous as the propriety with which they are executed. For example, not one of those delightful children who seem, each one, to have stepped straight off the pen of Jean-Jacques Rousseau but has not, since he put forth his milk teeth, dined daily off a grilled rump, or roasted shoulder, a stew, a fricassee or else a hash of human meat (*DH* 159).

The tribal chieftain admits that he is a ruthless ruler. He maintains his rule by inducing superstitious fears in the minds of his subjects. Even the smallest of rebellious thoughts arising within the hearts of his subjects is found out through telepathy. The incipient rebels and the entire family are then boiled alive. His words, " 'I am happy only in that I am a monster,' " best explains him (*DH* 161).

The chieftain's army made up of women is equally ruthless. These women earn their position by eating alive, their first-born child. The women folk of the community generally lack any feelings. Every girl child has her clitoris brutally excised so that she is absolutely devoid of any feeling. In the words of the tribal chief, their women folk "are entirely cold and respond only to cruelty and abuse" (*DH* 161). When the chief arrives, sitting on his chariot of human bones, his concubines are required to place their hands such that a track is improvised, over which the chariot runs crushing their hands. The tribal chieftain is a manifestation of the Count's desire to be avenged by the black pimp for his lover's murder. Desiderio realizes this only when the Count come face to face with the chieftain:

> 'You are my only destination,' replied the Count. 'You altered my compass so that it would point only to you, my hypocritical shadow, my double, my brother.' Then I saw this dreadful chieftain was indeed the black pimp who was now about to avenge his lover's murder, for such was the Count's desire he should be and do so (*DH* 159).

In a highly grotesque incident, which is pathetic and comic at the same time, the black pimp takes revenge on the Count. The horror element is softened by a touch of the comic. The Count is boiled alive in a huge cauldron to which the chef adds salt and pepper. The element of horror is counterbalanced by the humorous depiction of the scene:

> The chef flung a string of onions into the pot, thoughtfully stirred in more salt, stirred and sipped the stock from his ladle. He nodded. Then lady soldiers marched the Count between them to the fire, took firm hold each one of an elbow, lifted him bodily and plunged him feet first into the water, so that his head stuck over the rim. But his face did not change expression as it began to grow rosy. [. . .] And then, when he was red as a lobster, he began to laugh with joy-pure joy (*DH* 163).

It is only when the cannibals prepare to roast him and the Count's valet, that Desiderio realizes that the Count's valet is none other than Albertina. Her vision triggers him into action and snatching the musket from one of the soldiers, Desiderio shoots the chieftain. The chieftain's fall is also presented in the same comic vein as that of the Count's:

> The antique bullet, larger than a grape, pierced the painted eye in the centre of his forehead. A great spurt of blood sprang out as from an unstoppered tap in such a great arc that it drenched us. He must have died instantaneously but some spasm of muscle jerked him to his feet.[. . .] Somehow his uncoordinated shuddering freed the wheels of his trolley and [. . .] it began to move [. . .] still the corpse stayed upright [. . .] it started on a headlong career, crushing wives and [. . .] those of his tribe who [. . .] flung themselves under the wheels of its chariot with

> maenad shrieks. Bouncing over a path of flesh, bearing a tottering tower, the car's mad career took it to the bank of the river and there it plunged into a foaming torrent that carried it to the edge of the waterfall within seconds (*DH* 164).

The end of the Count and the fall of the cannibal chief demonstrate how black humour intensifies the horror in the grotesque. Commenting on "grotesque black humour", Mathew Winston observes that death dominates in this kind of humour. But it occurs in a ridiculous manner and is never dignified. The grotesque black humour tries to create a kind of uncertainty in the reader, arousing laughter one moment and horror next (283-84).

The grotesque episodes in the African coast subvert the idea of the noble savage and of a social idyll under a benevolent ruler. They also tell us that oppression of women is not just a civilized perversion. The barbarians who lead a life uncorrupted by civilization too are equally bad in treating their women. The society of the centaurs and the cannibals demonstrate that even a well-knit society may be terrorised into submission by those who rule it. Oppression, violence and restrictions are the elements underlying their seemingly contented community.

During his stay with the fairground people, Desiderio happens to meet and know several grotesque figures. The travelling circus in itself is a carnival-grotesque motif. When he joins the peep show as the proprietor's

nephew, Desiderio too becomes a part of the travelling show through the connivance of the Doctor himself. Most of the members of the sideshows are grotesques with their distorted features and capacity for suffering. The atmosphere is gloomy and infernal around these people. It exposes an altogether different side of the life of those who are in the entertaining business. The freaks live in a world of their own, coming to terms with their deformity: "They were not in the least aware how extraordinary they were because they made their living out of the grotesque. Their bread was deformity. Their biographies, however tragic or bizarre, were all alike in singularity [. . .]" (*DH* 99).

The Alligator man, the bearded lady and the sharp-shooter become Desiderio's friends. Madame La Barbe who exhibits her beard in order to make a living is a perfect lady otherwise: "It was not her beard that made her unique; it was the fact that, never, in all her life, had she known a single moment's happiness" (*DH* 106). Mamie Buckskin, the sharp shooter, is a paradox: "A fully phallic female with the bosom of a nursing mother and a gun, death-dealing erectile tissue, perpetually, at her thigh [. . .] Mamie too, was a tragic woman" (*DH* 109). The third of Desiderio's friends, the Alligator Man, spends most of the time under water in a glass tank. He is covered all over with scales. The personal history of these freaks exposes Desiderio to the tragic side of the life of those who surprise, enchant and amuse an audience: "I see them all haloed in the dark after light of

accomplished tragedy, moving with the inexorability of the doomed towards a violent death" (*DH* 109).

Desiderio who gets sidetracked by Albertina in his mission to search out and kill the doctor, follows her to the Doctor's castle. It is not as an enemy but as a friend that he enters the Doctor's eccentric world. The Doctor produces eroto-energy from the secretions of copulating pairs of young men and women who are put inside cages and injected with hormones. The sight of the caged lovers is something which Desiderio is not prepared for. The kind of fatality involved in their action depresses him. He becomes aware of the dangers involved in unleashing the desires of a mad scientist like Hoffman. Hoffman's aim is to inherit the whole world and make it work according to his whims and fancies. He seeks to cage and manipulate the energies of desire, not really to liberate them. Hoffman, possessed by the "It", lets loose the abysmal forces and almost succeeds in transforming the world into a phantasmagoria of fragmented images. Nevertheless, Desiderio recovers from his infatuation in time to apprehend the vile intention of the Doctor. The abysmal force that lurks waiting to engulf Desiderio's world is finally detected. The sight of an unoccupied cage sends tremors through Desiderio. Albertina acts only as a decoy to lure him towards the abysmal plans of the Doctor. He understands that the empty cage is meant for him and Albertina:

> Our long-delayed but so greatly longed for conjunction would spurt such a charge of energy our infinity would fill the world and, in this experiential void, the Doctor would descend on the city and his liberation would begin. [. . .] I had seen nothing in the peep-show to warn me of the grotesque denouement of my great passion (*DH* 215-16).

Desiderio who comes to his senses in time kills the Doctor and Albertina to save humanity from hitherto unknown violence and perversion. Desiderio's quest comes to an end, his mission is fulfilled and he returns to the city, a hero.

Through this novel, Carter shatters the idea of complete and ultimate liberation through technological development. The novel suggests that in the hope of liberation we only become slaves to the ideas of consumer capitalism propagated through media projected images. It also warns that the erratic objectification of desires will lead to anarchy. Carter underscores the need to put a rational restraint over desires. Otherwise mankind will only succeed in creating a world of chaos with its efforts to make the wildest dreams materialize.

Obversely Carter reminds the reader of the dangers of excessive rationalism also. Even as he sets out to destroy the principle of unreason as represented by Hoffman, Desiderio is critical of the inhuman rationalism

displayed by the Minister. He believes that a human being needs to possess some degree of imagination. When the Doctor's Desire Machines orchestrate the people into indulging in mindless evil, the Minister's Determination Police who deal sternly with the city dwellers and look as if they are "recruited wholesale from a Jewish nightmare" demonstrate another kind of evil (*DH*22). While Carter criticizes unreason, she does not altogether rule out the function of desires and dreams in human life.

The Passion of New Eve is a grimly dystopian novel which projects the vision of "a future America that has disintegrated into an anarchic landscape of warring private armies and desert marauders" (McHale 67). The novel states some very explicit things about the cultural production of femininity and it also presents a careful and elaborate discussion of femininity as a commodity. *The Passion* explores in detail the question of gender identity as epitomized in Simone de Beauvoir's famous aphorism: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (295).

In exploring the source of difference between women and men, Ruth Sherry identifies them as being biological and cultural. Biology differentiates humankind into male and female sexes. In addition to this difference cultures too tend to divide many human characteristics into two groups and label some as masculine, which they attribute to the male, and some as feminine that are

considered proper for a female. This opposition based on culture rather than biology is referred to as gender (18).

Fundamental to *The Passion* is the feminist concept of the distinction between biological sex and culturally constructed gender. The events in the novel are a vehicle that enables Carter to foreground this distinction. Carter achieves this end by means of the portrayal of the transformations of Evelyn, Leilah, and Tristessa. Apart from giving an amusing account of the methods by which femininity can be constructed, Carter also explores the question whether femininity resides in biology or in gender attributes (Palmer *Women's Fiction* 18-19).

Evelyn, the protagonist of the novel, begins his adventures in a disordered, violent America. At the centre of the story is the Hollywood screen idol Tristessa. Tristessa, the epitome of femininity, happens to be a man in drag, trying to preserve the illusion that he is a woman. Tristessa is a transvestite whereas Evelyn becomes Eve, a trans-sexual. The question of whether gender is a natural given or a constructed thing is being explored through these characters.

As in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman,* the beginning of the novel itself gives the picture of a city under dissolution which as already seen is an important grotesque motif. Evelyn, the young man from London

lands in New York to see the city of his imagination-a city shaped by the Hollywood fantasies:

> I imagined a clean, hard, bright city where towers reared to the sky in a paradigm of technological aspiration and all would be peopled by [. . .] the shadowless inhabitants of a finite and succinct city where the ghosts who haunt the cities of Europe could have found no cobweb corners to roost in. But in New York I found, instead of hard edges and clean colours, a lurid, Gothic darkness that closed over my head entirely and became my world (*PNE* 10).

The New York of realities disappoints him. The city is disgustingly dirty and fearfully restless. Society is divided into various sects and groups who try to disrupt life through guerilla warfare. Women's movements, militant black movements, groups of proselytizers, all together turn the city into a land of chaos. As Baroslav, the Czech soldier who becomes Evelyn's friend puts it: " 'Chaos [. . .] embraces all opposing forms in a state of undifferentiated dissolution' " (*PNE* 14).

Evelyn falls an easy prey to the charms of a young American black woman called Leilah. Leilah who is at first a predator later turns victim. Their relationship ends with a visit to a local abortionist. Evelyn runs away to the desert to save himself from the wrath of the blacks. The manner in which Leilah transforms herself into an object of male gaze conveys a lot about the

treatment of femininity as commodity. Leilah earns her living as a naked model, a naked dancer and takes part in simulated sex shows. She spends hours before her mirror to make herself look sexually appealing and therefore saleable:

> She did not grow beautiful by a simple process of becoming. Her beauty was an accession. She arrived at it by a conscious effort. [. . .] Leilah invoked this formal other with a gravity and ritual that recalled witchcraft; she brought into being a Leilah who lived only in the not-world of the mirror and then became her own reflection (*PNE* 28).

Thus she abandons herself to the mirror, functioning as the object of the exotic dreams of men who come to watch her perform. Through this ritual incarnation, "she systematically carnalised herself and became dressed meat" (*PNE* 31). Leilah ceases to be an individual human being with an identity of her own and takes up the role of a grotesquely arrayed erotic object. The grotesque nature of what Leilah has converted herself into escapes Evelyn's attention since she is now a reflection of the image of woman as sexual object already imprinted in his mind. The words describing her actions as she makes herself up cross the sphere of the inhuman: "with the manual dexterity of an assembler of precision instruments" (*PNE* 29), she glues, greases and sprays to convert her body to a grotesque assemblage of colours, paints, dusts and pieces of cloth. Once this transformation is achieved she is no longer her

original self: "everyday Leilah disappeared immediately" (*PNE* 28). The intervention of grotesque satire in the description of Leilah's transformation into an object of male gaze drives home the true nature of women in society. As de Beauvoir observes:

> [. . .] woman sees herself and makes her choices not in accordance with her true nature in itself, but as man defines her. So we must first go on to describe woman such as men have fancied her in their dreams, for what-in-man's-eyes-she-seems-to-be is one of the necessary factors in her real situation (169).

Leilah's transformation into an erotic object exposes how women are dehumanized and transformed into a "thing", an object of sexual gratification for the male. Her masquerade as "dressed meat" suggests how femininity is converted into a commodity to be purchased at the marketplace.

When Evelyn has had enough of her he abandons Leilah "to the dying city" and escapes. Linden Peach observes that Evelyn is "an arch-misogynist; a vicious parody of the male, objectifying gaze" (118). The relationship between Evelyn and Leilah is marked by violence. She is forced into subordination through violent means. He lives out of the money she gets by selling the charms of her femininity. Once she becomes pregnant, his desire for her vanishes altogether. When none of her voodoo threats force him into marriage, Leilah becomes passive. She becomes the true picture of the image of woman in his mind: "She was a perfect woman; like the moon, she only

gave reflected light" (*PNE* 34). Carter seems to be saying that total passivity is what the patriarchal society demands of a woman.

Eve who runs away from Leilah least suspects that a grotesque world lies in wait for him. His experiences in the matriarchal world of the Mother take him through the same kind of pain and humiliation that Leilah has undergone at his hands. By going through such a terrible experience he learns what it is to be a woman. Evelyn is captured and taken to the Mother. She calls herself the "great Parricide" and the "Castratrix of the Phallocentric Universe" (*PNE* 67). The emblem of a broken phallus which greets him right at the entrance, sends a shiver through Evelyn. All the pain and violence he has perpetrated on women as a male is meted out to him from the moment he is captured by the women soldiers of Beulah; the Mother's all female world. Technology and mythology meet in Beulah. Evelyn is unceremoniously dragged into this world by his captress: " She gave me no chance to get back on my feet; she dragged me along on my face so I arrived unceremoniously, in the woman's town and when fathoms deep, I came to rest at last, I was blubbering in the sand, aware of nothing but my own abasement" (*PNE* 48). The masculine gender, which is considered superior, is degraded here when Evelyn is brutally dragged by women into a world of their own. Once he reaches the underground world of the Mother, a metaphysical dread grips him. Evelyn is estranged from the world around him and the alienated world begins to be extremely terrifying:

> Now I felt I had been precipitated unceremoniously into the very heart of an alien cosmogony. Beneath the earth [. . .] I felt upon me the whole heaviness of that entire continent with its cities and its coinage, its mines, its foundries, its wars and its mythologies imposing itself in all its immensity, like the nightmare, upon my breast. I gasped, I choked. My fear took on a new quality; not only fear for my own safety, now, but dread of the immensity of the world about me (*PNE* 52).

The abysmal quality, the insecurity and the terror inspired by that alienated world around him all point to its grotesque quality. Here, through the use of the grotesque, the fearful nature of the Matriarchal world is revealed. It is a space as gruesome and terrifying as the oppressive patriarchal space. The sublime mottos and ideals of the community of women clash with the ridiculously distorted and monstrously horrible grotesque figure of the Mother:

> I was appalled by the spectacle of the goddess. She was a sacred monster. [. . .] She was fully clothed in obscene nakedness; she was breasted like a sow – she possessed two tiers of nipples [. . .]. Her ponderous feet were heavy enough to serve as illustrations of gravity, her hands, the shape of giant fig leaves, lay at rest on the bolsters of her knees. [. . .] Her voice

> was like, an orchestra composed entirely of cellos, sonority made speech (*PNE* 59-60).

The rape scene that follows is transformed into a piece of black comedy when even in the midst of his ordeal Evelyn makes funny discoveries about the Mother: "Her nipples leaped about like bobbles on the fringe of an old fashioned red plush curtain"(*PNE* 64). When Evelyn is placed on the Mother's knees he feels that it is like being seated at the console of a gigantic cinema organ (*PNE* 65). Some aspects of the carnival grotesque are seen here, both in the description of the grotesque body of the Mother and the subsequent rape scene. The elements of the bodily lower stratum are exaggerated to an excess here. Mother, with her two tiers of breasts, belly "rich as thousand harvests" and vagina like "the crater of a volcano" is a typically carnival figure. The Mother disrupts the notion of the feminine in patriarchal conception. Evelyn, a representative of the patriarchal world is degraded and reduced to the condition of a trembling, cowering animal:

> I lose my nerve in the hubbub, I whinny, mew, scrabble weakly at the sanded floor trying to burrow my way out. [. . .] Sophia seized my trembling body as I cowered there and dragged it to the great ululating being who now toppled from her chair to fall on her back on the floor, waving her legs in the air as fast as her girth permitted her (*PNE* 64).

The "degradation of the high", which is the essential principle of "grotesque realism" comes into play when Evelyn is raped by the black goddess. Here Evelyn and through him the superior male sex is humiliated, ridiculed and miserably subjugated when he is raped by a woman.

In the effort by the women to sustain their female Utopia at Beulah, Evelyn is chosen to be the "parthenogenesis archetype" (*PNE* 68). He is to be castrated, transformed into a complete woman and then impregnated with his own sperm. The terror castration holds for man is revealed through Evelyn's reaction when the girl gets him ready for the operation. He breaks down and begs her to allow him to escape. Though he loves women, it terrifies him to lose his masculinity and become a woman. He prefers to face the dangers of the desert than to be a woman. But he is destined to be the one to give birth to the "Messiah of the Antithesis" (*PNE* 67).

Further degradation of the male principle and triumph over phallocentricity suggest itself in the scene that depicts Evelyn's operation. The knife in Mother's hand becomes a painful reminder of his virility to Evelyn: "The monstrous being brandished an obsidian knife as black as she was. [. . .] Oh, the dreadful symbolism of that knife! To be castrated with a phallic symbol!" (*PNE* 70). Evelyn must undergo more punishment for making a weapon of his instrument of pleasure. He is forced to watch his

genital apparatus being sliced off before he loses his consciousness completely:

> Raising her knife, she brought it down. She cut off all my genital appendages with a single blow, caught them in her other hand and tossed them to Sophia, who slipped them into the pocket of her shorts. So she excised everything I had been and left me, instead, with a wound that would, in future, bleed once a month, at the bidding of the moon (*PNE* 71).

The phallic symbol is debased when it is treated trivially and with scorn. The cultural importance assigned to the phallus is debunked through the gesture of tossing it from the hands of one woman to the other as if it is a thing of no significance. Along with his sex, the second syllable too is sliced off from Evelyn's name to transform him to "Eve" the woman.

Evelyn who once dreaded the prospect of being a woman, Narcissus like, falls strangely in love with his/her new form as Eve turns out to be "the object of all the unfocused desires that had ever existed in Evelyn's mind" (*PNE* 75). When Mother converts Evelyn to a Play Boy centre fold, unconsciously she recreates the masculine idea of the female. The New Eve whom she creates to disrupt the phallocentric universe ironically turns out to be an incarnation of male desire, a perfect sample of womanhood as envisaged by men. When the women at Beulah work on Eve's shape based on the nature of an ideal woman drawn up from the media, they do so

unconscious of the fact that they are drawing upon the ideas projected from a male subjectivity. Mother's sonorous speech about the "halting of the phallocentric thrust so that the world could ripen in female space without the mortal intervention of time", proves to be a farce (*PNE* 77). Carter seems to suggest that there is no such thing as a female subjectivity or even an objective view of the world as everything is manipulated and fashioned according to the needs of the phallocentric culture.

Mother's hope of creating a myth of her own by bringing forth the Messiah of females through Eve's auto parthenogenesis fails when Eve escapes captivity. Carter here highlights the point made by her in *The Sadeian Woman* that myths are consolatory nonsense. She warns us against adopting myths because, "myth deals in false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances" (*SW* 5). The myth created by Mother in no way serves to ease the condition of women. Instead, it seem to entrap women in another set of restricting ideologies, denying them a right of choice or freedom to exercise their subjectivity. The grotesque depiction of the all female world of the Mother becomes a negative critique of myth and matriarchy.

The episodes at Mother's Beulah and at Zero's harem are Carter's exploration of the cultural production of femininity. These episodes demonstrate in detail that gender is something acquired by the intervention of

culture. Evelyn's metamorphosis into a woman at Beulah involves two stages. The physical changes are effected through a series of operations and the psychological changes are accomplished through psychosomatic treatment. The sex operation transforms him biologically into a female, but he becomes feminine only after he inculcates "the attributes of dependence, passivity, masochism and the desire to nurture which women are expected to possess [. . .] "(Palmer, *Women's Fiction* 18). Eve/Evelyn learns these culturally constructed gender qualities only during his/ her stay at Zero's oppressively patriarchal world.

K. K. Ruthven in his *Feminist Literary Studies* observes that the subjection of women is not brought about by their natural inferiority as is believed but by their classification as intrinsically inferior by a male-dominated culture. What enables a girl to become a woman is not the natural transformations of her body when she attains the age of puberty but the socialising processes of Culture which dictates to her how she ought to think and act as a woman. "Women are not inferior by Nature but inferiorised by Culture: they are accultured into inferiority." In the domain of the patriarchal culture woman is not considered as an essence but "a construct on which masculine meanings get spoken and masculine desires enacted" (44-45).

Eve who escapes from Beulah goes through the "socialising processes of culture" after she is made a captive by the monomaniacal poet Zero. In the

hands of Zero, an arch misogynist, Eve/Evelyn goes through the real experiences of a woman in a male-centred world. Zero's world is inherently grotesque with its distortion, inversions and heightened action. It is both abysmal and ludicrous. In the topsy turvy world of Zero, women are held in low esteem. They are not given enough food to eat; not allowed to live in clean circumstances and are not even permitted to speak a human language. In contrast, the pigs are allowed full freedom, are loved and properly looked after. The treacherous pigs often trip the girls down into their troughs and tease them in many other ways. The girls are taken to the city to work as prostitutes and earn enough to feed Zero and his pigs. Zero has created a myth of his own to terrify and keep the women under submission. Carter once again highlights the miserable plight of women as dumb creatures reduced to the state of animals in the patriarchal world. Through the exaggerated grotesque depiction of Zero's world Carter satirizes the women who find pleasure in being submissive and leading a life worse than that of animals.

Eve's apprenticeship as a woman at Zero's ranch achieves everything, which Mother's psychosurgery has failed to accomplish. It is here that she becomes truly feminine. Eve's life in Zero's harem turns out to be the punishment for the humiliation and violence which as Evelyn he had perpetrated on Leilah. Every time zero attacks Eve he/she feels a lack of self:

> And more than my body, some other yet equally essential part of my being was ravaged by him for [. . .] I felt myself to be, not

> myself but, he; and the experience of this crucial lack of self, which always brought with it a shock of introspection, forced me to know myself as a former violator at the moment of my own violation (*PNE* 102).

Paradoxically Zero's repeated rapes transform Evelyn into a woman not just in body but also in mind. The psychosomatic treatment at Mother's place has not been successful in making Eve think and feel like a woman. The old Evelyn remains in her mind and it is the violent experiences at the hands of Zero that turn Eve into a woman as culture would have her. The grotesque portrayal of Zero's patriarchal world and Mother's matriarchal world allows Carter to subvert existing views on gender identity. She posits that the allegedly feminine qualities which make women inferior to men are invented and indoctrinated by force through the agency of the male-dominated culture.

It is Zero's obsession for the Hollywood icon Tristessa that has driven him into the desert. He believes that Tristessa is responsible for making him sterile by casting a spell on him from out of the silver screen. He spends hours every day searching the desert for Tristessa's hideout so that he can kill her and thereby restore his potency. When he and his harem finally find Tristessa, they discover something appalling about her. Tristessa is not a woman but a man in drag. A man who has fallen in love with his own sexual fantasy of a woman that he transforms himself into it: "That was why he had been the perfect man's woman! He had made himself the shrine of his own

desires, had made of himself the only woman he could have loved!" (*PNE* 128-9). According to Carter Tristessa's character says a lot about "the cultural production of femininity and of Hollywood producing illusions as tangible commodities" (Haffenden 86).

By means of a highly carnivalesque scene Carter yet again subverts the notions about gender identity. She demonstrates that gender is a constructed thing, something slapped on to an individual by the society rather than something that one is born with. Tristessa is the epitome of femininity, a perfect woman of the masculine imagination. After seeing Tristessa and grasping her secret, Eve reasons thus: "Tristessa, the sensuous fabrication of the mythology of flea-pits. How could a real woman, ever have been so much a woman as you?" (*PNE* 129).

Zero who pounces on Tristessa as "the avenging phallic fire" is taken aback by her masculinity (*PNE* 127). When the initial shock passes, Zero and his harem let loose a series of crazy activities and the scene takes on a highly carnivalesque tone: "Zero rose to his knees and gazed with wonder at the spectacle. "Shee-it !" he exclaimed again and then began to laugh. As if at a signal the girls all burst out laughing too and slid off the statues to crowd round the poor, bound, female man" (*PNE* 128). Their laughter is the ambivalent carnival laughter and it is directed both at Tristessa and at those who have been fooled by her. Tristessa's fame is dragged through the mud

and he is made to go through experiences of ultimate humiliation. The laughter is directed towards Zero also as he has been all this time pursuing an illusion, an idea: "Tristessa had no function in this world except as an idea of himself; no ontological status only an iconographic one" (*PNE* 129). The Hollywood icon, the goddess of the silver screen is degraded, along with the masculine imagination that created her. In the scene of degradation, the material bodily elements take over completely. In grotesque realism, debasement of all that is sacred and exalted take place by bringing them to the level of the material bodily stratum or by mixing with its images (*Rabelais* 370). Through the grotesque gesture of displaying the buttocks, which according to Bakhtin is one of the most common uncrowning gestures, Zero's wives degrade the Hollywood goddess:

> Some of the other girls chose their favorite method of desecration, pulled down their dungarees and pissed copiously on the floor, while others tore off every stitch of clothing and danced obscene naked dances in front of him, contemptuously flourishing their fringed holes at him and brandishing mocking buttocks. The clamour and gesticulation were those of the monkey house (*PNE* 128).

They then set out on a destructive tour of the house breaking windows, smashing furniture, smearing excrement on the walls and finally making a

carnival bonfire of rolls of films. Not satisfied with all this they conduct a mock wedding of Tristessa, and Eve.

The wedding ceremony is marked with carnival eccentricities. Zero's wives dress for the occasion in many coloured rags and daub their faces with rouge and lipstick. In a reversal of gender roles once again, Eve is dressed as the bridegroom in an evening suit and Tristessa as the bride in white satin. But the harem pelts him with rouge, lipstick and eye paint until the white skirt is daubed and streaked. The wedding ceremony is both degrading and regenerating.

The degradation of Tristessa becomes a critique of western cultural images of women. It is also regenerative in the sense that it enables us to take a different view of such myths about femininity. The phallocentric universe has always tried to sustain the cultural idea of woman as a passive "thing", a negation of existence itself. Tristessa too becomes a part in this masculine conspiracy: " 'Passivity,' he said. 'Inaction. That time should not act upon me that I should not die. So I was seduced by the notion of a woman's being, which is negativity. Passivity, the absence of being [. . .]' " (*PNE* 137). These are the ideas of femininity being projected by the media through the celluloid icons so that they get imprinted in the minds of people. A woman is appreciated not for what she is, but for being what man wants her to be. That is why a man in drag becomes the most admired screen goddess:

"He had made himself the shrine of his own desires, had made of himself the only woman he could have loved!" (*PNE* 128-9). The complete destruction of the glass house is symbolic of the shattering of the myth that Tristessa creates for himself and along with it, Carter shatters the phallocentric myths about femininity.

The boy soldiers who capture Eve and Tristessa making love in the desert, satirize the naivety and fanaticism of certain American Christian sects. The boys who cannot condone lechery shoot Tristessa but forgive Eve since Christ forgave the woman taken in adultery. The colonel of the militant band is a boy of fourteen, the son of a millionaire from Florida. The boy who was born on Christmas day strongly believes that he is Christ, reborn to save the world, which is America for him. He forms a boys' crusade to lead the Holy war against Blacks, Mexicans, Red Indians, Militant Lesbians and gays and thus to save America from dissolution. However, when night arrives they are just little boys afraid of the darkness. Carter's presentation of this band of boy soldiers exposes the naivety, irrationality and blind faith of such factions founded on religious faith.

Escaping from the boy soldiers, Eve is thrown back to the hub of city life. Eve/Evelyn's adventures in America come a full circle. Her adventures in the desert over, the disillusioned newly formed Eve meets Leilah once again. Leilah, who is now Lilith the leader of a guerilla gang, turns out to be

the daughter of the goddess of Beulah. The Leilah who is engaged in guerilla warfare has nothing in common with the harlot Evelyn knew in New York she too has transformed: "Had that gorgeous piece of flesh and acquiescence been all the time a show, an imitation, an illusion?" (*PNE* 172). Now Eve realizes that Leilah has only been a projection of his desires: "She can never have objectively existed, all the time mostly the projection of the lusts and greed and self-loathing of a youngman called Evelyn, who does not exist either" (*PNE* 175). Eve learns from Leilah that the desert, the land of myths has become the grave of myths too. Leilah's Mother has realized the folly of trying to create new myths or sustain old ones:

> "History overtook myth", she said, "And rendered it obsolete. Mother tried to take history into her own hands but it was too slippery for her to hold [. . .] .Historicity rendered myth unnecessary," said Leilah. "The priestesses of Cybele have left off simulating miraculous births for a while and have turned into storm-troopers" (*PNE* 172-73).

The Mother voluntarily resigns from godhead and retires to a cave by the sea.

Eve is taken by Leilah on a journey to the coast where Mother lives. Eve enters a very narrow cave where Mother is said to be waiting for her. A highly symbolic journey takes place where Eve travels backwards to the Eocene period, the beginning of time itself. She goes through a very strange experience where time running backwards takes her along with it to the

beginning where she becomes one with the primordial atom. This is the scene of conclusive demythologisation, the site of Eve's ultimate revelation. The awareness that everything springs from the same source enables her to realize the foolishness in differentiating between the creatures of the world let alone that between male and female. The alchemical hermaphrodite image, which recurs in the novel, once again becomes significant. Eve realizes the significance of the hermaphrodite figure when she unites with Tristessa in the desert. She feels that it is an alchemical process where both of them become one, "the great Platonic hermaphrodite".

The bird archaeopteryx reminds her of the dual nature and interchangeability of objects in nature. The vision suggests to her not the oneness of things but their interchangeability. The hermaphrodite image highlights the argument that the male and the female are complementary to one another. One has no existence without the other. A male dominated world as envisaged by patriarchs or an all female world dreamt of by matriarchs like Mother in Beulah are quite absurd notions, while the symbol of archaeopteryx suggests that there is no fixed pattern in the universe. Things that we see today have not been so in the past and will change again in the future:

> At that time there was a bird called 'archaeopteryx' [. . .] bird and lizard both at once, a being composed of the contradictory elements of air and earth. From its angelic aspect spring the

> whole family tree of feathered, flying things from its reptilian or satanic side the saurian, creepy crawlers, crocs, the sealed leaper and the lovely little salamander [. . .]. A miraculous seminal intermediate being whose nature I grasped in the desert (*PNE* 185).

Eve realizes that just as the differences between species are not so in evolutionary terms, the differences between men and women, which is a socio-cultural construct, have no natural ground. Just as Evelyn and Tristessa have been constructed and reconstructed, gender roles can be constructed differently. Eve who comes out of the cave is in fact the New Eve. Leaving behind the bonds of old false myths, even the myth of origin, which proves to be false, she goes in search of a new future: "Ocean, Ocean, mother of mysteries bear me to the place of birth" (*PNE* 191).

When she lands back on the coast after her strange experience down evolutionary lane, Eve is once again offered the genitals, which once belonged to Evelyn. But she promptly refuses it as she has come to know the secrets of creation. She no longer feels sorry for being a woman and decides to remain so. She escapes to the sea in the boat kept by the grotesque old woman on the seashore. The old woman who may be Mother herself is the representation of old dying symbols of womanhood. Since history has overtaken myth and made it outmoded, New Eve and her child begotten from her union with Tristessa may hope to live in a world free of mythic unreason.

Desiderio and Evelyn learn during their picaresque adventure that the basic principles that rule different societies are more or less the same. The illustrations of the societies that the protagonists of the two novels enter become tools in Carter's hand to expose the limitations of various social structures. She establishes the fact that myths are constructed in order to imprison people in the narrow confines of patriarchy. Carter explodes the cultural myths about gender identity and rewrites the myth of creation through the carnivalesque mode. She is also critical of the media projected images that entrap mankind in a false world created out of fantasy and desire.

Chapter 5

Carnival of the Dispossessed: *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*

The last two novels by Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* are both carnivalized texts that explode sexist ideologies and expose the relative nature of prevailing truths. The narratives of both the novels are controlled by their female protagonists. As performing artistes they are typical carnival - grotesque characters. Fevvers, the heroine of *Nights at the Circus* is an aerialiste while Nora and Dora in *Wise Children* are music hall artistes. All three of them belong to the ignoble section of society marked by shame and infamy. Fevvers is an orphan brought up in a brothel whereas Dora and Nora are illegitimate twins disowned by their father. Nevertheless, the ability of the heroines to shatter all cultural and sexist differences makes the final victory theirs. True to the function of the carnival, all social, sexist and cultural barriers are overthrown thereby allowing for the free mingling of people.

By taking control of their own story, the female narrators assume a position of authority from where they freely express their thoughts and feelings without the intervention of the male voice. Linden Peach observes:

> Autobiography is one of the strategies by which women can take responsibility for their own sense of self in a restricted and

> restrictive environment or milieu, challenging the traditional appropriation of women's lives and histories by men. Self-making is an essential element in women's autobiography and the notion of the self as "subject in process" is important to both *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* (133).

By assigning the absolute control over their story to the female narrators, Carter gives them power to challenge an oppressive patriarchy and represent the emotions, frustrations and desires of women in a truly female light. Through these carnivalized texts, Carter disrupts the strategies employed by the official culture to consolidate and maintain the hierarchical structure of society. The august air of official culture is as a consequence, undermined.

The heroine of *Nights at the Circus* is Fevvers who is described in the novel as the most famous aerialiste of the times. Her slogan "Is she fact or is she fiction" illustrates her ambiguous nature. As a freak possessing a real pair of wings she is a typically grotesque character. She claims to have been hatched into the world and not born in the manner of ordinary human beings. Fevvers contains within herself a clash of opposites. This heterogeneity enhances the grotesque quality of the character. She is crude and bawdy but erudite at the same time. She belongs to the lowest class of the society yet moves among the circle of famous writers and artists of the times. In spite of her disgusting habits, she is charming. Mary Russo observes that she is "an exhilarating example of the ambivalent, awkward, and sometimes

painfully conflictual configuration of the female grotesque" (*Revamping Spectacle* 137).

Jack Walser, the American journalist, comes to interview her with the intention of unraveling the mystery of the "Cockney Venus" and to expose her as a fraud. Fevvers defies his attempts to prove her a fake by taking command of her own story right from the beginning. Magali Cornier Michael remarks that, "Fevvers asserts authority over her own story-history and evades attempts by Walser to fix an identity upon her" (496). The fact that Walser is almost blown over by the flapping of her wings as he watches Fevvers's performance is suggestive of his loss of control over the narrative. Walser is caught up in the magical spell of the narrative unfolded by Fevvers and Lizzie, her foster mother:

> He continued to take notes in a mechanical fashion but, as the women unfolded the convolutions of their joint story together, he felt more and more like a kitten tangling up in a ball of wool [. . .] or a sultan faced with not one but two Scheherazades, both intent on impacting a thousand stories into the single night (*NC* 40).

Even time seems to stand still during Fevvers' narration of her story. Walser gets an uncanny feeling when he hears the Big Ben striking midnight thrice that same night. The sceptic Walser soon becomes a slave to her charms and follows her enthralled.

Except for the pair of wings, there is nothing angelic about Fevvers. With her gargantuan appetite and earthy, coarse manners, Fevvers is a typical carnival-grotesque figure. Indulgence in eating and drinking is the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. In the act of eating, the individual body interacts with the world and gains a cosmic quality. In the act of eating man triumphs over the world and the boundaries between him and world are erased. Food and drink have the power to liberate human speech (Bakhtin *Rabelais* 281).

Walser is staggered at the quantity of food placed before Fevvers: "[. . .] 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" (*NC* 22). However, Fevvers with a little support from Lizzie finishes it all in no time:

> [. . .] 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 [. . .] at last her enormous appetite was satisfied; she wiped her lips on her sleeve and belched (*NC* 22).

In the course of the interview, she keeps drinking and finishes an entire case of champagne. When there is no more champagne left, she pours "pots of tea

down her gullet". She throws away measures and just tips "sugar into her steaming mug directly from the bag in a stream" (*NC* 43). Fevvers is a "marvellous giantess" whom only superlatives may adequately describe. Emma Parker comments: "A self-indulgent Epicurean, Fevvers makes a joyous spectacle of her appetite and self-consciously challenges conventional notions of female delicacy and propriety" (159).

According to Bakhtin, apart from eating and drinking, activities like belching, yawning and breaking wind are manifestations of the grotesque body. The grotesque body defies the regulations of the classic body with its closed, smooth surface that limits it as a separate phenomenon. The grotesque body is cosmic and universal (*Rabelais* 318). Fevvers with her unabashed, vulgar and indecorous ways completely neglects the cultural stereotype of woman and becomes a true carnival-grotesque figure. She overcomes the confines of the classic body and the confines between the body and the world through her bodily activities. While being interviewed by Walser, Fevvers: "Shifted from one buttock to the other and – 'better out than in, sir' – let a ripping fart ring round the room"(*NC*12). Even when she yawns, Walser feels, it is not that of a tired girl yawning:

> 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 (*NC* 52).

Such activities as these indicate the grotesque quality of Fevvers's character and expose its universality. She challenges the notion of the feminine through her grotesque body and her unseemly behaviour.

According to Bakhtin, the carnival-grotesque forms exercise the function of sanctifying inventive freedom. The formalization of carnival-grotesque images permits them to be used in many different ways and for various purposes by allowing the combination of a variety of different elements in a state of cordiality. Thus it offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world (*Rabelais* 34). These features of the carnival-grotesque forms are reflected in Fevvers. Instead of being discouraged by the coarse manners of Fevvers, Walser is rather impressed and enjoys the interview thoroughly. By making Fevvers, a carnival-grotesque figure Carter disrupts the conventional ideas of a heroine and even of the female. Carter's heroine challenges the official culture which ascribes certain codes of behaviour to certain distinct classes in society.

The polished manners of Jack Walser the refined journalist and representative of high culture suffer a rude shock when he interviews Fevvers. Walser who feels quite ill at ease in the presence of the aerialiste wants to escape for a while: " 'Ouch – excuse me, ma'am, the call of nature.'"

Fevvers offers him an easy way out: " 'Piss in the pot behind the screen love, go on. We don't stand on ceremony.' " With this invitation to "piss", Walser's pretensions to decorum disappear: "The act of engaging in this most human of activities brought him down to earth again, for there is no element of the metaphysical about pissing [. . .]" (*NC* 52). According to Keith Booker: "Carter overturns society's strictures against the lower bodily stratum with carnivalesque exuberance, using the tremendous levelling power of excremental functions to undercut pretentiousness" (229).

Ma Nelson's brothel where Fevvers is brought up has a carnival status. It overthrows the popular concept of a whorehouse being a place for immoral trafficking. Fevvers calls it a "decent house" where the "ladies" introduce themselves to the "gentlemen" (*NC* 23). The stigma that society attaches to prostitutes is completely absent and they are presented in a positive light. Fevvers's depiction of the house as having an "air of rectitude and propriety" and as being "a place of privilege" (*NC* 26) is outrageous if judged by the standards of the high culture. Michael observes:

> The novel's presentation of prostitutes in a positive light and prostitution in non moral terms as well as its use of an extraordinary heroine with wings are carnivalesque disruption of established norms. The physical description of the whorehouse itself further establishes its carnival status [. . .]. The whorehouse of the novel's London section is a carnival

> sphere, in the sense that it defies established conventions and codes; it becomes other than what it is generally thought to be and thus challenges the ruling order (504-08).

By adapting the language and style usually reserved to describe the culturally sanctioned institutions in order to depict the whorehouse, Carter subverts the hierarchical difference imposed by high culture and debases it.

There are several other instances in the novel where high and low cultures are brought together so as to shatter the pretensions and artificial boundaries between them. Fevvers is believed to have had acquaintance with all famous painters and writers of the nations that she has visited. These representatives of the high culture vie with one another to entertain her. There are several instances in the novel where works of famous authors are parodied. Certain great things which are generally treated with reverence, are juxtaposed with images of low culture and reduced to bathos. In one scene Walser's recital of Shakespeare coincides with the beastly copulation of the strong man with Mignon: " 'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty!' The strong man accomplished his orgasm in a torrent of brutish shrieks, such a hullabaloo that Walser stumbled over his recitation [. . .]" (*NC* 111). While Fevvers is narrating to Walser the story of her life at Ma Nelson's, she makes a reference to Baudelaire and this astonishes him: " 'I put it down to the influence of Baudelaire, sir'. 'What's this?' cried Walser, amazed enough to drop his professional imperturbability"

(*NC* 38). Such interjections at most unexpected places by the most unseemly persons wipe out the difference between high and low culture.

There are several such juxtapositions of images of high culture with images of low culture in the "London" section of the novel. Ma Nelson's drawing room is said to be decorated with the original paintings of great masters like Titian. But the effect is immediately destroyed by Lizzie's anecdote about how Ma Nelson has come to possess it:

> Curioser and Curioser, thought Walser; a one-eyed, metaphysical madame, in Whitechapel, in possession of a Titian? Shall I believe it? Shall I pretend to believe in it?
>
> 'Some bloke whose name I misremember give'er the pictures,' said Lizzie. 'He liked her on account of how she shaved her pubes'.
>
> Fevvers gave Lizzie a disapproving glance but spoiled the effect by giggling (*NC* 28).

The possession of an original work of a great master, considered to be a matter of pride and a symbol of superior taste and status by the high-society is made to look ridiculous because of the kind of connection made here. This carnivalesque strategy pricks the bubble of pretentiousness of the high culture, allowing those who belong to low culture to gain an edge of advantage. The same kind of effect is achieved where the reference to Ma Nelson's library is made. Walser gets another jolt to hear that Ma Nelson's

whorehouse had a library and that everyone of them including Fevvers used to spend most of their leisure time in pursuit of knowledge:

> 'Library?' He queried indefatigably, if a touch wearily.
>
> 'E left it to er,' said Lizzie.
>
> 'Who left what to whom?'
>
> 'This old geyser. Left Nelson `is library. On account of she was the only woman in London who could get it up for him-' (*NC* 40).

Yet again, something, which is a mark of the elite and the scholarly, is made to look trivial through the grotesque association made here.

Unlike the carnivalized world of Ma Nelson's brothel, Madame Schreck's museum for women monsters is a gloomy and terrifying world. It takes the readers temporarily to the murky world of the terrible grotesque. The sinister gloom that pervades the whole atmosphere is threatened and overcome through the efforts of Fevvers and her companions. From the Madame of the house to her servant, all the inhabitants are grotesques. They are physically deformed and inhuman. Madame Schreck herself is a living skeleton. Her manservant Toussaint has no mouth and hence cannot protest against the goings on in the house. The girls in the house are all freaks of nature. Fanny is a girl with four eyes, two on her face and two in place of her nipples. The girl who is called the "sleeping beauty" wakes up only once a day, that too only for a few minutes. "The Wiltshire wonder" is not even

three foot high and "Albert/Albertina" is bipartite. All of them are kept as exhibits in the dark cavernous cellar of Madame Schreck's house. Being freaks of nature, they prefer to remain in the dark interior of Madame's house and be the object of the gaze of the perverted men who visit the house rather than be gazed at by the whole world. As Fevvers puts it: "Madame Schreck, she catered for those who were troubled in their [. . .] souls" (*NC* 57). Every girl in the house has a tragic past and her present is no different. Fevvers describes the place as being as terrifying as hell: "[. . .] for there was no terror in the house our customers did not bring with them" (*NC* 62). With the timely intervention of Fevvers and Toussaint, Madame Schreck is subdued and the girls are released.

The violence inherent in the patriarchal world is not much fore grounded in this novel. In the two instances where Fevvers confronts the evil patriarchal figure, she subdues it with her will to survive. The first instance is her encounter with the mad scientist figure, Mr. Rosencreutz. He takes Fevvers to his gothic castle with the intention of sacrificing her. A follower of the phallic cult, he believes that by sacrificing her he will attain immortality and perpetual youth. Though a sense of impending danger pervades the whole scene, the grandiloquent style of Mr. Rosencreutz clashes with the flippant tone of the narration making it look ridiculous. He informs Fevvers that by uniting with her he hopes to get more power and asks her to lie on the altar. It is only then that she realizes his real intention:

> [. . .] I glimpsed, peering over my shoulder, a shining something lying along his hairy old, gnarled old thigh as his robe swung loose. This something was a sight more aggressive than his other weapon, poor thing, that bobbed about uncharged, unprimed, and unsharpened [. . .] in the cold, gray light of May morning, I saw this something was – a blade (*NC* 83).

The sight of the blade rouses Fevvers into activity. She subdues him with another phallic symbol – Ma Nelson's sword that she always carries for self-defence. The phallic symbol which Mr. Rosencreutz worships is ridiculed and its purpose is defeated by Fevvers. In a similar encounter she later escapes the Russian Grand Duke, whose evil intention is to shrink her and keep her shut in a miniature bird cage.

Colonel Kearney's Circus which Fevvers joins becomes the elaborate site of Carnival misalliances and eccentricities. Circuses and sideshows are themselves reduced versions of the carnival. The circus courtyard where a major part of the action takes place becomes a carnival square with its familiar contacts, disguises, scandals and decrownings. By using these techniques of carnivalization, Carter succeeds in presenting an Utopian vision where without the barrier of gender distinctions, cultural disparity and social status, people exist side by side to create a better world.

Colonel Kearney's Grand Imperial Circus shifts the scene of action from London to Petersburg, a city "on the threshold". Bakhtin in his study of the carnivalized works of Dostoevsky says that Petersburg becomes the right setting of action for a carnivalized work:

> It is characteristic that the very setting for the action of the novel – Petersburg – is on the borderline between existence and nonexistence, reality and phantasmagoria, always on the verge of dissipating like the fog and vanishing. Petersburg too is devoid, as it were, of any internal grounds for justifiable stabilization; it too is on the threshold (Bakhtin, *Problems* 167).

This same carnivalized sense of Petersburg is conveyed through *The Nights* also. Petersburg is described as the "loveliest of all hallucinations, the shimmering mirage in the Northern wilderness" and as "a city built of hubris, imagination and desire" (*NC* 96-7).

The most highly carnivalesque scene in the novel is included in the Petersburg section where Walser is accepted into the midst of the clowns. The initiation ceremony in his honour turns out to be the occasion for the clowns to perform all manner of eccentricities, carnivalistic obscenities and profanations. Buffo the head clown, in the parody of last supper sits in Christ's place and serves from a cauldron:

> Rising ceremoniously to his feet, the Master clown fished within the cauldron and found there all manner of rude things knickers, lavatory brushes, and yard upon yard of lavatory paper. (Anality, the one quality that indeed they shared with children) Chamber-pots appeared from nowhere and soon several wore them on their heads, while Buffo served up more and yet more disgusting tid bits from the magic depths of his pot and dealt them with imperial prodigality about his retinue (*NC* 124-5).

Thus they celebrate "the primal slime" in a carnivalistic parodying of last supper. More obscenities linked with bodily lower stratum are found in the dance of the buffoons. The dance which begins on a funny tone turns into a "dreadful libel upon the whole notion of dancing". It turns out to be bitter and cruel:

> As they danced, they began rhythmically to pelt one another with left over crusts of black bread and emptied their vodka bottles over one another's heads, mugged pain, resentment, despair, agony, death, rose up and pelted, emptied, turn and turn about. [. . .] What beastly, obscene violence they mimed! A joey thrust the vodka bottle up the arsehole of an august; the august, in response, promptly dropped his tramp's trousers to reveal a virile member of priapic size, bright purple in colour

> and spotted with yellow stars, dangling two cerise balloons from the fly. At that a second august, with an evil leer, took a great pair of shears out of his back pocket and sliced the hurried thing off but as soon as he was brandishing it in triumph above his head another buried phallus appeared in the place of the first, this one bright blue with scarlet polkadots and cerise testicles, and so on, until the clown with the shears was juggling with a dozen of the things (*NC* 124).

This phallic grotesquerie is not just meant to be part of the general transgressive mood of the novel, it also suggests the cyclic death and rebirth motif of the carnival. Though highly obscene and comical, the scene is suggestive of the underlying violence in the lives of the clowns. They are in fact challenging the "great ring master in the sky" (*NC* 120), who has doomed the clowns to a life of pain and humiliation. They react rudely and vehemently against a system that refuses to see them as human beings with feelings and emotions like others. The suppressed disquietude beneath the merry façade of the clowns' lives is revealed through the increasing number of suicides among them. The paradoxical nature of the clowns' lives is reflected in Buffo's words "Despair is the constant companion of the clown" (*NC* 119). Buffo is forced to take part in the show and make others laugh even immediately after receiving the news of his daughter's death. Personal

tragedy must not affect the show it must go on. When he cries his heart out in the ring, people laugh taking it for another comic piece by the clown.

Buffo's enactment of the resurrection in the presentation called the clown's funeral too is highly carnivalesque. At the climax of the clowns' Christmas dinner, Buffo starts to disintegrate himself by spinning round and round. The fallen Buffo is put in a coffin and the funeral march begins. But Buffo bursts through the coffin lid asserting life. In the carnival, death is always presented in a positive light as it heralds birth. The clown's rebirth also suggests the return of the repressed; it reminds that the upper stratum has no existence without the lower stratum. This carnivalesque episode while showing the merry life of the clowns also exposes the pathos and violence in their life. Thus the carnivalesque mode becomes a vehicle that depicts the true nature of things.

Carnival presents the picture of a topsy-turvy world where the order of things is reversed. It is a world turned upside down and inside out. Carnival life is free and unrestricted, full of debasings and obscenities. It brings about familiar contact with everyone and everything (Bakhtin *Problems* 130). In a scene of carnivalistic debasement, Walser who joins the circus incognito is made into an object and forced to stand naked before Mr. Lamarck's educated chimps: "Now Walser wore nothing but the dunce's cap [. . .]. Walser stood before them nude and exemplary[. . .].Walser wilted under the scrutiny of the

eyes of his little cousins twice removed (*NC* 110). A disruption of the hierarchical order takes place here when a human being is subjected to a study by animals. Carnival becomes a site of hierarchical disruption where all distinctions between the high and the low are erased.

Walser's plan to remain in disguise fails when he is injured in his attempt to save Mignon, the wife of Mr. Lamarck, the Ape-Man, from the attack of the tiger. The anatomy lesson of the chimps is interrupted with the intervention of the escaped tiger that comes in hot pursuit of Sybil, Colonel Kearney's pig'. But, when it finds "something better than pork" is "on the menu" (*NC* 112), the tiger turns towards Mignon. Though the scene is one of suspense and terror, its comic presentation replaces horror with mirth. The Strong Man abandons his lover in the lurch: "The Strong Man tore off the woman's clinging arms, clutched his loincloth round his privates and made for the auditorium door" (*NC* 111). Seeing the tiger, the Ape-Man's wife lets out "a blood-curdling scream" which attracts the tiger's attention to her. Walser the clown hurls himself towards the tiger: "Involuntary as his heroics, Walser let rip a tremendous, wordless war-cry: here comes the clown to kill the Tiger!"(*NC*112). The incident exposes Walser before Fevvers and he is lowered in esteem in her eyes as she suspects him of having an affair with Mignon:

> 'So you've run away to join the circus, have you, love?' she asked not quite pleasantly.

> Evidently she no longer felt the need to call him 'Sir' [. . .] he felt himself much diminished in their eyes and was glad to get out of the dressing-room. In some pain and painfully aware that, by the very 'heroicness' of his extravagant gesture, he had made a fool of himself just as the Colonel had predicted he would [. . .] (*NC*114).

Walser is only being initiated into the life of a clown. He has to suffer more humiliations in order to perfect the art of clowning. Walser is made to pose as a human chicken in a trick improvised by the clowns for him:

> 'Crow like a cock.'
>
> 'Cock-a-doodle-do,' said Walser obediently[...].
>
> 'Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls,' intoned Buffo, 'I give him and you can take him! - the Human Chicken!'
>
> Grik found an egg, not too fresh, inside his fiddle and tossed it between Walser's eyes. Buffo creaked approval. Grok found a couple of eggs in the belly of his tambourine. Amid ululations of glee, all the clowns followed suit, whipping eggs out of various parts of their clothing and anatomies, and pelted Walser until egg liquor streamed down his face, blinding him (*NC* 152).

The clowns further torment Walser by tripping him. His balked gestures of fury and his comic wound look extremely funny to them giving rise to

hilarious amusement. Degradation, the essential principle of grotesque realism is demonstrated here. The thrashings, abuses and smirching with dirt are not personal punishments but symbolic actions directed at something on a higher level. The abuses and bringing down to earth have a positive aspect in carnival: "The abuse and thrashings are equivalent to a change of costume, to a metamorphosis. Abuse reveals the other true face of the abused; it tears off his disguise and mask. It is the kings uncrowning" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 197).

Walser thus learns to stand the humiliation, becomes part of the circus, and does not remain an outsider. The process of degradation that he goes through destroys Walser's bourgeois ego and helps him see life in an entirely different light. He lets go of his inhibitions, hypocrisy and his skepticism. As Carter herself says in an interview with Haffenden, Walser becomes a serious person:

> [...] his rather two-dimensional idea of himself – as the foreign correspondent, the person in control, the permanent bystander, with the privileged marginality of the journalist – has to be broken down before he can become [. . .] not a fit mate for Fevvers at all, but a serious person (89).

When Walser represents one kind of American rationalism, Colonel Kearney, who "presides over the carnival like proceedings" (*NC* 146), of the circus, represents another type of rationalism rooted in entrepreneurship.

With his overconfidence, mercenary patriotism and air of pomposity, Colonel Kearney becomes a grotesque parody of the American entrepreneur. He runs his ludic game with the help of his pig, Sybil which he believes to possess oracular powers. This again is an instance of carnival inversion where the human being is made to act according to the advice of an animal and that too the one considered the basest. Keith Booker observes that: "Pigs have historically had a special association with both the carnivalesque and the abject" (238). Theorists like Stallybrass and White too categorize pigs and rats as "symbolically base and abject animals" (5). Colonel Kearney debases himself by turning to an abject creature for advice.

In the topsy-turvy world of the circus, the distinction between the human and the animal is disrupted. In addition to the chimps anatomy class using Walser, there are many more instances in the novel where the so-called superior beings are debased and controlled by animals. The chimps make Colonel Kearney obey them and re-write the contract made by Monsieur Lamarck, the Ape-Man, according to their requirements. The Professor Ape gives a note to the Colonel:

> Nature did not give me vocal cords but left the brain out of Monsieur Lamarck. He is a hopeless drunk with no business sense. I therefore propose to take over all the business management of the "Educated Apes" and demand the salary and

> expenses formerly payable to Monsieur Lamarck now be paid to me (*NC*169).

When the Colonel consults the oracle, Sybil takes sides with the apes making the Colonel doubt "that there might be some solidarity amongst the dumb beasts, that they could form a poet of some kind against him" (*NC* 170). The Colonel's complete degradation by the chimps is accomplished when the angry Professor chimp walks out on the Colonel and his circus:

> The Professor lost his temper completely, crumpled his paper into a ball and thrust it down the Colonel's throat. The stable-lads greeted this action with a burst of ironic cheering and scattered applause. The Professor, newly aware of his audience, granted it a jerky little bow. He stroked Sybil's ears, apparently in farewell; then he and his entire troupe precipitated themselves outdoors, leaving the Colonel choking (*NC* 182-83).

This results in an inversion that brings about the degradation of the high and the triumph of the abused. Stallybrass and White perceive Bakhtin's carnival as "a world of the topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled" (8). This is perfectly true of the carnivalized world of Carter's circus.

The Colonel's excessive patriotism is made fun of in the scene where he gives a seduction dinner to Fevvers. She makes a hearty meal and the

Colonel spares no expense. When he nervously invites her for a night-cap in his suite, Fevvers readily accepts realising that the overexcited and drunken Colonel will pose no threat to her. Things go on as she imagined:

> She enjoyed well-chilled champagne while the impresario lapsed into slumber on the couch beside her. Removing the bourbon bottle from his fist, she poked curiously into the aperture of his fly, which he'd just fumbled open before he passed out, and withdrew a string of little silk American flags (*NC* 171).

Lizzie's inquiry regarding the evening elicits this answer from her: " 'Couldn't get 'is star-spangled banner up,' replied Fevvers. Britannia's revenge for the war of 1812 ' " (*NC* 171). The Colonel and his absurd notion about patriotism are ridiculed throughout the scene.

Of all carnivalized literature, Menippean Satire has influenced post modernist fiction most. Brian McHale observes: "Postmodernist fiction is the heir of Menippean satire and its most recent historical avatar" (172). Menippean Satire, which originally developed in direct contact with popular carnival, exercised a very great genre shaping influence in literature. The menippea is fully liberated from history, legend or the demands for an external verisimilitude to life. It uses the fantastic and adventure as a mode of searching the truth. "Threshold dialogues" acquire a great importance in menippea. A very important characteristic is the free mixing of philosophical

and religious elements with crude slum naturalism. It includes elements of social utopia in the form of dreams or journeys to unknown lands. In addition to all these elements there is the predominance of carnivalistic-comic element (Bakhtin, *Problems* 114-19). *Nights at the Circus* incorporates almost all the features of menippea like the use of the fantastic, adventure, slum naturalism, utopian element, threshold dialogue etc. Carter's creative utilization of this genre enables her to present a completely new outlook on the world.

The elements of the fantastic can be seen in the episode revealing the Russian Grand Duke's vile intentions and the episode with the outlaws. In a highly grotesque and fantastic episode, Fevvers discovers the Duke's plans in time and saves herself using her guile. Her avarice gets Fevvers into the trap of the Duke. Fevvers accepts the Duke's invitation against Lizzie's warnings, eager to get the diamonds he offers her. As the Grand Duke takes her on a tour of his house Fevvers finds among the exquisite miniature toys a cage which she instantly recognizes as meant for her. The highly charged, terrible, atmosphere is alleviated by the funny tone adopted for the narration. When Fevvers realizes the danger involved, her apprenticeship at Ma Nelson comes in handy: " [. . .] a deep instinct of self preservation made her let his rooster out of the hen-coop for him and ruffle up its feathers, as he was ruffling hers"(*NC* 191). Fevvers is rendered defenceless when the Duke discovers Ma Nelson's sword, and breaks it into two. She continues to manipulate him and when she realizes that "the Grand Duke's time was nigh" she makes a move

which effects her highly fantastic escape. Fevvers takes the miniature train which bore the name of the one she was about to leave from Russia – The Trans-Siberian Express – and drops it on its runner. The train lands perfectly on its wheels and the next moment Fevvers is seen running down the platform and clambering into the real train. This is an instance of the fantastic in the text where Carter plays a confidence trick on the reader.

"The Trans-Siberian Express" which bears the Colonel's circus to Europe is blown up in the Siberian wilderness by outlaws. Their intention is to take Fevvers as a hostage and bargain for their pardon as they learn from newspapers that she is engaged to the Prince of Wales. They want Fevvers to ask her "would-be-mother-in-law", Queen Victoria to intercede with the Tsar to absolve them. The false story, which the Colonel himself fabricates for publicity, proves his undoing. All his dreams are shattered in the Transbaikalian snow desert. In another highly fantastic incident Fevvers and Lizzie and the others escape captivity. Lizzie persuades the clowns who are themselves sad at the death of the master clown, Buffo, to humour the disappointed and gloomy outlaws so that they can negotiate with them. The clowns' dance wakes up the outlaws from their lethargy: "This dance was the dance of death [. . .] .They danced it for the wretched of the earth, that they might witness their own wretchedness. [. . .] The outlaws entered into the spirit of the thing with a will" (*NC* 242-43). As if their dance evoked the spirits of nature, a storm begins to blow. The clowns and the outlaws continue

with their dance oblivious of the brewing storm. When finally it subsides, except for the hut in which Fevvers, Lizzie and the rest remain, everything else has been blown away. There is no sign of either of the clowns or the outlaws. The intervention of the fantastic once again creates an unsettling emotion. In analysing Dostoevsky's works Bakhtin examines the importance of fantastic in a work:

> [. . .] the verisimilitude of a character is the verisimilitude of the character's own internal discourse about himself in all its purity – but in order to incorporate it into the field of vision of another person, the law of that other field must be violated [. . .]. Some fantastical viewpoint must be sought for the author outside the ordinary fields of vision (*Problems* 54).

At the bottom of the carnivalistic acts and categories lies a deep carnivalistic sense of the world, which gives meaning to the seemingly absurd and unexpected things in them. This carnival logic can be presented in a somewhat simplified form through the fantastic elements in a work (Bakhtin *Problems* 146).

The utopian theme of using music as a powerful means to bring about a peaceful co-existence between human beings and even between animals and human beings is developed in the novel through the relationship between Mignon, Princess of Abyssinia and the tigers. Through the stories of Mignon and the Princess, and the women prisoners in the Taiga Carter challenges the

idea of the heterosexual relationship as being the ideal one. The liberating power of lesbian relationship is shown here. Almost every male she meets, except for Walser, abuses Mignon. She cuts a pathetic figure with her emaciated, bruised body and naïve innocent looks. Her husband, the Ape-Man, has made it a habit of beating her "as though she were a carpet" so that her body bears "marks of fresh bruises on fading bruises on faded bruises" (*NC* 129). Samson the Strong Man, her lover, abandons her to the mercies of the escaped tigress. When the Ape-Man treats her as an object over which to assert his authority by inflicting violence on her, Samson treats her as an object of sexual gratification.

Mignon acquires the status of a human being only when she joins the Princess of Abyssinia, when "the cruel sex threw her away like a soiled glove" (*NC* 155). The women discover her singing voice and give her a new life. Mignon's voice enchants even the tigers: "The cats all lifted their huge heads and their eyes dropped amber tears as if for their own dumb fates. Slowly, slowly, all the beasts dragged themselves towards the source of music, softly beating their tails against the straw" (NC 155).

The same utopian theme of bringing about a peaceful co-existence between man and animal with the help of music is seen in the episode of the Siberian wilderness. Tigers, birds and other animals gather around the house attracted by Mignon's song and the princess's piano: "We saw the house was

roofed with tigers [. . .] . Under that unseasonable sun, or under the influence of the voice and the piano, all the wilderness was stirring as if with new life" (*NC* 249-50). Music and the Princess utterly transform Mignon. She is no longer a passive victim but becomes an active subject.

The asylum for women convicts becomes an advanced site for the transformative power of love. The House of Correction set up by Countess P for female criminals who murdered their husbands is an abysmal grotesque world. The circular prison becomes a site of extreme mental torture. Countess P sitting in her circular room at the centre watches everyone with her penetrating eyes. The inmates who are denied all contact with one another or with the wardresses lose even the use of their voices. However, they get their voice back with the courageous act of Olga Alexandrovna. Olga's act of touching the hand of the wardress who brings her food marks the beginning of the change:

> Desire, that electricity transmitted by the charged touch of Olga Alexandrovna and Vera Andreyevna, leapt across the great divide between the guards and the guarded . [. . .] The stale air of the House of Correction lifted and stirred, was moved by currents of anticipation, of expectation, that blew the ripened seeds of love from cell to cell (*NC* 216-17).

The utopian aspect of the material bodily principle in grotesque realism is demonstrated through the manner in which the prisoners and wardresses communicate with one another:

> Contact was effected, first, by illicit touch and glance, and then by illicit notes, or, if either guard or inmate turned out to be illiterate, by drawings made in and on all manner of substances, on rags of clothing if paper was not available, in blood, both menstrual and veinous, even in excrement, for none of the juices of the bodies that had been so long denied were alien to them, in their extremity – drawings, as it turned out, crude as graffiti, yet with the effect of clarion calls (*NC* 217).

The bodily elements are presented here in a deeply positive, assertive note. The material bodily elements, generally considered to be hideous and disgusting, become the medium of liberation for the women. Their gestures turn out to be a degradation of authority. Olga uses her menstrual blood to challenge authority and to undermine the efforts to convert the prisoners into passive objects. Besides she defies the traditional association of menstrual blood with dirtiness. By using one of the most obvious emblems of female inferiority as a means of empowerment, Olga "literally writes herself into subject hood with her menstrual blood" (Michael 516).

The eccentric countess P's hierarchical set-up is shattered to bring together the guards and the prisoners. In grotesque realism, the gesture of

"bringing down to earth" always points to a new birth or beginning. The inmates of the House of Correction walk out on the countess. They go out into the wilderness to establish a sisterhood of their own: "The white world around them looked newly made, a blank sheet of fresh paper on which they could inscribe whatever future they wished" (*NC* 218). Though their utopia of an all women's set-up is something preposterous, they earn their freedom having to lose nothing.

The unfeasibility of setting up a "republic of free women" is suggested in Lizzie's sarcastic query with regard to the baby boys that may be born to them: " 'Feed 'em to the polar bears? To the *female* Polar bears? ' " (*NC* 240-41). The traveller's account of the women who beg him for "a pint or two of sperm" (*NC* 241), to ensure their community's survival makes Lizzie pose such a valid question. Though Carter asserts the liberative potential of Lesbian relationships, she does not support the establishment of a lesbian or a matriarchal community as an answer to the problems faced by women.

Slum naturalism is another important characteristic of carnivalized literature, especially the menippea that Carter employs in the novel. "Slum Naturalism" or crude naturalism is an important characteristic of the menippea where "the adventures of truth on earth take place on the high road, in brothels, in the dens of thieves, in taverns, market places, prisons, in the erotic orgies of secret cults, and so forth" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 115). Slum

naturalism permits Carter to combine philosophical dialogues, and lofty symbol systems with crude aspects of life. Philosophic and existential matters are discussed in Ma Nelson's whorehouse, in the clowns' alley, the wilderness of Siberia, in Countess P's prison by people like clowns, outlaws and whores.

The idealistic notions of the civilized world on the subject of the primitives are undercut through the grotesque portrayal of the Shaman and his tribal people with whom the deranged Walser lives for a while. They interpret everything through the dreams the Shaman experiences during his fainting fits. Walser a representative of the rational world comes under the control of the Shaman who lives entirely in a world of dreams. The episode of the Shaman is Carter's critique of the supposed rational world. She exposes the irony in the idealization of the irrational fantastic world of the primitives by the civilized world. The rational society represented by Walser comes under temporary amnesia when it is exposed to the exotic, abracadabran world of the tribespeople. This world is extolled as the ideal world and its lifestyle as ideal living. Blinded by the exotic façade of primitive life, they let go off their skepticism and obsession with facts. The episode pokes fun at the extreme fascination the civilized world has for the primitive life. Walser, the skeptic, leads a life steeped in necromancy, myth and rituals in the company of the Shaman.

The Shaman's efforts to make sense out of the incoherent babblings of Walser whom he thinks is a spirit sent by his forefathers , expose the absurdity of the Shaman's beliefs. The tribal people make no distinction between fact and fiction, dream and reality: "They shared a common dream, which was their world, and it should rather be called an "idea" than a "dream", since it constituted their entire sense of lived reality, which impinged on real reality only inadvertently"(*NC* 253). The unexpected intervention of Fevvers and Lizzie turns the table against the Shaman and disrupts the grotesque world he constructs for his survival. They accidentally enter the primitive church where the Shaman is preparing to sacrifice the bear before an idol. The sacrifice is interrupted and there ensues a scuffle between Lizzie and the bear:

> They banged against the idol in their wrestling. The idol toppled against another one, similarly clad with more of a stag-like look. Toppling in its turn the staggy deity knocked the next in Line of the row of idols from its perch and so on, in a domino effect of comprehensive desecration (*NC* 288).

The desecration of the temple and the toppling of the deities signify the loss of credibility of the world of false mythologies created by the Shaman. His power is challenged and his religion renounced by the tribal people who come to realize the real nature of the world. They abandon the world of mythology interpreted through the dreams of the Shaman, for a world of reality.

The novel ends with Fevvers' carnivalesque laughter filling "the entire globe". It is a triumphant laughter as Fevvers becomes successful in appropriating the narrative from Walser and taking control of her own story. The narrative is thus freed from the clutches of male subjectivity and helps propel feminist aims. It is not just Walser that she fools but the patriarchal set-up in its entirety. The laughter is directed at the patriarchal world that takes charge of every narrative and distorts it to its purpose. Carnival laughter is indicative of freedom from the old and the stale. It is gay, triumphant and mocking at the same time. Walser's question as to why she takes so much trouble to make him believe that she is the only "fully-feathered intacta in the history of the world", makes her laugh thinking how she fooled him: "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 unfolded beneath it, until everything that lived and breathed, everywhere, was laughing"(*NC* 295). Bakhtin describes the nature of carnival laughter thus :

> It is first of all, a festive laughter [. . .]. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope, it is directed at all and every one, including the carnival's participants. [. . .] Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives (*Rabelais* 11-12).

Fevvers' carnival laughter denies the old order and welcomes the new. The carnival, according to Bakhtin, celebrates the destruction of the old and the birth of the new world. Fevvers's laughter is indicative of the winds of change that welcome the new century:

> 'And once the old world has turned on its axle so that the new dawn can dawn, then, ah, then! all the women will have wings, the same as I . [. . .] The doll's house doors will open, the brothels will spill forth their prisoners, the cages, gilded or otherwise, all over the world, in every land, will let forth their inmates singing together the dawn chorus of the new, the transformed-' (*NC* 285).

Michael observes that the novel's ending on a note of laughter does not only indicate Fevvers' triumph over Walser, it also looks forward to potential new forms of feminist fiction that would be subversive and liberating both at the level of narrative and of politics (519). Substituting extant forms with a narrative mode solely controlled by them will enable women to express their reservations, anguish and aspirations free from patriarchal interference. The feminist utilization of carnival laughter opens up the way for the creation of new types of feminist fiction. Fevvers's laughter thus becomes a final disruption of the male-centred established order, a task that she and Lizzie have earnestly been engaged in.

Carnivalization allows Carter to subvert the established order and bring to the fore aspects in society which could not have been revealed otherwise. It underlines her faith in feminine power and its ability to disrupt patriarchal constructs. By bringing together high culture and low culture and uniting what is distant and diverse, the novel exposes the folly in assigning hierarchical position to people. The circus courtyard where a major part of the action takes place becomes a carnival square with its familiar contacts, disguises, scandals and decrownings. By using these techniques of carnivalization, Carter succeeds in presenting an utopian vision where without the barrier of gender distinctions, cultural disparity and social status; people exist side by side to create a better world.

Wise Children, Angela Carter's last novel too is a glorification of the carnival. The carnival grotesque, which gains predominance in her later novels, finds its culmination in *Wise Children.* It is a richly comic tale of the tangled fortunes of two theatrical families. It traces the history of the Hazard theatrical dynasty, from its nineteenth century heyday to its downfall with the popularization of television. The book's narrator is seventy five year old Dora Chance, an actress who has donned roles in Shakespearian plays and the vaudeville. She and her sister Nora are the illegitimate twin daughters of the great Shakespearian actor Melchior Hazard. Disowned by Melchior's family, they become chorus girls, working their way through London music halls to Hollywood.

The politics of "carnival laughter" builds its own world in opposition to the official world. It offers a completely different, non-official and extra-political aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations. Thus, they build a second world and life outside officialdom. Unlike the distorted and alien notion of humour formed within the framework of bourgeois modern culture and aesthetics, the carnival laughter possesses a creative power (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 4-6).

In *Wise Children* carnival laughter builds a world of the disowned parallel to the world of the legitimate, the loved. The laughter that characterizes all forms of grotesque realism or the carnivalesque, degrades what is high, spiritual or ideal. The legitimate world, which represents the official culture, suppresses the disowned continually in order to absolutize a given condition of social order. However, in the end, the carnival sense with its "joyful relativity" results in the victory of the disowned. The novel focuses on the elusive nature of paternity. Almost all the characters in the novel turn out to be subjects of disputed paternity. The idealistic notions about marriage, family and patriarchal supremacy are held up to ridicule.

The Hazards, the greatest theatrical family, as great as Shakespeare himself are considered as the cultural ambassadors of the British empire. The decline of British imperialism is traced in the decline of the Hazard theatrical dynasty. Ranulph Hazard, Melchior's father, travelled the continents with

missionary zeal to take Shakespeare and English values to the outside world. Carter's heroines in *Wise Children* who are illegitimates cannot make their way into their father's theatrical world but have to be satisfied with music hall shows. They seem to raise the question of whether the illegitimates are not the rightful heirs to Shakespearean theatre. Kate Webb observes: "Shakespeare may have become the very symbol of legitimate culture, but his work is characterised by bastardy, multiplicity and incest [. . .]" (194). The obsessive demarcation of the British society into high and low culture is being questioned here. Carter celebrates the vitality of the illegitimate world and challenges the false claim to authority of the legitimate world.

The two central characters Dora and Nora are reminiscent of the Kersh terracotta figurines of senile pregnant hags that so much influenced Bakhtin in formulating his concept of the grotesque body (*Rabelais* 25-26). Like these figurines, Dora and Nora, though at the twilight of their life, embrace it with a surprising enthusiasm. They are seventy-five and gaunt with their hipbones and cheekbones sticking out – "two batty old hags" as they call themselves. However, they are not ready to give up on life:

> We'd feel mutilated if you made us wipe off our Joan Crawford mouths and we always do our hair up in great big Victory rolls when we go out. [. . .] We paint an inch thick. We put on our faces before we come down to breakfast, the Max Factor Pan-Stik, the false eyelashes with the three coats of mascara,

> everything . [. . .] Our fingernails match our toenails match our lipsticks match our rouge. [. . .] The habit of applying war paint outlasts the battle (*WC* 6).

Though not pregnant like the figurines of the hags, at the close of the novel they affirm new life with the twin babies of their half brother Gareth given to them as a birthday present by their Uncle Perry : "[. . .] the barren heath was bloomed, the fire that was almost out sprang back to life and Nora a mother at last at seventy five years old and all laughter, forgiveness, generosity, reconciliation" (*WC* 227). Dora and Nora realize that they cannot "afford to die for at least another twenty years" that too when they have been thinking that it is "high time for the final curtain" (*WC* 230). Life is shown both in its degenerate and in its blooming aspects here. This dual nature is an important characteristic of the grotesque.

The "material bodily principle" that is, images of human body, especially those of eating, drinking and copulation reveal the devouring and regenerating lower stratum. The material bodily principle in grotesque realism is offered in a festive and utopian aspect. The cosmic, social and bodily elements are presented as an indivisible whole. The grotesque body with its images of material bodily lower stratum emphasizes the activities like eating, drinking, defecation, and copulation. All these activities are offered in a joyous, regenerative aspect as opposed to the closed, false seriousness of official culture. The material bodily lower stratum is productive as it

engenders new life and thus assures mankind's immortality (Bakhtin *Rabelais* 18-20).

The peculiar festive character of the material bodily principle is retained in the novel through characters like Peregrine, Grandma and Dora Nora. Peregrine or Uncle Perry as he is fondly referred to by the twins is a Falstaffian figure who indulges in excesses of merriment, eating and drinking. Grandma Chance is in a way a female counterpart to him. She and Peregrine get along very well. Grandma Chance is a carnival grotesque figure with her eating habits, indecorous language and love for the rejected. She eats a lot, drinks like a fish but has a very big loving heart which is ever ready to give shelter to the disowned. Grandma hates the old men who perpetrates war in which the young are killed so that the old can hang on to power: " 'Every twenty years its bound to happen. [. . .] So all the men all over the world get together and make a deal: you kill of our boys and we'll kill off yours. [. . .] Then the old men can sleep easy in their beds, again' " (*WC* 28-29). She reacts vehemently against the atrocities in the society. Grandma Chance is a naturalist who goes about in a bare minimum of clothes inside the house. Dora talks of Grandma's "family" consisting of herself, her twin sister Nora and Cyn, another orphaned girl: "Grandma invented this family. She put it together out of whatever came to hand – a stray pair of orphaned babes, a ragamuffin in a flat cap. She created it by sheer force of personality" (*WC* 35).

Grandma Chance celebrates her carnival identity through eating and drinking, the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. In the scene at the restaurant where Perry takes the girls and Grandma Chance on their birthday, her demeanour is suggestive of Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*:

> She'd overdone the rouge, perhaps because she'd overdone the gin, and she looked rakish as hell [. . .].
>
> The waiter hovered: 'For the first course may I suggest oysters, caviar, smoked salmon . . .' 'That sounds quayte nayce, thanks very much,' she said so she had all three, washing them festively down with crème de menthe, lifting her pinky like a dog lifts its leg as she raised her glass (*WC* 93-94).

Grandma Chance, in her encounter with the world in the act of eating comes out triumphant; she triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured herself. According to Bakhtin the body in the act of eating transgresses its own limits and grows at the world's expense. Eating is a weapon of transgression where the glutton violates all barriers and become one with the world (*Rabelais* 281).

Peregrine, Melchior's twin brother is a trickster who turns reality into a realm of magic and illusion. Lady Atalanta Hazard refers to Perry as a "travelling carnival" (*WC* 169). Perry himself perceives life as a carnival (*WC* 222). If his brother seeks to regain the lost empire of the Hazards, Peregrine seeks exile. He makes brief but memorable appearances and

vanishes when he reaches "his boredom threshold". Peregrine acts as father to his brother's unacknowledged daughters. He is Melchior's double and opposite. *Wise Children* abounds in twins. Peregrine's wit, mental energy, his bodily gratification and rich delight in life, make him a true carnival figure. His human qualities claim the love and affection of all who come in contact with him. Dora and Nora adore him for filling the wide gulf left by the absence of a father. Perry defies the ravages of age. He is the picaro, never ageing, full of bounce and bonhomie, appearing in the right places at the right time and vanishing to an altogether different part of the world, in pursuit of newer adventures. Peregrine is the incarnation of the true carnival spirit in his gay, laughing libertinage.

The biological father of Dora and Nora Chance, Melchior Hazard, is the last Shakespearian actor in the Hazard theatrical dynasty. There is an aura of grandeur about him. Even his dispossessed daughters cannot think of him but with reverence and awe. In the Hazard family's attachment to Shakespeare and the public's attachment to the Hazards, Carter satirizes the extreme nationalism of the British that centres upon key cultural images, most notably that of Shakespeare. Melchior's disowned daughters triumph in the end in a carnivalesque reversal of roles. Christina Britzolakis observes that, "music hall is the carnivalesque deflator of the bombast of 'high culture', epitomized in the myth of Shakespeare's genius as 'national treasure' "(187).

By means of carnivalesque debasements, Carter explodes several myths created by the official culture to maintain their importance.

The comic performances of the market place are important reflections of the carnival tradition. These performances are imbued with the atmosphere of freedom, frankness and familiarity. The market place represents the world of the unofficial where people are free to speak their own language. Thus, elements of common speech such as profanities, oaths and curses are fully legalized in the market place. The market place is the centre of all that is unofficial. It gives a chance for the low culture to enjoy a certain "extraterritoriality" in a world of official order and official ideology (Bakhtin *Rabelais* 153-54).

Gorgeous George who is a music hall comedian and "patriot" becomes a paradigm of the market place performer who entertains people with his bawdy jokes and enlightens them with his patriotic songs and striptease shows. The episode pokes fun at the nationalistic fervour of the English. Gorgeous George takes off his clothes piece by piece to display the complete map of the world on his body. Only a strip of the Union Jack, reduced to the role of a loincloth, covers his private parts. Average Englishmen throng Gorgeous George's performances enjoying wholeheartedly his bawdy jokes. The representatives of the low culture who watch George's performance enjoy heartily the self-mockery involved in the performer wearing the

national flag as if it is a mere gee-string. The laughter, which echoes in George's performances, has all the ambivalence of carnival laughter. It is both directed at the jokes and towards the excessive patriotism of the British.

The downfall of George from the position of "Clown Number One to the British Empire" (*WC* 150), to that of a beggar runs parallel to the decline of the Empire itself. Kate Webb observes that "George shows us an empire falling: having once dominated the entire world, this Englishman can now be master of only one space: his own body" (197). Once he reaches Hollywood to take the role of Bottom in Melchior's dream project, he loses all his ability to make others laugh. Dora notices: "The moment he stepped off his native soil, he stopped being funny" (*WC* 151). Later when Dora takes off the costumes from the drunken Bottom, she realizes that she has "inadvertently exposed the British Empire" on his torso. So she covers him up as she does not want their "nations shame out in the open for all to see" (157). Finally, towards the end of the novel, Dora recognizes him in the street beggar who begs her for money to buy a cup of tea. By then the British Empire too has been shorn of all its glory. Through such subtle delineations, Carter illustrates the decline and degradation of an empire that hoped to colonize the whole world.

According to Bakhtin, debasement is the fundamental artistic principle of the carnival grotesque. Everything that is sacred and exalted is combined

and mixed with the images of material bodily stratum in the process of bringing them down to earth. Degradation has not only a destructive, negative aspect but also a regenerative one. It encourages the participants of the carnival to change their outlook on the world. The success of parodies and travesties lies in the fact that all that is high becomes tiresome in the end and the uncrowning of such high matters brings about immense pleasure. Apart from parodies and travesties, there are several gestures of grotesque debasement like thrashing, abusing; besmirching with dirt, excrement and urine (*Rabelais* 370).

Carter makes wide use of the carnivalesque modes of debasement in the novel to undercut the pretentiousness of the high culture. The inaugural ceremony of "The Dream" a movie based on Shakespeare's *A Mid Summer Nights Dream*, is utilized to demystify the traditional cultural milieu in which the English take so much pride. "The Dream" is Melchior's first Hollywood movie. The grand function held to launch the production of the movie begins with the salutation to the Bard, where, in a dramatic gesture Melchior sprinkles the earth from Stratford-upon-Avon on the sets of "The Dream" and delivers a grandiloquent speech: " 'And yet it is especially precious to me because it is English earth, perhaps some of the most English earth of all, precious above rubies, above the love of women. For it is earth from William Shakespeare's own hometown, far away, yes!' " (*WC* 134). But, the earth which Melchior so dramatically and proudly sprinkles on the set happens to

be Californian soil. The Chance sisters throw away the original earth as Daisy Duck's cat has urinated over it. The earth carried so reverentially to Hollywood, all the way from the Bard's own land has been desecrated by the action of the cat urinating over it. Through the highly carnivalesque gesture of drenching in urine, Carter deflates the undue importance attached to images of culture. The process of desublimation is completed when a macaw lets its droppings down with a great splat into the midst of the gathered crowd. Drenching in urine and defecation, the important gestures of grotesque debasement are employed in this episode, to undermine the blatant pomposity of the high culture. The episode is narrated with a mock seriousness, which emphasizes the comic and subversive undertone.

The party scenes in the novel become sites of carnival degradation. They are created in the fashion of the carnival feasts in popular culture, which are sites of unrestricted celebration and desublimation. Such feasts are marked by open-air amusements and the participation of people in the guise of dwarfs, monsters, giants and such fantastic creatures (Bakhtin *Rabelais* 5). Apart from the last banquet scene in the novel that marks its climax, there are two other party scenes in the spirit of the carnival grotesque. "Lynde Court Twelfth Night Costume Ball" is meant to be a gigantic audition for Melchior's Hollywood debut production, "The Dream". A motley crowd of stars, everyone dressed up as Shakespearian characters, is gathered there. There is a gay festive air, which is destroyed suddenly by shoutings, screams and cries.

The Manor catches fire, but the funny description of the confusion and pandemonium that reigns takes away the horror of the incident completely. The undoubtedly comic verve of the description induces the reader to respond with amusement or mirth, blotting out the tragic overtones. When the house burns in a carnivalesque bonfire, a kind of madness is unleashed among the gathered guests. Some try to put out the fire, hurtling whole crates of champagne into it, while some others urinate into the fire as their own contribution to the jets of water directed by the Fire Brigade, and yet others who are consumed by the fires of lust are indulging in orgiastic pleasures.

In the meanwhile, Melchior Hazard the master of the Manor and the King of the "Hazard Theatrical Dynasty" manages to heave the big carved chair, his "throne" from the fire and slumps down on it, calling for champagne in a grotesque parody of the Emperor who played on the fiddle when Rome was burning. But he suddenly realizes that he has lost his crown, the heirloom of the Hazard dynasty – a battered gilded cardboard crown – to which he is superstitiously and foolishly attached. Peregrine Hazard as usual comes as a saviour and salvages the crown from the fire, but makes his brother jump for it clownishly before handing it over to him. His brother's exclamation "Give me the crown, your bastard!" extricates a toast from Perry, "Now God, stand up for bastards!" (*WC* 107). The carnival laughter that ensues results in the temporary decrowning and degradation of the high, the world of the legitimates, and becomes a victory for the opposing world of the

low, the illegitimates. The sheer ludicrousness of the whole incident and the hilariously comic manner of the description fill the atmosphere with carnival spirit. "The many sparks of the carnival bonfire renew the world" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 126). Carnival fire simultaneously destroys and renews the world. The fire at Melchior's manor signifies the destruction of the Hazard theatrical dynasty but Melchior's Hollywood dream materializes out of its ashes. The Hollywood producer Genghis Khan, whose cigar causes the fire, promises to take them all to Hollywood, the "Land of Make-Believe".

The "Dream Land," Hollywood possesses a wealth of carnival grotesque images ranging from Puck to the hooded shadow of Genghis Khan's ex-wife. It takes on the festive air of a typical carnival square. The carnival square knows no hierarchical order. The life of the carnival square is "free 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* 129-30). The set of "The Dream" turns out into a merry eccentric world of transformations.

The magic of Hollywood makes the participants heady and they indulge in all manners of eccentricities. The gay abandon that rules the atmosphere affects the participants resulting in two divorces and three engagements. Melchior divorces his wife Lady Atlanta Lynd to be engaged to Genghis Khan's divorced wife Daisy. Melchior thinks that he is marrying

Hollywood itself by marrying Daisy Duck. He believes that he is going to bestride the globe once he is in charge of the fabulous machine that is Hollywood. But all his calculations go wrong and his production heads towards disaster.

The wedding ceremony is the culmination of the carnival in the Hollywood episode. There is a crowd consisting of fairies, goblins, spirits, mice, rabbits and badgers gathered around the three brides. The swapping of partners, profanation of the sacred ceremony of marriage, abuses, blows and smirching with dirt mark the carnivalization of this scene. Dora sacrifices her marriage dreams by abandoning her bridegroom Genghis to his true wife who comes in her guise. Dora in her turn participates in the wedding disguised as Bottom. Peregrine Hazard in the disguise of a cowboy blesses the wedding and he unleashes a flurry of activities. Nora's Italian bridegroom's mother empties a vat of bloody red tomato sauce over the bride. The popping of champagne corks is mistaken for the firing of machine guns and pandemonium sets in resulting in the termination of Melchior's Hollywood dreams.

The episode ends with the desublimation of Melchior Hazard, the King of English theatre and the debasement of the Hollywood producer Genghis Khan. "The Dream", Melchior's dream project that aims at getting Shakespeare's name and English culture established in the Hollywood, proves

to be just a "masterpiece of kitsch" (*WC* 111), a self mockery. It takes too long for him to realize that English culture is something outmoded and that it no longer sells. After his adventures in the Hollywood Melchior comes back a broken man, "wifeless, childless, jobless, hopeless, quenched" (*WC* 161). Along with the fall of the Hazard dynasty, it becomes the debasement of Shakespeare whose fame Melchior wants to take to the other end of the world.

Lady Atalanta Hazard's fall from the position of the Queen of the Royal Family of the British Theatre to a cripple relegated to a wheel chair begins with the divorce. Saskia and Imogen's twenty first birthday celebrations become the site of her final downfall. The forced liveliness in the birthday party caused by the presence of the Chance sisters breaks when Melchior announces a new stepmother as a birthday gift to his recognized daughters. Saskia and Imogen turn wild when they know that the new mother is none other than their friend Margarine. Saskia behaves madly seizing the cake knife and destroying every piece of article on the table. Melchior's smart smack on her cheeks brings her sharply back to sanity from her hysterical excesses. There again one discerns a fall of the high, a victory for Melchior's natural daughters, Dora and Nora, who witness the scene.

The feast ends with a scuffle between Lady Atalanta and her daughters. It becomes a lowering in every sense. Lady Atalanta, the most beautiful lady of her times, one of the richest in the British Empire is reduced to a crippled

bankrupt, left at the mercy of her husband's natural children. The pretentiousness that goes with high culture is exposed in the transformation of Lady Atalanta Hazard to "Wheelchair" as she is nicknamed by Dora and Nora. No longer a Lady, she relinquishes the upper class decorum and becomes bawdy and coarse. Refinement is shown here not as something inherent but, something, which is forcefully inculcated as a part of being accepted into the circle of the high culture.

The degrading of Melchior, which begins in the fire episode, is completed in the episode of his hundredth birthday celebrations. A Carnival in the sense of the combination of all diverse festivities and grotesque images giving rise to a new world order is brilliantly presented in this episode. The reserve between people crumbles and there is a free and familiar contact. People separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers come together and are even accepted by each other. The illegitimate daughters of Melchior who live on the wrong side-"the *bastard* side of Old Father Thames" (*WC* 1) cross the river to the legitimate side. The truth about their birth is revealed in front of the gathered guests. Tiffany their Goddaughter, who is deceived in love by Melchior's son Tristram, too is accepted into the Hazard family but she spurns the invitation. The truth about the parenthood of Saskia and Imogen – who are really Perry's daughters –, is also revealed in this episode.

The language of the market place – obscenities, abuses and blasphemes mingle with the sophisticated and affected language of the elite. The shift of truth gives rise to a shift of world order. Melchior's kingdom is lost, of all the Shakespearian roles he has played; he comes closest to that of Lear. He presides over the closing carnival more as the ghost of imperial majesty than as the lord of the British Theatrical Dynasty. In the same episode, Saskia and Imogen the wicked daughters too lose their honour and the hitherto disowned twins are publicly given recognition as his own daughters. Peregrine, of whom nothing is heard for quite a long time makes a dramatic entrance on the birthday party scene upstaging his brother. Not only does Peregrine rise from the dead, but he brings with him Tiffany, Dora and Nora's goddaughter who is believed to have drowned herself. He also gives new life to Dora and Nora, a valid reason to look forward to life once again when he brings them the twin-children of their half-brother Gareth. He gives the twin children as birthday gifts to Dora and Nora who then realise that they cannot afford to die for another twenty years or so.

The high point of the carnivalesque in the novel comes when Dora seduces Peregrine, her surrogate father. For a while she thinks that her action will bring the whole house of the Hazards down and shatter all that which turned their lives into "mere peep shows". But she realizes that it is not to be so: "There are limits to the power of laughter [. . .]" She realizes that "the carnival's got to stop, sometime" (*WC* 222). It is almost as if Angela Carter

has realized the limitations of the carnival. After having served its function of desublimation, it has to stop.

The bastard branch of the family, Dora and Nora, discover in the course of their long life that the father who had disowned them has joined the ranks of the disreputed. The stage itself from which he has ruled has been upstaged by television. The greatest Shakespearean actor Melchior Hazard appears on television game shows that are not rated high even according to the standards of the electronic media. The battered cardboard crown, which Dora places on her father's head, sits askew symbolizing the desublimation of the King of the Hazard theatrical dynasty. The purpose of the carnival – desublimation of all that is high and holy – having been fulfilled, it stops and things go on as they did before.

Wise Children has been acclaimed as a wonderfully rich and funny book. There is a touch of pathos – the pain, the sorrow and the shame of the dispossessed. The pain that Dora and Nora feel, living as they do as the unacknowledged daughters of Melchior, is brilliantly camouflaged by the funny, flippant tone adopted by Dora, the narrator of the novel. In a way, it only heightens the sense of pity, allowing the readers to take part whole-heartedly in the happiness of the twins when they are acknowledged by their father in the end. The humour in this novel is not to be treated trivially. It serves to intensify the feeling of despair in Dora and Nora's sad plight. Even

Melchior, the cruel, selfish father, comes to be pitied and forgiven in the final banquet episode, the ultimate scene of the fall of the mighty and the crowning of the low.

The carnival spirit with its freedom and its utopian character is oriented towards the future. Even Dora and Nora in their ripe old age and looking towards oblivion are promised a future in the form of the twins they get as birthday gifts. The carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook at the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things.

These two novels by Carter become the site of victory of the marginalized. The sinister patriarchal figures of the earlier novels are altogether absent in *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children.* The women characters are shown as having immense courage to face the dangers and difficulties that life in a patriarchal society offers them. As Dora in *Wise Children* says, their victory is the "Triumph of nature over nurture" (28). They defy the official culture with its closed system and salute the life of the low culture with all its carnival glory. Carnival laughter that rings throughout the two novels is suggestive of the triumph of the representatives of the low culture over the efforts of the high culture to marginalize them.

Conclusion

The study of Angela Carter's oeuvre reveals how she successfully employs the grotesque as a mode for presenting her ideas and views on power structure, class struggle, gender identity, feminine desire, propagandist media, social fictions about femininity and various other myths, which a patriarchal system has forced upon society. The grotesque mode helps her to subvert the existing notions on these aspects and present them in a new light. It is obvious that the grotesque mode employed by Carter opens up new vistas of revelation to the reader.

Both the carnival and the terrible grotesque make possible the discovery of new and hitherto unseen things. The recognition of the possible signification of the grotesque characters, motifs and incidents enables works to be interpreted in a new light and a camouflaged hidden reality to be exposed. By relativizing all that is externally stable, set and readymade, the carnival grotesque with its pathos of change and reversal permits the author to penetrate into the deepest layers of human relationships, to explore the inequalities of patriarchal capitalism and to explode the pomposity of cultural paradigms.

The five novels – *Shadow Dance, Several Perceptions, Love, The Magic Toyshop* and *Heroes and Villains* – that belong to the first phase of

Carter's career explore through the grotesque mode the undercurrents in the lives of people. The three novels analysed in the second chapter – *Shadow Dance, Several Perceptions* and *Love* – show the gruesomeness and pathetic materiality of life in urban settings. The grotesque characters and incidents in the novels help in exposing the ugliness beneath the seemingly normal life of young people. All the three novels have characters that are mentally deranged. Their inability to orient themselves in the world has turned these characters into psychopaths. The three novels give us a vivid picture of post-imperialist Britain shorn of all its glory. Carter's purpose is to reveal the socio-cultural milieu of the sixties' England and the effect of its newfound emancipatory ideologies.

The novels expose the helplessness and ennui of the new generation. The main characters in these novels are part of an abysmal, drifting world. The grotesque landscape and the grotesque characters serve to highlight the dismal nature of life in supposedly thriving cities in the wake of extreme liberation. An onrush of countercultural movements takes the young people by surprise but these countercultures and cults fail to help in solving the existential angst of the youth who are desperately searching for something to cling on to. The lives of the main characters in these novels show how a lack of awareness of the self can lead to chaos. Honeybuzzard, Morris, Joseph, Annabel and Buzz live in a world of schizophrenia where they are unable to differentiate the self from the other and reality from fantasy. All these

characters are possessed by the abysmal force lurking in the world waiting to turn life on earth into a nightmare. Kayser calls this force, "It", as differentiated from the psychological "It". Except for Joseph in *Several Perceptions*, none of the other grotesque characters attempts to overpower these dreadful forces to save their lives from utter ruin.

The grotesque mode employed by Carter projects in all its intensity the anguish felt by humankind in the presence of the dark forces. Through this she presents new insights into how society is structured. A sudden feeling of estrangement from the familiar, apparently secure surroundings is created. As social critiques, Carter wanted her works to be understood as pieces of criticism. While a social realist mode would tempt the readers to overlook any critique in the author's writing, grotesque realism jolts them into awareness. They tend to look at their own world with fresh eyes and a different perspective and identify the implications in the happenings around them.

As a writer concerned about the status of women in society, Carter has tried to foreground the covert techniques of suppression employed by the patriarchal system. She also posits that the machinations of the oppressive patriarchal system are directed not just at women alone. Men too come under the ambit of their strategy of oppression. While Finn and Jewel become willing victims of the system, Joseph in *Several Perceptions* perceives the danger in it. His overwrought mind reacts violently against the tactics

employed to trap him by doing bizarre things. The strategy of subjugation is exposed by means of the grotesque depiction of the patriarchal figures in the novels. The grotesque scenes and incidents bring to light the underlying violence in the patriarchal world. All the important aspects of the grotesque such as the abysmal quality, the insecurity, and the terror inspired by the disintegration of the world are present in these novels.

The other two novels of the first phase – *The Magic Toyshop* and *Heroes and Villains* – dealt with in the third chapter also use the terrifying grotesque to undermine the existing worldview. The female protagonists of the two novels have to suffer the tyrannies of the patriarchal world before they can actually come out of its restraints. Both Melanie and Marianne have their desires and ideas shaped and controlled by the patriarchal world itself. They have to be first aware of this fact before they are able to break free of it. Marianne saves herself from falling into the trap set by Donally, whereas Melanie overcomes the manoeuvres of her uncle. The grotesque characters and incidents, which help them achieve this facilitate the reader also to perceive the dangers lurking behind the acceptance of the social myths about femininity.

Carter seems to direct our attention to the fact that power struggle, oppression and class structures are operative in advanced as well as in primitive communities. While she shatters our faith in a rational society, she

also undermines the myth of the noble savage. The rational world of the professors that Marianne abandons has its own means of oppression. The members of the community are classified according to the roles they play in the community. This naturally gives rise to disgruntlement and class struggle. The increasing number of suicides among the professors themselves points to the disillusionment one may meet with even in an advanced community. Carter asserts that extreme rationalism too is not an answer to the search for a universal remedy to save a world that seems to fall apart. The barbarians who fascinate Marianne prove to be equally disappointing. An unnerving hidden tension prevails among them, threatening to disrupt their world at the slightest provocation. The grotesque mode she adopts helps Carter to attain the subversive effect that she aims at.

In *The Magic Toyshop,* it is the faith in the institution of family that Carter subverts. The grotesque puppet microcosm of Uncle Philip threatens to destroy the identity of all the other members of the family. From dress code to eating habits, Uncle Philip decides everything. The grotesque swan and the incident in the puppet theatre are pointers to the fact that a woman's identity is threatened even in the family. Rape is used as a weapon to subjugate the woman. It shows how the emotional insecurity a woman experiences after physical violation is exploited by the male world. In *Heroes and Villains* Jewel rapes Marianne to get rid of his fear of her and also to make her submissive. Uncle Philip desires Melanie to be raped by Finn so that it wipes

out the class difference existing between them. Another significant strategy adopted by the patriarchal system in order to subdue women is to strike them silent. Aunt Margaret loses her voice on her wedding day and Melanie is warned by Finn never to raise her voice in the house. She is not allowed to wear the clothes she likes or do things of her choice. Melanie fears that in the claustrophobic atmosphere of Uncle Philip's house she will slowly wither away like a plant inside a closet. Melanie's plight is recognizably the plight of every girl in the family set-up. The grotesque depiction of Melanie's life serves as a revelation to subvert what has been taken for granted. The novel undermines the faith in the patriarchal family values which try to mould the girl child according to the norms of the male world.

When we come to the second phase of Carter's career, the atmosphere of gloom and terror vanishes and the carnival grotesque begins to gain predominance. *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr.Hoffman* question the nature of gender identity and explore the darkest realms of human desire. We still find the presence of grotesque characters like those in the previous phase, but the all-pervading gloom is absent once and for all. Even the presence of the grotesque Count who is the incarnation of all imaginable perversities does not spread terror in the manner of the characters in the novels of the first phase. Dr. Hoffman's battle against the reality principle and his efforts to destroy the conventional time and space equation point to the dangers involved in unleashing human desires. The grotesque

pictures in the peep show proprietor's collection, the dehumanized women folk of the river people, the perverted count, and the Sadeian brothel indicate the extreme danger involved in the uncontrolled liberation of desires. The threat, which the city in the novel confronts, is akin to the threat from the media entrepreneurs challenged by the present world. Unconsciously people are held in the grip of the vicious circle of desires brought to life in them through the mass media.

The *Passion of New Eve* deals with the question of gender identity. Through the delineation of the characters of Evelyn and Tristessa, Carter drives home the fact that gender is not something one is born with but a mere construct. Carter explodes the myth of femininity through the grotesque character of Tristessa. Through a carnival reversal of roles, Tristessa, the embodiment of male desire turns out to be a man in drag. Along with Tristessa, the male fantasy is also ridiculed in this episode. Carter argues that the concept of femininity is indeed constructed by men to trap and keep women inside a framework of beliefs. Eve's journey through the womb of the earth becomes the site of ultimate subversion. Along with Eve, the readers too understand that even the myth of origin is false. Every creature that Eve comes across has originated from the same primordial atom so that no hierarchical importance can be attributed to any of them. Recurring use of the alchemical hermaphrodite image in the novel suggests that the male and the female are complementary to one another. Carter seems to be as apprehensive

of matriarchal communities as she is of patriarchal communities. Through the grotesque depiction of the all female world of Beulah, she draws our attention to the absurdity in envisaging a female Utopia.

The last two novels are highly carnivalized hilarious works which shatter all notions of gender, class and social hierarchies. Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus* and Dora and Nora in *Wise Children* are typical carnival grotesque characters who disrupt our ideas of femininity and decorum. The structures and values of the establishment are ridiculed and degraded by the heroines or through highly carnivalesque scenes and episodes. High art and literature, cultural icons, notions of decency, everything comes under the scope of their disruptive coup. The paintings of masters kept in the brothel in *Nights at the Circus* and the uproarious story of how the Madame came to possess it, and the reciting of Shakespeare at the most untimely point by Walser are some of the techniques of subversion employed by Carter to remove the false notions of greatness attached to cultural figures. The same method is used in the Gorgeous George episode and the "Dream" episode in *Wise Children.* The material bodily principle, the most important feature of grotesque realism plays a very significant role in the scenes of degradation of the high and the mighty.

By choosing her heroines from the abject groups of the society and allowing them to triumph Carter inverts the elitist culture. Fevvers is said to

have been brought up in a brothel and has a dubious past. Nevertheless, she becomes a much sought after artiste and great cultural figures of the times compete with one another to entertain her. The heroines of *Wise Children* are illegitimates who try their luck as chorus girls. Later they too triumph over the society that marginalizes them. The novels celebrate the earthiness of coarse language and behaviour thereby sanctioning the culture of the lower social classes.

Apart from the lower culture, animals too are allowed to triumph in the topsy-turvy world of carnival. There are instances in *Nights at the Circus* where Walser and Colonel Kearney are treated as objects by the animals in the circus. When Walser is made to stand naked before the chimps for an anatomical study and when his pig Sibyl controls Colonel Kearney, the superior order is subjected to ridicule before the inferior ones. Walser represents an extreme kind of American rationalism while Colonel Kearney is a grotesque parody of the American entrepreneur. Carter ridicules the mercenary patriotism of capitalists like Colonel Kearney. She exposes the true nature of the patriotic fervour of those, who in reality, sell their country by exploiting nationalistic feelings. In *Wise Children* also American entrepreneurship is parodied through the figure of Genghis Khan, the Hollywood producer.

Fevvers's carnival laughter at the end of the *Nights at the Circus*, heralds a new era, the age of the new woman. According to Carter: "To be a woman is to be automatically at a disadvantage in a man's world, just like being poor, but to be a woman is a more easily remedied condition. If she abandons the praxis of femininity, then it is easy enough to enter the class of the rich, the men, provided one enters it on the terms of that class" (*SW* 78). Carter proves this conviction of hers through the carnival grotesque figure of Fevvers who shatters all codes of femininity, to come out triumphant in a largely male dominated world. The woman who is silenced by patriarchy in *The Magic Toyshop* seems to regain her lost voice as she recognizes the machinations of the patriarchal world to silence them. Fevvers's laughter is directed not just at Walser but the whole patriarchal set-up which appropriates the control of every narrative to distort it. By seizing the control of the narrative from Walser and by passing it over to Fevvers, Carter allows the women to speak for themselves without the intervention of the male voice. In *Wise Children,* the autobiographical mode gives the Chance sisters complete control over their story. The heroines of Carters last two novels sing, dance and laugh their way into a new age where the new woman exists laterally with man as suggested by the image of the alchemical hermaphrodite in *The Passion of New Eve*.

As it is already seen, the general mood of Carter's novels changes from that of a terrifying to a playful one from the first novel to the later ones.

Along with this, there is a transformation in the nature of the characters also. The grotesque characters that appear in the novels of the first phase incite either terror or pity whereas those of the later novels verge on the comic or the ridiculous. Honey Buzzard the sinister and manipulative protagonist of the first novel anticipates Uncle Philip in *The Magic Toyshop* and Peregrine in *Wise children.* However, while Honey and Uncle Philip spread terror and gloom, Perry, the carnival grotesque figure dispels gloom with his mere presence. Oppressive patriarchy is a recurring theme in Carter's novels. The patriarchal figures in the novels of the first phase are created in the vein of the terrible grotesque. In contrast when we approach the second phase, even the oppressive patriarchal figures become bearable through the intervention of the carnivalesque. The novels of the third phase are so completely carnivalized that there is no trace of a sinister quality even in the depiction of the negative characters.

By employing grotesque realism as the mode of narrative strategy in her works, Carter explodes the sexist myths about femininity and subverts all the prevailing misconceptions about social structure. Carter's works are a warning against giving in to the temptations of the propagandist media, and myths, which would imprison both women and men inside the narrow confines of the patriarchal structure. Her novels are a reflection of her conscious efforts to escape the confines of the patriarchal society:

> I spent a good many years being told what I ought to think, and how I ought to behave, and how I ought to write, even, because I was a woman and men thought they had the right to tell me how to feel, but then I stopped listening to them and tried to figure it out for myself but they didn't stop talking, oh, dear no. So I started answering back (*ED* 5).

She answers back through her subversive texts. Carter's texts expose the devious plans invented by the patriarchal society in order to silence the voices against it. She achieves this end by using the grotesque mode of communication as a vehicle in her novels to subvert the existing codes and conventions created and protected by the patriarchal society for its continued existence. The grotesque mode serves to alienate the readers and develop a critical prowess in them so that they recognize the snares set up by the society that are camouflaged as social systems and institutions.

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NBH605