Deconstructing Femininity:

Violence and Madness in Angela Carter's Novels

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Chapter 1. Introduction

One's personality is not a personal thing at all but an imaginative construct in the eye of the beholder.

- *Angela Carter*

The popular archetype of the suffering, mad woman, driven to insanity in a male-dominated world has been embraced by generations of writers, artists, psychologists, men and women alike. Consciously or not, the universal perception that woman stands for irrationality and man is associated with reason (Showalter 4) has set in motion a vicious circle of depicting melodramatic, sacrificial and "hysterical" women in art and literature. For centuries, femininity has been symbolically connected to nature, madness and passivity, whereas masculinity has been placed on the side of culture, violence and power (Showalter 4). Tracing the beginnings of these ideas goes as far back as the first myths of origin, all the way through hundreds of years of folk tales, fairytales, fictional and non-fictional narratives. Ancient archetypes of femininity still permeate the cultural and social scenes of life, some of them deceitfully alluring with their romanticism and pathos. The chaste Holy Virgin, the fallen Eve, the sacrificial Ophelia are just a few of the women doomed to be resurrected over and over again. The existence and continuous conjuring of these fictional femininities were amongst the lifelong fascinations of writer and journalist Angela Carter, and in 1978, she subversively stated that women are "flattering themselves into submission" by falling prey to culturally crafted ideas of womanhood (*The Sadeian Woman* 5).

Cultural and historical context

A particularly persistent trope in literature and beyond is women's inclination to go mad as an attempt to break free from the restrictions of a rigid femininity or as a result of

being too pure to remain sane or alive. “Hysteria”, the inherently female suffering, served as one of the main areas for research in the early days of psychoanalysis, and Freud’s androcentric creation unsurprisingly contributed further to the notion that madness was essentially a “female malady”, as coined by Elaine Showalter. The psychoanalytic field presented the most influential modern theory of femininity and female sexuality (Showalter 195), but the feminist movement, another prominent twentieth-century force, also took it upon itself to dismantle the conventions and stereotypes of the female role in society. Initially, many feminists were attracted to psychoanalysis, regarding it as a theory that “accepted female sexuality” and Freudian ideas became widely “popular with the literary avant-garde” (Showalter 196). Disappointingly for those in the feminist ranks, psychoanalysis eventually “hardened into a discourse that devalued women” (Showalter 197), as they were believed to be afflicted with penis envy, to be morally inferior to men and inherently masochistic, dependent and passive (Chesler 1). As Elaine Showalter recapitulates, mental illness, institutionalization and therapy were often presented as “extremes of typical female experiences of passivity and confinement” (219), and some feminist critics believed that mental illness was the perfect literary metaphor for the female condition, for their “lack of confidence, dependency on external, often masculine, definitions of the self, split between the body as sexual object and the mind as subject, and vulnerability to conflicting social messages about femininity and maturity” (Showalter 213). Nonetheless, postmodernist writer Angela Carter believed that this attitude merely prolonged the existence of a social cult detrimental to the individual. Even though psychoanalytical ideology played an important role in her rich symbolic repertoire, she had an intense dislike for the “spectacle of the suffering woman” (Sage 32). According to Carter, “the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration … is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men’s attitude towards women and our attitude to ourselves, that transforms women from

human beings into wounded creatures who were born to bleed" (*The Sadeian Woman* 23). Angela Carter regarded femininity as a "culturally choreographed performance of selfhood" (Gordon xiii) and often expressed the opinion that masculinity and femininity were simply "behavioural modes" (Gordon 38).

Research focus

At the heart of this thesis lies an exploration of Carter's oeuvre as her unceasing search for identity, one which demanded the demythologization of sex-role stereotypes, and especially the fiction of femininity. By examining the portrayal of women in her works and her unsentimental approach in creating her characters, I will dissect Carter's manner of picking apart the female literary figure. As the title of the thesis suggests, I will investigate violence and madness in her narratives, but my focus will be on juxtaposing them to the gender associations they hold, as men are symbolically equated with violence and women traditionally associated with madness. I will explore the various manifestations of this binary opposition in the novels *The Magic Toyshop (*1967*), Love* (1971) and *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (*1972*)*. In doing so, I will examine Carter's manner of offering critique – to what extent does she engage with these stereotypes and when and how does she ridicule them? In my deconstruction of violence in her novels, I will be referring to Carter's work of cultural criticism *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1978), and I will analyse the various psychological, physical and emotional realms where violence takes place. I will explore how much of said violence against women in Carter's narratives is a product of an external patriarchal world, and how much of it is an internalized female self-inflicted stoicism and self-victimization. Why is violence so often symbolically confined to the male sex, and what is the embodiment of female violence in Carter's narratives? On the other end of this associative spectrum, where violence and madness are the metaphorically juxtaposed gender traits, I will explore the madness in the novels by referring to Elaine

Showalter's study of cultural concepts of femininity and madness in her book *The Female Malady* (1985), as well as Phyllis Chesler's work *Women and Madness* (1972). These two books served as my principal research on the perils of romanticizing myths of femininity and madness. Elaine Showalter investigated the representation of the madwoman in fictional and non-fictional texts, art, photography and film, which she named the "fundamental cultural framework in which ideas about femininity and insanity were constructed" (5), whereas Phyllis Chesler examined novels, poetry, mythology and anthropology, focusing on myths of Mother Goddesses (3). Therefore, my attention will be directed at the maddening aspects of femininity – the conflicting and narrow ideas of womanliness, such as self-sacrifice, masochism, purity, passivity and innocence. I will relate the role of a patriarchal society to the characters' perceptions of femininity and how it drives them mad, and contrast their sense of confusion to male manifestations of madness in Carter's works. Moreover, in my exploration of traditional female traits, I will apply the popular concept of "performativity of gender", as presented by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Butler's view that "gender is an "act," open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism" (187) correlates with Angela Carter's sardonic depiction of the fragile female cliché.

Structure

As a rather rough outline of Carter's oeuvre, her works can be divided into two periods – the early works she completed in the 1960s and her more experimental novels that followed in the 1970s. Nevertheless, beginning with her early essays as a journalist and all the way through her late picaresque novels and enchanting fairytales, Carter's writing offers an intriguing insight into her conscious development of style, narrative, imagery and her abiding commitment to a linguistically and philosophically rich prose. Her biographer Edmund Gordon remarks that "British fiction in the late 1950s and early 1960s tended to be

formally stiff and verbally gaunt, in conscious retreat from the lush complexities of modernism" (49) and with a focus on social realism. Carter, however, found inspiration in previous generations, in medieval and modernist literature, in the Gothic, in Shakespeare, in fairytales and folklore, and she never shied away from combining styles, registers and themes that surprised and provoked. Despite their magical quality, Angela Carter's narratives bear a strong resemblance to her personal experiences, and considering her oeuvre as an extended exercise in autobiographical fiction, I will analyse the three novels chronologically in terms of her development as a writer and as a feminist literary icon. The three works in this thesis have not been typically studied together, but my decision for selecting them was driven by the fact that each one signifies a crucial transformation in her literary and personal endeavours. Chapter 1 will focus on her second, and most popular of her early works – the novel *The Magic Toyshop* which, in a characteristically Freudian manner, grants the reader a peak into Carter's own experience as an adolescent girl and her self-realisation as a woman. Chapter 2 will be centered on her last novel of the 1960s. Even though it was published in 1971, *Love* was completed at the end of the previous decade and marked not only the conclusion of an incredibly productive period for her, and on a personal note – her marriage, but her move towards a more experimental, fragmented and daring prose. Finally, in Chapter 3 I will explore *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman*, the first of the novels that exemplify Carter's initiation into magical realism and the moment she realized she could do anything in fiction which "marked the beginning of [her] obscurity" (Clapp 32). The novels I will analyse offer a rich repository of characters, both female and male, and even though my lens will be aimed at ideas of femininity, I will explore the Carteresque deconstruction of gender as a whole, not limited to the scope of feminism. Throughout her writing career, Carter passionately pondered "how much in love with the idea of the blameless suffering of women we all are, men and women both" (*The Sadeian Woman* 101), which consequently

prompted me to explore how the Carteresque fictional woman fits into or diverges from the stereotype of the suffering and sacrificial woman.

Conclusion

Having chosen a topic that juxtaposes two prominent concepts in Carter's books – violence and madness – as a method of contrasting aspects of femininity and masculinity, I hope to provide a more multifaceted perspective on Carter's canon. Angela Carter was not merely a feminist writer, but an extremely individualistic, diverse and critical one, who believed the self, whether male or female, is perpetually disassembled and rebuilt in order to serve whatever social function one choses for it. In 1978, she declared "The goddess is dead" (*The Sadeian Woman* 110) in a candid expression of her desire to destroy the falseness of sentimental femininities, but I believe that all her female characters leading up to that statement had already played that role she had masterfully assigned them with.

Chapter 1. Living Vicariously in *The Magic Toyshop*

> *Innocence is a transparent quality, difficult to see in full daylight … innocence is made real to us by the desecration of it.*
>
> - *The Sadeian Woman*

"The summer she was fifteen, Melanie discovered she was made of flesh and blood" (*The Magic Toyshop* 1). *The Magic Toyshop* opens with an explicit description of the budding sexual curiousity of its protagonist Melanie, who indulges in "a tranced voyage, exploring the whole of herself" (1). Carter's distinctive affinity for combining high and low culture, profanity and lyricism, shines through in the first paragraphs of her second novel. Her heroine engages in a self-conscious performance of her own sexuality, inspired by a framework of cultural images she has collected and reenacts in front of her bedroom mirror. She poses for a cohort of imaginary male artists artistically readjusting her stage persona, either a "Pre-Raphaelite", or "a la Toulouse Lautrec", judging herself as "too thin for a Titian or Renoir" or "particularly wicked" (*The Magic Toyshop* 1) in front of Lautrec. Melanie invents and reinvents herself, one minute a "pale, smug Cranach Venus", the next a gift-wrapped present "for a phantom bridegroom in an extra-dimensional bathroom-of-the-future in honeymoon Cannes" (*The Magic Toyshop* 2). In all of this she seems unable to locate an identity independent of an imaginary male recipient. It is truly in the first chapter of the novel that Carter sets the scene for the lifetime of disappointment which awaits her protagonist. Weighed down by cultural images of femininity, Carter's middle-class adolescent heroine is preoccupied with daydreams of a future self which would live up to the socially-imposed fantasies. Nevertheless, what unfolds in the novel is a forceful collision with the far-from-glamourous real world, Carter's fairytale-like take on "the traumatic transition from the

freedom of androgynous childhood to the confines of the adult feminine role" (Showalter 56). *The Magic Toyshop* is a novel about self-invention, and Melanie is "the first incarnation of a character who appears in several of Angela Carter's early short stories … a neurotic, teenage girl, clever, bored and self-absorbed" (Gordon 89). She is "the bourgeois virgin", as Carter called her (quoted in Gordon 89), and what is more, she is, to a certain degree, a mirror image of Carter's own experiences as an adolescent girl. Melanie is in possession of many of the private fears and insecurities Carter struggled with – ideals of body image, femininity and sexuality, and she is the fictional manifestation of a collective female disappointment silently inhabiting a loud and culturally pre-determined world.

The influences on Carter's novel can be traced back to the fairytales of the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault, Lewis Carrol's *Alice in Wonderland*, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, D.H.Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* whose ending she consciously borrowed for that of *The Magic Toyshop* (Gordon 91). Furthermore, she often conjured up Dickens' Miss Havisham when employing the symbolism of wedding dresses in her fiction (Gordon 28). Indeed, with a wedding dress begins Melanie's journey to womanhood – by stealing her mother's dress, putting it on and inadvertently destroying it, an act she believes to be the cause of her parents' death and the premature end of her own childhood. Carter inherited from her mother an interest in fashion which she combined with an interest in semiotics, and she came to believe that "clothes are the visible woman – the detachable skin which expresses inner aspirations, dreams and fantasies" (Gordon 11). Therefore throughout the novel, clothes and personalities are intrinsically connected. Her heroine puts "Melanie back on like a coat, slowly" (*The Magic Toyshop* 167) comparing herself to her mother who "must have been born dressed … in an elegant, well-fitting caul selected from a feature in a glossy magazine" (*The Magic Toyshop* 10). In the first pages of the book, Melanie puts on a "crazy dress", transforming into "a bride" and "a virgin"

– a perfect woman, and decides to go into the darkness of the garden. The first chapter is exceptionally heavy on symbolism, intertwining the mythology of Eve and fairytale imagery. Melanie perceives herself to be "the last, the only woman" in "the world, which was only this garden", and upon discovering she has locked herself out of her house, with an Alice-like desperation, climbs up the apple tree and tears the virtuous white satin, "horribly conscious of her own exposed nakedness" (*The Magic Toyshop* 20). The next day when she finds out her parents have died in a plane crash, she feels as if "part of herself was killed, a tender, budding part; the daisy-crowned young girl who would stay behind to haunt the old house" (*The Magic Toyshop* 31), and her world of blessed innocence has abruptly ended.

Melanie and her younger siblings, Jonathon and Victoria, are sent to live with their maternal uncle, a toymaker they have never met. They find themselves transported from an affluent and warm home environment to one of poverty, complex family relations and a suffocating lack of freedom. The children are introduced to Uncle Philip's dumb wife Margaret and her two brothers Finn and Francie Jowles. At first apprehensive towards her new family, Melanie grows to love and crave their affection, developing complicated romantic feelings for Finn. The house, on the other hand, seems filled with dark secrets, danger lurking behind every locked door, and with little joy left with Philip's stifling presence around. There are only a few descriptive episodes in the narrative which demonstrate Philip's physical cruelty, but his violence and bad temper hold an omnipresent power over the house and its residents, a sense of dread which needs no action to be reaffirmed. Nonetheless, their fear is exacerbated when he recruits Melanie to perform as Leda in one of his grotesque puppet shows, and the twisted sense of pleasure he derives from inflicting pain on his family culminates in a mock-rape scene between Melanie and his mechanical "phallic" swan. Afterwards while Philip is away, Finn seeks revenge by destroying the swan, followed by a drunken celebration of their temporary freedom, during

which Melanie learns about the incestuous relationship between Margaret and Francie. Upon his return, Philip enraged by their disobedience and his wife's betrayal, burns down the house, and Melanie's world is demolished once again. The novel closes with only Finn and Melanie's narrow escape and their anxious anticipation of an uncertain future together.

A work of autobiographical fiction

Carter's second novel is, by and large, a thinly-veiled fictionalized account of her own childhood. She grew up in a stifling family environment deprived of privacy, under the oppressive influence of her mother, Olive Farthing, who exerted immense control over all aspects of Angela's life, stripping her from any sense of agency and independence. Carter's first and most dramatic need for self-creation was triggered by the infantilizing relationship with Olive. She perceived "her clever, stylish, well-read mother as a classic example of frustrated female potential" (Gordon 11), and spent her adolescent years in a state of revolt against the femininity her mother stood for – the prim and proper lady of the house. Carter's feminism was rooted in her relationship with Olive rather than that with her father whom she described as having "very little to do with the stern fearful face of the Father in patriarchy" ("Fathers" 26).

She grew up to be an overweight and self-conscious teenager actively trying to craft her own self-image (Gordon 35) who would go to great lengths in her desire to distance herself from her mother. Carter took pleasure in being provocative, a trait heavily present in her writing as well, but despite her confidence in the intellectual sphere, she struggled with deep-seated physical insecurities and became fascinated with the alluring image women were so desperate to portray, and the mental and physical pain it inevitably caused them. Carter developed an unhealthy preoccupation with her weight, and food found its way into her psychologically rich fiction, serving as one of the leitmotifs in her second novel. Melanie not

only fears food, being "afraid that if she ate too much of it she would grow fat and nobody would ever love her and she would die a virgin" (*The Magic Toyshop* 3), but she constantly measures herself up to the women she encounters, equating a state of content with a distorted notion of beauty. Their housekeeper Mrs Rundle is seen as "fat, old and ugly" (*The Magic Toyshop* 3), unmarried and so lonely that she resorts to similarly naïve fantasies, "dreamily inventing the habits and behaviour of the husband she had never enjoyed" (*The Magic Toyshop* 3). In contrast to her Aunt Margaret, "the worn, sad woman", Melanie feels herself to be "very strong, young and vital and tough", owing to her "resilient body, fed on wholesome food all its life" (*The Magic Toyshop* 138).

Carter's biographer Edmund Gordon reflects on her mental distress by referring to the work of psychotherapist Mara Selvini Palazzolli, who defined the two common features of women struggling with eating disorders as a "heightened awareness of the cultural baggage attached to femininity and a lack of personal autonomy due to having an overprotective mother" (Gordon 39). I am drawing attention to this aspect of Carter's life because an overwhelming number of accounts on her personal life, her literary persona and her interest in gender politics use as a starting point her early insecurities as a woman. Furthermore, women's complex relationship with their bodies is at the heart of any discussion about female mental illness, fictional or not, and especially considering modern culture's "impossible and contradictory demands on young women" (Chesler 7), women's emotional responses to their physical features have become an integral part in diagnosing, treating and evaluating various manifestations of "the female malady". In her book *Women and Madness*, Phyllis Chesler also refers to the idea of women becoming "female impersonators" as a reaction to their aesthetic burden (7). This is a concept which Carter had long adopted as one of the recurrent themes in her narratives. From the start of her career, she had been intrigued by the physical and emotional aspects that mold a woman into a desired feminine ideal, and the numerous

ways in which women of all ages, classes and backgrounds participate in this charade, maintaining a faux sense of femininity.

Another key autobiographical element crucial to understanding the novel is the choice of setting – "the south London of [Angela's] childhood" (Gordon 61) where her female protagonist is destined to make a "dramatic gesture, forsaking everything, giving up her oppressive past for an uncertain future" (Gordon 47). Melanie's dramatic gesture involves reluctantly committing to her future with a man, much like Carter who disobeyed her parents by entering into a marriage she perceived as her passage to freedom. However, the same man whom she saw as her liberator turned into her next oppressor, and her second novel serves as evidence for her "plotting her escape from another oppressive domestic situation" whilst recreating the "stifling atmosphere of her teenage years" (Gordon 31). The tyrannical Uncle Philip Flowers in the novel is an exaggerated fictional portrayal of Carter's husband, whose constant depression filled their home with a heavy air of discontent. The Flowers household closely resembles a "madhouse", as referred to by its inhabitants, and as Elaine Showalter recapitulates, mental asylums have long been compared to any man-made institution that exerts control over women – from an overbearing parental environment to the socially limiting scope of marriage (1). Feeling mentally infantilized and emotionally smothered, Carter described the speed at which she composed her early novels – one every year between 1965 and 1969 – as the product of a "neurotic compulsion", the result of her swaying between her creatively repressing roles of a daughter and a housewife. This overbearing sense of intrusion on the self is another leitmotif in the novel. To her distress, Melanie discovers a "spy-hole" in her room, "neat, round and entirely premeditated … made by someone to watch her" (*The Magic Toyshop* 109). She is unsettled by the inability to exist authentically in a house that exerts control over all aspects of her. "They had not even let her keep her own loneliness but had intruded on it" (*The Magic Toyshop* 109).

The magical madness of the toyshop

After her parents' tragic death, and departing from her opulent childhood home, Melanie arrives at the gritty, poverty-stricken south parts of London into a household likened to a "madhouse". Literary critic Elaine Showalter states that one possible reason for the popular image of the "madwoman" was the "feminization" of poverty during Victorian times (54), and that this cultural perception is an anticipated outcome of "a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable, but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal" (Showalter 73). In Melanie's new home "the water ran cold, there was no proper toilet soap, she could feel her skin corroding" (*The Magic Toyshop* 55), and being poor seems to be the antipode to being feminine: "The thought upset her – would there be any spare money, any pocket-money, for her own small, personal needs, shampoos and stockings and perhaps a little face-cream, that sort of thing?" (*The Magic Toyshop* 55). Women's economic and social constraints are apparent in the fact that Melanie and Aunt Margaret are tied down to the household and not allowed any existence independent of the domestic space.

> "I don't really need ready money, you see. And it is his way," she tried to gloss over the humiliation of it.
>
> "I understand," said Melanie. An ancient, female look passed between them; they were poor women pensioners, planets round a male sun. (*The Magic Toyshop* 140)

Showalter explores the manifold ways in which "a girl's growing awareness of [her] social dependence and constraint, the realization of her immobility and disadvantage as compared with her brothers and other boys, may well [precipitate] an emotional crisis" (57). This universal gender contrast is marked by Melanie's continuous comparisons with her

brother Jonathon. Despite the otherwise dramatic move to the Flowers household, Jonathon is taken under their uncle's wing, his passion in constructing models of ships indulged in, and thus his days are filled with more meaning than those of his older sister. "Jonathon now worked on model ships under the eye of Uncle Philip and was learning how to carve them directly from wood" (*The Magic Toyshop* 93), whilst Melanie, ignored, uncared for and taken away from any form of education, is left to help around with mindless chores and minute tasks at the shop.

Another important presence in the Flowers household is that of Aunt Margaret – the dumb woman, whose ability to speak has mysteriously vanished on her wedding day, "like a curse" (*The Magic Toyshop* 37), implicitly triggered by Philip's oppressive presence and violent nature. Philip is said to like "silent women" (*The Magic Toyshop* 63), and in Melanie's mind "the new aunt had been a shadow … a wispy appendage of the toymaking uncle. Now she had a substance because she had a characteristic. Dumbness" (*The Magic Toyshop* 37). Relating Carter's choice of portraying Margaret as dumb to various historical accounts of mental illnesses, a clear association can be established with the fact that women's refusal to speak has often been considered a symptom of mental illness, particularly hysteria (Showalter 156), "a rebellion against the rationality of the patriarchal order" (Cixous 49), or "a creative escape form the boredom and futility of daily life" (Showalter 156). Showalter further notes that on an "avant-garde" spectrum, hysteria and feminism (determination to speak) are situated on the two opposing ends (161) which would then infer Margaret's feminism coming to life at the end of the novel, when she speaks up to warn Finn and Melanie to run away. "'Get out,' she said. She could speak. Catastrophe had freed her tongue" (*The Magic Toyshop* 197).

I would now like to direct the focus of this analysis towards a comparison of the Flowers household to a mental institution. According to Elaine Showalter, asylums and

therapy mirror the female experience within family and society, and she states that women in mental institutions spend a great deal of time observing themselves and each other (212). "The female body is constantly on display … feeling that they have no secure identities, the women look to external appearances for confirmation that they exist. They continually look at their faces in the mirror, but out of desperation rather than narcissism" (Showalter 212). Interestingly, Carter believed that in the Western world "women and mirrors are in complicity with one another" (*Fireworks* 65), and she employed her character's need for physical affirmation for similar purposes. Comparable to the environment in a mental institution, Melanie is "constrained, controlled and spied on" (Gordon 31), and she craves others' validation for her own existence.

> "Pretty lady! Pretty lady!"
>
> "Do you really think so?" said Melanie wistfully, as if Victoria's opinion counted or as if being pretty was a kind of protection. (*The Magic Toyshop* 162)

Carter's heroine suffers greatly due to her inability to verify for herself some sort of personality in a house with no mirrors. Melanie has "not seen her own reflection" since her parents' death and she is "seized with panic" (*The Magic Toyshop* 103), petrified that she might fail to recognize herself if she were to catch a glimpse of her own face. Therefore she is desperate to remember the old Melanie through others' perceptions, often looking at herself through a male gaze. Before Finn kisses her, "she could see her own face reflected in little in the black pupils of his subaqueous eyes … she did not move … she stood in his arms and watched herself in his eyes. It was a comfort to see herself as she thought she looked" (*The Magic Toyshop* 105), but during the kiss he closes his eyes and she feels as if she has been lost again. So, she wishes "someone was watching them, to appreciate them, or that she

herself was watching them" (*The Magic Toyshop* 106). Melanie is incapable of constructing an identity not reliant on her appearance, on external images of femininity or her own immature ideals, so with time her only mode of existence is actively trying to be the woman she believes Finn wants her to be. "She sat in Finn's face; there she was, mirrored twice" (*The Magic Toyshop* 193).

In her elaborate study on female madness and its cultural representations, Elaine Showalter emphasizes the stark juxtaposition between the "feminine nature of Ophelia's insanity as contrasted with Hamlet's universalized metaphysical distress" (10). Conventions as old as the ones enacted on the Elizabethan stage dress Ophelia in white with "fantastical garlands of wildflowers" and her hair loose (Showalter 11). As noted by Showalter, these perceptions evoke a duality of messages about femininity and insanity. "The woman with her hair down indicated an offense against decorum, an improper sensuality", and the flowers allude to her sexuality, she is in the act of symbolically deflowering herself (Showalter 11). On the other hand, in the sphere of psychotherapy, an improvement in a woman's mental state has predominantly been assessed through her revitalized interest in her own appearance. Case studies and medical journals often portray women in the midst of madness with disheveled hair and no interest in their clothing or weight. In *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie equates hair with femininity; female essence is symbolically represented by one's locks. It becomes evident in the first chapter that for her, hair is not merely a sign of beauty, but the mark of being a grown-up, real woman.

> … she had given up climbing when she started to grow her hair … when her periods began, she had felt she was pregnant with herself, bearing the slowly ripening embryo of Melanie-grown-up inside herself for a gestation time the length of which she was not precisely aware … and during this time, to climb a

> tree might provoke a miscarriage and she would remain forever stranded in childhood, a crop-haired tomboy. (*The Magic Toyshop* 20)

Femininity is a form of shield to Melanie, "she pulled her hair around her, to protect herself for the night" (*The Magic Toyshop* 20), and when faced with the damaged dress and "her hair larded with apple leaves … she brushed and combed them onto the floor, wrenching out long strands of hair in her fury. It did her good to feel the pain. She was chastened and humiliated, a foolish child" (*The Magic Toyshop* 23). As retribution, Melanie attempts a dramatic return to the androgynous childhood she was so eager to leave by pretending to be a bride. So after her parents' untimely death and with a heavy conscience, she "plaited her hair so tightly that it hurt her, straining hair and flesh until it felt as though the white seam down the back of her head might split and the brains gush out" (*The Magic Toyshop* 28). Carter also pays great attention to Aunt Margaret's hair especially juxtaposed to her frail body. "Aunt Margaret grew even thinner and more spectral. Her hair, red snakes struggling to free themselves from the hairpins, was the only vital thing about her" (*The Magic Toyshop* 134). When Melanie wonders "however does [Margaret] manage to do her hair without a mirror?" (*The Magic Toyshop* 188), it is as if she is asking however does she manage to be a woman, and is she truly one, if there is no one to be feminine for, not even one's own reflection? Faced with the bleak reality of her new home, Melanie is distraught by the fact that she cannot care for that revered symbol of femininity as she always had before, her hair is now constantly dirty and coarse. Nonetheless, she tosses "her hair loose down her back without plaiting it up again, to please Finn" (*The Magic Toyshop* 97) in her misunderstood notion that in order to feel feminine, she needs a masculine audience.

Having considered all the symbolism Carter applies in her narrative, it comes as no surprise that "the cardinal difference between men and women's relations to their bodies" (Sage 54) was of great interest to her and her take on gender politics. With a similar interest

in mind, Showalter speaks of a male "voice running critique of appearance and performance" (213) both inside mental institutions and in the outside world. This conventional male behaviour is illustrated by Finn and Philip's attitudes towards Melanie's physical features. Finn criticizes the way Melanie wears her hair, "You're spoiling your pretty looks, pet" (*The Magic Toyshop* 45), and exerts some male authority over her body by rearranging her braids in a semi-flirtatious, semi-disinterested manner, provoking her insecurities and planting in her a need to seek his approval. On the other hand, Uncle Philip's interest in Melanie's appearance is limited to her resemblance of a grotesque puppet. "This is how he sees you. White chiffon and flowers in your hair. A very young girl" (*The Magic Toyshop* 141). In his eyes, Melanie "would be a nymph crowned with daisies once again; he saw her as once she had seen herself" (*The Magic Toyshop* 141). She is so desperately deprived of any sense of self, that even in her recognition of the parody of a girl she is made to be, and even when knowing she is taken advantage of, Melanie still feels "flattered" (*The Magic Toyshop* 141).

In conclusion, the female "madness" in the novel is one of a "continual state of mourning", the women are grieving "what they never had … or had too briefly, and what they can't have in the present" (Chesler 102). In contrast, the male madness is depicted as a sullen escapism from reality or an obsessive determination. Jonathon, who unlike his sister feels no need for intimacy or family and takes "no interest in the room or the company", devotes himself completely to his hobby and acts as an almost ghostly presence throughout the novel. Similarly, after being attacked by Philip, Finn stops talking, engulfed by thoughts of revenge because "only Uncle Philip was real to him any more", until he accomplishes it and swiftly becomes "the old, soft-voiced, slippery-tongued Finn" (*The Magic Toyshop* 134). Melanie, Mrs Rundle, Margaret, on the other hand, are all fictional manifestations of the same female longing for self and happiness which is never sated because it is eternally misplaced. In the same vein, Margaret Fuller remarks that the crucial difference between the

male and female experiences lies in the fact that "men never in any extreme of despair [wish] to be women" (quoted in Chesler 292). This significant distinction is exemplified by Melanie's dream of being Jonathon and her revelation upon waking up, that "she had been so uncertain of herself all day that it was almost a relief to find she was in fact, Jonathon" (*The Magic Toyshop* 174).

The violent nature of desire

Even though "the violence in the house [is] palpable" (*The Magic Toyshop* 135), very little of it is actually transposed into physical incidents. In comparison with Carter's other works, some of which are disturbingly graphic, no real rape takes place in *The Magic Toyshop*, and apart from Philip's play, there are no descriptive episodes of violence towards the female characters. Edmund Gordon defines Carter's second novel as her first version of the Fall, a fairy tale of "the fortunate expulsion from an evil Eden", where the toyshop is a secularized Eden and Philip acts as the God figure. However, in an interview in the 1970s, Carter stated that "Eden is always evil … states of grace always are" (quoted in Gordon 32). The Eden she is expelling her heroine from is not a physical space, but the mental realm of a bogus female grace, notably illustrated by a recurrent image of a Fallen Woman throughout the novel. The wedding dress Melanie wears "opened out, flapping white wings in her face", a foreshadowing of the swan, and when she finally reaches her window, she jumps and crashes into her room "face down on the floor" (*The Magic Toyshop* 22). Later on, Finn shows her Philip's toys and one in particular captures her attention. "Lying face-downwards in a tangle of strings was a puppet fully five feet high, a *sylphide* in a fountain of white tulle, fallen flat down as if someone had got tired of her in the middle of playing with her, dropped her and wandered off" (*The Magic Toyshop* 67). A similar image appears later in the pleasure garden where Finn takes her and shows her his favourite statue – that of Queen Victoria, "from this plinth had, a long time ago, fallen sideways a tall figure which now lay face-down

in a puddle, narcissistically gazing at itself" (*The Magic Toyshop* 104). Finally, the puppet-nymph in Philip's show "attempted a final arabesque but the effort proved too much for her weak heart. She gracefully collapsed in a waterfall of white tulle" (*The Magic Toyshop* 127). All of these figures – the girl, the toy, the queen, the puppet, mirror each other and represent Carter's notion of a necessary Fall from a phony grace as an escape from the evil Eden of ideologies and mythologies surrounding femininity.

In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter analysed the symbolic allure of innocence and virtue and declared that "it is necessary for the young girl, the virgin, the rose … to be of exceptional beauty. Her beauty in itself excites abuse because it has helped to make her an object of reverence. Her expectation of reverence ensures her passivity and her weakness" (72). Carter argued that female "purity is always in danger" because the woman "herself mystified by herself, narcissistically enamoured of the idea of herself as Blessed Virgin, has no notion at all of who she is except in fantasy. To the extent that she has been made holy and thinks of herself as such, so she is capable of being desecrated" (*The Sadeian Woman* 73). In all her narratives, Angela Carter sets out to subvert her characters' innocence and in the case of *The Magic Toyshop*, she desecrates her protagonist by "swiftly [disabusing] her of her romantic notions" (Gordon 120) through the mock-rape, through her own conflicting desire for Finn, through placing her in an environment where she can no longer play the role of the virtuous virgin, if she wishes to survive. Finn is forced by Uncle Philip to rehearse a rape scene with Melanie in his bedroom, an order he is unable to follow through with and he confesses everything to her. "'He wanted me to fuck you' … She was deeply agitated. She had never connected the word with herself; her phantom bridegroom would never have fucked her (*The Magic Toyshop* 151). Later on, when Finn destroys the mechanical swan and begs Melanie to sleep in her bed, she feels it is "the most normal thing in the world" (*The Magic Toyshop* 174), and at the same time she is revolted in the knowledge "they would get

married one day and live together all their lives and there would always be pervasive squalor and dirt and mess and shabbiness, always, forever and forever. And babies crying and washing to be done and toast burning all the rest of her life. And never any glamour or romance or charm. Nothing fancy" (*The Magic Toyshop* 177). Her suffering is not caused by external acts of aggression but by her self-illusions being shattered and by her own role as a passive observer of her life.

Melanie is the perfect representation of a trope character which Carter analysed more than a decade later by stating that "she has done nothing at all to deserve the pain inflicted upon her except to juxtapose the expectations of a well brought-up virgin against the harsh cynicism of poverty" (*The Sadeian Woman* 50). Carter further argued that "since she herself denies the violence of her own desires, all her sexual encounters become for her a form of violence because she is not free to judge them … It is not rape but seduction she fears, and the loss of self in participating in her own seduction" (*The Sadeian Woman* 49). During her kiss with Finn, Melanie "choked and struggled, beating her fists against him, convulsed with horror at this sensual and intimate connection, this rude encroachment on her physical privacy, this humiliation" (*The Magic Toyshop* 106). In his presence, she is utterly subdued not so much through forceful actions on his part, but because of the way she perceives their relationship from the start. He is masculine and assertive; she is feminine and merely responsive. "It was as if he had put on the quality of maleness like a flamboyant cloak. He was a tawny lion poised for the kill – and was she the prey?" (*The Magic Toyshop* 45).

Phyllis Chesler defines the psychological portrait of the powerless woman as "consisting of naiveté, fearfulness, self-hatred and of compassion, passion and idealism" (322). All of these stereotypically female attributes are discernible in the characters in the novel, and Carter has purposefully portrayed her fictional women in this light. In doing so, she has created caricatures of female passivity which undermine the romanticism ascribed to

it. Carter believed "the only reward of virtue is to escape punishment, while virtue itself consists solely in observing an arbitrary set of rules" (*The Sadeian Woman* 42), and she discussed "how far is [such a] behaviour innately that of a woman or how far has she adopted the stance of the cringe as a means of self-defence. She is not only a woman in a man's world; she is also a receptacle of feeling, a repository of the type of sensibility we call 'feminine'" (*The Sadeian Woman* 47). Her point of view is illustrated by Aunt Margaret, who crouches at the foot of the table, while Philip sits in a large chair; who has given up speaking whilst he barks "brusque commands" at her (*The Magic Toyshop* 124). Margaret's passive virtue is exemplified by her incessant acceptance of her role. She continues to wear her wedding gift, a painfully heavy collar designed and made by Philip and when she wears it, she eats "with the utmost difficulty" (*The Magic Toyshop* 113). Her husband, on the other hand, observes "her with expressionless satisfaction, apparently deriving a certain pleasure from her discomfort, or even finding that the sight of it improved his appetite" (*The Magic Toyshop* 113). She has learnt how to make her slavery bearable, by being silent and submissive, but she has never considered fighting for herself. Even in the portrait drawn by Finn she is presented as the perfect suffering woman, sensual and sad. "Aunt Margaret sat on a bank of primroses, naked but for a cloak of brilliant green loosely slung around her shoulders. Her famine leanness was softened by all the scarlet hair drifting around her … Down her white cheeks rolled two fat tears which glistened" (*The Magic Toyshop* 108). With only her as a role model, Melanie quickly adapts to this mode of existence and notion of herself. Both of them play their roles of voiceless and subjugated women without even considering the idea of defending themselves or fighting for their rights. The only rebellion in the book is carried out by a man, Finn, and the women merely follow his lead, fearful and indecisive in their manner. For them, to oppose Philip is to symbolically oppose a patriarchal order which seems to hold in place the "natural" order of things – their own femininity, their

relationships with men and their roles in an otherwise purposeless world. The women have already enslaved themselves in their minds, and they simply participate in the male masquerade, almost always in the audience, applauding "with dutiful enthusiasm" (*The Magic Toyshop* 129) "until their hands hurt" (*The Magic Toyshop* 128).

In conclusion, Carter's second novel introduces her sardonic idea of "the perfect woman" and in exaggerating it, she vehemently attacks the notion that women's patience is or should be a revered quality. More than a decade after she started publishing her novels, Angela Carter summarized some of her views on femininity in her cultural analysis of the works of Marquis De Sade. There she wrote that "the virtuous … with her incompetence, her gullibility, her whining, her frigidity, her reluctance to take control of her own life, is a perfect woman. She always does what she is told. She is at the mercy of any master, because that is the nature of her own definition of goodness" (*The Sadeian Woman* 55). One might expect an outspokenly feminist writer to be resolute in creating strong, independent and morally inspiring female characters. However, in terms of Carter's fiction this is rarely the case, and her women are often "woefully uninspiring" (Gordon 31), a fictional manifestation of her lifelong discontent with the idea of the pure and passive female. Through her narratives, Carter tends to figuratively punish her characters for their inability to save themselves by desecrating all that they perceive to be holy within them. Her critical opinion correlates with Chesler's idea that "women are no more to be congratulated on their "pacifism" than men are to be congratulated for their "violence"" (332).

Conclusion

Carter's biographer Edmund Gordon defines her early novels as "a blend of social commentary and psychodrama, in which the characters have ordinary enough (if thoroughly bohemian) existences, but extraordinary fantasy lives" (63). Whereas, in the *Women in the*

House of Fiction, Lorna Sage writes of "a recurrent Carter plot from these years which, if you translated it into more or less realistic terms, would go like this: a middle-class virgin bewitched and appalled by the fictions of femininity falls in love with a working-class boy, a dandified, dressed-up tramp who's meant to make sense of her desires, but doesn't" (170). Nevertheless, Sage's synopsis strikes me as a gross oversimplification of the underlying dissatisfaction which drove Carter to delve into the nature of female desire. When encountering Melanie, the focus ought to be placed not on the male counterpart who is supposed to make sense of her. In doing so, the reader would participate in the same pathetic reenactment of passion which Melanie subjects herself to. Instead, the key message sent by Carter revolves around her character's tragic inability to discover a self outside of the images imposed on her. Melanie, just like many of the female characters to follow, is never, even for a moment, abandoned by the cultural and social baggage that pins her down to a stereotypical female role, and it is that psychological entrapment that turns her into a dramatic female character. She is convincingly relatable yet unsettlingly pitiful in her role as a self-dramatizing innocent girl whose naïve romantic illusions are bound to be violently crushed. The particular circumstances of her life are of little importance to Carter, she aims her feminist discontent not so much at individual male acts of violence but at the presupposed female passivity that allows them to perpetually unfold. Much in the same vein, Phyllis Chesler declares that as much as "women who live in patriarchal settings are defined by certain traits, or by the absence of other traits" (319), "female emotional "talents" must be viewed in terms of the overall price exacted by sexism. It is illogical and dangerous to romanticize traits that one purchases with one's freedom and dignity – even if they are "nice" traits; even if they make one's slavery more bearable; even if they charm and soothe the oppressor's rage and sorrow" (318). Rebellious, provocative and indulgently individualistic

Angela Carter revisited this idea in each and every female character she created in the following decades.

Chapter 3. Self-deceit and Self-destruction in *Love*

To speak of love is to betray
my independent yesterday
- *"Love's Impossibility"*

Through the looking glass of fiction, Angela Carter revisited her own life, questioned her beliefs and ridiculed social and cultural conventions. She began her writing career in the 1960s, a period in which she felt "all that was holy was in the process of being profaned", and that dramatic changes were taking place in "the society around … [and in her] own questioning of the nature of [her] reality as a woman" ("Notes from the Front Line" 70). Those early formative years as a writer laid the groundwork for her eclectic oeuvre, in which she explored her recurrent themes concerning disparities between gender and sex, class distinctions and aspects of "Englishness", and she ardently refused identification with her background. Carter dwelled on questions such as "how that fiction of [her] "femininity" was created, by means outside [her] control, and palmed off on [her] as the real thing" ("Notes from the Front Line" 70), and in relation to her career, the decade of sexual revolution and second-wave feminism proved to be one of intense emotional turmoil and vast creative output.

Predominantly pegged as a feminist writer, Carter loathed the notion that her interest in the relations between the sexes should be the defining quality of her works, and she exercised a radically individualistic form of feminism that would frequently place her in disagreement with both feminists and non-feminists alike. A firm objector to mythologization, she believed that those who saw her in a one-dimensional light, be it as a feminist writer, a magical realist, a "Fairy Godmother" or any other label attached to her, had

completely missed her point. Carter had a multifaceted personality and she often presented different aspects of herself in real life, and this theatricality is a trait she shares with her fictional characters. In regard to the feminist movement and its various social and political expressions, Carter maintained that she wasn't "actively involved in anything" but liked to "snipe from the sidelines" and that is why she "[got] attacked a lot" (quoted in Gordon 215). Despite the fact that she is mainly considered a feminist writer, a straightforward reading of Carter's fiction as "feminist" would fail to encompass its psychological complexity and philosophical nuances. During the sixties, Carter "identified" alternately with her male and female characters (Sage 16), and even though *The Magic Toyshop* is the most popular of her early works, it came after her first novel *Shadow Dance*, which along with the later *Several Perceptions* and *Love* became known as "The Bristol Trilogy".

The Bristol Trilogy

"The 1950s and early 1960s were a fallow period for British feminism, with a huge cultural emphasis placed on the nuclear family" (Gordon 42). After marrying at the age of nineteen, Carter found herself living out her domestic nightmare in a flat in the Bristol suburb of Clifton with her first husband Paul Carter. Torn between Paul's "brutal silence" and the neverending demands of the household which she referred to as "the fire-kettle-porridge-bread routine", Carter longed for a creative escape. She soon discovered it in the world of "provincial bohemia" (Gordon 61) that Clifton offered her, at the heart of which was a local pub she frequented and the acquaintances she made there. Clifton struck her as "very seedy and picturesque", and the pub's clientele was predominantly "made up of aspiring writers, out-of-work actors, penniless painters and musicians … promiscuous and dissolute" (Gordon 61). This new exhilarating environment separated her from the monotonous and unfulfilling life with Paul, and from it she drew inspiration for the characters of her first novel, *Shadow Dance*, also published as *Honeybuzzard*.

Carter's first book deals with issues of stereotyping genders, with one of the main characters Honeybuzzard portrayed as the "shadow side" of masculinity to the passive male protagonist Morris (Sivyer "Shadow Dance"), whereas femininity is mainly acted out by the "book's nightmare-heroine" Ghislaine (Sage 11). As Lorna Sage writes, in her first novel Carter "crammed in ideas and themes and images that [she] was to explore at leisure for years to come" (9). A representative example is the portrayal of the vile Honeybuzzard as a toy-maker, in anticipation of Melanie's uncle, who fantasizes about the "freedom of role-playing" (Sage 11). "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" (*Shadow Dance* 79). In contrast, Ghislaine "was a very young girl. She used to look like a young girl in a picture book … the sort of girl one cannot imagine sitting on the lavatory or shaving her armpits or picking her nose" (*Shadow Dance* 2) until Honeybuzzard "knifed her" and now "the scar drew her whole face sideways … and her face was horribly lop-sided, skin, features and all dragged away from the bone" (*Shadow Dance* 3). As Edmund Gordon observes, the character's "disfigurement is a metaphor for what Carter's doing to the literary female form … [Ghislaine] starts off as a figure from male fantasy and she becomes a woman of lurid physicality" (82). Carter has made her more human and in turn, more disturbing. The novel opens with one act of desecration upon the heroine's innocence and beauty, and the narrative reaches its climax with Ghislaine's rape and murder at the hands of Honeybuzzard.

The second novel considered part of this loose trilogy, *Several Perceptions,* was inspired by the 1960s' counterculture of antipsychiatry and psychiatrist R.D.Laing's work *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. Carter was intrigued by Laing's notion of an "ontological insecurity" residing in the individual, who is bereft of a true self and is thus "locked in a continuous struggle to maintain a sense of personal identity" (Gordon 108). The ontologically insecure person fears "engulfment" by others, the

"implosion" of external reality, and in extreme cases experiences "a radical division … between their 'inner self' and a 'false self' they present to the world" (Gordon 108). Fear of engulfment was one of Carter's private anxieties since childhood, and just as much as "she wanted warmth and passion … she wanted to be free from emotional demands" (Gordon 57). Carter was fascinated by Laing's view on mental illness as a response to the social circumstances of one's life, but she "was suspicious of [his] concept of an essential inner self" (Gordon 108). Thus, in her distinctive manner of collecting ideas from a myriad of sources and blending them together, she combined Laing's concepts with others derived from empiricist philosophy (Gordon 108). So, the novel's title and epigraph were derived from David Hume's works, and "madness", whether it was subtly mild or melodramatically severe, constituted a considerable fraction of the allegories Carter employed in her narratives.

Lastly, with *Love*, a more mature Carter closed the Bristol chapter of her life and fiction by revisiting both of the aforementioned concepts – the performance of masculinity and femininity, and the contradicting demands of love and independence upon the self. In Carter's fifth novel, love is felt most strongly as self-deceit, and "the improvised performative nature of selfhood" (Gordon 106) is what drives the three main characters throughout the story. Her recurrent themes of theatricality, sexual exploration and madness appear again, but towards the end of the decade, she had abandoned some of her previous beliefs. Carter considered *Love* an "anti-Laing novel" in contrast to the "pro-Laing" *Several Perceptions*, and even though she had previously described Laing's take on "madness [and] alienation" as "glamourous", the years she had spent living with her depressed husband had made her regard "mental illness as a piteous retreat from human contact" (Gordon 126). She openly admitted that *Love* was autobiographical, but the character with whom she identified was not the female protagonist. In her tale of a destructively toxic relationship, Carter placed her sympathies with the husband Lee and stated that he was her fictional alter ego (Gordon

127). Not only did she acknowledge her portrayal of "the husband-wife dynamic disguised by a crafty gender switch", but Carter also defined *Love* as "an exercise in style" (Gordon 127), and her conscious practice included Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* "for precision" and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* in her depiction of passion (Gordon 128). The storyline itself is inspired by Benjamin Constant's 1816 book *Adolphe* about an "emotionally ambivalent, destructive romance", and both novels perceive "romantic attachments as intolerable constraints on personal freedom" (Gordon 126).

The narrative revolves around the turbulent relationship between Lee, his wife Annabel and his brother Buzz. As Lorna Sage notes, "glamorous, sinister Honeybuzzard [from *Shadow Dance*] has been split into two, the "Honey" reborn as beautiful Lee, and the Buzzard as his dark half-brother" (20). The novel begins in medias res, on a day when "Annabel saw the sun and moon in the sky at the same time", a possible allusion to Lee and Buzz, and "the sight filled her with a terror which entirely consumed her and did not leave her until the night closed in catastrophe" (*Love* 1). Then through episodic flashbacks the reader is made aware of her mental instability and is introduced to the hesitant beginning of her relationship with Lee, their marriage and her first meeting with Buzz. Annabel "suffered from nightmares too terrible to reveal [to her husband]" even though Lee "was a beautiful boy whom anybody else would have thought well worth the effort of loving" (*Love* 3). Lee is a university student and a high-school teacher, a sentimental and "honest orphan" coming from a working-class background, who meets Annabel by mere chance at the end of a party when she "was so cold she arbitrarily selected one boy and went to lie down beside him to keep herself from freezing" (*Love* 16). His half-brother Buzz, on the other hand, is an outrageous figure, detectably unstable through his extravagant display of promiscuity, violence and drug abuse, whom Annabel initially considers "the boy who … frightened her more than anything had done until that date" (*Love* 4), but they quickly develop a deeper

unspoken connection than the one she has with Lee. Carter elaborates on the brothers' life story by elucidating that their mother "had gone mad in style" (*Love* 10) and they have been brought up by their aunt. From the beginning of the novel, the dynamic between Buzz and Lee exudes a sense of intense intimacy fused with rivalry, and later on in the narrative a much deeper homoerotic relationship is revealed. The book follows Lee's inability to connect with Annabel, who on her part experiences the external world through her own twisted "mythology". The narrative progresses through a number of significant events which the characters interpret through their own narrow perspectives – Lee's affair with another woman, Annabel's suicide attempt upon seeing them together, her hospitalization, their subsequent failed reconciliation, and finally Annabel and Buzz submitting to long-repressed desires and spending a disappointing night together.

> In time, the principal actors (the wife, the brothers, the mistress) assembled a coherent narrative from these images but each interpreted them differently and drew their own conclusions which were all quite dissimilar for each told himself the story as if he were the hero except for Lee, who, by common choice, found himself the villain. (*Love* 41)

The novel ends with Annabel's utter break from reality and her theatrical suicide, whilst Lee is seeking comfort in the arms of one of his students. In his recapitulation of Carter's writing throughout the 1960s, Edmund Gordon states that the image of committing "suicide by gas" appears in all the novels in the so-called Bristol trilogy, "becoming … more macabre as the decade progresses" (75). "Morris in *Shadow Dance* contemplates suicide, Joseph in *Several Perceptions* attempts it, and finally Annabel in *Love* carries it off" (Gordon 75). And even though she takes her own life, unlike her original incarnation as Ghislaine, Annabel's suicide is not a victorious but a piteous act, and both girls are portrayed as the

"blasphemous sacrifice to the fantasies of power … [they] die of delusion, overdosed on role-playing, and complicit in their own destruction" (Sage 20).

A theatricality of sexuality

"The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance, pass, re-pass, glide away and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations" (*Several Perceptions* epigraph). Carter's partiality towards Hume's concept of selfhood is understandable given that she perceived "her own very strongly held self-image as a random blur of reactions" (Gordon 108), and equated not having a fixed self with absolute freedom of choice and action. Carter's affinity for theatricality and her passion for Shakespeare, combined with her philosophical explorations, resulted in her works growing more theatrical in essence and form (the culmination being her last novel, *Wise Children*). The removed style, dynamic pace and sensational pathos present in *Love* evoke this distinctive sense of theatrical artificiality.

> In the sequence of events which now drew the two brothers and the girl down, in ever-decreasing spirals, to the empty place at the centre of the labyrinth they had built between them, this nameless boy performed the function of the fool in the Elizabethan drama, a reference point outside events but inside another kind of logic, the remorseless logic of unreason where all vision is deranged, all action uncoordinated and all responses beyond prediction. Such logic now dominated Annabel. (*Love* 99)

Lorna Sage pronounces the novel Carter's "Camp triumph – experience transformed into theatre, with nearly nothing left over once the curtain falls" (21). "Camp", a popular concept in the sixties, was a "metaphor of life as theatre" (Sontag 118), and Sage explains how it represented a "fault-line running through contemporary culture, where the binary

opposition of masculine and feminine broke down" (9). Indeed, Carter's characters engage in a perpetual game of play-pretend, their personalities are a bric-a-brac of social expectations, their flesh "culturally conditioned … costume or disguise" (Sage 21), and their passions are "an exercise in alienation, not revelation and intimacy" (Sage 21). The tragedy of the narrative lies in the feeling that the described events could be taking place in anyone's life, they are deeply human and unlimited to the stage Carter had built for them. Her protagonists "had only intersected by chance upon one another and exchanged spurious, self-contradictory falsehoods as if flashings lights in one another's faces" (*Love* 47).

In her book *Women and Madness*, Phyllis Chesler writes that "psychological dramas [take] place in the theater of the unconscious" (54) and when those concern sexuality, "women are conditioned to experience physicality – be it violent, destructive, or pleasurable – more in the presence of another, or at male hands, than alone or at (their own) female hands" (109). This concept is discernible in Lee's authoritative attitude towards Annabel, deciding when "the time was right" for her to lose her virginity, coldly instructing her that she "won't get much out of it this time" and even reprimanding her for she "ought to have had it by [her] age" (*Love* 33). Annabel's complete inability to understand, enjoy or relate her own physical experiences to herself is an exaggerated portrayal of a sexual passivity supposedly inherent in women. She plays her feminine role in a process which Judith Butler defines as "the heterosexualization of desire". According to Butler, "the heterosexualization of desire requires … the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between "feminine" and "masculine"" (23) in order for the universal cultural law to prevail. These oppositions require the women in the narrative to maintain a melancholic, infantile strangeness if they wish to win over the juxtaposed impulsive and powerful maleness. Carter's characters are locked in a "premeditated theatre where the romantic imagination could act out any performance it chose" (*Love* 2), but they fail to create unique parts to play,

and they merely fit into the stereotypical ones which have been externally assigned to them. What is more, reality always proves unsatisfying and their original affections transform into violent disappointments. “Connoisseurs of unreality as they were, they could not bear the crude weight, the rank smell and the ripe taste of real flesh” (*Love* 92).

In correlation with Carter’s stance and in contradiction with Freud, Judith Butler states that in this social charade, “not biology, but culture, becomes destiny” (12), and that “the body” is a passive medium on which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related (Butler 13). Both feminist and psychological discourses have embraced the idea that when the body struggles to adapt to its socially and culturally imposed role, it departs from the realm of normality and enters the lurid landscape of mental distress. And it is there that Carter’s female protagonist serves her purpose perfectly, as she is everything the reader would expect her to be, “the very image of mad Ophelia” (*Love* 69). Judith Butler states that in response to external pressure, “the mind … occasionally entertains the fantasy of fleeing its embodiment altogether” (17), and in the most tragic of scenarios this vision comes true. Carter’s Annabel attempts this symbolic escape numerous times until she successfully carries it out at the end of the novel. “Annabel was falling asleep … a prelude to nothing and she felt her exterior fading as her outlines ceased to define her” (*Love* 108).

By choosing to portray the female character as the mentally unstable one, Carter has made it easy for the reader to interpret this depiction as driven by her feminist inclinations. It is widely believed that “the madwoman is the [female] author’s double, the incarnation of her own anxiety and rage” and that through the violence of this double “the female author enacts her own raging desires to escape male houses and male texts” (Gilbert & Gubar 85). However, this is not the case with *Love*, and I perceive Carter’s portrayal of Annabel as a mockery, a purposeful attack on the tendency to romanticize female madness, even if feminist reasoning lies behind it. In her criticism towards cultural depictions of insanity,

Elaine Showalter also remarks that the notorious romantic qualities attached to the female malady stem from an inherent male sentiment towards women's suffering, and the fact that men find women's "despair oddly feminine and attractive" (Showalter 94). During their fateful first encounter, "Annabel opened her eyes and some kind of hunger, some kind of despair in her narrow face caught at Lee's very tender heart" (*Love* 14). In his sentimental self-centeredness, Lee considers Annabel only in relation to himself, and their entire relationship develops because "he was attracted to her because he was unsure of his effect upon her and became increasingly attached to her because of her strangeness" (*Love* 17). However, he is not the only man in the narrative who considers Annabel in a one-sided, egocentric light.

In the previous chapter I analyzed the symbolic significance of mirrors in the fictional and psychotherapeutic spheres, and now I would like to focus on another "reminder of personal appearance" (Showalter 86) which played an incredibly important role in creating the image of the Madwoman, namely photography. Elaine Showalter writes that "the advent of photography provided a valuable aid in the management of women" (86), because then not only the written but also the visual evidence of mental illness became acts "of [male] appropriation of the female experience" (97). Importantly, Showalter notes that "the management of female insanity is represented purely visual [and] few of the women's own accounts exist" (97). These female patients "were not photographed just once, but again and again, so that they became used to their role as photographic subjects" (Showalter 152). In the novel, Buzz uses his camera "as if to see with" (*Love* 24), and Annabel and Lee "would often [wake up] in the morning to find him perched on the end of the bed, clicking away" (*Love* 25). Soon, the spouses' intimacy is plastered all over the walls to the point that "the flat was given over entirely to the cult of appearances" (*Love* 24), and with no sign of protest, Annabel becomes a primary object of Buzz's voyeuristic tendencies. Buzz's behaviour

towards Annabel is comparable to Showalter's argument that female distress was a performance for the clinician's camera, and that the representation of the Madwoman is the "accumulated projection of male fantasy and male guilt" (97). "The brooding images of helpless women often evoked [men's] own unconscious erotic fantasies, their own displaced melancholia, aggression and discontent" (Showalter 97). On a couple of occasions, Buzz discovers Annabel in vulnerable states, and his initial reaction is to take "several photographs of her without her knowledge" (*Love* 6). The first instance is when he finds her in the park in the midst of a panic attack, and the second one is when she locks herself in the bathroom to slit her wrists. Even more dramatically, during the anticlimactic night Buzz and Annabel spend together, Buzz finds that the only way he can make himself go through with the physical act is by recalling "a memory of Annabel prone on a tiled floor with her blood welling out through the silk pores of her embroidered shawl" and this image "filled him with desire" (*Love* 90). He has appropriated Annabel's misery and fragility and incorporated them into his fantasy world for his own pleasure and gratification. Annabel's experience has ceased to be her own, and it only has significance as part of the narrative Buzz and Lee ascribe to it.

Even long before the development of photography, the Madwoman had already entered male fantasies, and in her analysis, Showalter focuses on two prominent images – Ophelia and Crazy Jane. Interestingly, "one of [Carter's] most persistent borrowings, is the image of crazy, dying Ophelia, as in Shakespeare and Millais: waterlogged, draped in flowers, drifting downstream to her virgin death" (Sage 33). As well-known tropes, both Ophelia and Crazy Jane exhibit "classic symptoms of love melancholy", in response to which Showalter sarcastically poses the question "what could be more feminine and respectable, or pose less of a threat to … falsehearted men?" (13). Lee's concern and attraction to Annabel are tainted by his egotism, and when she shares her vulnerability with him he is "astonished to discover he was so touched by this grief, perhaps because it seemed evidence he was

important to her" (*Love* 23). Annabel's strangeness appeals to Lee in the beginning, but he never truly sees her as anything but his troubled, incomprehensible wife. She eventually lives up to this image and her ultimate self-destruction is far from unexpected. Chesler argues that "suicide attempts are the grand rites of "femininity"" (109) because ""good" women destroy themselves gracefully [like Ophelia] … they remove themselves from the path of male mobility and renewal" (345). This is precisely what Annabel does – Lee "had truly wished her dead, for then he would no longer have to care about her" (*Love* 95), and she unknowingly grants him his freedom. At the time of her death, Annabel is the "perfect" woman – feminine, beautiful and powerless, giving up her life to give Lee back his own. Her "greatness" is further amplified by the fact that in her last hours Lee is in the arms of another woman.

> Lee returned to the house only to retrieve a little money and a few clothes. He found her in the bedroom. Buzz crouched at the end of the bed, at the feet of the bedizened corpse.
>
> "I think you should stand with your foot on her neck," said Buzz. "Then I would take your picture with your arms crossed and, you understand, your foot on her neck. Like, in a victorious pose." (*Love* 109)

This analysis would be incomplete if I fail to mention the two other female characters who act as antagonists to the brand of femininity Annabel epitomizes. One of them is Carolyn, the woman who Lee has an affair with, and who egocentrically refers to herself as "The Other Woman", "The Femme Fatale" (*Love* 49). Carolyn is "far prettier than Annabel, much more passionate and three times as comprehensible" (*Love* 41), but she is desperate for some sort of cathartic confrontation with "The Wife", which never takes place because Annabel is not interested in her and decides instead to kill herself. Carolyn is portrayed as an

unfortunate pawn in the dangerous game of chess the destructive trio plays – upon Annabel's suicide attempt, Carolyn is caught between infuriated Buzz and runaway Lee, and consequently gets her nose broken. Her affair with Lee quickly dissolves, her heart and illusions are shattered, and she only reappears later in the novel to profess her stoicism in the face of a pregnancy she had "heroically" decided to terminate. She is the fragile victim, and she "proclaims her vulnerability in every gesture, every word, every act, defining herself in the third person", as a passive object to be trampled all over (*The Sadeian Woman* 66). Despite his sentimentality, Lee is enraged by the image of victimhood Carolyn puts forward, and feeling "richly murderous towards" her (*Love* 88), he mocks her for her unnecessary sacrifice.

> "She was still in the madhouse, then. Was that why you didn't tell me?"
>
> "Yes," she said with a sudden plucky little jerk of the head that implied hitherto unexplored dimensions of feminine grit.
>
> "That was terribly, terribly brave and thoughtful of you," he said so sardonically she was shocked. He decided to undervalue her self-sacrifice as much as he was able. (*Love* 87)

The other female character is Lee's student, Joanne, who is depicted as a seductive Nabokovian nymphet with a tragic backstory and a tendency to always appear in the most unfortunate of circumstances, in the midst of action. In this theatre of sexuality, Joanne plays the part of "The Good Bad Girl", the reincarnated male fantasy "celebrated for her allure, but this allure is never allowed to overwhelm the spectator … she has to rely on a childlike charm; she must make up to the pedophile in men, in order to reassure both men and herself that her own sexuality will not reveal to them their own inadequacy" (*The Sadeian Woman* 67). Joanne is a contradicting embodiment of confidence and inexperience, "whoever she

was, she only played at being a trusting child or else became a trusting child intermittently, when she had no other signposts as to how to act" (*Love* 106). Despite the contrast between the three female characters, Annabel, Carolyn and Joanne are not complete opposites. They might exhibit different aspects of femininity, but they all possess a similar naïve idealism and gullibility, and they use their "innocence [as an] excuse for [their] own object status" (*The Sadeian Woman* 67). Carter's female characters in *Love* are not given much more agency or control over their lives than Melanie and Margaret from *The Magic Toyshop* were granted. Annabel, Carolyn and Joanne might have found a louder, more melodramatic manner of expression than mute Margaret, but it does not mean that they are being heard or respected.

As a final note, I would like to mention the homoerotic nature of the brothers' relationship masked by their overtly and overly heterosexualized behaviour. Referring to Lacan and post-Lacanian reformulations of Freud, Judith Butler states that "the masculine "subject" is a fictive construction produced by the [cultural] law that prohibits incest and forces an infinite displacement of a heterosexualizing desire" (36). In a reflective flashback, Lee recalls an erotic scene between Buzz, an unnamed girl and himself, and how "the residual traces of his brother on the nameless girl's body had given him a peculiar satisfaction" (*Love* 95), bringing long-repressed feelings to the surface of his consciousness. A similar unconscious homoeroticism has been proposed by Lévi-Strauss, and in regard to it, Butler argues that the "relationship between men which is [essentially] about the bonds of men … takes place through the heterosexual exchange and distribution of women" (52). This homoerotic connection in which women are exchangeable commodities is illustrated numerous times throughout the novel. Before his official commitment to Annabel, Lee is having an affair with the wife of his philosophy tutor, a woman towards whom he has a "derisive affection" (*Love* 17), but "he [takes] a certain pleasure in coupling with the wife of a man who taught him ethics" (*Love* 18). Later, when Annabel's parents briefly take her

away, the brothers feel "incomplete without her presence; without any conscious volition of her own … since she was so insubstantial, somehow she had entered the circle of their self-containment" (*Love* 29). And finally, when Buzz takes Annabel home, he realizes that he had always seen "her only in relation to his brother; his interest in her was based on the knowledge he could utilize her both to defend himself against Lee and also to attack him through her" (*Love* 90). The women in Carter's novel are unflatteringly portrayed in the role of powerless pawns passed around between their much stronger male counterparts. Through her sardonic depiction, Carter argues that the blame for the female "object status" should be placed as much on the women, as it is on the men who disrespect them.

Splitting the stereotypes

Aside from interests in antipsychiatry and empiricist philosophy, Angela Carter was particularly partial to the ideas presented by literary critic Roland Barthes in his 1967 essay "The Death of the Author" which express the writer's desire to find anonymity in the written word. "Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (Barthes 142), and Carter was drawn to this liberating notion and liked to purposefully distance herself from her class, gender and nationality. She would often impersonate men in her narratives, and when doing so, she strived to penetrate the male psyche and illuminate the experiences, albeit fictional, from an authentic male gaze. Reflecting on her early journalistic endeavours, Carter admitted that she "was, as a girl, suffering a degree of colonialization of the mind. Especially in the journalism [she] was writing then, [she]'d – quite unconsciously – posit a male point of view as the general one. So there was an element of the male impersonator about this young person as she was finding herself" ("Notes from the Front Line" 71). Lorna Sage believes Carter adopted the supposedly male perspective because "under the mask of the "general", it was more aggressive, more licensed, more geared to wanting, more authorial" (25). However, as much as that pretense might have given Carter more authority, her journals and personal

correspondences show that she had always considered the battle between the sexes from both sides, and she admitted to understand "why men hate women and [that] they are right" for doing so, because women are so in love with their "self-inflicted wounds" that they give men, "the poor things", a good example (Sage 32).

Lorna Sage writes that there is "no patriarch or puppet-master character in *Love*. The text's propensity for violence is distributed amongst the three central figures" (20). And as I mentioned before, those figures are not as clear-cut as a superficial reading of the text might have one believe. Lee and Buzz are, on the surface, half-brothers in a deeply disturbing relationship, but on another level, they could also be read as the two sides of the same person, a subtle Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde scenario which is never explicitly stated but implied through their portrayal as "curiously self-contained so that people rarely mentioned them separately" (*Love* 13). And if one is to consider them as a manifestation of the duality of human nature, then Buzz is just as much an alter ego of Carter as is Lee, and he provides access to the darker, more egocentric nuances of her character. Moreover, owing to the previously mentioned gender switch of the spouses, Carter gave herself freedom to play around with already established social stereotypes and, through exaggeration, to ridicule them. And if in the process of doing so, the reader takes it for granted that Annabel is simply Carter's fictional doppelgänger, then that just goes to show how ingrained in our collective minds these gender associations are.

For decades women have been regarded as "naturally mentally ill … hysterics, malingerers, child-like, manipulative, either cold or smothering as mothers, and driven to excess by their hormones" (Chesler 1) whilst psychiatry used to consider men mentally stable, and as Chesler reflects men were not pathologized for being drug addicts or alcoholics, sexual predators or violent aggressors (2). Therefore it comes as no surprise that in the novel set in the 1960s, despite "the brothers' reputation for picturesque and shameless

behaviour" (*Love* 84) and their violent and drunken outbursts, no one who encounters them, not even the psychiatrist, hints at the possibility that either of them ought to be treated. Whilst Annabel is described by the doctors as "a very disturbed girl, very sick … a girl in need of care" (*Love* 51), the tone of the conversation between Lee and the psychiatrist does not imply any such necessity regarding Buzz or himself, and in response to Lee's aggressive reaction, she merely suggests Buzz moves out of the flat.

> "Your brother does not seem to be entirely normal," she said gently.
>
> "In our milieu, that's something of a compliment, you bourgeois cow."
>
> "Has it come to personal abuse already?" she enquired pleasantly.
>
> "Abuse or violence, take your choice." (*Love* 57)

Furthermore, Chesler recapitulates that "the psychiatric literature actually blamed the mothers, not the fathers, of such men" (2) as it had been long perceived in the field that "it was mothers who caused neurosis and psychosis" (1). Lee and Buzz have different fathers and although they are described as absolute opposites, Buzz's eccentric character is still attributed to the fact that he had been "grievously exposed to his mother's madness; her persistent delusion that her sallow, dark baby … was touched with the diabolic" (*Love* 12). Her belief that her younger son was the incarnation of the Anti-Christ had "warped his development … and blighted him with a sense he might be cut out for some extraordinary fate" (*Love* 13). Apart from Chesler's observations on the representation of mothers and madness, another real-life connection can be made here – one with Carter's own mother who regarded her daughter's provocative behaviour with excessively dramatic parental disappointment. This reading matches the idea of Buzz being the fictional embodiment of Carter's darker side.

Carter has built her female characters in such a way that they neatly fit into the notion that women are "those creatures who are supposed to get so carried away emotionally that they cannot think clearly, if at all" (Chesler 82). Annabel declares she will die if Lee deceives her, Carolyn seduces him in front of his wife in a moment of blinding egotism, and even the wife of Lee's professor demonstrates a certain female romanticism when she realizes with "unbelievable pain" that his "caresses had been quite involuntary … nothing to do with her, no kind of tribute" (*Love* 21). Furthermore, Chesler argues that many women are not mad, but "deeply unhappy, self-destructive, economically powerless, and sexually impotent" (85), and this appears to be an accurate description of the women in *Love*. Annabel is the epitome of self-destructiveness, she is indeed sexually impotent, "the sensation of his touch had no effect on her" (*Love* 32), but in terms of economic dependence, the scales are peculiarly tipped in her favour. When she starts working, Annabel experiences such an exhilarating financial freedom that she only spends her money on "chocolate bars, cream cakes, sugar buns and other sweet, unnecessary things she consumed immediately, as if it were pocket money and she were twelve years old" (*Love* 74). Her reckless spending spree ties in with the long-held perception of women as infantile, impulsive and in need of male supervision.

Phyllis Chesler analyses the harmful tendency to romanticize this emotional infantilism, and in response to the image of the dependent and powerless woman, she proposes that "women, like men, must be capable of violence or self-defense before their refusal to use violence constitutes a free and moral choice" (341). She further argues that such a choice would be a revolt against the traditional image of "the ideal woman [who] avoids committing direct physical violence – and does not practice self-preservation" (Chesler 342). Annabel does perpetrate a type of emotional violence upon her husband, forcing him to get a tattoo with her name on his chest and branding him like one of her possessions. But as much as Lee feels humiliated, he quickly realizes she had not planned it

as an act of revenge, but to her naïve mind a tattoo meant he physically could not betray her again. The pain Annabel inflicts is not driven by a conscious choice to do so, as she is the perfect portrayal of the powerless, immature mad girl inflicted with love melancholy, even if it is for a love she is uncertain she wanted to begin with. Her moods are erratic, her decisions are pointless and her entire madness appears so artificial that any reading of it as a feminist protest seems unconvincing.

On the other hand, both Lee and Buzz exhibit the typical male symptoms of mental distress, defined by Chesler as "sex addiction, alcoholism, drug addiction, personality disorders, sociopathic behaviour" (100). Buzz spends every night "sweating at the unmistakable creaking and groans, writhing as he imagined [Annabel and Lee's] unimaginable privacy … and slowly became obsessed with the idea of stabbing them both as they slept together" (*Love* 24). With his wife hospitalized, Lee is "unable to negotiate the city on its own" so "to compound his distress, he had [started] drinking heavily" (*Love* 53). These depictions are far from unpredictable; they are in fact frighteningly relatable. The male protagonists' moodiness and cruelty are the fictional reactions one would expect of them, and they play an essential role in juxtaposition to the female madness. As Chesler remarks, "depression rather than aggression is the female response to disappointment or loss" (Chesler 102). Both in the real and in the fictional world, men act and women simply react.

Lastly, in 1978 Carter wrote that "everyday meetings in the marriage bed are parodies of their own pretensions" (*The Sadeian Woman* 22) and that "all pleasure contains within itself the seeds of atrocities; all beds are minefields" (*The Sadeian Woman* 25). On these intimate and secluded minefields, she claims that "the victim is always morally superior to the master … that is why there have been so few notoriously wicked women in comparison with the number of notoriously wicked men; our victim status ensures that we rarely have the opportunity. Virtue is thrust upon us" (*The Sadeian Woman* 56). In line with this idea,

Annabel's portrayal as a victim may grant her some ambivalent moral triumph, but it is not the result of a feminist revolt against her social role. By destroying herself, she has merely deprived "her master" of the satisfaction of torturing her further, and her suicide ought not to be romanticized because it is essentially an act of pitiful escapism. Nearly twenty years after the novel's publication, Carter provided alternative endings for all the characters – they all continued to live reasonably normal lives after the depicted dramatic events, all characters but one. Carter further noted that "even the women's movement would have been no help to [Annabel] and alternative psychiatry would have only made things, if possible, worse" (*Love* 111). *Love*, Carter's text or the feeling itself, forever remains "Annabel's coffin" (*Love* 111).

Conclusion

In his extensive biography on Carter's life, Edmund Gordon ruminates on the question "how narrowly [her] writing has been pigeonholed … by her admirers and her detractors alike", given that *Love* has generally been read as a "fable of patriarchal oppression and feminist self-determination, with Annabel as the brothers' defiantly wayward victim" (129). Some critics have praised "the novel's efforts to provide Annabel with an empowering femininity", whilst others have claimed that "she has no femininity … she is Jung's emptied woman" because Carter's idea had been to rewrite *Adolphe* from the point of view of the female (Gordon 129). It appears inconceivable for many readers that Carter's sympathies could have resided with the male protagonist (Gordon 129), or that she had been merely using the established cultural stereotypes as a pretense to write about matters not limited to either of the sexes. Carter confessed that she did not see much of a difference between men and women and that in her mind, "it [is] all horrible … imagine having to be macho. I cannot think of anything more terrible" (quoted in Gordon 215). As Gordon summarizes, the majority of people who have come in contact with Carter's works "have invented a wholly synthetic author, unnaturally clear in her intentions and consistent in her outlook" (Gordon

129), and that based on her posthumous fame "she [has] been reduced to the status of a pamphleteer, a writer who created not art but argument" (Gordon 130). Carter herself vehemently argued her position in the literary world as well as against some of the (mis)interpretations of her works. She stated, "I write to ask questions, to argue with myself, not to provide answers" (quoted in Gordon 130), and "I do not believe it is moral to love somebody unless both partners are entirely free. It is very easy for people to destroy one another in the name of love" (quoted in Gordon 189). So *Love* should be read as a cautionary tale of the danger of (self-)annihilation in the name of love, regardless of who in the relationship forces their hand and who inevitably breaks under the pressure.

In conclusion, I would like to relate Judith Butler's argument that "there need not be a "doer behind the deed," but that the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed" (181) to Carter's literary life. In line with Butler's statement, a look at Carter's deeds – her multilayered writing, uncovers her true self as a self-conscious, inquisitive writer, who aspired to examine human relationships and the nature of self-creation by shifting her perspective, by contradicting herself and by refusing to be placed within the narrow boundaries of a feminist discourse.

Chapter 4. Nebulous Ideals of Femininity in

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman

Destruction is only another aspect of being

- *Doctor Hoffman*

At the end of the 1960s, Angela Carter embarked on a solitary journey of self-discovery which took her far from her Bristol home and all the way to Japan. What was initially intended as a short-term trip to Tokyo turned into a much longer life-changing experience, the dramatically dislocating one of being a stranger in a foreign land. This sense of isolation was further amplified by the fact that Carter was a single woman alone and out of place in a country permeated by outdated traditions, rigid gender stereotypes and prevalent sexism. Even though Carter had begun "describing herself as a feminist before she had moved to Tokyo", her life there reaffirmed her "allegiance to the cause" (Gordon 164). She was appalled by the "intense polarity between the sexes", by the "absolute femininity and charm" portrayed by Japanese women, and the corresponding pervasive sexist male behaviour (Gordon 164). As quoted in Gordon's biography, Carter declared Japan "a heartbreaking country for a feminist", and expressed the belief that the sexism inherent in Japanese culture had just as much a devastating effect on its men as it did upon its women, because "the men in a society which systematically degrades women also become degraded" (Gordon 164).

In Japan Carter became acquainted with magical realism, a genre which played a crucial role in her later works. She was thrilled by the new mode of writing which incorporated "fantastical elements into fastidiously detailed realist settings, and accords them

exactly the same kind of attention as one another" (Gordon 176). Initially Carter meant to write "an inventory of imaginary cities" (Gordon 143), but her vision changed and *Dr Hoffman* became a mind-bending erotic dream, unbound by space and time, a search for the true essence of desire and the self. Still, the various imaginary societies in her novel each have their own religion, political structure and language, and are as "meticulously described" as those in Jorge Luis Borges' story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", while the South American choice of setting was inspired by Gabriel García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Gordon 175). As Edmund Gordon notes, "Latin American influences were almost entirely alien to the British fiction of the early 1970s" (176), thus this new affiliation placed Carter at the forefront of fictional experimentation once again. Furthermore, she "was rare among novelists in her partiality to theory … and she tended to jumble up bits of Marxist, feminist, structuralist, postcolonial and psychoanalytic theory in her books, using them because they interested her, rather than seeking to reconcile them and fashion a sleek intellectual product" (Gordon 121). Thus, the influences on *Dr Hoffman* are numerous, since Carter applied ideas derived from the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Claude Levi-Strauss, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Melanie Klein and Xaviere Gauthier. Her literary inspirations, other than magical realist writers, were Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Edgar Allan Poe's gothic stories, Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, the surrealism of Salvador Dali's *Hidden Faces* and Marquis de Sade's picaresque narratives (Gordon 104). And once again, fairytale and Shakespeare allegories make an anticipated appearance in Carter's first novel of the 1970s.

Dr Hoffman begins at the end of the story, where Desiderio, the book's unreliable narrator, opens an intimate metafictional dialogue with the readers, the purpose of which is to "dedicate all [his] memories" to "the heroine of [his] story, the daughter of the magician, the inexpressible woman … the miraculous Albertina" (*Dr Hoffman* 6). Desiderio, an old

politician, recalls his youth during the Reality War, and how he unwillingly became a hero and "saved mankind" (*Dr Hoffman* 4). A fight between reason and romance had ensued when the capital of a South American country had fallen under the influence of Dr Hoffman, a shadowy mad scientist, who had found a way to "modify the nature of reality" (*Dr Hoffman* 11), thus transforming the city into a nightmarish "freak show" (*Dr Hoffman* 4). In the beginning, the Doctor's activities had been subtle. "Sugar tasted a little salty, sometimes" (*Dr Hoffman* 9), but soon "there was no longer any way of guessing what one would see when one opened one's eyes in the morning for other people's dreams insidiously invaded the bedroom while one slept" (*Dr Hoffman* 14).

Because of his nihilistic nature and status of an outsider, Desiderio is entrusted by the Minister to find and assassinate the Doctor, but once he has set off on his journey, Desiderio finds himself in an unstoppable avalanche of events, seemingly outside of his control, which takes him from one peculiar place to another. At his first stop, Desiderio attempts to uncover the reason behind the mysterious disappearance of the Mayor of a seaside town. He briefly resides in the Mayor's house, which results in the Mayor's daughter's death and Desiderio's sentence for her murder. Upon his escape from the Determination Police, Desiderio is rescued by the clan of the river people, a self-contained family who lives on barges, and is nearly married into it before he once again escapes, this time with a heavy heart. Then he travels with the proprietor of a disturbing peep-show, who is revealed to be the Doctor's physics professor, and along the way he meets the bizarre performers of a travelling fair, most notably the acrobats of desire, at whose hands he suffers the greatest pain and humiliation possible. After an unexpected landslide kills everyone in the city and reality falls under the rule of Nebulous Time, Desiderio encounters a Dracula-like Count and his valet, with whom he travels through the dreadfully erotic and self-indulgent dreams of the Count, which take them all the way to the coasts of Africa. There, Desiderio once again makes a near

escape when the Count is “made into soup” by a group of cannibals, led by the Count’s dark double, and Desiderio discovers that the Count’s servant is not who he thought he was. Desiderio and the valet’s final encounter is with a society of God-like centaurs, before they finally manage to make their way to the Doctor’s gothic castle. There the significance of all these seemingly disjointed events is finally revealed to Desiderio. He gains his subsequent fame and reputation of a saviour rather unheroically, when he defeats the Doctor and gives up the one thing he had longed for throughout his dreamy voyage – Albertina, the female ideal conjured up into reality by Desiderio himself.

Albertina’s elusive presence in the narrative becomes apparent only at the very end. She first appears in Desiderio’s dreams, later on he recognizes her in the features of the Ambassador sent by the Doctor, then in one of the moving pictures in the peep-show, as well as in the brothel the Count and Desiderio visit. She is ultimately revealed to be the Count’s mute and submissive valet. Albertina and Desiderio are Carter’s fictional embodiments of the idealised notions of feminine virtue and masculine nobility. With regard to her own romantic experiences in Japan, Carter wrote that “sustained by passion only, we walk the tightrope of desire and acrobatically perform the double somersault of love without a safety net” (quoted in Gordon 153). This image not only laid the groundwork for the entire dream landscape of her novel, but also elucidates her own romantic stance, which she referred to as the “effortful creation of the idea of [herself] in love” (quoted in Gordon 154). Thus, *Dr Hoffman* is a speculation on the origins of desire and how those are performed or suppressed in the tempestuous confrontation with a “rational” reality. Carter, just like Hoffman, threatens to expose the “divine illusion of perfection” (*Dr Hoffman* 11) in either of the sexes and in love itself.

The political landscapes of gender and sex

"Some cities are women and must be loved; others are men and can only be admired or bargained with" (*Dr Hoffman* 10). The dream narrative of Carter's Swiftian-like novel distinctly exemplifies her political and feminist views. In the lands Desiderio visits even places and inanimate objects have genders, and the role of women in every society is described in great detail. The capital itself is initially depicted as "solid, drab…thickly, obtusely masculine" (*Dr Hoffman* 10), but under the Doctor's "massive campaign against human reason" (*Dr Hoffman* 3), it gradually loses its rationality and becomes a more feminine, natural and brutal landscape. Judith Butler notes that "the nature and culture discourse regularly figures nature as female, in need of subordination by a culture that is invariably figured as male" (48), and so it appears in Carter's novel that nature is a female force that ought to be controlled, otherwise a maddening chaos would ensue. Like a tragically suffering but beautiful woman, "the city acquired a majestic solitude. There grew in it, or it grew into, a desolate beauty, the beauty of the hopeless, a beauty which caught the heart and made the tears come" (*Dr Hoffman* 17). Hoffman aims to liberate all objects within the city, freeing "the streets from the tyranny of directions" so they could "go anywhere they please", while the timepieces could finally be "authentically pieces of time and can tell everybody whatever time they like", and liberating the roads, "poor things, forever oriented by the insensitive feet of those who trample them" (*Dr Hoffman* 32). These images resonate with the idea of female subjugation and women's need for locating an authentic identity outside cultural boundaries. Furthermore, the Ambassador's accusation towards the Minister further implies this parallel between the city and a woman. "You are in the process of tabulating every thing you can lay your hands on. In the sacred name of symmetry, you slide them into a series of straitjackets and label them with, oh, my God, what inexpressibly boring labels … you murder imagination in the womb" (*Dr Hoffman* 36). This allusion evokes the treatment

many women received for living outside the expected norms and carrying a creative embryo unwanted in their socially restrictive environments. The straitjackets allude to the psychiatrical attitude towards female distress, "the sacred name of symmetry" reflects the cultural burden of a singular form of femininity, and the womb symbolizes both the physical and the artistic processes of creation. In these times of collective madness, the Doctor's dreamy and erotic phantoms are so palpable, that "they [can] be seen and touched, kissed and eaten, penetrated and picked in bunches … arranged in a vase" (*Dr Hoffman* 21). Compared to flowers, a symbol of femininity and nature, the female nuances of these haunting illusions are further accentuated.

In this part of my analysis, I will focus on the ways in which Carter's patriarchal societies force a traditional femininity upon their women and "subject them to a rigorous process of depersonalization" (Gordon 216). Carter drew inspiration for the latter whilst living in Japan, and in *The Sadeian Woman* she wrote that "the actual nature of men and women is capable of infinite modulations as social structures change" (11), and since "sexuality is as much a social fact as it is a human one it will therefore change its nature according to changes in social conditions" (17). Therefore, I will analyse society's role in creating gender stereotypes and establishing unequal norms of appropriate sexual expression for men and women. Moreover, as Butler argues, "the identification of women with "sex" … is a conflation of the category of women with the ostensibly sexualized features of their bodies and, hence, a refusal to grant freedom and autonomy to women as it is purportedly enjoyed by men" (26). In line with this theory, I will explore the male treatment of the female body and how it is intrinsically connected to the cultural perception of womanliness.

The first woman Desiderio encounters is the Mayor's daughter, Mary Anne, "the beautiful somnambulist" (*Dr Hoffman* 50), and he is struck by the tragic "strangeness in the girl" (*Dr Hoffman* 54). "She looked like drowning Ophelia … though [he] could not know

how soon she would really drown, for she was so forlorn and desperate" (*Dr Hoffman* 57). Mary Anne is innocence personified in a white nightgown, "such as convent schoolgirls wear" (*Dr Hoffman* 60), when she visits Desiderio's room in the middle of the night. "Her eyes were open but blind and she held a rose in her outstretched fingers" (*Dr Hoffman* 60). Desiderio commits an atrocious act of defloration when he decides to take "the rose because she seemed to offer it to [him]" (*Dr Hoffman* 60). Even though he is "perfectly aware she [is] asleep", Desiderio goes through with the act, justifying it to himself as if Mary Anne had initiated it, subconsciously "dreaming of passion" (*Dr Hoffman* 60). The next day, Mary Anne indeed admits to dreaming "about a love suicide", like she always does (*Dr Hoffman* 61), and her confession correlates with the perception of "uncontrolled sexuality [as] the major, almost defining symptom of insanity in women" (Showalter 74). Mary Anne, like her predecessor Ophelia, drowns in the "petticoats of the [female] ocean" (*Dr Hoffman* 67), and in her analysis of the meaning of this symbolic suicide, Showalter states that "even her death by drowning has associations with the feminine and the irrational, since water is the organic symbol of woman's fluidity: blood, milk, tears" (11). When the waves finally "deliver her to [Desiderio's] feet", in his attempt to revive her, he recognizes the "cruel parody of [his] own [behaviour] the previous night, [his] lips pressed to her mouth" for "there was hardly any difference between what [he] did now and what [he] had done then" (*Dr Hoffman* 67). Desiderio is "ravaged … with guilty horror" (*Dr Hoffman* 67), realising that he has taken advantage of the girl's madness for the fulfilment of his own desires. The first part of Desiderio's journey enigmatically sets the tone for the rest of his tribulations. On his picaresque adventures, he is perpetually faced with a choice between his morals and his desires, and Desiderio perceives the women he encounters as tests of his ethics, nobility and valour. Mary Anne is merely the first of the many female "bodies" in the story, devoid of humanity and whose fate is predetermined by cultural clichés.

The next chapter focuses on Desiderio's life with the river people. The clan has a myriad of customs centered around the female body, all the women stain their teeth black, use "a great deal of paint" on their faces "in a peculiarly stylized manner" (*Dr Hoffman* 81), and wear clothes that "[give] them a top-heavy appearance, as if they would not fall down if you pushed but only rock to and fro" (*Dr Hoffman* 82). These traditional preparations serve as a shield, a disguise, tailored to both repel men and protect the women. In addition, "the women [are] all ordered below [deck] whenever they [reach] a place of any size", so no man outside the family would even have the chance to lay his eyes on the clan's "characteristic shape of a woman" (*Dr Hoffman* 82). Desiderio is stunned how "all the women [move] in [a] stereotyped way, like benign automata" and how with "their musical box speech" they seem not "fully human" (*Dr Hoffman* 82). This portrayal correlates with Judith Butler's statement that "within the discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative … gender is always a doing" (33). The clan's femininity is a performance so heavily scripted with old-fashioned traditions that the individual female parts are indistinguishable.

> "Even the method of pouring a drink was hallowed by tradition and never altered. One held out one's glass to the offered jug, then took the jug after one's own glass was filled and filled the other's glass, so nobody ever poured out a drink for himself. The community spirit reigned among them to that extent! And in this lack of self, I began to sense a singular incapacity for being … [a] sad, self-imposed limitation of experience." (*Dr Hoffman* 100)

Amongst this restrictive feminine masquerade, Desiderio gets reluctantly engaged to the nine-year-old Aoi, who soon after their official betrothal, starts visiting him each night, dressed in white like Mary Anne, and acts out passions as if she had "studied every word and movement from a book of manners" (*Dr Hoffman* 95). Under the pressure of social norms he does not comprehend, Desiderio loses his sense of agency and feels caught between spending

his nights "in elaborate love play with [his] erotic, giggling toy" and the mornings pleasing "the toy's grandmother" (*Dr Hoffman* 98). Here, for the first time in the narrative, he finds himself experiencing life from a female perspective, feeling "like a love slave" (*Dr Hoffman* 98), dependent on the family unit and perceiving the days before the wedding as "the last days of freedom of choice" (*Dr Hoffman* 99). The clan's deceptive nature of femininity inevitably degrades all performers on the stage of sexuality – the women and Desiderio himself. Even though the river women seem to be the initiators of sexual advances, this titillating "spurious female dominance" is still a product of a "male-dominated society" (*The Sadeian Woman* 20), and the women are merely "programmed puppets" (*Dr Hoffman* 106). They are granted no freedom of choice, and even in the roles of seductresses, their sexuality is still governed by the social politics of the clan, which inhibit free exchange and force them into arranged marriages from an early age. Carter's depiction of the clan's customs infers her criticism towards female conditions within various historical and present-day social structures.

In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter's seminal non-fiction work of the 1970s, she defined "the notion of a universality of female experience [as] a clever confidence trick" (12), and in the beginning of the decade she made sure that a vast variety of female experiences was justly represented by creating her fictional societies, each with a distinctly unique attitude towards its women. Even so, this widespread maltreatment of women seems to be invariably rooted in an inherent misogynistic distrust and contempt towards them. Later in the narrative, on the coasts of Africa, the chieftain justifies his decision for building an army entirely made of female soldiers by proclaiming the idea of women as the weaker sex as a romanticised mythologization of the mother figure. He urges men to "tear this notion of the mother from [their] hearts. Vengeful as nature herself, she loves her children only in order to devour them better and if she herself rips her own veils of self-deceit, Mother perceives in herself untold

abysses of cruelty as subtle as it is refined" (*Dr Hoffman* 192). In this land, once more, nature and women are regarded with a sense of fear, hatred and an urgency to be subdued. Even mother figures are not treated with the typical holy reverence accorded to them. Here the means through which the female status is degraded are similar to a notorious method used in the psychiatric field as a cure for female insanity. In accordance with the hypocritical Victorian code of conduct, when women were exhibiting an uncharacteristic interest in their sexuality, the clitorectomy procedures by Dr Isaac Baker Brown guaranteed "the surgical enforcement of an ideology that restricted female sexuality to reproduction" (Showalter 77). And Carter's fictional chieftain has found a method that strikingly resembles this real-life cruelty.

> "Since my early researches soon showed me that the extent of a woman's feelings was directly related to her capacity for feeling during the sexual act, I and my surgeons take the precaution of brutally excising the clitoris of every girl child born to the tribe as soon as she reaches puberty … Therefore I am proud to say that not a single one … has ever experienced the most fleeting ecstasy, or even the slightest pleasure … so our womenfolk are entirely cold and respond only to cruelty and abuse." (*Dr Hoffman* 193)

By taking ownership of the female body and entrapping women in the confining role of mothers, unfeeling objects for another's pleasure, or, in this case, female soldiers, the patriarchal society is certain that its dominance will not be endangered. However, as Carter argues, "the mutilations … society inflicts upon women … suggest that male political dominance might be less a matter of moral superiority than of crude brute force", so by portraying patriarchal societies as barbaric devices for subjugation, Carter removes "a degree of glamour from the dominance itself" (*The Sadeian Woman* 23).

Last but not least, the centaur society exhibits an analogous hatred towards its women who are forced to work (unlike the men), are incessantly humiliated and tattooed all over "in order to cause them more suffering, for they believed women were born only to suffer" (*Dr Hoffman* 208). The fanatically religious centaurs "prized fidelity above all other virtues", yet their "rigorous puritanism did not prevent every male in the village from raping Albertina" (*Dr Hoffman* 211). Phyllis Chesler notes that "rape has been systematically used by men of every class and race to destroy both their own women and the women of enemy men", and that "the intended effect of rape is always the same: to break the spirit of the victim, to drive her … out of her body and quite often out of her mind" (35). In Carter's narrative, however, the centaurs commit the violent act without a purpose and without even taking pleasure in it, but perpetrate it for the simple reason that Albertina is female and their culture and religion presuppose that women ought to be abused. Their aversion towards women originates in the myth about The Bridal Mare, the centaurs' version of Eve, the original sinner who has forever marked all women as depraved creatures in the eye of society.

Desiderio encounters many more women on his adventures who are just as lifeless, subjugated and bereft of agency in their individual self-contained microcosms. However, a closer look into each of them would not add much more than what has already been established so far in this analysis. Regardless of the particular expression, this universal maltreatment of women is endorsed in patriarchal settings where an intrinsic male apprehension is further amplified by social, cultural and religious representations of women. In conclusion, I would like to pay attention to a symbolic transformation which takes place during the narrative. During his time with the river people, Desiderio is placed into a confining female-like role within the family, but it is ultimately at the hands of the acrobats of desire, who give him "the most comprehensive anatomy lesson a man ever suffered" (*Dr Hoffman* 138), that he experiences the full brutality of being treated as a woman. In her

cultural study on madness, Showalter explores two different processes of feminization of the male psyche. One is the concept of shell shock, triggered by the "heightened code of masculinity" expected of men during war (172) which is juxtaposed to the expectations of femininity placed upon women in society. The other one is the use of shock treatment as a metaphor in literature, notably in the works of Anthony Burgess and Ken Kesey. Employed as a "feminizing therapy" (Showalter 219), it strips away the inherently masculine qualities men possess and transforms them into subdued, weaker and malleable beings. In *Dr Hoffman*, Carter also subjects her male protagonist to a process of feminization, but she does so through the humiliating rape he suffers and through his implied inferiority to Albertina. And as Elaine Showalter remarks, it is often "men's quarrels with the feminine element in their own psyches" that becomes externalized as fear or anger (173). In accordance with Showalter's argument, Desiderio is dramatically torn between worship and fear when he faces the woman of his dreams.

The object of desire

Albertina is a projection of Desiderio, she is the central point where all romantic illusions and violent passions meet. Named after Proust's "ineffable object of desire … a boy in disguise" (Sage 34), Albertina appears to Desiderio in different shapes and forms during the narrative, "maintained in [her] various appearances only by the power of [his] desire" (*Dr Hoffman* 248). She is also not granted much agency or independence, as she is ultimately the Doctor's puppet just like Melanie is Uncle Philip's Leda. Owing to Desiderio's unreliable narration, his portrayal of Albertina's virtues reads like a false narrative. It seems she lacks any essence to begin with, and as Carter argues, "a woman who has never been completely born as a woman, only as a debased cultural idea of a woman is appreciated only for her decorative value" (*The Sadeian Woman* 70). To make matters worse and even more untruthful, Albertina's tragic death at the hands of the man who supposedly loves her further

intensifies this nonsensical romanticism. Desiderio confesses that "Albertina has become for [him] now, such a woman as only memory and imagination could devise", and that he sees "her as a series of marvellous shapes formed at random in the kaleidoscope of desire" (*Dr Hoffman* 6). And because his desire for her remains "impotent" (*Dr Hoffman* 7), Albertina will never truly fail to satisfy him and will be eternally glamourized. However, Albertina, like any unreal woman, is vaporous and is "most arousing as a memory or a masturbatory fantasy" (*The Sadeian Woman* 70). Actual encounters with her in the realm of reality are doomed to fall short of the idealised vision.

The various disguises in which Abertina appears in front of Desiderio illuminate her illusory nature. In the beginning, Desiderio writes, "every night as I lay on the borders of sleep … I would be visited by a young woman in a neglige … which clung about her but did not conceal her quite transparent flesh … she did not speak; she did not smile … she did not move. But she never failed to visit me" (*Dr Hoffman* 22). At this point, her presence serves little purpose, her ghostly arrival is an act of reassurance, and she soothingly stays beside Desiderio until he falls asleep. In his subconscious, Albertina is transformed into a black swan, whose neck resembles "a snake about to strike" and whose song is a "savage wordless lament" (*Dr Hoffman* 29). With a "thrilling, erotic contralto", the dream version of Albertina informs Desiderio that she is a woman and she is about to die (*Dr Hoffman* 29).

Later on, Desiderio describes the Doctor's Ambassador as "the most beautiful human being [he has] ever seen – considered, that is, solely as an object, a construction of flesh, skin, bone and fabric" (*Dr Hoffman* 31). Desiderio is fascinated by him, although he does not comprehend this attraction fully until he sees the Ambassador's white, "virtually invisible" (*Dr Hoffman* 39) handkerchief with the name ALBERTINA stitched on it. He sees her again in Dr Hoffman's set of samples, which have been placed in the peep-show machines. No one is aware that even though "the photographs themselves had every appearance of authenticity"

(*Dr Hoffman* 126), they transform in accordance with the person looking at them, by reflecting their internalized desires and projecting them as if they are pre-existing moving pictures. Desiderio is "particularly struck by a series showing a young woman trampled to death by wild horses because the actress bore some resemblance to Dr Hoffman's own daughter" (*Dr Hoffman* 126). This image materializes later in the narrative when Albertina is raped by the centaurs and it is only in that moment that Desiderio grasps the role he has played in the horrid event. "At the back of my mind flickered a teasing image, that of a young girl trampled by horses … 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" (*Dr Hoffman* 217). Just like one of the peep-show proprietor's "gnomic utterances" is that one ought to "objectify [their] desires" (*Dr Hoffman* 129) for them to come true, so is Albertina put through the most elaborate and painful process of objectification. The whole reason behind it has nothing to do with Desiderio's love for her, but everything with his own loss of self, purpose and agency.

Judith Butler argues that Lacan's Symbolic Order requires women to be "precisely what men are not" and thus "establish the essential function of men" (Butler 58). As Butler notes, the positions of men and women according to the Symbolic Order are interdependent, and it is through its re-enactment that they define themselves. In the same vein, Albertina is a projection of Desiderio's desire to be a hero, to be more than "a man like an unmade bed" as he perceives himself in the beginning (*Dr Hoffman* 5). In order for Desiderio to be strong and courageous, his "perfect woman" has to appear weak and fragile. When Albertina reveals herself to be the Madame in the brothel, and the "machine-gun fire [crashes] through the windows", "she clings" to Desiderio and cries "like a child" (*Dr Hoffman* 163). Faced with her vulnerability, Desiderio suddenly feels as if he is "stronger than anyone in the world" and he tries to rescue her by carrying her, but Albertina begins to "melt like a woman of snow …

she [grows] less and less … she [dissolves]" (*Dr Hoffman* 164). Later on, when the Count's feminine and submissive valet Lafleur and Desiderio are about to suffer the Count's fate at the hands of the cannibals, another dramatic revelation takes place. Underneath all his bandages, Lafleur is uncovered as Albertina, and in the heat of the moment Desiderio kills the chieftain and rescues his lover. He confesses that "never before, in all my life, had I performed a heroic action" (*Dr Hoffman* 197), and when the Doctor informs him that the chieftain was not real, but an emanation of the Count's desires, Desiderio realizes that his courageous act was just as false, a mere product of his need to assert himself as the hero. "I felt a twinge of doubt for killing the Chief was the only heroic action I performed in all my life and I knew at the time it was out of character" (*Dr Hoffman* 259).

Carter's interest in the symbolism attached to the female body is reasserted in the beginning of the final chapter. "Albertina absently [plaits] her hair" when the two lovers are finally reunited in safety, and in doing so, "she puts away all her romanticism" (*Dr Hoffman* 235). Despite the supposed strength of his love for Albertina, Desiderio begins to feel "an inexplicable indifference towards her" (*Dr Hoffman* 235). In fact, his disillusionment is so profound that he thinks that "perhaps she was now yet another she … the absolute antithesis of [his] black swan" (*Dr Hoffman* 235). Frustrated and desperate to have her, he begins to wonder "whether the fleshly possession of Albertina would not be the greatest disillusionment of all" (*Dr Hoffman* 245). However, when she refuses him he is so "disconcerted to find [his] physicality thwarted by metaphysics" that he reacts violently, striking "her in the face with the heavy flat of [his] hand" (*Dr Hoffman* 248). In the end, Desiderio discovers that their "long-delayed but so greatly longed-for conjunction would spurt such a charge of energy" that the Doctor's plan all along had been to use them to "descend on the city" (*Dr Hoffman* 263). Thus, the "more savagely and triumphantly beautiful than any imagining" Albertina, the "dream made flesh" (*Dr Hoffman* 263) is

anticlimactically killed by her lover with "a common kitchen knife" (*Dr Hoffman* 265) in Carter's characteristic manner of juxtaposing romanticism and reality. Angela Carter claimed that "to be the object of desire is to be defined in the passive case. To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case – that is, to be killed. This is the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman" (*The Sadeian Woman* 76). Therefore, Albertina was destined for her role as a sacrificial lamb, because she was never an active subject, but an inanimate object, a weapon tossed around between the Doctor and Desiderio.

In her book *Women and Madness*, Phyllis Chesler argues that a sacrificed woman cannot disappoint and therefore the image men hold for her will never be corrupted. And just like Dr Hoffman reserves "his affection for a wife who [is] safely dead" (*Dr Hoffman* 248), Desiderio ultimately transforms his lover into the perfect woman, the one who will never let him down. "I desire therefore I exist" (*Dr Hoffman* 258) is the Doctor's rendition of the Cartesian cogito, and the bewitching and pure Albertina will continue to exist as long as Desiderio desires her.

Conclusion

Lorna Sage describes the Doctor as "the last and most deadly of Carter's puppet-masters: he is the great patriarchal Forbidder turned Permitter, the one who sets the libido 'free' (as in Freud) – a most depressing figure, because he points to the recognition that there's no world outside power games" (34). Indeed, in her subsequent works, Carter did not create another male character as diabolical as him, but she continued to focus her energy on demystifying the nature of stereotypes and myths. Arguably, her two most famous works were written in the decade that began with the creation of *Dr Hoffman*. Those are the short story collection *The Bloody Chamber* and the non-fictional book *The Sadeian Woman*, and Lorna Sage defines what Carter did with the pre-existing fairytales and Sade's narratives as

"yet another assault on myth" (39). Angela Carter liked to bend familiar ideas into shapes previously unheard of, and in the process of doing so, she aimed to offer different perspectives. She perceived myths as detrimental to authentic human existence, because they "deal in false universals" (*The Sadeian Woman* 5). Just like Hoffman's phantoms, long-held myths, ideas and stereotypes are "invisible presences [which often] have more reality than visible ones … they exert more influence upon us" (*Dr Hoffman* 244).

Carter famously coined the phrase "moral pornographer", whose use of pornographic material would serve "as a critique of current relations between the sexes", and who "would not be the enemy of women … perhaps he might begin to penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distorts our culture" (*The Sadeian Woman* 19). So through her innumerable graphic depictions of rape and violent sexual acts, Carter aimed to expose male hostility towards women as the result of "any society with sex-role stereotypes" (Chesler 80) or from a violence inherent in male nature, but further endorsed by a culture which depicts women as the passive recipients of abuse. Carter argued that all literature which contains eroticism "has the potential to force the reader to reassess his relation to his own sexuality" (*The Sadeian Woman* 17) and hopefully make them abandon the "repression and taboo that govern our experience of flesh" (*The Sadeian Woman* 11). And as Chesler notes, "women's acceptance and enjoyment of their bodies is an absolute prerequisite for their self-development" (296), for their independence and liberation. In order for women to be freed from their cultural chains, the "poetic form of pure femininity as the male culture [has] construed it: absolutely irrational, absolutely emotional, and, once the single act is accomplished, absolutely passive" (Showalter 17) needs to be broken. Carter subverts this dramatic romanticism by building worlds full of crude, immensely flawed, sexually abhorrent men and women. In many ways, their behaviour is disturbingly close to the real-life relations between the sexes, and as a result they can serve as more powerful tools in instigating social

change. Just like Desiderio proclaims that he "must unravel [his] life as if it were so much knitting and pick out from that tangle the single, original thread of his self" (*Dr Hoffman* 3), so does Carter unstitch the cultural threads that hold gender stereotypes together.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

Woman's greatest misfortune has been that she was looked upon as either angel or devil, her true salvation lies in being placed on earth.

- *Emma Goldman*

Through my exploration of Carter's writing in relation to her personal life and the literary trends of the time, I aimed to provide insight into her creative process, her political and social views and her individualistic expression of feminism. In analysing both her male and female characters, my goal was to argue that Carter's derisive regard towards culturally prevalent gender associations is discernible in her writing, and that through the medium of fiction, she challenged universal perceptions about both sexes. Angela Carter's method of critique involved active engagement with the same ideas that she was ridiculing. In her hands, the stereotypes that surround femininity and masculinity served as the same weapons which attack them.

Carter was ahead of her time in her desire to demystify romanticised portrayals of mad, suffering and vulnerable women, which at the time of her career had already found their way into numerous spheres of life. For my research, Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* and Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness* offered a rich repertoire of cultural images, historical accounts and personal confessions of women, which greatly influenced my own interpretation of visual and literary texts. The questions posed by Carter, and later by Chesler and Showalter, seem just as relevant in contemporary culture even if the images enforced in the twentieth-first century are qualitatively different to those dominant in the twentieth or

ninetieth centuries. Gender stereotypes, maltreatment of women, social and cultural control over the female body are unfortunately still facts of life.

Another important influence on this thesis were Judith Butler's ideas on gender performativity which provided an elaborate theoretical framework incorporating numerous schools of psychological and philosophical thought, and thus proved to be a valuable tool in dissecting Carter's multi-layered fiction. Last but not least, Lorna Sage's and especially Edmund Gordon's reflections on Carter's life and career were the sources on which I based my analysis of her works. These detailed biographical accounts granted me with a much better understanding of Carter's inspirations, passions and her attitude towards fiction. As Sage writes, Carter's "narrative utopia is a dialogue with the reader, a sort of deconstructive communion" (50). And conducting in-depth research into her world felt just like that – an open-ended dialogue about the essence of women, the "fiction of femininity" and how women can break free from the cultural chains around them.

The focus of my research was placed on representations of madness and violence in relation to the associations they have with femininity and masculinity. I analysed the "maddening" aspects of femininity imposed on women within the family, in society and even in their own notions of themselves. In Chapter 1, I explored the effects of cultural representations of womanliness on the female psyche, and how they instigate intense emotional anguish when juxtaposed to the confining and monotonous female experience in the domestic environment. Chapter 3 was focused on the same process but on a grander scale, as a result of patriarchal societies which enforce rigid gender laws and depersonalize their women. I also compared Carter's female characters to long-held cultural figures of female insanity, and I aimed to interpret their significance in the relations between both fictional and real-life men and women. So, Chapter 2 was focused on the symbolic connection between femininity and irrational romanticism verging on madness, and in all three chapters I

proposed connections to historical methods of psychiatric treatment, which I had discovered in Carter's fictional worlds. The aim of this analysis was to demonstrate the perils of romanticising madness and female suffering, as proposed by Carter in her unflattering portrayal of women. Female freedom is endangered when it is associated with weakness and fragility, and it seems that Carter's goal was to remove the charm from female madness by employing it so often and in such banal scenarios that it ceases to be alluring. Furthermore, in opposition to these expressions of female madness, I provided representations of male mental distress, as acted out by Finn and Jonathan, Buzz and Lee, and present in Desiderio's maddening idealisations of Albertina and himself. This juxtaposition emphasized the stark contrast between expectations placed on men and women, and how the sexes differ in their responses to social pressures.

On the other end of the spectrum, I explored various aspects of violence – psychological, physical and emotional, and I analysed the origins of male aggression towards women, both in Carter's fiction and in the broader general context of contemporary culture. In my dissection of the societies in Chapter 3, I proposed that violence is the result of gender-stereotyped environments, cultural and religious depictions of femininity. I further argued that male violence is often made possible by women's insistence on adopting qualities like passivity and stoicism as part of their ideas about womanliness. Examples supporting this claim came in the portrayal of the female characters in all three novels, starting from Melanie's subordination and ending with Albertina's role of an object devoid of agency. Even though I had planned to juxtapose male to female violence, just as I had done with the instances of insanity, I discovered that there was little or no female aggression present in the texts. The only violent female acts were the emotional ones unknowingly perpetrated by Annabel. However, this absence ultimately supported my main claim regarding the prevalence of female portrayals as passive, inactive and fragile creatures who do not fight for

themselves. Moreover, I soon found out that Carter may have intended it to be this way. She detested the image of the victimized woman, and ironically conjured it up throughout her narratives, as if in attempt to use it up, to exorcise it completely from popular culture. Her feminism was ironic and deeply subversive because it was issued from within the feminist ranks and not directed so much at the opposite side of the battlefield. I wanted to offer insight into Carter's take on gender politics, and that is why I chose to analyse violence as one of the two aspects defining womanliness. Femininity is not typically associated with a propensity for violence, but women's responses to it (passivity, defencelessness, silence or madness) are considered defining aspects of femininity.

Last but not least, I delved into the concept of gender performativity in regard to Carter's oeuvre, her character creation and her own views on the authenticity of self. In all of this, I aimed to provide an argument towards understanding and interpreting Carter's fiction as an assault on the idea of female fragility, and to display her multifaceted writing persona, unbound by the image of the feminist writer. I argued that the grotesque theatricality inherent in her characters was Carter's method of mocking the myths and ideas associated with either of the sexes. Finally, I aimed to offer an interpretation of Carter's texts that does not focus on their magical, fairytale and Gothic qualities, but rather relates her works to significant social and cultural aspects of life. None of the stories analysed in this thesis take place within a psychiatric clinic or revolve around therapeutic practices. However, I think that finding implicit similarities between Carter's narratives and historical accounts of psychiatric treatment has opened up an interesting channel of intertextuality between these two seemingly unconnected spheres, one that might be explored in further detail.

In conclusion, the purpose of this thesis was to offer a different reading of Angela Carter, one that emphasizes her conscious and continuous process of self-creation, as well as her profound and empathetic engagement with the social burden placed on both men and

women. Even though I focused predominantly on aspects of femininity, I hope that in my juxtaposition of violence and madness in her novels, I have provided strong arguments supporting what I believe was Carter's creative impetus – to highlight the importance of dismantling gender stereotypes in general.

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