



**Critical Fictions/Fictional Critiques:
Angela Carter and Decadent Iconographies of Woman**

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Abstract

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Title: Critical Fictions/Fictional Critiques: Angela Carter and Decadent Iconographies of Woman

This thesis examines conflicting claims made about the fiction of British feminist writer Angela Carter. The first claim, made by critics such as Britzolakis, Clark, Kappeler and Dworkin, is that Carter's intertextual allusions to canonical male-authored texts constitute a form of literary fetishism that is antithetical to her professed feminism. The second claim, made by Carter herself, is that her fiction is a form of literary criticism. In order to evaluate the validity of each of these claims, the thesis examines Carter's intertextual allusions to that strand of the European, male-authored canon commonly termed the Decadence, which stretches from Hoffmann through to Proust, and which is characterised by a heavily fetishized representation of Woman. The thesis performs a series of readings in which Carter's fictions are juxtaposed with the canonical texts to which she alludes, and which also situate her fictional critique within the history of the critical traditions and debates surrounding these texts. The thesis examines her intertextual allusion to texts by Hoffmann, Proust, Poe, Baudelaire and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, with sections on the representation of Woman as doll, Muse and *femme fatale*. I conclude that Carter's deployment of aspects of the decadent iconography of Woman is an ironic, highly self-conscious feminist strategy, which can best be understood as an instance of Walter Benjamin's dialectical image.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Section 1. Introduction: the Question of fetishism

"A fetish is a story masquerading as an object" (Stoller 155)

Fetishism is a very sticky subject. As Baudrillard observes, "the term "fetishism" almost has a life of its own. Instead of functioning as a metalanguage for the magical thinking of others, it turns against those who use it, and surreptitiously exposes their own magical thinking"(50). Attempts to critique representations of fetishism tend to become enmeshed in replicating that long-drawn out and repetitive lingering over linguistic and visual detail that in itself constitutes the fetishistic. This tendency of fetishism to rebound on those who set out to expose it makes a theoretical or fictional feminist critique of the fetishization of women in cultural forms doubly problematic. Neither Angela Carter's professed feminism, nor her claim to be engaged in an investigation into the social fiction of femininity, has staunch a flow of accusations by other feminists that her writing reinscribes the misogynistic, highly fetishized representations of women that are endemic within patriarchal cultures.

Carter's labyrinthine intertextuality has also rendered her vulnerable to the charge of indulging in literary fetishism, of being "parasitic upon... empty styles" in Robert Clark's dismissive words (156). Her proclivity for making intertextual allusions to those strands of the male-authored literary canon, such as the Symbolists and the *fin de siècle* Decadents, which are saturated by a fetishistic iconography of femininity, has further compounded her offence in the eyes of many feminist critics. For example, Christina Britzolakis, in her essay "Angela Carter's Fetishism" suggests that Carter's fiction comes perilously close to participating in the masculine scenarios of fetishism that she is purportedly deconstructing (53). Britzolakis claims that Carter's fetishism is enacted at the level of representation, particularly the representations of femininity as spectacle that permeate her fiction, and also at the linguistic level. Indeed, she posits an interrelation between these two levels, seeing the objectification of women as spectacle as inseparable from the highly figurative language in which this objectification is conveyed, a

language "saturated with sensuous detail, with coruscating surfaces and ornate façades"(45).

Hence Britzolakis proposes that Carter's use of language, because it "foregrounds its own spectacular stylistic effects", is itself a form of fetishism, a "fetishism of the signifier"(47):

An intensely specular figurative energy turns language into a matter of collecting, hoarding, displaying, fondling, possessing and continually looking, an activity at once clinical and museological... Words are flaunted as objects; discrete images are isolated from their context. Although Carter describes herself as an allegorist, here, as elsewhere, she writes as an unabashed female fetishist; and it is the conjunction, as well as the disjunction, between these two terms, fetishism and allegory, that requires closer scrutiny. (46)

Although her thesis is infinitely more complex and subtle, Britzolakis' accusation contains an echo of charges laid earlier by anti-pornography feminists, particularly in reference to *The Bloody Chamber* and *The Sadeian Woman*, that Carter ends up by reduplicating the pornographic objectification of women that she is ostensibly critiquing. This point is made trenchantly by Patricia Duncker in her review of *The Bloody Chamber*. Whilst lauding Carter's genuinely original style, and her ambition to re-imagine "the archetypes of the imagination" through her revision of the fairy tale, Duncker asserts that Carter ends up reproducing rather than altering "the original, deeply, rigidly sexist psychology of the erotic"(6). As far as Duncker is concerned, Carter's attempt to rewrite the tales from a female perspective and infuse their erotic component with female desire fails because she does not imbue them with an autonomous female sexuality, only "female erotic ingenuity" in response to masculine sexual aggression. "I would suggest that all we are watching, beautifully packaged and unveiled," Duncker concludes, "is the ritual disrobing of the willing victim of pornography"(7). Avis Lewallen expresses a similar disquiet about the ambivalent representation of female sexuality in *The Bloody Chamber*. Although she acknowledges the ironic discourse that Carter sets in motion by forcing the reader to read her revisions of the tales against their familiar written precedents, Lewallen still contends that the tales ultimately reinscribe the Sadeian dualism of victor/victim. She finds the narrative strategy of inducing the reader to identify and sympathize with the masochism of the female victim of the title story especially troubling, objecting in particular to the seductive quality of Carter's writing (151-152).

As the reader will have noted, these critics unanimously find against Carter both thematically and on the basis of her ornate prose style. Her habitual use of figurative language, or as Britzolakis would have it, her "fetishism of the signifier"(47) is seen somehow to render the fetishistic images of women that pepper her fiction even more reprehensible. The singling out of Carter's language usage as particular grounds for offence by these critics is revealing. Are they suggesting that fetishized images of women presented in a plainer, more literal prose style, devoid of the extravagant lexicon, the zeugmas, oxymorons, and other figures of speech that characterize Carter's writing, would be more acceptable? Can the alleged fetishization of women in Carter's fiction be separated from her alleged fetishization of language? As far as her writing style is concerned, Carter has openly described herself as a mannerist incapable of writing "plain, transparent prose," even though she admires such writing (Haffenden 91). She claims that her mannerism is simply a response to the tenor of the times, which, after Cyril Connolly, she describes as "closing time in the Gardens of the West"(Haffenden 91). Herein, I will argue, lies the explanation as to why her highly figurative and ornamented style evokes such a hostile response from these critics.

In *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine*, Naomi Schor demonstrates that whilst in pre-Renaissance art the detail was traditionally linked to the sacred, since the Renaissance excessive ornamentation in all cultural forms has been censured. According to Schor, the immensely influential aesthetic theories of Sir Joshua Reynolds and Hegel both stress that the ideal of Art is to improve upon Nature, to erase the natural flaws of matter, which is gendered feminine, by the imposition of form, which is gendered masculine (Schor *Reading in Detail* 11-22). In his *Discourse on Art* Reynolds proclaims that the great style in art is to avoid details, which are identified with monstrosity, pathology and pollution. The system of aesthetics that Hegel expounds further demonizes the detail by associating excessively ornamented or detailed art with the withering of cultural forms, that is to say, with decadence. Even Baudelaire, so often called the father of French Decadence, states "art is nothing but an abstraction and a sacrifice of the

detail to the whole" (Baudelaire "Salon of 1846" 149). Schor claims that much of the critical hostility directed towards realism, naturalism and decadence in the nineteenth century was provoked by their tendency to focus on the particular rather than the general, in defiance of the axioms of Neo-Classical aesthetics.

Allegory is also enmeshed in detail, in that it always involves a synecdochal substitution of the particular for the general, the part for the whole. It is interesting that Britzolakis identifies the conjunction of allegory with fetishism in Carter's work as requiring further scrutiny, given that both fetishism and allegory hinge on foregrounding the detail whilst gesturing towards something *other*, something that remains unspoken. It is also interesting to find that allegory, like fetishism, has been linked to decadence by at least one critic. In *Studies in European Realism* Georg Lukács denigrated allegory as the exemplary modern art form, claiming that the oversignification of allegorical detail testifies to the loss of transcendental signifiers in modernity, and that allegory, like Modernism, denies typicality and destroys the world's coherence. From the distinctive Marxist perspective that Lukács adopts, the rise of modernist allegory is concomitant with the decline in the integrity of European culture that took place as the nineteenth century drew to its close, and thus concomitant with the advent of the decadent movement.

The imbrication of ornamentalism with decadence, and decadence with fetishism, in the art of the Aesthetic movement of the late nineteenth century is beyond dispute. The Decadents contravened the tenets of Neo-Classical aesthetics by reverencing the detail, honouring the thing-in-itself as worthy of contemplation, without requiring that it necessarily be subsumed into some greater whole. Whilst the most striking and recognizable characteristic of Decadent and Symbolist art is the idealization of artifice, *fin de siècle* art also has much in common with the art of earlier periods that are similarly designated as decadent, such as the Baroque. Like the art of the Baroque period, Symbolist and Decadent art is characterized by extreme embellishment, lush and hyperbolic language and imagery, and an excessive preoccupation with that which is usually deemed insignificant, that is, a fetishism of detail. "Decadence," Schor asserts, "is a pathology of

the detail" (*Reading in Detail* 3). Commenting on the essence of literary decadence, Paul Bourget writes, "a decadent style is one where the unity of the book decomposes to give way to the independence of the page, where the page decomposes to give way to the independence of the word"(20). There is an obvious homology here between the operations of fetishism and the decadent style. In both, supposedly insignificant detail has the ability to seduce the subject away from the prescribed *telos* of the activity, whether it is the normative goal of heterosexual intercourse or the pursuit of narrative to its ending.

Given the perception that fetishism, "detailism" (to adopt Schor's neologism) and decadence are inextricably linked, it is perhaps inevitable that Carter's foregrounding of the word, her virtuosic metaphoricity, her predilection for the overwrought and overwritten figure of speech rather than "plain, transparent prose," is read by hostile critics as a mark of decadence. This unstated but implied perception that Carter's linguistic "detailism" constitutes a kind of decadence surfaces most revealingly in Britzolakis' claim that her language is "saturated with sensuous detail, with coruscating surfaces and ornate façades"(45), and in her comment that in Carter's writing "words are flaunted as objects; discrete images are isolated from their context"(46). Britzolakis' phrasing accentuates the erotic quality of the word, the sensuality of the detail that she detects in Carter's writing, and finds so disturbing. Schor, who asserts that there is always a link between the detail or ornament and the erotic, also makes this connection between detailism and the erotic (*Reading in Detail* 156) . In Decadent literature, the fetishism of the signifier is inseparable from the fetishism of the signified, and it is this dual fetishization, this conjugated eroticization, which Britzolakis senses and censures in Carter's fiction.

Of course, Carter's fiction *does* have affinities with Decadent literature: both foreground language, and both dwell obsessively on the intensely specularized figure of Woman. What is at issue here is whether the stylistic and thematic affinities between them constitute simple repetition unmediated by any analysis, or whether Carter's citation of this particularly misogynistic cultural mode opens up a space in which it can be critiqued. This question has, in

part, generated my thesis, but before going on to consider it, I think it is imperative to point out that an imputation of another's decadence can never be disinterested. Decadence, like fetishism, carries a load of pejorative baggage, and an accusation of either reveals as much about the subject of the accusation as its object. It is true that at the *fin de siècle* the Decadents themselves happily appropriated the label imposed pejoratively upon them, just as contemporary fetishists celebrate their psychiatric diagnosis as a badge of honour, but the existence of these counter-discourses should not induce us to forget that both of these terms have more commonly been used to pathologize and stigmatize the Other. The pejorative usage of the term "decadence" casts it as the antithesis of normality and progress, and links it to a whole matrix of ideologically loaded terms with negative connotations: decay, disease, exhaustion, deterioration, decline, depravity, immorality, perversity, entropy and degeneration, to name but a few.

Probably no one has made the connection between ornamentalism and physical, moral and spiritual degeneracy more succinctly than Adolf Loos, the *fin de siècle* Viennese architect and crusader against decadent ornamentalism. In his essay "Ornament and Crime" Loos contends that "Lack of ornament is a sign of spiritual strength" (231). Loos envisages the citizens of the twentieth century marching unadorned into a Modernist utopia; their clothing, furniture, food, buildings, writing and speech entirely functional, stripped of the superfluous embellishments that are relics of past barbarism. Ornamentalism is the antithesis of progress in Loos's teleological discourse: pure functionalism *must* be the ideal of modernity. Schor makes the point that the repression of the detail is always carried out in the name of a moral code (*Reading in Detail* 156n): Loos's polemic serves to illustrate this point well. For Loos, unnecessary embellishment signals evolutionary regression, or, at best, stasis. But whereas he avers that the ignorant peasant who clings to an outmoded aesthetic of ornamentalism is to be pitied, the supposedly enlightened middle-class citizen of the metropolis who does the same is to be spurned as a virtual criminal transgressing the law of Progress. Loos posits a stark choice- one is either *for* Progress, and

therefore *against* ornamentalism, or one is hopelessly mired in the past, a degenerate anachronism addicted to retrogressive detail.

Loos's uncompromising binarism haunts the above-cited criticism of Carter's ornate writing style, in that it is underpinned by the assumption that the writer who is *for feminism* must be *for progress*, which is positioned in opposition to ornamentalism and decadence. She who partakes in the stylistics of *decadence* is effectively an agent of the opposition, albeit unwittingly. The writer who dallies with decadent detail cannot, it seems, be an authentic feminist. However, I would argue that this objection to Carter's ornamental style bespeaks an aesthetic Puritanism on the part of her critics that is not in the best interests of feminism. When an oppositional political movement starts to prescribe the themes and artistic styles deemed suitable for its project, it is skirting perilously close to sponsoring the kind of art that was so risibly awful in totalitarian states such as the Stalin's Soviet Union or Mao's China. Heroic female factory workers striving to increase their unit's output are no more convincing as art than their male counterparts, however admirable they may be in life. Carter's project was, at least in part, to explore "the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture"(Carter *The Sadeian Woman* 23), and her focus on the nexus between the erotic, the imagination, the unconscious and the broader culture could not easily be accommodated in a latter-day feminist version of socialist realism, which is what these critics seem to be calling for.

A more overt questioning of Carter's commitment to feminism can be found in the work of feminist anti-pornography campaigners Andrea Dworkin and Suzanne Kappeler, who also insinuate that Carter is actually a literary poseur, a decadent posing as a feminist. For Dworkin and Kappeler, broaching the subjects of female masochism and women's collusion with patriarchal oppression, as Carter does in *The Sadeian Woman* as well as in her fiction, appears to be tantamount to treason to the women's movement. Ironically, Dworkin and Kappeler both subscribe to the gendered version of the Sadeian dualism of victor/victim that Carter is at such pains to demystify in *The Sadeian Woman*, espousing as they do an extremely polarized view of

heterosexuality in which the male is inevitably the aggressor, the female always the innocent, suffering victim. As has been remarked, Carter "feared and loathed and found hilarious the spectacle of the suffering woman" (Sage "Death of the Author" 247) and the iconization of the willing female victim that is so much part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. As her journalism, editorial work and fiction attest, Carter's feminism set great store by female ingenuity, resistance and subversion rather than the idealization of female powerlessness as an exquisite moral virtue. For Carter, the goal of feminism was surely equal access to power for all human beings regardless of gender, or indeed of social class or race, accompanied by a radical transformation of the nature of power itself. This sets her radically at odds with Dworkin and Kappeler's essentialising brand of feminism that enshrines the moral superiority of woman-as-victim.

Like other hostile critics such as Robert Clark, Dworkin and Kappeler view Carter's embrace of a postmodern literary aesthetic as being incompatible with feminist political commitment. According to this line of criticism, it is not only Carter's imagery, language, or thematics that calls her feminism into question, it is her "literariness" itself, her self-conscious situating of her writing within a literary culture by engaging rhetorically with her literary predecessors and contemporaries. For instance, in her anti-pornography polemic *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Andrea Dworkin presents a very partial reading of *The Sadeian Woman*, which she berates as "a recent pseudofeminist literary essay" that enters "the realm of literary affectation heretofore reserved for the boys"(84). Similarly, Suzanne Kappeler claims that in her defence of de Sade, "Carter, the potential feminist critic, has withdrawn into the literary sanctuary, has become literary critic"(134). Feminism, it would seem, is not compatible with literary pretensions.

Although he argues from a different position - puritanical Marxist/feminist rather than anti-pornographic feminist - Robert Clark adopts a similar line of argument. He makes the curious claim that the inclusion of overt social criticism in Carter's works signals her belief in criticism as an abstract good in itself, which is divorced from political action. According to Clark:

The importance of this rupture is that it deprives Carter's work of any way of including within its own critical representation an understanding of the complicity of that representation with the social forces it appears to reject. Consequently, her texts become a sequence of broken reflections- an image of which they are particularly fond- in which the reader captures momentary and fugitive awareness of the social system that engenders him/her. This same process, however, is one by which the reader is *captured*, both in reading and in social life, for we now more and more inhabit a world composed of the various, multiple and discordant images the desire machine has prepared for us. (154)

Clark believes that Carter's failure to develop a coherent fictional critique of patriarchal ideology that could serve as the basis of political action can be traced to her aesthetic:

However, Carter's insight into the patriarchal construction of femininity has a way of being her blindness: her writing is often a feminism in male chauvinist drag, a transvestite style, and this may be because her primary allegiance is to a postmodern aesthetics that emphasizes the non-referential emptiness of definitions. Such a commitment precludes an affirmative feminism founded in referential commitment to women's historical and organic being. (158)

Perhaps wisely, Clarke does not attempt to define "women's historical and organic being," nor does he specify the kind of literature that an "affirmative feminism founded in referential commitment" to such an entity might produce. But what he seems to require from Carter is that she write agit-prop, a genre she loathed and had no desire to write.¹ Neither does he specify the kind of political action that this idealized feminist literature would supposedly inspire. The curious, indeed paradoxical, implication of the position that he adopts here is that writing, or in other words entering into discourse, is not in itself a political act. Clarke's position here runs counter to the emphasis that feminists have universally placed on the importance of women assuming the subject position in discourse, rather than the object position traditionally accorded them in masculinist societies.

Like Britzolakis, Clark sees Carter's literary style as antithetical to her professed politics:

The brilliant and choice lexicon, the thematization of surfaces and odors, of beauty, youth and power, the incantatory rhythms and tantalizing literariness, are strategies that bind the reader poetically, give the illusion of general significance without its substance, and put the reason to sleep, thereby inhibiting satire's necessary distancing of the reader from both the text and the satirized illusions. (158-59)

¹See her scathing (if somewhat tongue-in-cheek) description of Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* as an example of this genre, in her interview with John Haffenden, "Angela Carter," *Novelists in Interview*, ed. John Haffenden (London: Methuen, 1985) 93-94.

Clark's article has been subjected to intensive debate by Carter's defenders, and this critical debate will not be reiterated here.² My purpose in citing Clark's article at such length is not in order to engage in a detailed rebuttal of his argument, with which I obviously disagree. It is rather because Clark's piece offers such a clear-cut assertion of the often unstated perception underpinning much of the hostile or ambivalent criticism of Carter, which is the idea that there is a fundamental contradiction between her aesthetic and her politics. But where Clark and like-minded critics situate this contradiction within Carter's body of writing, I would claim instead that it resides squarely within their critical practice- a critical practice that insists upon positing politics and aesthetics as an oppositional binarism. This critical practice rests on a whole range of implicit assumptions about the relations between the political and the aesthetic, and more specifically, about the relations between postmodernism and feminism. These assumptions need to be brought to light before proceeding to address the specific issue of whether Carter's style constitutes a form of literary fetishism.

In her discussion of the cool critical reception given to Virginia Woolf's fiction by contemporary feminist critics, Toril Moi makes the point that all aesthetic value judgements are historically relative and deeply imbricated in political value judgments. Speaking against the assumption held by some feminist critics that Woolf's commitment to modernism is antithetical to her feminism, Moi asserts that feminist criticism should be fundamentally concerned with deconstructing any perceived opposition between the political and the aesthetic. Therefore Moi refuses to allow any hypothesized binary opposition of aesthetics versus politics to infuse her reading of Woolf, claiming instead that Woolf's politics must be located in her textual practice (Moi *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* 85-86). According to the terms of Moi's argument, there is no contradiction between an oppositional politics and an aesthetic mode *per se*.

² See Jordan "Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions"; Jordan "The Dangers of Angela Carter"; Altevors; Blodgett; Makinen "Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* and the Decolonization of Feminine Sexuality."

If Woolf's high modernism is not inimical to her feminism, then surely the same point can be made about Carter's postmodern aesthetic.

To this end, I want to rebut the critical practice that opposes Carter's postmodern aesthetic to her feminist political project by demonstrating that it is grounded in the spurious idea that Carter's postmodernism is a suspect aesthetic choice which reveals her hidden reactionary tendencies. Indeed the very positing of postmodernism as a choice is problematic, if one takes into account the epochal notion of postmodernism as a cultural dominant that demands the invention of a new form of oppositional politics advanced by Fredric Jameson in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Jameson's paradigm of postmodernism as *the* lived political, social and cultural reality of advanced capitalism renders the idea of any metaposition from which one could critique, choose or refuse the postmodern impossible. However, leaving aside the contentious issue of whether postmodernism can be regarded as an option, the logical conclusion of the idea that postmodernism is an ideologically incorrect aesthetic choice is the assumption that other aesthetic modes are intrinsically more favorable to the feminist project. Indeed, it suggests that each and every literary style or aesthetic carries a unique, unalterable political load. However, the disputation amongst feminist literary scholars over the relative merits of realism, modernism, *l'écriture féminine* and the *avant-garde* writing labelled feminine by Kristeva for feminist purposes suggests that this idea is inherently flawed.

The problematic implications of attributing political value to any specific artistic genre or aesthetic are addressed in detail by Rita Felski in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Whilst Felski's argument runs counter to Moi's in that she is arguing specifically against the trend within feminist literary scholarship of devaluing realism in favor of the experimental writing that is often labeled "feminine," her argument is nevertheless extremely relevant here. Felski claims that it is impossible to demonstrate either the feminine or feminist qualities of so-called "feminine" experimental texts, as they are just as liable to be the bearers of patriarchal ideology as the frequently maligned texts of classical realism. She asserts that the

erroneous claim made by poststructuralist feminist theory that the polysemic indeterminacy of the experimental text undermines phallogocentrism stems from a tendency to overestimate the radical effects of linguistic indeterminacy. According to Felski, experimental texts can be called feminine *only* if one equates all marginal or non-mainstream writing with the feminine position vis-à-vis patriarchy, an equation which renders the term feminine so broad as to be virtually meaningless. Therefore, Felski concludes that the political use-value of a text cannot be equated with its aesthetic form, because no aesthetic form is intrinsically feminist, feminine, or patriarchal. Indeed, "literary forms may take on quite different political and social meanings in relation to changing cultural perspectives and struggles over meaning and interpretation" (*Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* 8). Carter's texts can be read as feminist *and* postmodern; there is no inherent contradiction between these two descriptors.

However, dismissing the claim that Carter's postmodern aesthetic undermines her feminism as a critical red herring is not the same as denying the problematic nature of the relation of feminism to postmodernism and poststructuralism. The contentiousness of this issue for feminism is attested to by the multitude of positions adopted in the debate that it has spawned, and this multiplicity of perspectives is reflected in feminist cultural and literary theory. Andreas Huyssen, for example, identifies specific aspects of post-war women's artistic activity, such as the recuperation of mutilated and buried traditions, the refusal of canonized forms, and the emphasis on the gendered nature of subjectivity, as crucial to the critique of modernism and the emergence of postmodernism ("Mapping the Postmodern" 27). According to the terms of Huyssen's argument much of late twentieth century women's writing, including Carter's, belongs unquestionably to the category of postmodern literature.

And yet Patricia Waugh argues that feminist literary scholarship should refuse the aesthetic categories of modernism and postmodernism as completely inapplicable to women's writing, given that the rupture between these two categories is predicated upon the disintegration of the ostensibly universal but actually always masculine humanist subject. Waugh asserts that

women's subjectivity has never been experienced or represented in a manner analogous to that of the fictitious universal subject, and so women do not feel nostalgia for a model of subjectivity in which they have had no investment. Therefore they do not share the concern about the loss of the subject that is central to postmodernism. In fact, she claims that the concerns of both modernism and postmodernism are to a certain extent alien to women. The feminist theoretical project, as Waugh sees it, is to produce an alternative conception of the subject which is constructed through relationship, and it is therefore necessarily at odds with the dismantling or negation of the unified, autonomous subject that suffuses postmodernism and poststructuralism (Waugh 1-33). Although Waugh notes the influence of poststructuralist theory and postmodern experiment on Carter's work, she still includes her within a tradition of twentieth century women writers who, in their rejection of the impersonality central to modernism and postmodernism, write outside these aesthetic categories altogether (30).

My point here is not to endorse either of these arguments but rather to illustrate the diversity of critical positions which have been adopted in the debate about the relation between women's writing and postmodernism, for whilst it seems that we can dismiss the accusation that Carter's postmodernism subverts her feminism, it is obvious that there can be no final word on the vexed issues of either Carter's, or indeed of feminism's, relation to postmodernism. And far from wishing to fetishize the seemingly endless debates on these subjects, I want simply to acknowledge their contentiousness, and perhaps ultimate unresolvability, and return to my starting point, which is that of Carter's alleged fetishism. On this topic Britzolakis' article presents the most comprehensive and sophisticated analysis published to date, but, rather appositely, its productive power derives from its ambivalence rather than its conclusiveness. For Britzolakis' rhetorical questioning has the effect of opening up a veritable Pandora's box of responses in the avowed Carter fan. For this reader at least, reading Britzolakis initially sparked an indignant mental defence of Carter that despite its vehemence could not eradicate some residual doubts, doubts that in their turn engendered further rhetorical questions. If Carter is a fetishist because

her fetishistic style further embellishes and refetishizes the fetishes dear to fetishistic literary styles, such as Decadence, to which she fetishistically alludes, where does that leave the reader, particularly the feminist reader? Are the pleasures of the Carter text the pleasures of perversion? Is the reader implicated, guilty by association, as, her sweaty palms stuck to the page, she has her greedy fill of Carter's fetishism? Can the reader be accused of the crime itself, or, like a receiver of stolen goods, merely of complicity? Is Carter, and by inference the reader, guilty of second-hand fetishism, or is every fetishism a fetishism *de novo*? And if we are speaking of intertextual allusions to the fictional representations of fetishism written by writers other than Carter, *whose fetishism is it anyway?*

Sticky questions indeed. Sticky enough to force the reader to rethink, to reframe the argument, to turn it on its head, to engage in some rhetorical questioning of her own. Must fetishism carry negative connotations? Can one be a feminist fetishist? Of course there are those within feminism for whom the answer to the latter question is unequivocally negative, for whom the very term is an oxymoron. After all, *men* are the perverts; fetishism is something that *men* do. And furthermore, something that men do *to* women, like a lesser form of rape. It must be remembered here that the reverse-discourse instigated by sexual fetishists which has led to fetishism being celebrated in *haute couture* and popular culture is a very recent phenomenon, and this fashion for fetishism must not allow us to forget that hitherto the discourse of fetishism has mostly been a critique of the mysterious, incomprehensible practices of degraded others. Part of the attraction of participating in the discourse, as opposed to the practice, of fetishism has been this discursive effect of creating a critical distance between the critic and the credulity and perversity of others. As William Pietz suggests, the discourse of fetishism grants the critic the illusion of rationality and self-knowledge, of occupying "that Archimedean point of man at last...the impossible home of a man without fetishes"(14).

Andrea Dworkin's invective about fetishism as a male-supremacist practice which is indistinguishable from misogynistic sadism issues forth from the "impossible home" of a woman

without fetishes, for here, as elsewhere, she articulates an essentializing vision of gender in which perversion is projected onto a demonized masculine sexuality:

...every fetish, expressed on whatever level, manifests the power of the erect penis, especially its power in determining the sensibility of the male himself, his ethical as well as his sexual nature. Since men never judge ethical capacity on the basis of justice towards women, the sexual meaning of the fetish remains subterranean, while on the cultural level the fetish is expanded into myth, religion, idea, aesthetics, all necessarily and intrinsically male-supremacist. The uniting theme is the hatred expressed toward women. (*Pornography: Men Possessing Women* 127)

The force of Dworkin's polemic is deflated somewhat if we recollect that the psychoanalytic establishment has mostly viewed fetishism as the least harmful of perversions; indeed, fetishism has only been included in the category of the perversions because it induces the sufferer to deviate from the presumed *telos* of adult sexuality- procreative heterosexual intercourse.³ Since in much of Dworkin's writing consensual heterosexual intercourse is equated with rape, and the sexual act is always characterized by male violence and female degradation, the reader could be forgiven for assuming that fetishism, in deflecting the male from this ghastly goal, should be considered a good thing!⁴

Part of the difficulty with Dworkin's rhetoric is that her usage of the term "fetishism" is so generalized that it becomes almost meaningless. It is impossible to ascertain whether she is referring to fetishism in the religious or anthropological sense, to commodity fetishism, to fetishism as a sexual perversion or practice, or indeed to a conflation of all of the above. A lack of precision when referring to fetishism is by no means unique to Dworkin; terminological imprecision frequently bedevils understanding when fetishism is under discussion. This imprecision is not so much the result of theoretical sloppiness as to the recent emergence of fetishism as a critical trope, or cultural discourse, to use Emily Apter's term, in which the three hitherto distinct but related usages of the term -anthropological, commodity, and sexual

³ Freud makes this argument in the section entitled "The Sexual Aberrations" in Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 7 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1968).

⁴ The intercourse= rape equation is spelled out in Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (New York: The Free Press, 1987).

fetishism- have become conflated. Before embarking on an analysis of the operations of fetishism in Carter's writing, it is imperative to examine these distinct historical usages of the term fetishism, as well as the manner in which the distinctions have become blurred in theoretical discourse.

The word 'fetish' came into English usage in the early seventeenth century. Its origins can be traced from the Latin 'facticius' meaning manufactured, through the Portuguese derivation 'feitiço,' the name given in the Middle Ages to charms or talismans (Pietz 7). As these talismans were frequently regarded as heretical by the church, the term 'feitiço' also came to connote both the artifact that was bewitched or charmed and the practice of sorcery or witchcraft itself. Hence the practice of attributing magical or superhuman powers to an artifact, which we now conceptualize as anthropological or religious fetishism, was historically strongly associated with women, as they were believed to be the main practitioners of witchcraft in the Middle Ages. In the fifteenth century Portuguese sailors and traders traveling to the west coast of Africa applied the term 'feitiço' to the objects and amulets used in ritual by the Africans with whom they traded, the word being transformed to "fetisso" in the sixteenth century pidgin which evolved in order for these two cultures to communicate (Pietz 7). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, following its adoption in C. de Brosses's *Le Culte des Dieux Fétiches* (1760), the term "fetish" came to be used in anthropological discourse to signify "an inanimate object worshipped by savages on account of its supposed inherent magical powers, or as being animated by a spirit" (OED2 fetish n.1b). Thus it can be seen that in the pre-modern period Europeans viewed fetishism as the exclusive province of Europe's non-Christian "others": witches, sorcerers and heretics, who were predominantly but not exclusively female, as well as the "heathen" races of Africa.

When placed in this historical context, the later Freudian stress on sexual fetishism as the exclusive domain of civilized masculinity can be seen to be historically anomalous. Similarly, the witty characterizations of feminist attempts to recuperate fetishism for women, sometimes by those same theorists committed to this project- for example Marjorie Garber's "fetish envy"

(118-27) and Schor's "perversion theft" ("Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand" 371)- sound rather hollow when the historical and linguistic origins of fetishism are examined. Perhaps it is Freud, rather than feminism, who should be accused of "fetish envy," given that if the anthropological concept of fetishism which stands behind all later usages of the word can be said to be gendered at all, it is surely gendered feminine.

Freud's concept of sexual fetishism, outlined in his 1927 essay "Fetishism," is not only masculinist, it is profoundly misogynist, because it is predicated on an aversion to the female genitals that is tantamount to revulsion. Until recently the Freudian classification of fetishism as an exclusively masculine perversion has remained virtually uncontested, despite the documentation of a number of cases of female fetishism in the psychiatric and psychoanalytic literature.⁵ The classic Freudian fetishist is notable for his sexual overvaluation of the inanimate object or bodily part that constitutes his fetish object. Indeed, his ability to achieve orgasmic gratification is entirely dependent upon the presence of this fetish object. According to Freud's account, fetishism arises from the male child's inability to renounce his perception of the maternal genitals as castrated, a perception which fuels significant anxiety about the potential loss of his own penis. One of the central assumptions of Freud's theory is the idea that the little boy cannot accept the reality of the female genitals; therefore in order to render them tolerable he must somehow endow them with a penis. The fetish object comes to stand metonymically for the fantasized but absent maternal penis, and at the same time serves as a defence against the male child's castration anxiety. In Lacan's reformulation of Freud's analysis of fetishism, the fantasized maternal penis also takes on the role of the phallus, the signifier of power and authority. Thus the fetish object also "commemorates the last percept prior to the little boy's traumatic loss of illusions regarding maternal anatomy, power and identity" (Schor "Fetishism" 114). Fetishism is characterized by oscillation between belief in the maternal phallus and *disavowal*,

⁵ See See Jann Matlock's "Masquerading Women, Pathologized Men: Cross-Dressing, Fetishism and the Theory of Perversion, 1882-1935" for an historical overview of psychoanalytic and psychiatric reports of cases of fetishism.

or denial of that belief, and the fetish object commemorates the moment of the child's horrified discovery of the imaginary "reality" of female castration. In effect, the fetish functions as a memorial to the male child's first recognition of sexual difference.

Far from being an obscure description of some rare and harmless perversion, the theory of fetishism is actually central to Freud's theorization of sexual difference. As Schor points out, inscribed within it are Freud's insistence on the inferiority of the female genitals and the superiority of the penis, the notions of female castration and masculine castration anxiety, the child's resolution or non-resolution of the Oedipal complex, and the primary importance Freud accords to visual perception. She argues:

Fetishism (like Penis Envy) is the linchpin of Freud's privileging of the phallus, and privileging the phallus underwrites the ideology of gender and the hegemony of heterosexuality. At the same time, the hypothetical scene of fetishism attests to the extreme fragility of Freudian theories of sexual differentiation, and especially of the development of male heterosexual desire, for what the fetish advertises is the little boy's *uncertainty* over maternal lack; it is a testimony to the ultimate undecidability of female castration. The mark of fetishism is a perpetual oscillation between two logically incompatible beliefs: woman is and is not castrated. Or, in the words of Octave Mannoni's celebrated patient: '*Je sais bien, mais quand même...*' (I know, but nevertheless...) (Schor "Fetishism" 114)

Freud's theory of fetishism, and indeed his whole theory of sexual difference, is based on the premise that the child can only interpret *his* initial perception of sexual difference in terms of the absence or presence of the penis. The masculine pronoun is used deliberately here, for as Charles Bernheimer notes, virtually all of Freud's rather slight evidence about children's perceptions of sexual difference is taken from the case histories of his male patients ("Castration as Fetish" 1). It is simply not imaginable to Freud that a child of either sex could recognize and accept sexual difference as a simple difference, and therefore the perception of difference must always be couched in hierarchical terms within his theory. His use of the image of castration to represent the female genitals is profoundly problematic for feminists not only because of the connotations of mutilation, inferiority, and lack that this image conveys, but also because it implies a complete non-recognition of the reality of the female sexual organs, which frequently disappear altogether in his discourse. Unless of course they are reframed in terms of the penis, as is the case in the

closing sentence of his essay: "In conclusion, we may say that the normal prototype of fetishes is man's penis, just as the normal prototype of inferior organs is a woman's real small penis, the clitoris" (Freud "Fetishism" 157).

The phantasmic origin of the notion of female castration is elided within Freud's theorization of the psychic mechanisms underpinning the evolution of sexual identity, and the effect of this elision is that female castration is no longer presented as childish speculation but rather as an indisputable fact. Indeed, this "fact" is so pivotal to Freud's theory that Bernheimer has been moved to joke that "psychoanalytically speaking, without castration psychoanalysis would be castrated" (Bernheimer "'Castration' as Fetish" 1). However, the fictitious facticity of female castration within Freudian theory has far-reaching material effects that are far from funny. Carter, for example, argues that the idea of women as castrated, inferior beings has the effect of naturalizing the violence inflicted upon them within the discourse of violent pornography:

The whippings, the beatings, the gougings, the stabbings of erotic violence reawaken the memory of the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration, which is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, to which it is related in the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture. Female castration is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men's attitudes 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)

Bernheimer suggests that it is Freud's difficulty in accepting sexual difference, rather than the child's, that determines the primacy his theory grants to the idea of castration. The fantasy of female castration functions fetishistically within Freud's discourse, for like the fetish object that it resembles, the phantasmic notion of female castration both gestures towards and covers over the fearful reality of female genital *difference*. Although it is tempting to read the fetishization of castration within Freudian theory as determined by its author's unconscious, it can more profitably be understood as a historical marker of the origins of psychoanalysis. The fantasy of female castration historicizes Freud's supposedly transhistorical scientific theory of sexual difference, a theory that actually turns out to be a theory of sexual sameness, of men and

castrated men rather than of men and women, and so turns out to be yet another example of Irigaray's "Law of the Self-same" (*Speculum* 32).

Through his reading of some of the many literary representations of the Old Testament story of Salome that proliferated at the *fin de siècle*, specifically those of Huysmans, Wilde, Flaubert and Mallarmé, Bernheimer advances the thesis that "castration is the seminal fantasy of the decadent imagination" (sic) ("Fetishism and Decadence: Salome's Severed Heads" 62). By situating Freud's theory in the artistic and intellectual *milieu* of its genesis, which is that of *fin de siècle* European decadence, Bernheimer reveals the historically determined nature of Freud's adoption of the metaphor of castration to represent female sexual difference. According to Bernheimer, in the decadent imagination the figure of Salome is virtually inseparable from that of her mother Herodias, and together they embody misogynist masculine fantasies of woman as castrating and castrated. Salome-Herodias's desire to decapitate John the Baptist is figured in the decadent imaginary as a manifestation of the universal feminine desire to castrate men, a desire which is motivated by revenge for woman's own castrated state, and which Freud later formalised in his famous equation "to decapitate = to castrate" ("Medusa's Head" 273). Bernheimer claims that although Freud may posit castration as the key to understanding the universal psychic processes of sexual differentiation, his incorporation of the fantasy of female castration into his theory of sexual difference actually signals his participation in the misogynistic ideology of *fin de siècle* decadence.

In effect, by bestowing the status of fact upon what is actually a theoretical construct, Freud's theorizing enacts the fetishism he is supposedly explicating:

Castration is the theory that the fetishist invents to account at once for that difference and deny its reality. Castration is a welcome theoretical advance, a welcome addition to the bastion of male theory. To consider women as castrated men is the most effective defence of the fetishist, whose fundamental fear is that women are intolerably, uncannily, other. The idea of castration reassuringly domesticates this fearful otherness. It may cause the boy, as Freud says, to 'tremble for his masculinity,' but this anxiety is more than compensated for by a narcissistic gain: 'he will despise the unhappy creatures on whom the cruel punishment has, as he supposes, already fallen.' (SE XI, 95)

My critique preserves the fundamental structure of Freud's description of fetishism- women's sexual difference is at once acknowledged and denied- but implicates Freud in the very perversion

he is analysing, in so far as he equates female sexuality with castration. (Bernheimer "'Castration' as Fetish" 3)

Bernheimer's critique of Freud's fetishism serves as a perfect illustration of Baudrillard's point that the term fetishism has a tendency to hex those who use it and to expose the fetishistic oscillations in their own thinking between unconscious belief and conscious knowledge. To paraphrase Mannoni's patient, "Freud knows that women are not castrated, and yet, all the same..." (Schor "Fetishism" 114).

Why then, given fetishism's propensity to bite the hand that feeds it, in addition to the obvious difficulties for feminist theory that a theory of sexual difference which presupposes female genital inferiority poses, did the psychoanalytic concept of fetishism become a focal point of feminist scholarship in the late 1980s and the 1990s? This scholarship has ranged from Dworkin's outright rejection of fetishism as a phallogocentric practice, to attempts to appropriate fetishism for feminism. Naomi Schor's entry on Fetishism in Elizabeth Wright's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Critical Dictionary* provides a succinct account of the three separate strategies adopted by feminists in this appropriative endeavor, and I will briefly summarize this account here before going on to discuss further work in the field that post-dates Schor's entry.

The first strategy Schor lists is a deconstructive political strategy of mimicking the oscillation that characterizes fetishism in order to assert seemingly contradictory claims, such as the claim for equal rights and the claim for sexual difference. The second is a textual strategy of unearthing instances of fetishism in both women's writing and male-authored representations of women. Schor's own essay, "Female Fetishism: the Case of George Sand", on the fetishization of the female wound in Sand's fiction, is notable in this category as is Emily Apter's exploration of the morcellation of the female body in canonical nineteenth-century French literature. In *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France*, Apter breaks new ground in suggesting that various feminine behaviours represented in *fin-de-siècle* literature, such as *bibelot* collecting, sartorial narcissism, religious self-stigmatization and the maternal

melancholia that underpins the mania for collecting relics of babyhood, constitute non-sexual forms of female fetishism that have gone unrecognized by psychoanalysis.

The third strategy is that employed by Elizabeth Grosz to rework the Freudian paradigm of fetishism so that the mechanism of disavowal can be utilized to articulate female experience, particularly the disavowal of women's own symbolic castration under patriarchy. Grosz reads Freud's theory against the grain to assert that what the little girl is disavowing is not maternal castration, but her own. As Grosz's feminist recuperation of the concept of disavowal offers a productive way of rethinking the recurrent image of woman-as-fetish in Carter's fiction, I will briefly reiterate her thesis here. It is essential to understand that according to the terms of Grosz's argument, women can and do utilize disavowal as a defence mechanism against the loss of status and the personal debasement that entail from their *symbolic* rather than genital castration under patriarchy. According to Grosz, the little girl who denies her own psychic castration can take one of three paths: heterosexual primary narcissism, hysteria, or the masculinity complex. In the case of narcissism, the little girl copes with the recognition of the secondary status that is a corollary of her non-possession of the phallus by phallicizing her whole body, by treating it as if it were the phallus. The female narcissist's obsessive investment in her body as a means of obtaining social approval and transforming herself into an object of sexual desire for males is regarded by Freud as a normal component of femininity, albeit in an exaggerated form. Yet the subject position of the narcissist is tenuous and disabled, requiring constant vigilance and exertion in order to maintain an illusory phallicism that is ultimately transparent:

The narcissistic woman, contrary to Sarah Kofman's characterization, is far from independent and autonomous. She strives to retain her position as the object of the other's desire through artifice, appearance, or dissimulation. Illusion, travesty, make-up, the veil become the techniques she relies on both to cover over and to make visible her "essential assets." They are her means of seducing or enticing the masculine or anaclitic lover, becoming a love object for him. While thus concealing her "deficiency" by these means, she secures a mode of access to the phallic. Ironically, in this aim of becoming the phallus, the object of the other's desire, she is revealed as the site of rupture, lack, or castration, both idealized and debased, bound up with the masquerade of femininity, the site of both excess and deficiency.... (Grosz 111)

Thus far Grosz follows the outline of narcissism laid down by Freud and Lacan, but she begins to deviate from the orthodox psychoanalytic position when she claims that the narcissist's behaviour is a form of fetishism. Rather than investing an inanimate object or part of the other's body with heavily charged sexual meaning, as the male fetishist does, the narcissist invests her whole body with sexual significance. In effect, she phallicizes or fetishizes her whole body in order to compensate for her supposed genital inferiority, and the elevation of her body into a fetish object becomes a way to disavow her symbolic castration. In Lacanian terms, whilst the narcissist may not have the phallus, she *is* the phallus. Grosz views the hysteric as following a similar psychic trajectory to the narcissist, the difference being that the hysteric phallicizes a single body part or hysterogenic zone rather than her whole body. The hysteric also differs from the narcissist in that she does not seek the desire of a masculine subject in order to be transformed into a phallic object; rather she remains attached to the phallic mother. This enables her to phallicize or fetishize part of her body, whilst retaining an active subjectivity. Similarly, in her analysis of the masculinity complex in women, Grosz reiterates the Freudian analysis of the little girl as one who disavows her castration, continues to identify with the phallic mother and retains her position of pre-Oedipal "masculinity". She continues to take the mother as her love object, rather than transferring her affections to the male parent, and this female object choice is continued in adulthood. However unlike Freud, Grosz detects fetishism at work here, claiming that the female love object selected by the woman with the masculinity complex functions as a fetish object in that she is a substitute for the phallus. This phallic substitution enacts the fetishistic structure of displacing phallic value from the body of the mother onto an object outside of the subject.

In "Lesbian Fetishism?" Grosz plays out a fetishistic oscillation, both affirming and repudiating the insights into female sexual development proffered by psychoanalysis, describing her strategy of using the terms of patriarchal theory against itself as one of "developing paradoxes and contradictions to see how the theory itself copes (or does not cope) with its own unspoken

assumptions or unacknowledged implications" (Grosz 114-15). In short, what Grosz is doing is appropriating those aspects of psychoanalytic theory which she believes have explanatory power for feminism, and exposing the limitations of what remains. What is at stake in her work is not so much whether lesbianism can be read as a form of fetishism, indeed she herself expresses doubt about the value of asking this question, but rather identifying the limitations of psychoanalysis's capacity to address the specificity of female experience. However I would argue that by attempting to undermine the phallogentrism of psychoanalytic discourse by arguing with it on its own terms Grosz allows the limitations of the psychoanalytic perspective to determine the limitations of her own argument's explanatory power.

The most interesting recent work in the field has set up a much more radical challenge to the psychoanalytic paradigm which has hitherto largely determined the parameters from which feminist theorists such as Schor, Apter and Grosz have approached the issue of fetishism and women. In *Female Fetishism: A Second Look*, Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen exhibit an eclectic and irreverent approach to their topic, admittedly adopting "smash and grab" tactics to expand the concept of female fetishism beyond the psychoanalytic paradigm. At the same time they argue for a far more specific and nuanced reading of fetishism, a reading that is alert to degrees of fetishization and also attends to the operations of anthropological and commodity fetishism, rather than one that is limited to the concept of sexual fetishism. For example they reject the usual explanation proffered by cultural theorists, including feminists, that the behaviour of female pop fans is a result of sexual fetishism, rather they detect elements of religious or anthropological fetishism, commodity fetishism and sexual fantasy in the phenomenon of "fandom." A second example of their innovative approach is their idea that the eating disorders endemic amongst first world women, particularly bulimia, constitute a fourth type of fetishism which they label food fetishism.

After conducting their own empirical research in the British "fetish scene" and re-examining the documented cases of female sexual fetishism in the psychoanalytic literature,

Gamman and Makinen conclude that women do practice sexual fetishism. The female practitioners whom they unearth range from those who meet Freud's criteria of the fetishist as a person who is only able to achieve orgasm through use of a fetish object, through to those who use fetish objects as adjuncts to their sexual practice which may involve a variety of other activities. Here Gamman and Makinen employ Paul Gebhard's concept of a continuum of intensities of fetishism, the lowest level of intensity consisting merely of a preference for specific stimuli whilst the most intense level of fetishism coincides with Freud's description of an absolute requirement for the specific stimuli or object that takes the place of a sexual partner (Gamman and Makinen 38). Their aim in proving that women can and do fetishize in the Freudian sense is more ambitious than Grosz's goal of testing the limits of psychoanalytic theory, for they claim that what is at stake in this endeavor is no less than demolishing once and for all the psychoanalytic axiom that feminine sexuality is inherently passive and reactive. They argue that writing women into the psychoanalytic account of the perversions is a way of beginning to deconstruct the whole discourse of perversion, and with it the discourse of gender (Gamman and Makinen 82-95).

Prior to Freud's formulation of the perversions as a pathology of sexual difference, psychiatrists such as Binet considered fetishism to be essentially an ungendered perversion practiced by both sexes, although the majority of documented cases were male. However, ever since Freud's 1927 formulation of fetishism as a masculine pathology arising from the drama of sexual differentiation, fetishism has been viewed as the model for all the other perversions. According to Gamman and Makinen, this insistence on the central place that fetishism occupies in the pantheon of perversions is a direct result of Freud's "phallicising of fetishism" (39) and a reflection of the profound phallocentrism that constitutes the blind spot in the psychoanalytic discourse of gender:

Could the importance that is attributed to fetishism be because it is located so firmly on the protection and valorization of the phallus? We would almost argue that fetishism as a male preserve is itself a signifying concept of psychoanalysis's phallocentric discourse. Psychoanalysis

must deny women as practitioners of fetishism because to admit that they are questions the importance of the phallus as *the* signifier of desire (and hence value). (Gamman and Makinen 39)

Establishing the existence of female fetishism has the effect of displacing the phallus from its position as the universal signifier of desire, because by definition female fetishism cannot arise as a result of castration anxiety. Although the reification of the phallus within Freudian and Lacanian theory is such that it begins to resemble an anthropological fetish, the existence of female fetishism signals the possibility of women's desire for something other than this supposedly "universal signifier of desire." The phenomenon of female sexual fetishism as an example of a female desire that is not organised around the phallus demands an alternative explanation to that supplied by either Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalysis. In order to develop a hypothesis about the aetiology of female fetishism Gamman and Makinen draw on a variety of other sources. These include Melanie Klein's exploration of the pre-Oedipal relationship between mother and baby, and subsequent work by the object-relations school on the infant's relation to transitional objects, as well as work by feminist psychoanalysts Parveen Adams and Estelle Welldon. Their reading of these sources leads them to hypothesize that sexual fetishism can arise out of the infant's conflicts over differentiation and separation from the mother rather than anxiety over sexual difference, a hypothesis that allows for inclusion of both male and female fetishists. In this scenario the fetish object is used as a symbolic substitute for either the mother in total, or her breast alone (Gamman and Makinen 95-121). Because this hypothesis locates the aetiological moment in the primarily oral pre-Oedipal period, it supports their interpretation of eating disorders as a form of food fetishism. Here they are referring specifically to bulimia with its typically fetishistic oscillation between doing and undoing, between sensual pleasure and the disavowal of threatening unconscious knowledge (Gamman and Makinen 122-45).

Clearly, Gamman and Makinen do not wish to jettison psychoanalysis in its entirety; rather they seek to forge a new theory of the female erotic which incorporates the valuable insights which psychoanalysis has to offer without taking on board its phallogocentric blind spots

about female sexuality. Because of this, I believe that their work presents a much stronger challenge to the phallocentrism of the Freudian account of fetishism than that of other feminists publishing in the field whose work, although pushing against the limits of Freud's theory, ultimately remains circumscribed by it. Thus Mulvey's work on cinema, and that of Shor, Apter and Garber on literature, almost invariably follow the dictates of psychoanalysis in positing men as the practitioners or *subjects* of fetishism, and women as the *objects* of the objectifying male gaze.

Naomi Schor's essay on fetishism in the novels of George Sand is a case in point. Although Schor is seeking to establish the possibility of vicarious fetishism on the part of a female author, and to explore the ramifications of this possibility, the two examples that she cites to support her argument are both representations of the fetishization of female wounds by male characters. This again raises the question I posed earlier about Carter's fetishism: *whose fetishism is it anyway?* Can we really attribute the behaviour or attributes of the characters in a novel to their author? Schor's argument that it is the fetishization of wounds in Sand's novels that signals the operation of a specifically female form of fetishism is based on her claim that men do not generally fetishize wounds (Schor "Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand" 366). However, this claim is undermined by evidence that one of the favoured fetish objects of men frequenting brothels in the nineteenth century was the stump of a female amputee; indeed, the psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel claims that "in times past, any thriving brothel featured a 'wooden-legged' woman" (Chasseguet-Smirgel 81). And even the most cursory glance at contemporary pornography sites on the Internet demonstrates that this particular "perversion" continues to flourish. Of course, as I will discuss below, Schor subsequently revised the position articulated in this early article on Sand's fetishism, claiming that what she was really gesturing towards in her early work was the feminist appropriation of irony rather than fetishism (Schor "Fetishism and Its Ironies" 98-99).

But before moving on from my discussion of Gamman and Makinen's work I wish to highlight one last point which marks their departure from earlier feminist work in the field.

Whilst previous feminist theorists of fetishism have largely followed the psychoanalytic paradigm that posits sexuality as universal and transhistorical, Gamman and Makinen understand sexuality as a culturally and historically located material practice. This leads them to stress the importance of situating the psychoanalytic reading of female fetishism within a cultural context, for as they observe, "unconscious desire, no matter how it is generated, is always socially mediated" (Gamman and Makinen 166). Their insistence on the historical contextualization of the discourses of sexuality reveals just how grounded in the *fin-de-siècle* Freud's theory of female sexuality is, for it simply can not account for the diversity of women's sexual practices in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Although Freud posits a transhistorical model of female sexuality, the sexual practices of women in the advanced capitalist economies have clearly evolved in response to changes in the socio-economic position of women as well as the availability of effective contraception. This indicates that the opposite is true: sexuality is not essential or transhistorical, it is contingent on social and material circumstances, which is precisely the argument that Carter makes in *The Sadeian Woman*.

Gamman and Makinen make the claim that other feminist theorists frequently fail to specify the type of fetishism that is under discussion and this leads them to conflate sexual fetishism with voyeurism, sadism, commodity fetishism, and what they call a consumer fetishism of the erotic (171-212). Whilst Gamman and Makinen's ideal of theoretical specificity may be laudable, it begins to seem like a chimera when placed in the context of the ever-increasing eroticization of the commodity and commodification of the erotic within the cultures of advanced capitalism. In effect, it has become extremely difficult to disentangle the workings of the various forms of fetishism within advertising, the media, and aesthetic practices. Within the late twentieth century culture of conspicuous consumption the overvaluation and sexualization of the commodity has been paralleled by the commodification of the individual, to the extent that fetishism has been seen as *the* condition of postmodernity. The concept of the commodity fetish as we understand it today has undergone significant modification since it was first elucidated by

Marx in 1867 in the first volume of *Das Kapital*. Space precludes an in-depth discussion of the evolution of Marx's concept here, so I will limit my commentary to the topic of direct concern to my discussion of Carter, which is the fetishization of the commodity at the point of consumption.

Marx claimed that when the commodity entered the marketplace it assumes what he called exchange-value, and in the process is divested of its use-value. Henceforth the value of the commodity is seen to reside in the product itself rather than in the labour that has produced it, and thus it begins to assume mystical qualities. Here Marx draws upon the concept of the anthropological fetish as a man-made object whose status as the product of human labour is disavowed, and which is thought to possess mysterious or magical powers. The social relations between human beings involved in the production of commodities, that is the exploitative relations between those who labour and those who purchase that labour, are disavowed or rendered invisible in the process of commodity fetishization, which supplants human relations with a phantasmic relationship between things.

Our current usage of the term "commodity fetishism" differs from that developed by Marx in the greater emphasis it lays on the consumption of commodities rather than their production. Towards the latter half of the nineteenth century the conspicuous consumption of commodities began to be understood as a signifying practice, a way of signalling one's social status as a member of the leisured classes. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class* Thorstein Veblen drew attention to how consumption of commodities generated meanings about social class and concomitant aesthetic value. In his unfinished cultural history of the Paris Arcades, Walter Benjamin develops this idea that the commodity is fetishized at the point of consumption with his notion of the commodity as spectacle in the urban phantasmagoria, the dazzling, ever-changing city space:

For Benjamin... the key to the new urban phantasmagoria was not so much the commodity-in-the-market as the commodity-on-display, where exchange value no less than use value lost practical meaning, and purely representational value came to the fore. Everything desirable, from sex to social status, could be transformed into commodities as fetishes-on-display that held the

crowd enthralled even when personal possession was beyond their reach. Indeed, an unattainably high price only enhanced a commodity's symbolic value. (Buck-Morss *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* 81-82)

Benjamin's commodity is anthropomorphized in its eroticism, its power to seduce the bedazzled spectators into the pleasures of looking, and, for those with the requisite purchasing power, the pleasures of possession. The conjuncture between the eroticized commodity and the commodification of the erotic in Benjamin's work is located on and in the body of woman.

Firstly through the phenomenon of fashion, which:

prostitutes the living body to the inorganic world. In relation to the living it represents the rights of the corpse. Fetishism, which succumbs to the sex-appeal of the inorganic, is its vital nerve; and the cult of the commodity recruits this to its service. (Benjamin *Charles Baudelaire: a Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* 166)

Fashion fetishizes the surface transformation of the female body through cosmetics, coiffure and clothing so that desire is displaced from the body of the living woman onto that of her antithesis, the mannequin. It is important to note that here Benjamin positions woman to represent fecundity, nature, and the organic, and hence she stands in opposition to the inorganic, mechanized mode of production of industrial capitalism. Fashion enslaves women into a quest for novelty and beauty that entails both an endless consumption of commodities and her own transformation into a commodity, which by its very nature is inorganic, dead. Therefore, according to Benjamin, fashion "has opened the business of dialectical exchange between woman and ware – between carnal pleasure and the corpse" (Benjamin *The Arcades Project* 62 (B1,1)).

Secondly, Benjamin designates the body of the prostitute as the emblem or hieroglyph of commodity capitalism. Whilst the labour of those who produced it is usually effaced when the commodity is put on the market, the labour of the prostitute, which consists of selling her bodily participation in a variety of sexual acts, cannot be erased, as her body *is* the commodity. The prostitute is an example of Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image because she synthesizes "the form of the commodity and its content" (Buck-Morss *The Dialectics of Seeing* 185).

Benjamin saw the dialectical image, glossed by Jennings as "the diachronic relationship of certain images from a past epoch to certain related images that proliferate in every present moment" (35), as an epistemological tool for understanding the true character of both the past and the present by bringing lost knowledge of the past to present consciousness. As it evolves in his later works, the task of the literary or cultural critic is to juxtapose images from different historical eras in order to bring about a revolutionary upheaval in the reader's consciousness, a realization of the true nature of current social conditions. The dialectical image is an antidote to the capitalist ideology of progress, for what it reveals is stasis, the absence of progress:

It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural <*bildlich*>. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical—that is, not archaic—images. (Benjamin *The Arcades Project* 463 (N3,1))

Carter has acknowledged Benjamin as exerting great influence on her work (Goldsworthy 12), but it is not for this reason alone that his concept of the dialectical image and his work on the relationship between woman and the commodity-as-spectacle will be crucial to my reading of her fiction. Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image is central to my argument, but his work also offers a way of conceptualising the interrelationship between commodity fetishism and the sexual fetishization of women that permeates advanced capitalism, marked as it is by the two complementary tendencies of the eroticization of the commodity and reification or commodification of the gendered subject. Carter and Benjamin have in common a highly materialist perspective on culture and history and a commitment to de-mythologizing myth and other forms of false consciousness. The dialectical image is in essence a de-mythologizing device, a way of making connections between past and present forms of social relations and social oppression through the juxtaposition of cultural representations. In her 1983 essay "Notes from the Front Line" Carter describes how she draws on the European cultural heritage to develop

ideas for her fiction, and this description reveals her fundamental methodological affinity with Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image as a device for revealing untruth:

So I feel free to loot and rummage in an official past, specifically a literary past, but I like paintings and sculptures and the movies and folklore and heresies, too. This past, for me, has important decorative, ornamental functions; further, it is a vast repository of outmoded lies, where you can check out what lies used to be à la mode and find the old lies on which new lies have been based. (74)

Reconceptualising Carter's intertextual citations of fetishized representations of women as dialectical images, or purposeful juxtapositions by *the writer as literary critic*, as Carter has described herself, leads to very different conclusions about Carter's alleged fetishism than those expressed by Britzolakis. Whilst Britzolakis acknowledges the importance of Benjamin's ideas in her reading of Carter, even citing some of the same passages from his work as myself to support her argument, she comes to a radically different conclusion about Carter's fetishism. This is partly because she does not utilise his notion of the dialectical image, but what is perhaps more significant in explaining the difference in our readings is that Britzolakis does not address Carter's habitual use of irony. In this she is not alone. Elaine Jordan has observed how critics often fail to take Carter's echoic irony into account, reading the utterances of particular characters as representative of the opinions of their author instead of ironic citations from popular opinion or other cultural forms (Jordan "Afterword" 218).

With the exception of Austen, women writers have not been noted for their use of irony. Which is not to say that female writers have not been ironical. On the contrary, the perception that female writers rarely adopt the ironic mode is the result of a failure to recognize female irony rather than to a historical paucity of female ironists. Toril Moi's discussion of the critical reception given to Mary Ellman's early feminist classic *Thinking About Women* provides a perfect illustration of this point. According to Moi, Ellman adopts the rhetorical trope of irony in order to expose the extent to which thinking in Western culture is permeated by essentialist sexual analogies and also to deconstruct stereotypical representations of women commonly propounded by male authors. Yet Ellman's use of irony to construct her thesis goes unrecognized by critics to

the extent that a even a superficially sympathetic female critic such as Patricia Meyer Spacks proposes a new feminine stereotype of evasiveness to categorize Ellman's literary style, rather than call it ironic (Moi *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* 31-41). Irony, it seems, is not considered to be a "feminine" mode of writing.

Women's writing has frequently been subjected to a very literal kind of reading, and the expectations that this reading practice has engendered may go some way towards accounting for the absence of recognition of women's irony. Susan Rubin Suleiman has described this highly literal reading practice as "ultra-thematic" in its relentless concentration on theme, scene and character to the absolute exclusion of any consideration of textuality (Suleiman *Subversive Intent : Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* 84). I would assert that the critics cited at the beginning of this introduction (Dworkin, Kappeler, Lewallen, Clark and Duncker) all subject Carter's fiction to an ultra-thematic reading which is either blind to the operations of textuality or even openly hostile to it, seeing Carter's foregrounding of textuality as a kind of élitism or else a willful muddying of the waters of interpretation. Lorna Sage has noted just how prickly Carter's relations were with many of her feminist contemporaries, not least because she "was in general an offence to the modest, inward, realist version of the woman writer"(Sage "Death of the Author" 248). Putting aside the ideological differences between Carter and feminist separatists and purists, it seems to me that much of the hostility directed at Carter stems from the conviction that a committed feminist writer should write in a more overtly didactic and less slippery, postmodernist fashion. Carter's irony is the source of much of the offence she gives to the critics I have been discussing, or to put it more succinctly, much of the difficulty they have with her fiction can be attributed to their failure to recognize her irony.

However, recognition of Carter's irony would not inevitably dispel these critics' suspicion of her ideological slipperiness, because irony is itself inherently slippery; indeed the possibility of being missed or misunderstood is intrinsic to the ironist's project. As Jonathan Culler points out, the fundamental feature of irony is its double structuration, and this doubleness permeates its

every aspect. Irony relies for its effect on the contrast between appearances and reality in order to establish the conditions by which the ironic statement or text can give rise to vastly different readings. The ironic statement, passage or text has a literal meaning, and although it contains incongruities, these must not be so glaringly obvious as to preclude a literal reading by the naïve reader. Therefore the text must refrain, by and large, from passing adverse comment upon or otherwise openly disparaging that which it seeks to ironize. In contrast, the true meaning or proposition is buried and relies on the knowing reader to find or reconstruct it, in which process the knowing reader establishes his or her complicity with the author's project. Culler pinpoints four factors which govern the reader's perception of irony: the contrast between the behaviour presented in the text with the expectations of human behaviour derived from life experience; expectations about the world of the novel which suggests how specific details should be interpreted; incongruities in the assertions made by the text which are recuperated as irony; and a sense which develops as the reading progresses of the "habitual procedures of the text which provide a justification for ironic reading and reassures us that we are only participating in that play to which the text invites us" (190). The implication of the latter point is that irony begets irony, that is to say, the detection of a series of small ironies embedded in the text leads the reader to adduce a greater, over-arching irony pervading and informing the text as a whole.

As far as I am aware, Carter has not been accused of elitism on account of her habitual use of irony, and yet such a charge would be legitimate in the sense that irony operates through the assumption of mutual intellectual superiority by the ironist and the knowing reader. This intellectual superiority distances them from the object of their irony, thus enabling them to pass judgment upon it. The truth proposition or irony of the text is usually only available to the intelligent, culturally knowledgeable reader; indeed Culler claims of irony that "more than any other form it supports the elitism of intelligence" (185). Furthermore, irony is frequently only discernible if the reader and the writer share the same values and political point of view, and should this not be the case, the irony simply does not work; it becomes invisible. Thus, irony is

only visible from a specific and limited vantage point, and the message, if such a reductive term is permissible here, of the ironic text is only available to a limited readership.

Whilst Carter is not on record as having commented directly on her use of irony, the comments she made in an interview with John Haffenden about the allegorical dimension of her writing indirectly addresses the problem of elitism which also inheres in her adoption of the ironic mode. The doubleness set up by the play between surface and hidden meanings that characterises irony is also typical of allegory, and the hidden meaning is again not accessible to every reader. Carter's remarks about allegory reveal that she regards the reader of her fiction as having a choice between reading for entertainment and reading for instruction or intellectual engagement:

But it does seem a bit of an imposition to say to readers that if you read this book you have got to be thinking all the time; so it's there only if you want it. From *The Magic Toyshop* onwards, I've tried to keep an entertaining surface to the novels, so that you don't have to read them as a system of signification if you don't want to. (Haffenden 87)

In other words, even if the reader is unaware of the ironies of the text, he or she can still take pleasure from it and be entertained. However, for many people access to the "high" cultural forms and academic discourses to which Carter so frequently alludes is profoundly limited or non-existent, and thus their ability to perceive the allegorical or ironic aspect of the work is curtailed. The implication of this putative choice is really one of instruction for the few, and entertainment for the many, which is not entirely reassuring for the feminist or socialist critic troubled by Carter's adoption of a literary mode that, on the surface at least, appears to be so anti-egalitarian.

From the perspective of an oppositional political movement such as feminism, irony is problematic as a mode of critique because it sidesteps the need for overt confrontation between opposing worldviews, as Moi has pointed out (*Moi Feminist Theory & Simone de Beauvoir* 52). The impossibility of pinning down the ironist's exact position means that she is just as likely to be found wanting by those who share her convictions as by those who oppose them. Moi's

description of the difficulties that irony entails for the politically committed writer might have been written with Carter in mind:

Politically speaking, the ironist is extremely hard to assail precisely because it is virtually impossible to fix her or his text convincingly. In the ironic discourse, every position undercuts itself, thus leaving the politically engaged writer in a position where her ironic discourse might just come to deconstruct her own politics. (Moi *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* 40)

Emancipatory discourses such as feminism usually utilize invective to articulate social critique, rather than subtler, less obvious rhetorical tropes such as irony. The difficulty or impossibility of pinning down the political position of an ironist such as Carter obviously thwarts the desire of many feminist critics for art that offers a clear-cut and suitably indignant representation of patriarchal injustice.

However there is another, more progressive aspect to irony which renders it a highly appropriate tool for feminist critique. It is the very indeterminacy of the authorial or narrative voice within the ironic text which forces the reader to construct meaning for him or her self to an unusual degree, by examining the text's incongruities and contradictions. Culler calls the reader's quest for meaning a "dizzying dialectic" (185) and it is in irony's dialectical aspect that its liberatory potential resides. By inducing the reader to attempt resolution of the problems of interpretation posed by the text's incongruities, irony compels an intense examination of the contradictions between what is being said in the text and what the text *seems* to mean, between what is represented in the text as true by the characters or the narrator and truth as the reader perceives it, between the specific fictional representations of truth and untruth, and those of the culture at large. This capacity of irony to force the reader to confront contradictions underlies Haraway's call for irony to be mobilized in the service of feminism, socialism and materialism in her "Manifesto for Cyborgs":

Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into greater wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humour and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method, one that I would like to see more honored within socialist feminism. (173)

I hope to demonstrate in the chapters that follow that Carter's ironic citations of Western cultural iconographies of Woman as a fetish object is just such an example of the use of irony as a "rhetorical strategy and political method" that Haraway calls for. My thesis is that the conjunction of irony and fetishism in Carter's work is not just serendipity; on the contrary, her adoption of the ironic mode in order to refer back to literary movements noted for their fetishism, such as *fin de siècle* Decadence, is *strategic*. But before embarking on a detailed examination of the operations of irony and fetishism in Carter's fiction, the more general relationship of irony to fetishism needs to be scrutinized.

As we have seen, irony is indissolubly linked to the intelligentsia, to cultural if not political elites. Naomi Schor makes the further claim that the art of these elites, that is, avant-garde art, is permeated by the interrelationship of irony and fetishism, which she terms "the fetishization of irony and the ironization of fetishism." According to Schor, this mutual imbrication of fetishism and irony can be traced back through the nineteenth century to Flaubert, and continues to exert far-reaching effects on twentieth-century aesthetic practices: "The fetishization of irony runs unchallenged through both high modernism and postmodernism; even in the face of the major cultural mutation of the second half of the twentieth century, irony remains the indelible marker of the elite, whether it be in literature, theory, or the arts"(Schor "Fetishism and Its Ironies" 92).

Although Schor's project is to map out some of the implications for feminism of the nexus between irony and fetishism in the work of Flaubert, her observations are pertinent to the "ironization of fetishism" in Carter's fiction. Schor works from the Freudian definition of fetishism as a sexual perversion, and hence she claims that "fetishism defines the limit of realist description, for the fetishist cannot describe that which he would deny: woman's genitals and the threat they represent"(Schor "Fetishism and Its Ironies" 97). The need to tell it slant is thus inherent in fetishism; its contradictory and negative nature demands the use of figurative language: "Fetishism necessarily speaks in tropes...irony and not metaphor is the trope of

fetishism"(Schor "Fetishism and Its Ironies" 97). In the discourse of fetishism the ironic mode functions as a way of gesturing towards the unrepresentable: a code decodable only by those privy to unspeakable knowledge. There is thus a homology between irony and fetishism, for "just as the fetish enables the fetishist simultaneously to recognize and to deny woman's castration, irony allows the ironist both to reject and to reappropriate the discourse of reference..."(Schor "Fetishism and Its Ironies" 98).

Schor's usage of the term "discourse of reference" derives from Rainer Warning's discussion of Flaubertian ironic discourse, in which he differentiates ironic discourse from the rhetorical trope of irony:

Our thesis will be that this "order" of ironic discourse consists essentially in the citation of reference discourses and that this act of citation is to be understood in the light of an ambivalent relationship of deceptive allusion and repetition, of critique and redemption, of deceptive allusion and aesthetic resemblance. As something merely cited, the reference discourse is deprived of its own claim to truth; at the same time, however, it is "realized" anew- in the citation- and thereby redeemed aesthetically. Its content remains, even when seen through, an object of fascination; it speaks directly to the eccentric negativity of the ironist who, in the citation, seeks to gain distance in order to save himself in that distance for the renewed realization of what is cited. Ironic discourse thereby appears, however, in a perspective no longer identical with that of the act of rhetorical irony. (Warning 255-56)

Whereas Flaubert's usual reference discourse can be identified as that of Romanticism, Carter's multiplicity of intertextual allusions to a host of literary genres, movements and styles defies such easy summation. For the purposes of this thesis, in which Carter's intertextual reworking of the iconographies of femininity that pervade the texts of Decadent literature will be examined, Warning's thesis is apposite on several counts. Firstly, its description of the vicissitudes of the relationship of the text to its reference discourses provides an intriguing way of conceptualizing the oscillation between reiteration and critique which structures Carter's intertextual citations. Secondly, Warning's notion that aesthetic resemblance between text and intertext is inherent in the process of ironic citation subtly skews Britzolakis' charge that Carter's novel participates in the "poetics of specularity" of decadence by stylistic reduplication (Britzolakis 46). Interestingly, and of relevance to this point of the aesthetic resemblance between text and intertext, intertextuality itself has been seen as part of the decadent aesthetic. Spackman

observes that "decadent texts flaunt their intertextuality, footnote themselves endlessly, self-consciously present their own literary genealogies. Indeed, a text such as *A rebours*, the so called bible of decadence, might more aptly be termed the bibliography of decadence"(34). Thirdly, Warning's notion that the act of citation voids the reference discourse of its truth-value supports my contention that Carter's citations of fetishized literary images of women serve a feminist strategy aimed at revealing these images as historically determined cultural artifacts rather than universal truths. Finally, although the seductions of a career as a fetish object that decadence offers women continue to dazzle momentarily, to exert a "fascination" in Carter's prose, through the relentless interplay of text and intertext, a distance is created in which the reader is able to decode the cited discourse, or in Warning's terms, to "realize" it anew, thus coming to an awareness that the seductions of the masculine scenarios of fetishism for women are indeed "bankrupt enchantments."

Schor's insight into the imbrication of fetishism and irony is pivotal to my argument, but so too is an understanding of the antipathy between these two terms. For to claim that there is a homology between them is not to say that they are identical. On the contrary, their motivation, dynamics and effects are profoundly antagonistic, and it is imperative for my purposes that the points of difference between them be teased out. Let us first consider the question of motivation. Fetishism, in all its manifestations, is deeply hostile to notions of truth. Rather, it is motivated by a desire for untruth, or at best, by a desire to gloss over truths that are deemed unacceptable. Thus we see that in anthropological and commodity fetishism, human or superhuman qualities are attributed to mere things, belief triumphs over reason. In its Freudian sense, sexual fetishism is an attempt to deny the unpalatable truth of female sexual difference by projecting a phantasized phallus onto the body of the mother. As we have seen, the primary mechanism of fetishism is disavowal, and although sexual fetishism gestures towards its own imaginary "truth" of female castration, this gesture is inadvertent and unwitting.

The impetus behind irony is diametrically opposite. It may tell its truths slant, but the ironic text nevertheless impels the reader to see through the untruths it contains and to seek the nugget of "truth" imbedded within it, however that "truth" is constructed. The motivation of the ironist is to bring the reader to a greater awareness of reality and the representations of it inscribed in cultural forms, whereas the fetishist seeks to screen out awareness of a reality too disturbing to be assimilated.

Fetishism and irony are also at odds in terms of their dynamics. Fetishism is static. The fetishist is fixated on the repetition of magic incantations and unchanging rituals. Fetishism cannot incorporate new knowledge, being locked into the repetition of an immutable scenario. It is also profoundly egocentric, involving the subject's quest for gratification through its relation to an object, rather than through communion or communication with another subject. Irony, as previously noted, is mobile and dialectical. Irony involves the juxtaposition and resolution of contradictions, which generates multiple meanings and facilitates the communication of ideas from one subject to another through the medium of the text. In short, fetishism is monologic, whereas irony is dialogic.

But perhaps the most important distinction that needs to be drawn between fetishism and irony is functional. The function of fetishism is primarily consolatory. In anthropological and commodity fetishism, the fetish object serves to alleviate the distress of the subject confronted with implacable natural and social forces over which it has no control. As Apter puts it in regard to commodity fetishism: "the household fetishes of cars, TVs and swimming pools are shown to be sites of displaced lack, dream surrogates for better values" (Apter "Introduction" 2). The fetish is simultaneously a consolation prize for the subject's lack of power, and the screen that obscures that very same powerlessness. In the psychoanalytic scenario the fetish object functions as an ersatz penis which obscures the discovery of female sexual difference, thereby screening off the threat of castration and obscuring the horror of his own genesis which is supposedly so shattering to the male infant's narcissism. Hence fetishism is deeply conservative because it

conceals the "real" conditions of existence whilst paradoxically inducing the subject to resign her or him self to them. Of course, irony also has its consolatory aspect, consoling the knowing reader by affirming his or her place amongst the intelligentsia, even if that intelligentsia has no real social power. Yet, on balance, irony is subversive rather conservative, because it instigates the reader's quest for new insights and knowledge, for the forging of new connections and the formulation of new questions.

Rainer Warning contends that ironic discourse only flourishes in times of great historical change, because it relies upon a reading public which is positioned outside hegemonic value systems (264). The writings of Swift and Voltaire spring immediately to mind here, but for Warning the prime example is Flaubert, that great ironist of Romanticism. Carter's increasing popularity at a time of immense change in the position of women supports Warning's contention. Patriarchy may not be dead yet, but there are enough feminists digging its grave to constitute a devoted and highly literate readership for Carter's ironical revisions of its cultural representations of women. This readership takes its pleasure not in Carter's reinscription of dominant values, but in her subversion of them. Carter's deployment of the ironic mode can be viewed as singularly appropriate to her project of revealing the insidious effects that patriarchal myths of femininity continue to exert in our culture; her embrace of the verbal fetish is an intrinsic part of this project. Where Britzolakis implies that Carter is simply recycling the fetishistic imagoes of women inherited from her masculine literary forebears, I want to stake the claim that her ironization of the debris of the Western literary heritage is a feminist strategy which aims to reveal the extent to which these historically specific imagoes haunt contemporary culture. The highly fetishized imagery of femininity that permeates the texts of nineteenth century fiction continues to reverberate in contemporary cultural and literary representations of women with the power of archetype and the banality of cliché.

It was Benjamin who noted:

What distinguishes images from the "essences" of phenomenology is their historical index. . . . These images are to be thought of entirely apart from the categories of the "human sciences," from so-called habitus, from style, and the like. For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time. . . . Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each "now" is the now of a particular recognizability. (Benjamin *The Arcades Project* 462-63 (N3,1))

The nineteenth century has left us with a legacy of imagoes of woman as prostitutes, *femme fatales*, hysterics, Muses and automata or dolls that have been so widely disseminated throughout twentieth century cultural forms that their historically specific origins are obscured. Carter's demythologizing project is also a de-universalizing one; in order to disempower the fetishized imagoes of femininity which in their guise as universal truths continue to determine our "present," it is necessary to equip them in their contemporary guises with a history, thereby revealing their historical specificity. Thus Carter's fictional recuperation of fetishistic imagoes of women, I will argue, is an attempt to bring them to legibility in the Benjaminian sense, to make us see them anew as the "old lies on which the new lies have been based" (A. Carter "Front Line" 74). Such imagoes are dialectical in the same sense as Benjamin's figure of the *flâneur*, at once preserved in history and negated by it. Although their historical specificity is lost, as clichés they continue to saturate mass culture in the society of the spectacle.

This thesis will demonstrate that an alternative answer is possible to Britzolakis' rhetorical question: "Can one write as a demythologizer in the Enlightenment tradition which attacks the 'idols of the mind' (an outstanding example of which is Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism), and at the same time, embrace the verbal fetish at the level of style?" (Britzolakis 49). For whilst I agree with Britzolakis that Carter is drawn to "the rhetoric and iconography of a prominent, largely male-authored strand of European literary history, which runs from the mid-nineteenth century through Baudelaire, Poe, Sade, much of French Symbolism, the Decadent writing of the *fin de siècle* and Surrealism," and that she focuses on the "metaphorization of femininity in its most fetishized and spectacular forms" (Britzolakis 49) that permeate these texts, I disagree that this fascination somehow undermines her claim to interrogate how the social fiction of femininity

operates in our culture. Rather, I aim to show that it is precisely through her textual strategy of ironizing the fetishism of the European literary tradition that Carter denaturalizes these fictions of femininity.

This thesis will support Britzolakis' claim that many of Carter's texts foreground literary and cinematic scenarios of masculine fetishism through representations of women staged as spectacle for the male gaze. Furthermore it will show how Carter is at pains to demonstrate that female complicity with these scenarios is at least partly responsible for sustaining them. It cannot be disputed that Carter's fiction is replete with fetishistic images of women disporting themselves as commodities-on-display. But where Britzolakis sees the emphasis on female self-specularization as contrary to Carter's self-proclaimed de-mythologising project (Britzolakis 54), and questions whether the tendency of some of Carter's heroines to collude in their own objectification works to undermine the possibility of seeing these texts as part of an emancipatory feminist project (Britzolakis 44), I will demonstrate how Carter's resurrection of the Decadent literary canon's repertoire of imagoes of fetishized femininity furthers her feminist deconstructive strategy.

In effect, what I want to establish is whether Carter's own claims about her work stand up to scrutiny. In an interview with Kerryn Goldsworthy in 1985 Carter described her early writing as "a kind of elaborate form of literary criticism"(Goldsworthy 5). In an interview with John Haffenden that same year, she made the same claim, stating "my fiction is very often a kind of literary criticism"(Haffenden 79). Although Carter also said that she had "always used a very wide number of references because of tending to regard all of western Europe as a great scrap-yard from which you can assemble all sorts of new vehicles...*bricolage*" (Haffenden 92), the description of her fiction as literary criticism suggest that Carter regarded her prodigious intertextual allusiveness as more than the garnering of a vast range of sources, more than *bricolage*. The inference to be drawn from Carter's description of her writing strategy is that her

intertextuality is self-conscious and deliberate, and that her fiction is structured rhetorically as a series of apostrophes to prior texts and literary traditions.

This thesis examines this idea, as well as the allegations of Carter's literary fetishism and Decadence, through reading a selection of her texts alongside significant intertexts from what can loosely be described as the Decadent tradition. Carter's invocation of these multiple intertexts sends her readers on what Linda Hutcheon terms "inferential walks" (Hutcheon *Irony's Edge: the Theory and Politics of Irony* 144). This is a process in which the reader refers to various intertextual frames so as to glean information about the primary text. According to Hutcheon, this intertextual mechanism is one of the primary means of producing irony, as the reader is forced to contrast the 'said' of text and intertext (s) with the unsaid of both. The resultant "rubbing together of meanings" makes irony happen (19). It is important to note that for Hutcheon irony is not limited to the *antiphrastic*, that is the inverse or opposite of the said, as it is sometimes assumed. Hutcheon argues that the antiphrastic conception of irony ought to be replaced with the idea that irony results from the said and the unsaid of the text together producing new meanings: "The semantic solution of irony would then hold in suspension the said plus something other than and in addition to it that remained unsaid" (63). In other words, irony is dialectical, dialogic, and premised on difference, not static or simply oppositional.

Hutcheon's premise is central to my reading of how specific texts by Carter interrogate the iconographies of femininity at the heart of the Decadent aesthetic. My focus throughout has been on mapping how Carter's fictions address not only specific Decadent intertexts, but also the most influential readings that these Decadent texts and writers have generated. In the first section, I read the figure of the Woman-as-Doll in *The Magic Toyshop* alongside E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman", as well as the most notable reading Hoffmann's tale has spawned, Freud's essay on "The Uncanny" (1919). I also consider the relation between *The Magic Toyshop* and two of the best-known theatrical versions of "The Sandman": Offenbach's opera *Tales of Hoffman*, and Léon/Délibes ballet, *Coppelia*. The second section of the thesis examines Carter's

parodic restagings of the figure of the Muse. It consists of three separate but interrelated subsections. In the first, I read *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* as a hyperbolic rendition of Proust's ambiguous Modernist Muse, Albertine, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The second subsection reads the short story "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" from the collection *Black Venus* as a parody of Marie Bonaparte's psychobiographical treatise, *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. The final part of this section on the Muse examines Carter's decentering of the figure of the poet Baudelaire in "Black Venus" from the same collection, and the effect this has on his ability to author his Muse, Jeanne Duval. The final section of the thesis examines Carter's iteration of the figure of the *femme fatale* in two texts from the late 1970s, *The Sadeian Woman* and *The Passion of New Eve*. I situate Carter's polemical and fictional deployments of the *femme fatale* in the context of contemporaneous feminist debates about female archetypes, as well as a historicizing of the split traditions of interpreting this iconographic figure. The focus of the final subsection is an intertextual reading of the figure of Leilah/Lilith in *The Passion of New Eve* in relation to the *femmes fatales* in Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's 1886 novel, *L'Eve future*.

This thesis does not claim to present an exhaustive account of Carter's relation to the Decadent tradition, nor to have the final word on her ironic re-iteration of the iconographies of Woman-as-Doll, Muse, or *femme fatale*. Sarah Gamble, for instance, has recently made a case for the character of Ghislaine in Carter's first novel, *Shadow Dance*, to be considered as an iteration of the *femme fatale* (Gamble "Something Sacred: Angela Carter, Jean Luc Godard and the Sixties" 55-61). My understanding of the *femme fatale* as a figure of female power as well as of overt female sexuality renders this interpretation of the masochistic Ghislaine problematic. My choice of primary texts from amongst Carter's oeuvre has been made on the basis that these particular texts sustain thoroughgoing and productive readings of both their specific Decadent intertexts and the traditions of representing the feminine encoded therein.

Section 2: Olympia's Revenge

There is an invisible doll at the heart of Carter's second novel. Hardly surprising, you might argue, given that it is entitled *The Magic Toyshop*, and a magic toyshop might be expected to contain a whole arsenal of tricky automata. But no amount of legerdemain can make this doll visible, let alone bring her to life, for she has no ontological status whatsoever. She is a metaphor, the ghost of a doll. She is a product of reading rather than vision. Only a specific kind of reading strategy can bring her to legibility- one that explores the frame of reference that the text sets up. Carter puts her cards on the table on the very first page. *The Magic Toyshop* is a title that conjures up a host of childhood associations, thereby setting in train multiple possibilities for reading. For what else is a toyshop but a privileged space in which to play?

Here, as elsewhere, Carter's intertextual allusiveness enables a subjectively determined play of reading that is not prescriptive but liberating. The reader is free to resurrect Ur-toys and Ur-toyshops from the storehouse of personal memory. And for this reader, the magic toyshop of memory is not to be found in Santa stories or animated Walt Disney extravaganzas, but in ballet-land. Or, to be more precise, in the second act of the ballet *Coppélia*, in which the usual collection of ethnic dances that pad out most major nineteenth-century ballets are cunningly performed, or so it seems, by automata come to life. And in which there is a curious blurring of the distinction between an inanimate doll called Coppélia and a highly animated dancer masquerading as Coppélia magically brought to life. Of course Coppélia is an alias, the *nom de ballet* of the Ur-doll, Hoffmann's Olympia. That Olympia should turn up like this in Carter's magic toyshop is not at all surprising, if we take Freud at his word. Didn't he say that the repressed always returns? And didn't he refuse to accord her any significance in his reading of Hoffmann's "The Sandman" in his essay on the uncanny? Hence, according to his own master-theorem, her return is inevitable. As we shall see, Olympia will not be easily denied.

But how can it be said that a doll that is never once referred to by name lies at the heart of *The Magic Toyshop*? The answer to this rhetorical question is that Olympia may not be present, but she is a powerful absence. She is not a textual entity as such; rather her name codes a specifically female subject position: that of the living doll. Both the principal female characters, Melanie and her Aunt Margaret, are forced to negotiate their way around this subject position. Indeed, *The Magic Toyshop* can be read as a lesson in how to escape the fate of the living doll. In the nightmare world of Flower's Puppet Microcosm, the only means to avoid incurring the wrath of the puppet master is by mute service and utter physical compliance with his Law. He likes his women silent and obedient; they are to go about his house performing their duties like clockwork. And whilst there is no shortage of domestic violence in Philip Flower's house, it is not by brute force alone that women are made over into silent dolls. One of the great strengths of *The Magic Toyshop* is that it maps, not only the perils of doll-hood, but also the enticements, the promises of narcissistic pleasure, by which this subject position entraps women.

But if we are to appreciate Carter's exposé of the seductive lures of the Ur-doll, the phantom Olympia, we must go back to the tale in which she makes her debut, E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman," and situate it in the historical context of its production. This is not merely an academic exercise, but is rather the very precondition for reading Carter's strategy of historicizing images of femininity, making past and present representations collide as dialectical images. Hoffmann's living doll is a concrete embodiment of the notion that women are mere matter, devoid of moral or intellectual life, which underpins many Decadent representations of femininity. Nevertheless Hoffmann's status as a precursor to Decadence, which will be discussed below, should not blind us to the fact that the representation of Olympia in "The Sandman" is cautionary and satirical. Hoffmann's subversive irony, which is akin to Carter's, is quite alien to the politics of many of those Decadents, such as Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, who explicitly claimed him as an influence, and who

redeployed his image of the female automaton to misogynistic ends. Peter Christensen highlights these political, rather than merely thematic, affinities between Hoffmann and Carter:

Hoffmann warns us that people are being turned into automata and that machines are being credited with inordinate value. To link Carter with Hoffmann means more than acknowledging a mutual interest in puppets, images of seeing, and the grotesque. What she writes is not parody or pastiche but rather an inscription in a critical literary tradition. (Christensen 69)

Hoffmann is little read today, but in the first half of the nineteenth century he was a major force in European literature. In his short, turbulent life Hoffmann was a musician, composer, conductor, theatre director, music critic, painter, jurist, judge, and finally, a writer of fiction. Although his tales achieved a degree of success in the last years of his life, Hoffmann's death in 1822 coincided with the demise of the German Romantic movement with which his name was associated, and thereafter he fell out of favour in his native language. However, after his death his work was almost immediately translated into French, and in French translations his work enjoyed immense success all over Europe. His ironic tone, experimentation with narrative form, and exploration of the workings of the unconscious gives his work a surprisingly modern feel. Hoffmann's extraordinary imagination, and his startling juxtapositions of the prosaic with the uncanny, the grotesque, and the supernatural have ensured that he is now considered to be one of the forerunners of magic realism. His fiction greatly influenced such writers as Dostoevsky, Pushkin, and Gogol in Russia, and Dumas, Hugo, Balzac, Sand, Gautier and, most notably, Baudelaire, in France (Braar 271-78; Lloyd *passim*). Indeed, *Le Grand Robert de la langue française* credits Baudelaire with coining the adjective *Hoffmannesque*. Just as with Poe, Hoffmann's influence on Baudelaire and his coterie was so pervasive that he can rightly be considered as one of the forebears of nineteenth century French Decadent literature. This, of course, is the very strand of the European literary tradition that Carter is accused of fetishizing.

Hoffmann's popularity and the extent of his influence can be adduced from a list of works based on his tales. Amongst operatic works we can list Offenbach's *Le Roi Carotte* and *Les contes d'Hoffmann*; Busoni's *Die Brautwahl*; Braunfels' *Prinzessin Brambilla*; Petersen's *Der goldne Topf*; Adam's *La Poupée de Nuremberg*; Audran's *La Poupée*; Reinecke's *Nusknacker und Mausekönig*; and Hindemith's *Cardillac*. Additionally, Schumann's musical work *Kreisleriana* was inspired by Hoffmann's quasi-autobiographical persona, Johannes Kreisler. Two of the most popular ballets in the classical repertoire, the Tchaikovsky-Petipa collaboration *Casse-Noisette*, or *The Nutcracker* and Délibes-Saint-Léon's *Coppélia, ou la Fille aux yeux d'émail*, are based on his tales "Nusknacker und Mausekönig," and "Der Sandmann" respectively. The latter also inspired one of the earliest non-realist films, Georges Méliès' *Coppélia or the Animated Doll* (Bleiler xv).

Carter's affinities with Hoffmann are obvious: the hyperbolic imagination, the ornate prose style, the juxtaposition of the fantastic with the quotidian, the use of irony and satire, the Gothic themes and the affection for the genre of the literary tale. In her Afterword to the collection *Fireworks*, Carter openly acknowledges her debt:

Though it took me a long time to realize why I liked them, I'd always been fond of Poe, and Hoffman- Gothic tales, cruel tales, tales of wonder, tales of terror, fabulous narratives that deal directly with the imagery of the unconscious-mirrors, the externalized self; forsaken castles; haunted forests; forbidden sexual objects. Formally the tale differs from the short story in that it makes few pretences at the imitation of life. The tale does not log everyday experience, as the short story does; it interprets everyday experience through a system of imagery derived from subterranean areas behind everyday experience, and therefore the tale cannot betray its readers into a false knowledge of everyday experience.

The Gothic tradition in which Poe writes grandly ignores the value systems of our institutions; it deals entirely with the profane. Its great themes are cannibalism and incest. Character and events are exaggerated beyond reality, to become symbols, ideas, passions. Its style will tend to be ornate, unnatural- and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the world as fact. Its only humour is black humour. It retains a singular moral function- that of provoking unease. The tale has relations with sub-literary forms of pornography, ballad and dream, and it has not been dealt with kindly with literati. And is it any wonder? Let us keep the unconscious in a suitcase, as Père Ubu did with his conscience, and flush it down the lavatory when it gets too troublesome. (121-22)

As Mikkonen argues, Carter's engagement with Hoffmann goes beyond specific intertextual allusions into what we might term a global engagement with Hoffmann's themes and narrative techniques, in

particular his irony and his redefinition of literary characters as tropes (Mikkonen 167-86). This engagement with Hoffmann is explicit in her most fantastic text, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, which, as Christensen and Mikkonen have shown, draws heavily on his tales "Nussknacker und Mausekönig," and "Kleines Zaches," amongst others (Christensen 63-70; Mikkonen 167-86). Several critics have also identified the connection between *The Magic Toyshop* and Hoffmann's tale, "The Sandman" (See Palmer 183; Armitt 204-5; Ferrell 131-44). "The Sandman", first published in the collection *Nachstücke* (1817) inaugurated a century in which the representation of woman as living dolls became commonplace, a century which ended, fittingly enough, with the resounding slam of Nora's Doll's House door. The woman-doll dyad became a trope of nineteenth century art alongside the rise of commodity fetishism and the erotic commodification of women. It is a trope that continues to flourish: witness the endless parade of girl-dolls gyrating on MTV and the enduring popularity of the Barbie doll. But *The Magic Toyshop* stands not only in intertextual relation to "The Sandman" itself, but also to the multiple revisionary versions generated by the tale. Carter self-consciously situates her text within the history of these readings so that it functions as much as a commentary upon other readings as upon its primary intertext.

Whilst Gasiorek claims that Carter's later works, from *Doctor Hoffman* on, move toward what he terms a "theoretically explicit form of critical fiction" (126), I argue that *Toyshop*, a text that long proceeds *Hoffman*, can already be considered in this light. For *Toyshop* can clearly be read as a fictional argument with the most highly theorized reading of "The Sandman": that given by Freud in his 1919 essay on the uncanny. *Toyshop* challenges Freud's insistence that the uncanny effects of "The Sandman" are due to its evocation of castration anxiety, rather than to the unsettling effect of the inability to distinguish the inanimate doll from the living woman. By reinstating the doll at the heart of her narrative, and by revisioning the family romance that is the subtext of Hoffmann's tale, Carter

questions the notion that there can be a universal experience of the uncanny, the very entity that Freud seeks to elucidate.

But *what* exactly is the status of the doll in Hoffmann's tale? Hoffmann's fiction is exemplary of German Romanticism, an aesthetic movement greatly concerned with the exploration of dreams, the unconscious and myths. Notions of fatalism and of the grotesque are central to the German Romantic aesthetic: the world is frequently imaged as a lunatic asylum and "man" is imaged as a puppet. It is instructive to note that Hoffmann's Olympia appeared during the same period as Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the second part of Goethe's *Faust*, in which a man is created out of a homunculus. This suggests that Hoffmann's animated doll is not simply a manifestation of his spectacularly florid imagination but is rather a reflection of the contemporaneous concern with the creation of artificial life and thus with the ontological status of the human being. Of course, the fantasy of creating life by non-reproductive means predates the Enlightenment, as the myths of Pygmalion, the mandrake, the Golem and homunculus attest. But the centrality of images of dolls, puppets and automata to German Romantic fiction is a singularly post-Enlightenment phenomenon, and owes as much to the deterministic, mechanistic philosophy of Descartes as to the craze for automata that swept Europe in the late eighteenth century. Indeed, historians of automata make a direct link between these two phenomena. As John Cohen states, "the epoch of modern automata opens with Descartes" (68).

Gaby Wood recounts the oft-repeated but unsubstantiated tale of Descartes' last journey, a boat trip to Sweden to visit Queen Christina, on which he was accompanied by a mysterious "daughter" called Francine. During the course of the journey, "Francine" was discovered by the sailors to be an automaton that Descartes had constructed as a memento of his own flesh and blood daughter Francine, whose death at the age of five from scarlet fever had left him bereft. But when the ship's captain learnt about the automaton, he ordered that it be thrown overboard, for he

regarded it as an "instrument of dark magic" that was responsible for the adverse weather the ship had encountered (Wood 3-4). As Wood remarks, the historical veracity of this story is almost immaterial; it is of value because it illustrates so perfectly the ambivalent reactions evoked by automata. Are they, as Descartes appeared to believe, harmless mechanical toys, or do they represent something more diabolical, as the ship's captain clearly thought? Do they unsettle, in some fundamentally troubling way, the distinction between the human and the machine?

It is tantalizing to speculate whether the fable of the mechanistic philosopher assuaging his paternal grief with a clockwork doll, an ersatz daughter, lies behind the creation of Olympia, the daughter-doll of the mechanic Spalanzani in Hoffmann's tale. Speculation aside, what is certain is that the Cartesian postulate that man is a machine, albeit one animated by a soul, provided a great impetus to philosophical and scientific inquiry into the distinction between the mechanical and the human, as well as stimulating the production of ever more ingenious automata. The former finds its Enlightenment apotheosis in La Mettrie's provocative thesis *L'Homme-machine* (1748), which posits the human body as nothing more than a clock subject to the laws of mechanics, the latter in the marvellous automata of Vaucanson, von Kempelen and Droz which were celebrated all over Europe. The fame of the musical automata of Vaucanson, especially his flute player, was eclipsed only by the success of his duck automaton, which produced the illusion of eating and defecating. The father and son team of Pierre-Jaquet Droz and Henri-Louis Droz achieved universal acclaim for their writing automata, which are exhibited at Neuchâtel in Switzerland to this day. These clockwork-operated twin "boys" write various phrases, including, ironically, Descartes' maxim "*cogito, ergo sum.*" Von Kempelen achieved notoriety for his fraudulent Chess Player Automaton, exhibited for many years on both sides of the Atlantic. Such was the fame of the automata that they made their way into the literature of the period. Poe's tale "Von Kempelen and His Discovery," as well as his essay

"Maelzel's Chess Player" are examinations of Von Kempelen's Chess Playing Automaton, which was also the inspiration for Hoffmann's story "Automata."

But although the automata attracted large crowds and generated much revenue as they toured Europe and America, the spectators who thronged to see them were not without their qualms. Marvellous although they undoubtedly were, these Enlightenment automata evoked a great deal of anxiety. For instance, the automaton-maker Droz was imprisoned for heresy by the Spanish Inquisition after exhibiting an automaton considered too life-like. Other reactions were less extreme, but nevertheless they were founded in the same basic anxieties about categories. Where does life begin? What distinguishes the human from the machine? How can the creation of artificial life by human beings be reconciled with Christian dogma? As Wood, amongst others, observes, these anxieties still resonate in contemporary debates about cyborgs, robotics, cloning, assisted reproductive technology and other bio-technologies. The divide between religious fundamentalism and the Enlightenment discourse of science as pure disinterested knowledge, which was demarcated in the eighteenth century discourse of automata, still stands.

But the erotically charged representation of the automaton Olympia in "The Sandman" marks a paradigm shift away from these actual Enlightenment automata. For whilst there had previously been real-life female automata, their sex was almost incidental. As Wood observes, "in the shift from the real to the imaginary and from the playful to the destructive, androids ceased to be male and became, more often than not, female"(xviii). According to Andreas Huyssen, there is a causal link between the introduction of industrial machinery at the end of the eighteenth century, the decline in the cult of actual automata, and the emergence of the female automaton as a literary figure. Huyssen argues that when the automaton was appropriated as a literary theme at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, it came to signify nightmarish threats, rather than benefits, to

humankind. This change in the meanings associated with automata was accompanied by a change in gender, as the automaton came to be figured in the feminine:

Historically, then, we can conclude that as soon as the machine came to be perceived as a demonic, inexplicable threat and as harbinger of chaos and destruction- a view which typically characterises many 19th century reactions to the railroad to give but one major example- writers began to imagine the *Maschinenmensch* as a woman. There are grounds to suspect that we are facing here a complex process of projection and displacement. The fears and perceptual anxieties emanating from ever more powerful machines are recast and reconstructed in terms of the male fear of female sexuality, reflecting, in the Freudian account, the male's castration anxiety. This projection was relatively easy to make; although woman had traditionally been seen as standing in a closer relationship to nature than man, nature itself, since the 18th century, had come to be interpreted as a gigantic machine. Woman, nature, machine had become a mesh of significations which all had one thing in common: otherness; by their very existence they raised fears and threatened male authority and control. (Huysens "The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*" 69-70)

The eroticization of Olympia inaugurates a trend in the representation of female automata which reaches its apotheosis in Villiers' *Hadaly*, the sublime android that is not merely indistinguishable from a real woman but superior to her in every way. However, the eroticization of the android in these representations is not unambiguous, for the too-perfect copy evokes anxieties verging on panic in her masculine admirers. In this sense the female literary android evinces a similar disquiet to that generated by the real-life androids of the Enlightenment.

In the passage above, Huysens provides the historical contextualization that is absent from the Freudian account of "The Sandman." Because Freud's analysis is purely psycho-sexual, the historical meanings attached to literary representations of the female automaton elude him. The point that Huysens is making is that in the masculine Imaginary, already existing negative or ambivalent sexual fantasies about women, for example, as castrated and thus as representations of castration anxiety, enable them to carry the negative or ambivalent cultural meanings attached to the machine. The Woman-machine is thus doubly marked, and bears two meanings that are not exclusive but rather are inextricably linked. It is remarkable that Freud's reading of "The Sandman" should so minimize the importance of the automaton in producing the effect of uncanniness, given that both the other most significant revisionary versions of "The Sandman" -the ballet *Coppélia, ou la*

Fille aux yeux d'émail and Offenbach's opera *Les contes d'Hoffmann* grant such prominence to the uncanniness of the doll. As we shall see, *Toysshop* produces a radically different reading of Olympia's tale to that proffered by Freud.

Disgust Always bears the Imprint of Desire

The Magic Toysshop depicts its heroine Melanie's progression from the house of girlhood to the house of adulthood; two houses diametrically opposed to each other in every respect. Melanie is not the narrator but rather the agent of perception or focalizer of the text; it is through her consciousness that the reader is granted access to the events of the story. Melanie's vision shapes our understanding of the *fabula*; indeed the evolution of her consciousness and her growing awareness of social relations make up the *synzhet* of Carter's tale. In an interview with Olga Kenyon Carter articulated a dispassionate attitude to her heroine, describing her as "a bourgeois virgin, a good screamer," and "silly and overprivileged." Carter claimed that she liked to put her adolescent heroines "through the mangle," adding, "there seemed no reason she [Melanie] shouldn't find out about real life" (cited in Gamble *The Fiction of Angela Carter: A Reader's Guide* 32). However, the distanced tone Carter adopts here is not reflected in the text as a whole, and could even be considered disingenuous. Melanie's adolescent pretensions are indeed gently mocked in the opening chapter, but because she is positioned as the focalizer of the tale, the reader is induced to sympathize with her later tribulations. Indeed, I would argue that although she is an "every-girl" figure rather than a highly individuated psychologically coherent character, her position resembles that of the heroine in a classic realist text, with whom the reader is clearly meant to identify. Her portrayal is decidedly more sympathetic than that of Marianne, the adolescent heroine of *Heroes and Villains*, who is described in the opening sentence as "spiteful" and cold-eyed.

But although it is possible to read *Toysshop* as a female *Bildungsroman*, a narrative of a girl's accession to womanhood, it is a *Bildungsroman* in the Gothic mode. *The Magic Toysshop* foregrounds its

own textuality by oscillating between the realist and the fantastic or Gothic mode. These two modes are interlocked in the text so that the Gothic functions as the unconscious of the realist "real." This self-conscious textuality is an implicit argument with Freud's literal reading of Hoffmann's tale. Because Freud does not concede that the idea of intellectual uncertainty has any bearing on how the text produces uncanny effects, he effectively ignores the textuality of Hoffmann's text. Freud disregards the fantastic or Gothic aspects of the text, claiming that any uncertainty as to the reality status of the events depicted is dispelled during the course of the narrative:

It is true that the writer creates a kind of uncertainty in us in the beginning by not letting us know, no doubt purposely, whether he is taking us into the real world or into a purely fantastic one of his own creation. He has, of course, a right to do either. ... But this uncertainty disappears in the course of Hoffmann's story, and we perceive that he intends to make us, too, look through the demon optician's spectacles or spy-glass- perhaps, indeed, that the author in his very own person once peered through such an instrument. For the conclusion of the story makes it quite clear that Coppola the optician really *is* the lawyer Coppelius and also, therefore, the Sand-Man. ("The Uncanny (1919)" 230)

Freud's project of reading "The Sandman" straight as a paradigm for the unconscious effectively forecloses any consideration of the fantastic elements of Hoffmann's text. His reading of the text as a literal account of events that actually happen to Nathaniel is, in a sense, a variant of the highly literal biographical criticism of Proust and Poe, which, as I shall show in later sections, Carter parodies so relentlessly.

The Magic Toyshop's very title is a signifier of its non-realist dimensions, for by definition a *magic* toyshop is a place in which the implausible and the inexplicable, that is to say, the very hallmarks of the Gothic and the fantastic, can be expected to occur. And indeed Melanie's journey into the Magic Toyshop is a journey into the Gothic realm of the unconscious, in which she comes face to face with violence, sexuality and incest, and is forced to confront her own abjection in the abjection of the other. Her journey from innocence to knowledge is prefigured in the incident of the wedding dress. Whilst living in the parental home Melanie secretly puts on her mother's wedding dress and ventures into the night garden but she is panic-struck by the size of the sky and the

enormity of the night: "In the silence of this night, no horror from film or comic book or nightmare seemed too outlandish to be believed" (MT 19). When she tries to go back into the house she finds the door locked against her, and she is forced to climb the apple tree to gain access to the house through her bedroom window. However, as she climbs the Edenic tree of knowledge, which drops showers of "sinister poison apples"(MT 20), the wedding dress, symbol of innocence and virginity, is bloodied and torn to ribbons. The ripping and soiling of the shimmering surface of the wedding dress prefigures the cleavage of the surface of reality that Melanie experiences when she journeys into the Gothic realm of the repressed.

The novel opens with the fifteen-year-old Melanie exploring her emerging sexual identity. Naked before the mirror, Melanie adopts poses gleaned from the tradition of the nude in Western art:

She also posed in attitudes, holding things. Pre-Raphaelite, she combed out her long, black hair to stream straight down from a centre parting and thoughtfully regarded herself as she held a tiger-lily from the garden under her chin, her knees pressed close together. A la Toulouse-Lautrec, she dragged her hair sluttishly across her face and sat down in a chair with her legs apart and a bowl of water and a towel at her feet. She always felt particularly wicked when she posed for Lautrec, although she made up fantasies in which she lived in his time (she had been a chorus girl or a model and fed a sparrow with crumbs from her Paris attic window). In these fantasies, she helped him and loved him because she felt sorry for him, since he was a dwarf and a genius. She was too thin for a titian or a Renoir but she contrived a pale, smug Cranach Venus with a bit of net curtain wound round her head and the necklace of cultured pearls they gave her when she was confirmed at her throat. After she read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, she secretly picked forget-me-nots and stuck them in her pubic hair. (MT 1-2)

Thus schooled in these iconic representations of femininity, Melanie wraps herself in tulle in readiness for "a phantom bridegroom taking a shower and cleaning his teeth in an extra-dimensional bathroom-of -the-future in honeymoon Cannes. Or Venice"(MT 2). Melanie is blissfully unaware that her erotic fantasies come to her pre-fabricated. They are not, as she supposes, her own singular inventions but merely the inheritance of every female in Western culture. Melanie's fantasies about her future are structured by the patriarchal imperative that a woman's success on the marriage market is predicated upon her sexual attractiveness. These fantasies serve as "ghost plots." As glossed by

Patricia Ingham, these are "the possible outcomes evoked for the reader by the desires, ambitions or future plans of the characters"(Ingham 14). Thus the ghost plot forms a sort of ironic subtext which develops as the reader contrasts the actual outcomes of the plot with the outcomes to which the characters aspire. The fifteen-year-old Melanie's two principal aspirations are inextricable: a romance that leads to marriage and a marriage that leads to material comfort and upward social mobility. Her aspirations are summed up in an utterance that is immediately punctured by an ironic narrative metaphor. As she looks at her reflection in the mirror, "She said to the daisy girl with her big brown eyes: 'I will not have it plain. No. Fancy. It must be fancy.' She meant her future. A moon-daisy dropped to the floor, down from her hair, like a faintly derisive sign from heaven"(MT 7).

But Melanie's ghost plot is spectacularly derailed by the death of her parents and her relocation, along with her two siblings, to Uncle Philip's South London home. Here her aspirations will be comprehensively dashed, for Philip Flower despises everything "fancy," which category includes girls who shave under their arms and people who use "toilet paper and fish knives"(MT 152). In the first chapter, the privileged material conditions of Melanie's girlhood are meticulously inventoried:

Meanwhile they lived in a house in the country, with a bedroom each and several to spare, and a Shetland pony in a field, and an apple tree that held the moon in its twiggy fingers up outside Melanie's window so that she could see it when she lay in her bed, which was a single divan with a Dunlopillo mattress and a white quilted headboard. She slept between striped sheets. The house was red-brick, with Edwardian gables, standing by itself in an acre or two of grounds; it smelled of lavender polish and money. Melanie had grown up with the smell of money and did not recognise the way it permeated the air she breathed but she knew she was lucky to have a silver-backed hair brush, a transistor radio of her own, and a jacket and a skirt of stiff, satisfying, raw silk made by her mother's dressmaker in which to go to church on Sundays. (MT 7)

The girlhood home is the material signifier of bourgeois plenitude with its space and light, central heating, ample supply of hot water, designer décor, and relentlessly over-signified hygiene. But it is also homely- *heimlich*- a place of emotional nurturance in which Melanie has the security to dream and envisage a range of future possibilities for herself. Her trajectory from this upper middle class

home to the Flower house is one of irrevocably downward social mobility. Furthermore, her upper middle class background exposes her to Uncle Philip's class hatred. The disparity between Melanie's class origins and those of the Flowers and Jowles with whom she now lives is raised repeatedly as the narrative progresses. Critics of *Toyshop* have paid little heed to the importance the text accords to class, but Philip Flower's antagonism towards his niece is motivated as much by class hatred as by his misogyny.

The Flower household is the antithesis of all Melanie has ever known. It is a Gothic mansion, a Bluebeard's castle, writ in suburban mode. It is a cold, dark, foreboding place. It is distinctly *unheimlich* in the sense identified by Freud in the first part of "The Uncanny," that is to say, *un-cosy*, *un-homely*. Here for the first time the orphaned Melanie experiences solitude and misery and is exposed to violence. Here she finds out about "real life" as Carter has it, that is to say, she learns the ugly lessons of poverty and powerlessness. What she learns, in fact, is that all she had previously taken to be real was an illusion. Her parents' home had been kept "nice" through the denial, repression and exclusion of the abject. Neither birth nor death nor sexuality nor bodily excretions impinge upon this bourgeois haven because it is constructed by the very process of their exclusion. It is no accident that Melanie's sexual awakening coincides with her journey into the Gothic house. The Gothic is the domain of the unconscious, and the unconscious is by definition unclean. But the Gothic is also, in the fictional universe of *Toyshop*, equated with the working class itself. In the bourgeois Imaginary the working class pays little heed to the taboos surrounding hygiene and sexuality- the observance of which are definitive of bourgeois subjectivity.

In her journey into the unclean the bathroom serves as a concrete signifier of the class differential between past and present. On Melanie's first morning in the Flower house, she ventures into the bathroom anticipating a hot bath:

But water ran cold in the bathroom basin. She held her hand under the flow for a long time but the water grew no warmer. Incredulously, she had to accept the fact that there was no hot water in the

bathroom neither to bath in nor to wash her face in. She had not realised there were still houses where there was no hot water system or that a relative of hers might live in one. Neither was there proper toilet soap. Squatting toad-like in a blue and white China soap-dish was a worn cake of common household soap, coarse-textured and yellow and marked with dirty thumb prints from careless usage, which stung her face and probably corroded it. She could feel her skin, corroding. Cold water and washing soap, this was how it was to be. (MT 55)

Further exploration of the Flowers' bathroom reveals its impoverishment: an ancient pull chain toilet that barely flushes; wads of newspaper in lieu of toilet paper; a generalised ugliness and griminess, and, tellingly, no mirror. This last is a defining point of difference that will grow in importance as the narrative progresses. Melanie involuntarily contrasts the Jowles's grim bathroom with the hallucinatory Sunday supplement bathroom of memory:

Melanie washed as quickly as she could. The bathroom depressed her very much. 'The Last Wash at the Old Home' Not a genre picture at all, but a photograph from an advertising book on bathrooms. Porcelain gleamed pink and the soft fluffy towels and the toilet paper were pink to match. Steaming water gushed plentifully from the dolphin shaped taps and jars of bath essence and toilet water and after-shave glowed like jewellery; and the low lavatory tactfully flushed with no noise at all. It was a temple to cleanliness. Mother loved nice bathrooms. She thought bathrooms were terribly important. 'Don't,' said Melanie sternly to herself, 'cry because of the state of their bathroom.' But all the same, it was hard. She forced herself not to think of the old bathroom and, by extension, her mother. Now, though, she perceived that many things which she had taken for granted in her life, simple, cosy, homely things, were, in fact, great luxuries. No wonder there was no inheritance for the children and they must scrape themselves with newspaper and redden their pampered fingers in icy water now that the goose who laid the golden eggs was dead. (MT 56-57)

Melanie consciously represses her nostalgia for the old bathroom. Yet despite her altered circumstances she wages an unconscious battle to remain within her class of origin. In this battle the bathroom carries an extraordinary symbolic weight. It is "a temple to cleanliness," and cleanliness is constitutive of bourgeois subjectivity. Despite the lack of hot water and the primitive conditions of the Flower bathroom, Melanie struggles futilely to maintain a level of personal cleanliness consonant with her middle class identity. To give up this struggle is to risk giving up one's class identity and sliding into the threatening domain of those others, the "great unwashed."

For Melanie, the Jowles are the concrete embodiments of the "great unwashed." The red people, as she calls them, are doubly marked as other by their Irishness and their working class

origins. For the greater part of the novel Melanie remains deeply ambivalent towards the "red people," in spite of the warm welcome they give her and the children. Like Melanie and her siblings, they also constitute a trio of orphans forced to live in the terrifying shadow of the "Beast of the Apocalypse." Their common fate could be a source of identification and comfort to the children, for as Finn tells her, they are all "in the same boat"(MT 38). On one hand, Melanie is strongly attracted by their music-making, their warmth and mutual affection; "she yearned above all things to break into their home movie"(MT 76). But she immediately censors her yearning:

But did she really want to belong to them? For a moment she ached with longing- then, just as suddenly, revolted against them. They were dirty and common. She hated to use the word 'common', only common people called other people 'common'; her mother taught her that. But it fitted. 'I haven't seen a single book in the house, not one.' And the lorry-drivers caff line-up of sauce-bottles in the dining room. And Francie dowsing himself with porridge and (now) meditatively picking his teeth with a used matchstick. And Finn's vile singlet and viler pyjamas. And the only pictures in the house that she had seen were the sentimental, old-fashioned print in her room and Finn's dog over the mantelpiece, which a child might have painted and hung up, to show off. And tea, tea, tea with everything, just when she had begun to appreciate the sophistication of coffee. And the holes in Aunt Margaret's stockings. And no lavatory paper. It was all disgusting. They lived like pigs. (MT 77)

In this representation of Melanie's thought process there occurs a metonymic chain of signification that ends in a very telling metaphor. The Jowles are "common" (for which read working class), they are uncultivated in their personal habits, unsophisticated in their manner of dining: even their culture is devoid of "culture." They are dirty; they are disgusting; they are "like pigs." In their exploration of the concept of cultural hierarchies, Stallybrass and White single out the pig as the most symbolically debased of animals in Western society. The culturally debased pig has frequently served as a metaphorical vehicle for the denigration of marginal groups with whom it has historically been associated. Melanie's metaphorization of the Jowles as pigs thus draws upon a long tradition of English cultural representations in which the Irish and the working class have often been likened to pigs. But Melanie's metaphorization of the Jowles as porcine is rendered ambivalent by her

articulation of disgust. According to Stallybrass and White, disgust is not the unequivocally negative emotion it might first appear:

It has been argued that 'the demarcating imperative' divides up human and non-human, society and nature, 'on the basis of the simple logic of excluding filth' (Chase 1984: 194; Kristeva 1982: 68). Differentiation, in other words, is dependent upon disgust. The division of the social into high and low, the polite and the vulgar, simultaneously maps out divisions between the civilized and the grotesque body, between author and hack, between social purity and social hybridization. These divisions, as we have argued, cut across the social formation, topography and the body, in such a way that subject identity cannot be considered independently of these domains. The bourgeois subject continuously defined and re-defined itself through the exclusion of what it marked out as 'low'- as dirty, repulsive, noisy, contaminating. Yet that very act of exclusion was constitutive of its identity. The low was internalized under the sign of negation and disgust. But disgust always bears the imprint of desire. (191)

"Disgust always bears the imprint of desire." Nowhere is the ambivalence of Melanie's disgust more clearly apparent than in her ambivalent relation to Finn. From her first sighting of him at the railway station she is attracted to and revolted by him in equal measure. He is imaged as a Simple Ivan; graceful, supple, poetic, with extraordinary grey-green eyes and an oblique and disturbing glance. But he is also marked by poverty: his teeth are yellow and rotten; his eye has a cast in it; his clothes are filthy poor-box cast-offs. However, when Melanie and the children share a taxi with Finn and his brother Francie, it is their smell, above all, that evinces her disgust:

Then there was a silence and Melanie began to smell the men. She was puzzled for some moments as to the source of the smell, so little did she expect the brothers would be so dirty. Crushed as she was close to them, their smell filled her nostrils until she almost choked with it. And also with horror, for she had never sat so close to men who smelt before. A ferocious, unwashed, animal reek came from them both; in addition, Finn stank of paint and turps on top of the poverty-stricken, slum smell. And Francie's collar, she saw, was rimmed with dirt and his neck was filthy. She could not see Finn's neck for the hair.

All her fifteen combed and scrubbed years rose up in an endless vista of baths and shampoos and clean underwear; a cortege of full baths in which she had washed herself, a slithering file of bars of soap which she had rubbed to nothing against her flesh. She tried to evoke the memory of sudsy hot water to protect her against their smell but it was no help. Surely the taxi-ride would never end and she be out in the fresh air. (MT 36)

Although she is shabby and at times unkempt, Aunt Margaret is free of the taint of her brothers' smell. Their smell is inextricable from their masculinity. Later, when Finn comes up to Melanie's room his maleness is imaged as a sexually threatening smell:

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

Finn confounds Melanie's ghost plot. Her fancy man is anything but fancy. Her dream lover may have been as faceless and nebulous as a cloud but he was most certainly not a dirty, stinking, squinting Irishman. Finn is the anti-lover, the antithesis of Melanie's desire. He is variously described as small, emaciated, red-haired, stinking, having a mouth full of rotten molars, filthy, shabby, beaten, bruised and powerless. Here the text deliberately thwarts the erotics of inequality that usually structure the Gothic romance plot, in which the romantic hero is invariably more physically, socially and economically powerful than the heroine. For although Melanie apprehends Finn's sexual presence as a form of power or mastery over her, in the claustrophobic confines of the Flower household he is as powerless as she. This mutual powerlessness marks Melanie and Finn as doubles. Both are dependent orphans forced to do their master's bidding, and both are the butts of his violence. In Melanie's case Philip Flower's violence is largely symbolic, whereas Finn is relentlessly abused, kicked and beaten. By marking Finn as Melanie's masculine double, *Toyshop* inverts Freud's hypothesis that Olympia is nothing more than Nathaniel's feminine double, thereby calling his reading of "The Sandman" into question.

The Doll was Herself

In bodying Melanie and Finn forth as doubles, Carter deliberately sets herself some narrative problems that the text must then work through. How is Melanie to be reconciled with the red people? How can her disgust at Finn's filth be overcome to the extent that, by the end of the novel, she can forge an alliance with him and claim him as an ally, if not, exactly, as a lover? It is in working through these problems that Carter draws on "The Sandman" and Freud's essay on the uncanny, texts that are both unmarked by any consideration of class difference. Hence Carter's borrowing

from and arguments with these texts centres on their particular reworking of the Oedipal conflict, rather than on their treatment of class. However, in *The Magic Toyshop*, class difference is not eradicated but is rather subsumed by the all-consuming nature of the Oedipal struggle.

Keeping Hutcheon's formulation of the inferential walk in mind, let us embark upon a detour through Hoffmann's tale and Freud's reading of it in order to see how their articulation of the Oedipal conflict can be brought to bear upon *Toysshop*. Both these texts are marked by indeterminacy. In "The Sandman," which is concerned with the mental disintegration and suicide of the young student Nathaniel, it is reality itself that is undecidable. The reader cannot be certain whether some of the events depicted are to be considered as actual occurrences in the context of the story or whether they are aspects of Nathaniel's delusional system. This indeterminacy extends to Freud's reading of "The Sandman" in his 1919 essay "The 'Uncanny.'" Several commentators have noted that this essay is marked by a degree of uncertainty and circularity that is quite uncharacteristic of Freud's work. Cixous calls it a "commentary on uncertainty." She remarks that:

...this long text of Freud employs a peculiarly disquieting method to track down the concept *das Unheimliche*, the Disquieting Strangeness, the Uncanny. Nothing turns out less reassuring for the reader than this niggling, cautious, yet wily and interminable pursuit (of "something"- be it a domain, an emotional movement, a concept, impossible to determine yet variable in its form, intensity, quality, and content). Nor does anything prove to be more fleeting than this search whose movement imposes its secret necessities everywhere. The ensuing unfolding whose operation is contradictory is accomplished by the author's double: Hesitation. (525)

It is no wonder that Freud hesitates, flounders and backtracks, given the ephemeral nature of his object, which is to nail down the experience of the uncanny itself, and his aim, which is to determine the universal underpinning to that experience. In this quest Freud adopts the definition of the uncanny proffered by Schelling, who states that: "'*Unheimlich*' is the name for everything that ought to have remained ...secret and hidden but has come to light" ("The 'Uncanny'" 224). Freud proposes a number of causal mechanisms for the sensation of uncanniness: the castration complex, the double, the omnipotence of primitive thoughts and ideas, repetition compulsion, confusion over

whether something is animate or inanimate, and the fear of death amongst them. Neurotic men, he adds provocatively, often "feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs" ("The 'Uncanny' (1919)" 245). However, his insistence that the *unheimlich* effects produced by "The Sandman" are due to its evocation of castration anxiety forces him to foreclose other possible meanings. The corollary of Freud's fetish for castration anxiety is that his reading of the tale unwittingly focuses on its effect on the male reader. The female reader cannot, by definition, experience castration anxiety; hence Freud's thesis cannot enlighten us as to the source of her experience of the uncanny. Furthermore, Freud's elision of female subjectivity from his reading extends to the female characters in Hoffmann's tale. He dismisses Olympia as irrelevant to the production of the effect of uncanniness. Neither Nathaniel's betrothed Clara nor his mother figure in his analysis. In order to appreciate how *The Magic Toyshop* takes issue with Freud's elision of female subjectivity in the tale, it is necessary that we retrace our steps back to "The Sandman" itself.

"The Sandman" opens with an exchange of three letters. In the first Nathaniel writes that the recent visit of a dealer in barometers threatens to destroy his life. In order to explain this extraordinary claim he recounts the events of his childhood that the barometer dealer has called to mind. He recalls that in the evenings his family circle was frequently disturbed by the threatened arrival of a mysterious visitor, the "Sandman," whose identity comes to obsess the little boy. His sister's nurse tells him that the Sandman is a wicked man who throws sand in the eyes of children who refuse to go to bed so that their bloodied eyes jump out of their heads. He then feeds these eyes to his own bird-like children who live on the moon. Although he disbelieves this folk story, Nathaniel becomes more and more obsessed with the "uncanny ghost" whose footsteps he frequently hears on the stairs at night. One night he hides in his father's room and discovers that the "Sandman" is none other than "the repulsive Coppelius," an elderly lawyer who sometimes visited the family (Hoffmann 90). Nathaniel, hidden behind a curtain, watches on as Coppelius and his

father perform a mysterious experiment involving disembodied eyes. During the course of the experiment his father is transformed into the double of the diabolical Coppelius. When Nathaniel screams out in fear he is discovered by Coppelius who threatens to take out his eyes. His father intervenes and saves him, but Coppelius then unscrews Nathaniel's hands and feet, attaching them to his body in various unnatural ways. Nathaniel faints and subsequently falls into a fever from which his mother nurses him back to health. After an absence of a year, the Sandman is heard ascending the stairs once more. Nathaniel's mother, who loathes Coppelius, pleads with his father to turn him away: " 'But father, father,' she cried, 'must it be so?' "(Hoffmann 93). She is assured that it will be his final visit and she and the children are sent off to bed, only to be awoken around midnight by a terrible explosion in which the father is killed. The authorities seek out Coppelius for the murder but he disappears without a trace. In his letter Nathaniel claims that the itinerant dealer in barometers, Coppola, with whom he has just had dealings, is none other than Coppelius, the original of the Sandman.

By a parapraxis Nathaniel inadvertently sends this letter to his betrothed Clara, sister of the intended recipient Lothario. Clara stands for the Real, the commonsensical, hence in her reply she attempts to persuade Nathaniel that he has imagined these events, that Coppola and Coppelius are products of his own mind. Nathaniel is momentarily persuaded, and announces his imminent visit to her. At this point the narrative is taken over by the third person narrator, who extols Clara's virtues at length. Yet despite Clara's virtues, she and Nathaniel become increasingly estranged during his visit home. Their estrangement reaches a climax when Nathaniel reads her a poem about the destruction of their love by Coppelius/Coppola. In the poem Clara's eyes, which spring out of their sockets and burn their way into Nathaniel's heart, are equated with death. Clara's rejection of this poem causes Nathaniel to deride her as a "lifeless, accursed automaton" (Hoffmann 106). In response Lothario threatens to fight Nathaniel but Clara intervenes and they are reconciled.

Nathaniel returns to his university town only to find that his lodgings have been burnt down. His new lodgings look onto the house of Professor Spalanzani, and give him an uninterrupted view of the Professor's beautiful daughter Olympia sitting motionless in her room. Nathaniel remains indifferent to her until he is visited by the itinerant optician Coppola. The mass of "lov-ely *occe*- lov-ely *occe*" (Hoffmann 109)—spectacles and lorgnettes— that Coppola produces appals Nathaniel, but he eventually purchases a pocket telescope. After viewing Olympia through the telescope Nathaniel becomes utterly besotted by her and forgets Clara. Two days later at the ball Spalanzani holds in her honour, Nathaniel dances with the mechanical, ice-cold Olympia, and declares his devotion. His infatuation becomes a local joke, as others find Olympia uncanny, objecting in particular to her clockwork rigidity and unseeing lifeless eyes. However, the deluded Nathaniel views her as the ideal woman, one who never wearies of listening to him, never fidgets nor displays boredom. He considers her passivity and silence as proof of a higher nature. But when Nathaniel happens upon Spalanzani and Coppola fighting over her body he realizes at last that she is merely a doll. He sees that her eyes are lifeless pits. Spalanzani tells Nathaniel that Olympia's eyes had been purloined from Nathaniel himself, at which point he picks up her blood-flecked eyes from where they lie on the floor and hurls them at Nathaniel's chest. Nathaniel rants psychotically: "Ha, ha, ha! Circle of fire, circle of fire! Spin, spin, circle of fire! Merrily, merrily! Puppet, ha lovely puppet, spin, spin!" (Hoffmann 120) before being dragged off to the madhouse.

At this point, with one of the abrupt changes of tone so characteristic of Hoffmann, the narrator launches into a satirical account of the scandal that ensues from Spalanzani's attempt to introduce an automaton into "respectable tea-circles" (Hoffmann 121). Despite the declaration of the Professor of Rhetoric and Poetry that the episode "is an allegory, an extended metaphor" (Hoffmann 121), the masculine half of polite society is thrown into turmoil:

But the minds of many esteemed gentlemen were still not set at rest: the episode of the automaton had struck deep roots into their souls, and there stealthily arose in fact a detectable mistrust of the

human form. To be quite convinced they were not in love with a wooden doll, many enamoured young men demanded that their young ladies should sing and dance in a less than perfect manner, that while being read to they should knit, sew, play with their puppy and so on, but above all that they should not merely listen but sometimes speak too, and in such a way that what they said gave evidence of some real thinking and feeling behind it. (Hoffmann 121-22)

The scandal forces Spalanzani to leave town, whilst Coppola also disappears from the scene.

Meanwhile Nathaniel is once again nursed back to health by his mother and Clara. All seems to be going well, and the entire family relocates to a country town in which Nathaniel's mother has recently inherited property. However, a fatal incident occurs when the betrothed couple climb the town hall tower on a sightseeing excursion. At the top of the tower Clara tells Nathaniel to look at a "funny little grey bush" (Hoffmann 123) that appears to be moving towards them. But Nathaniel takes out his pocket telescope and inadvertently looks at Clara through it, and the sight precipitates another attack of madness: "Spin, puppet, spin! Spin, puppet, spin!"... "Spin, spin circle of fire! Spin, spin, circle of fire!" he raves (Hoffmann 123). His attempt to push Clara off the tower is foiled by her brother. Nathaniel then spies Coppelius in the square below, and jumps to his death crying "Ha! Lov-ely *occe!* Lov-ely *occe!*" (Hoffmann 124). Much later, Clara finds domestic happiness with another, which, the narrator remarks "the inwardly riven Nathaniel could never have given her" (Hoffmann 125).

Freud's analysis of "The Sandman" takes a quote by his predecessor in interpretation, Jentsch, as its starting point:

In telling a story, one of the most successful devices for creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether the particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton, and to do it in such a way that his attention is not focused directly upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be led to go into the matter and clear it up immediately. That, as we have said, would quickly dissipate the peculiar emotional effect of the thing. E.T.A. Hoffmann has repeatedly employed this psychological artifice with success in his fantastic narratives. ("The 'Uncanny' " 227).

However Freud immediately discounts Jentsch's thesis, saying that he cannot think "that the theme of the doll Olympia, who is to all appearances a living being, is by any means the only, or indeed the most important, element that must be held responsible for the quite unparalleled atmosphere of

uncanniness provoked by the story"(Freud "The 'Uncanny' [1919]" 227). He believes his objection is supported by the satirical tone Hoffmann adopts in his description of Nathaniel's idealization of his doll-mistress. In an extended footnote further on in the essay, Freud elaborates on the significance of the doll:

This automatic doll can be nothing else than a materialization of Nathaniel's feminine attitude towards his father in infancy. Her fathers, Spalanzani and Coppola, are, after all, nothing but new editions, reincarnations of Nathaniel's pair of fathers. Spalanzani's otherwise incomprehensible statement that the optician has stolen Nathaniel's eyes..., so as to set them in the doll, now becomes significant as supplying evidence of the identity of Olympia and Nathaniel. Olympia is, as it were, a dissociated complex of Nathaniel's which confronts him as a person, and Nathaniel's enslavement to this complex is expressed in his senseless obsessive love for Olympia. (Freud "The 'Uncanny' (1919)" 232)

In Freud's view, Olympia is simply Nathaniel's female double, a projection that he mistakes for the real. According to Freud, the uncanny effect of the text derives not from any uncertainty about the status of the doll but rather from its iteration of the motif of the disembodied eye. In Freud's analysis, the disembodied eye and the fear of losing one's eyes symbolize the fear of being castrated. Freud collapses all the father figures in the text into the Sandman, the "bad father" whose threat to blind his son is a symbolic threat of castration.

The Magic Toyshop adopts a number of strategies in order to state its argument with Freud's analysis. Firstly, it foregrounds a specifically feminine understanding of the uncanny by iterating moments of recognition in which the focalizing female subject makes a connection between her own subject position and that of the doll or puppet. The figure of Melanie collapses the distinction between Hoffmann's Clara and his Olympia, for in the course of her sojourn in the Flower house Melanie comes to experience herself as a doll. Yet it is not the doll itself that Melanie experiences as uncanny, but rather the fleeting moment of self-recognition, for as Ferrell points out, the uncanny is by definition momentary:

It is, in short, the return of the repressed, says Freud. And the return of repression is a doubling that gives the uncanny moment its odd beat or shimmer. It is a movement between the repressed and its repression, there but not quite there. Out of the corner of your eye you glimpse it; but when you turn to face it, it is gone. (131)

The textual equation of Melanie with the doll is presaged in the first chapter when she wrecks her parents' bedroom "like an automaton" (MT 25) after receiving the telegram announcing their deaths. When she comes to live in the Flower house Melanie finds that both the household and the toyshop are populated with automata- stuffed singing birds, a cuckoo clock, bicycle-riding Irishmen, musical monkeys- which, at times, seem more alive than the human inhabitants. These are products of Uncle Philip's basement workshop, which also houses the puppet theatre that lies at the heart of the story. On her first visit below stairs to the workshop cum theatre, Melanie is overcome by the "*Walpurgisnacht* of carved and severed" puppet limbs, and the huge array of puppets, with their "strange liveliness"(MT 66-67). But it is the sight of the Sylphide puppet with long black hair lying on the floor that specifically evokes her crisis of identification:

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

Here the text bodies forth an experience of the uncanny that is specific to the female subject.

Melanie's recognition of herself as a doll is an uncanny moment, a moment when something "that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden" is brought to light. And what comes to light is not the Freudian postulate of castration anxiety, but rather the culturally constructed nature of femininity.

Or, to put it in Althusserian terms, what is revealed to Melanie at this uncanny moment is precisely how she is interpellated as a gendered subject.

For the uncanny moment of recognition in which she sees herself in the Sylphide doll retrospectively contaminates Melanie's ghost plots. At this moment she realises that all the while she had been posturing before the mirror in the wedding dress and thinking herself so bold and transgressive she had simply been acting out a culturally ordained script. The text makes a direct link between the wedding dress and the Sylphide costume that Aunt Margaret fits on Melanie to wear in

Uncle Philip's puppet play: "She gestured Melanie over to her and draped the material around her shoulders. All at once, Melanie was back home and swathing herself in diaphanous veiling before a mirror"(MT 141). It is the dress, we are given to understand, which seduces the living woman into acting the part of the doll. The dress promises to transform the female subject into a culturally sanctioned image of desirable femininity. Even though Melanie knows she is about to be symbolically raped by Uncle Philip's swan puppet, when she puts on the Sylphide dress, "in spite of everything" she is "flattered," because she "would be a nymph crowned with daisies once again; he saw her as once she had seen herself"(MT 141). Melanie's seduction by the dress is paralleled by the pathetic pleasure Aunt Margaret takes in the choking ruby collar made expressly for her by Uncle Philip as his wedding gift. Like those American Indians swindled out of land with beads and blankets, Aunt Margaret has exchanged her birthright for a bauble. The ruby collar is the price of her subservience and silence. By foregrounding the powerful allure that these accoutrements of femininity have on the female subject, the text makes a point about the *modus operandi* of patriarchy, i.e. that female desire is culturally constructed to serve its interests, and that women are as much seduced as coerced into accepting their subordinate social position.

The text's formulation of a specifically feminine experience of the uncanny shows up the blind spots- Irigaray's "*taches aveugles*" (*Speculum* 11-129)- in Freud's analysis of "The Sandman." As several feminist critics have pointed out, Freud's enthusiasm for nailing the source of the uncanny on castration anxiety blinds him to the textual representation of castration itself. Because he discounts the significance of the feminine he cannot account for what Nathaniel sees when he looks at the doll, or, in the end, at Clara. As Jane Marie Todd remarks, Freud fails to see that "the question of woman is inextricably connected to Nathaniel's fear of castration" (523). Hoffmann's text makes it abundantly clear that it is only when Nathaniel realizes that Olympia has lost her eyes that he finally understands that she is a doll, and this realization precipitates his psychosis: "Nathaniel stood dumb

with horror. He had seen all too clearly that Olympia's deathly-white face possessed no eyes: where the eyes should have been, there were only pits of blackness- she was a lifeless doll"(Hoffmann 119-20). Of course, since Olympia is female she cannot *actually* be castrated; the removal of her eyes signifies symbolic or social castration:

Olympia is a caricature of the ideal woman: silent, powerless, docile. It is only when, having lost her eyes, she is exposed as an automaton, that the "tea circle" realizes how this ideal is achieved. Olympia's "castration" signifies nothing other than this social oppression of women. She is denied life, power, and autonomy, all symbolized by the eye/penis. By passing over the theme of the doll Olympia, Freud failed to see the social meaning of castration. (Todd 525)

If we read Melanie's recognition of herself in the doll as a realization of her symbolic castration within the patriarchal economy of the Toyshop, the incident of the severed hand becomes intelligible. Prior to this incident, the kitchen had already been imaged as the site of domestic oppression in which Melanie functions like an automaton:

She separated herself from their intimacy by putting the forks precisely away in a drawer, where other forks were. Then she dried and put away knives, and spoons, also. She was a wind-up putting-away doll, clicking through its programmed movements. Uncle Philip might have made her over, already. She was without volition of her own. (MT 75-76)

One evening, whilst she is alone in the kitchen putting away the dishes, Melanie sees a bleeding, severed hand in the dresser drawer:

It was a soft-looking, plump little hand with pretty, tapering fingers the nails of which were tinted with a faint pearly lacquer. There was a thin silver ring of the type small girls wear on the fourth finger. It was the hand of a child who goes to dancing class and wears frilled petticoats with knickers to match. From the raggedness of the hand at the wrist, it appeared that the hand had been hewn from its arm with a knife or axe that was very blunt. Melanie heard blood fall plop in the drawer. (MT 118)

Francie, who rescues her from her ensuing faint, tries to reassure her in commonsense terms that her recent bereavement has caused her to hallucinate. But Melanie's symbolic interpretation is nearer the mark: "I am going out of my mind," she said aloud. "Bluebeard was here"(MT 118). Melanie symbolically equates the fairytale ogre with Uncle Philip, who threatens to psychically annihilate her. The dismembered limb stands for everything that she has lost under the patriarchal tyranny of the

Toyshop. Something has been cut off all right, but it is not a penis. The severed hand tells us that for the female subject symbolic castration is a fact, a *fait accompli*, rather than the mere threat that hangs over the masculine subject. The hallucination of the severed arm is a female take on the hallucinatory episode in "The Sandman," in which Coppélius unscrews Nathaniel's arms and legs. It might also be considered Freud's calling card in the text, for according to Freud, "dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist. . . all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them. . . as we already know, this kind of uncanniness springs from its proximity to the castration complex" (Freud "The 'Uncanny' (1919)" 244). But as Melanie's insight makes clear, for the female subject castration involves subjectivity rather than anatomy.

Melanie's experience of the uncanny comes to a climax when she is forced to act the part of Leda who is raped by the swan in Uncle Philip's puppet play. "Flower's Puppet Microcosm," as Uncle Philip calls his puppet theatre, is a microcosm of the family unit. The misanthropic Gothic ogre Uncle Philip is the puppet master whose feudal tyranny metaphorizes the other inhabitants of the Toyshop into his puppets. Uncle Philip exercises total control over his dependents, determining what they eat and wear, obliging them to service the production of toys, and ultimately, to participate in his puppet shows. Yet their position vis-à-vis the puppets is ambivalent. As Melanie learns, for Uncle Philip human beings are simply inferior puppets. They lack the requisite malleability of the marionette. Uncle Philip, as Finn has told her, likes his women silent and compliant. In the interests of her own survival Melanie tries to oblige him, but despite her best efforts her impersonation of a puppet falls short of Philip's ideal. Firstly, her body does not meet his aesthetic requirements; her "tits are too big" (*MT* 143). Secondly, he derides her performance itself, claiming that she had been "melodramatic" and "overacted." He hits her for "spoiling the poetry," thereby alluding to Yeats transmutation of Leda's rape into a poem. "Puppets don't overact," he tells her (*MT* 167).

The mock-rape constitutes Melanie's quintessential experience of the uncanny, because it is the moment when she apprehends, in a visceral sense, her own position in the hierarchy of value that structures the Puppet Microcosm. On an intellectual level she can mock Uncle Philip's beloved swan puppet; it is a "grotesque parody of a swan," "dumpy and homely and eccentric"(MT 165). But nevertheless, on a symbolic level this homely-*heimlich*- puppet is endowed with a phallic power that is distinctly *unheimlich*: it has the uncanny power to undo her, to make her over into nothingness. When the gangly swan descends upon her prostrate on the stage Melanie comes face to face with her own erasure as a subject:

All her laughter was snuffed out. She was hallucinated; she felt herself not herself, wrenched from her own personality, watching this whole fantasy from another place; and, in this staged fantasy, anything was possible. Even that the swan, the mocked up swan, might assume reality itself and rape this girl in a blizzard of white feathers. (MT 166)

As Jean Wyatt notes, the puppet theatre is a microcosm of the family unit, which functions as "a cultural site where the myths that sustain patriarchy are fabricated" (68). There is clear connection between the mock- rape scene and Melanie's adolescent posturing in front of the mirror with which the novel opens. Melanie's frivolous mimicry of cultural representations of women as male-defined sexual objects turns out to be a rehearsal for her own objectification with its attendant annihilation of her subjectivity. Melanie's alienation from herself after the mock-rape demonstrate that patriarchal representations of female victimage, such as the myth of Leda and the swan, have a self-fulfilling power to subjugate and victimize the female subject.

Robyn Ferrell suggests that what Melanie experiences here is a specifically female version of the uncanny:

Melanie feels like laughing when she first sees the swan, just as any little girl may be inclined to do when she first sees that funny little flap of skin between her brother's legs. How ridiculous! A dangling dilly bag; the two cute scrolls lend a baroque touch. Looked at full frontal, it is a laugh. Only, when she sees how important it is to everyone else, how it attracts privileges and attentions that her narcissism tells her that she's every bit as entitled to- that is where the wound comes; something is missing all right. And then when she perceives its power, the power to fix her in this less-than lacking identity, that is an uncanny moment. The meaning of which must escape her- something she puts no value on to be value itself? That is uncanny. (137)

In Carter's version, the uncanny is that moment of recognition when the power relations that underpin patriarchy are made visible to the female subject. In other words, *Toysshop* produces a version of the uncanny that is not universal but gender-specific. *Toysshop's* argument with Freud's reading is not that it is wrong *per se* but that it is lacking. *Toysshop* sets out to correct the partiality of the Freudian reading, to tell Olympia's half of the story. Freud's elision of Olympia in his analysis is the corollary of his greater project, to find a universal underpinning to the uncanny. Here as elsewhere, the universal turns out to be a masculine masquerade. As feminists have long argued, the very concept of the universal has an uncanny way of eliding the feminine from its terms of reference.

Freud's elision of the doll is indeed striking when considered in the light of the two major nineteenth century theatrical variations on "The Sandman." Because both these variations are centrally concerned with the undecidability of the figure of the doll they must be considered as intertexts for Carter's reconfiguration of the doll-woman dyad. In the first act of Offenbach's opera, *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, a fictional version of the author Hoffmann stands in for Nathaniel as the romantic hero. The narrative recounts the romantic disappointments that have driven the hero to his current state of dissolution. Hoffmann has fallen in love with Olympia, whom he has been led to believe is Spalanzani's daughter. His discovery that she is an automaton both devastates him and makes him the butt of public ridicule, as it had been obvious to others that she was merely a clockwork contrivance.

The ballet *Coppélia, or the Girl with the Enamel Eyes* foregrounds the undecidability of the doll-woman figure to a much greater degree. The ballet was choreographed by Saint-Léon to the music of Déléibes and premiered at the Paris Opera in 1870. The plot concerns the betrothed couple Franz and Swanhilda, the toymaker Dr. Coppélius and his "daughter" Coppélia. Despite his impending marriage to Swanhilda, Franz is infatuated with Coppélia, who sits motionless on her balcony overlooking the village square. Whilst Dr. Coppélius is away from home, Swanhilda and a band of friends break into

his workshop where they discover a treasure trove of miraculous automata. To their astonishment they find that Coppélia is not a girl at all but a wonderfully life-like, life-sized doll. When the toymaker returns unexpectedly, her friends run away but Swanhilda secretes herself in the doll's alcove where she disguises herself as Coppélia. Meanwhile Franz has also crept into the toymaker's den, but the sly Dr. Coppelius plies him with spiked wine until he falls unconscious. The toymaker now embarks upon his master plan; using magical formulae from his book of spells he attempts to draw the life force from Franz's body in order to animate his beloved doll. What follows is an uncanny reversal: the flesh and blood Swanhilda, now disguised as Coppélia, mimics the doll coming to life to dance for her master. Dr. Coppelius is enraptured, but his joy is short lived for Swanhilda soon reveals her deception and she and Franz escape leaving the toymaker broken hearted. After exposing the toymaker's deception and the credulity of her fickle betrothed, Swanhilda restores social order by marrying Franz and forgiving the puppet master, whom she has, in effect, mastered.

Coppélia sets up a double play with the notion of the living doll. On the one hand, Coppélia is a doll impersonating a living woman, whilst on the other, the patently human Swanhilda masquerades as a doll that has been magically brought to life. For the sophisticated spectator who knows that all of these figures are humans masquerading as automata, or in the case of Swanhilda, humans masquerading as automata masquerading as humans, the fascination derives from the uncanny skill with which the dancers create the illusion of automatism. Of the original uncanniness of Hoffmann's tale, there is little residue. *Coppélia* is essentially a comedic version of "The Sandman" in which the uncanny is transformed into a lark. Swanhilda's message may be non-verbal but it still comes across loud and clear: men who fall in love with dolls are uncannily stupid.

Coppélia is not mentioned by name in the novel, but the production notes for the film version makes this intertext explicit, by referring to the dancer who plays the parts of the wood nymph and the female marionette as "Coppélia/Nymph dancer" (*The Curious Room* 508). However, although

Coppélia is not referred to explicitly, ballet as a cultural form functions as a kind of generic intertext throughout the novel. As previously mentioned, Melanie identifies with the tutu-clad Sylphide puppet on her first visit to the puppet workshop, and this same puppet is featured dancing *en pointe* in the first puppet play of Uncle Philip's she witnesses, "Death of a Wood Nymph." Furthermore, the puppet play of Leda and the Swan in which Melanie is later forced to participate is performed to excerpts from the score of *Swan Lake*. Whilst the mock-rape is taking place, Melanie recalls her last visit to the theatre to see *Swan Lake* and her previous fondness for ballet, a fondness, the narrative intimates, that is "snuffed out" when she finds herself "on stage with an imitation swan" (MT 166). These references conjure up the iconography of femininity that pervades the classical ballet repertoire: sleeping beauties awaiting their prince, girls transmogrified into swans by evil enchanters, village maidens who die for love, and squadrons of indistinguishable sylphides, nymphs, bayaderes and willis. It is an iconography of femininity in the passive case in which the mute female body is rendered as an exquisite aesthetic object rather than an active agent. It can fairly be said that the aestheticized female body is the Muse of the Classical and Romantic ballet traditions, in which the male dancer mostly figures as a porter. The representation of the Muse is one that Carter repeatedly engages with elsewhere, as will be discussed in the following section of the thesis. Suffice to say here, that in ballet, as elsewhere, it is a representation that is far from enabling for the female subject, given its glamorisation and eroticisation of female silence, passivity and victimage.

The representation of Swanhilda in *Coppélia* departs from this tradition in a quite extraordinary manner. She is depicted as a character in the humanist tradition; that is to say she is invested with sentience, volition, and intelligence. She is the mover and shaker of the plot rather than its victim. She engages in a battle of wits with two powerful men and wins. In some productions she even dismembers the doll and engages in fisticuffs with the Toymaker. *Coppélia* is clearly a significant intertext for Carter's novel. Obviously, she takes from it the idea of the magic toyshop peopled by

human puppets. But more importantly, she borrows its two central themes of a woman resisting the power of the dollmaker, and its dichotomized vision of femininity- woman as passive object or woman as active agent. By invoking both the traditional balletic iconography of female passivity simultaneously with the most significant departure from that iconography in the classical repertoire, Carter delineates her heroine's dilemma: how can a woman resist the weight of a tradition of representations that figure her as a passive, volitionless object? Swanhilda stakes out the possibilities of resistance, the anonymous Sylphides and wood Nymphes the fatal consequences of acquiescence.

There is a striking parallel to Melanie's dilemma in the domain of life writing. In the autobiography of ballerina Gelsey Kirkland, *Dancing on My Grave*, Swanhilda's refusal serves as a paradigm for resistance to the gender norms operating within the ballet world. Kirkland captions a photograph of herself performing in *Coppélia* with the rubric "Not a Doll," and this emphatically negative statement also encapsulates the thrust of her narrative. As she tells it, the dominant theme of Kirkland's life story is a desperate attempt to escape the ballerina's fate of becoming a sublime automaton, a beautiful body manipulated by her masculine master, the choreographer. Kirkland describes her formative psychological enslavement to the pre-eminent choreographer of his generation, Georges Balanchine or Mr B., as he was always known. The quasi-divine status of Mr B. was such that, like scores of other adolescent girls who passed through his school and company, the American Ballet Theatre, Kirkland developed anorexia and willingly endured a multitude of cosmetic surgical procedures in order to conform to his aesthetic. Kirkland's story implies that the pathological relationship between female dancer and male master is structural to the ballet world. Their gender and their relative paucity protect male dancers, but the competition amongst the too-numerous female neophytes ensures that she must please the master in order to be noticed. The female dancer is schooled in unquestioning obedience to a system and an aesthetic that threatens, almost literally in Kirkland's account, to kill her. The psychoanalytic implications of this story are

blatant; the daughter is the puppet of the Father, her very survival is predicated on her ability to realize his wishes. Kirkland's memoir reveals that the subject position of the living doll continues to flourish in the cultural form that also, paradoxically, generated Swanhilda's refusal.

"But father, father," she cried. " Must it be so?"

However, Melanie's response to Uncle Philip's attempts to fix her as a living doll fall far short of Swanhilda's full-blown rebellion. Through privileged access to Melanie's thoughts the reader learns that she comes to hate Uncle Philip, yet she proffers little overt resistance. How is the feminist reader to account for the fact that it is Finn, rather than Melanie, whose actions precipitates the revolt of the puppet-people and the downfall of the Puppet microcosm? Is Melanie, then, merely a reinscription of the familiar trope of the woman as passive victim? Does the text suggest any possibility of female resistance to patriarchy? On this question Paulina Palmer suggests that *Toysshop* is of a piece with Carter's other early works, which, "while presenting a brilliantly accurate analysis of the oppressive effects of patriarchal structures, ran the risk of making these structures seem even more closed and impenetrable than, in actual fact, they are" (181). Palmer's point is certainly arguable of Carter's other early novels, *Shadow Dance*, *Several Perceptions*, and *Love*, in which, for the most part, the female characters are inscribed in the passive case. And similarly, in "The Loves of Lady Purple," Carter's short story concerned with the trope of the woman as puppet, the female character is completely fixed within patriarchal structures. When the puppet billed as the "shameless Oriental Venus" comes to life she does indeed strangle the puppet master and burn down his theatre. Yet she puts her new-found liberty and humanity to little use because she is programmed to repeat the script of woman-as-whore that he has mapped out for her: her brain "contained only the scantiest notion of the possibilities now open to it"(51). Since an old puppet cannot be taught new tricks, she heads straight off to work in the nearest brothel.

In Pauline Palmer's view, the burning down of the Toyshop does not presage emancipation, for she regards Uncle Philip and Finn as equally complicit in Melanie's entrapment within patriarchal structures. She argues that Finn "in rebelling against his uncle's authority, ... discovers himself usurping his position" (Palmer 183-84). According to Palmer, Melanie resigns herself to sex and marriage with Finn because he protects her from Philip: "as is typical of woman in a patriarchal society, she is pressured to seek refuge from one man in the arms of another" (187). Lucy Armitz concurs with this aspect of Palmer's reading, arguing that Finn is truly his master's apprentice: "Right from day one, Finn controls Melanie's movements and appearance, practising his puppetry skills with one squinty eye always on his own inheritance" (211). Other critics have seen Melanie's relation to Finn at the novel's ending in a much more Utopian light. Aiden Day, for example, argues that because Finn rejects patriarchal masculinity he and Melanie are able to forge a relationship that "is not defined in terms of oppression and subservience but in terms of equality" (31). Similarly, Wyatt argues that Finn "makes the revolutionary gesture of forfeiting the privileges of masculinity," thereby "opening up the possibility of a different relationship between man and woman" (72).

Although these readings are diametrically opposed, it seems to me that they are all predicated on a mimetic reading of the text that evaluates Melanie and Finn as psychologically coherent characters. As previously noted, by her own admittance Carter's texts are "arguments in fictional terms" rather than simply transcriptions of some imagined reality, and thus a mimetic reading of *Toyshop* essentially misconstrues her project. It seems to me that a non-mimetic reading of the text should privilege the notion of the subject over that of character in the traditional humanist sense. If we consider Melanie and Finn as exemplary feminine and masculine subjects, rather than as psychologically coherent characters, a somewhat more equivocal reading of their relationship is possible. As we have seen, Finn functions as Melanie's double, for despite differences of gender, class and national origin, they are similarly positioned within the household. If Melanie feels herself

to be almost made over into Philip's "wind-up putting-away doll," then Finn "creaks like a puppet" (*MT* 148) after Philip has assaulted him. Their mutual positioning is made clear in the rehearsal scene. Finn, on Philip's orders, rehearses Melanie in his bedroom for her role in the puppet play. During the rehearsal of the mock-rape scene, their sexual feelings for each other surface. However, Finn suddenly realises that he has been set up by Philip, and retreats to the wardrobe:

"You see," he said "He wanted me to fuck you" (*MT* 151):

'It was his fault' he said. 'Suddenly I saw it all, when we were lying there. He's pulled our strings as if we were his puppets, and there I was, all ready to touch you up just as he wanted. He told me to rehearse Leda and the swan with you. Somewhere private. Like in your room, he said. Go up and rehearse a rape with Melanie in your bedroom. Christ! He wanted me to do you and he set the scene. Ah, he's evil!' (*MT* 152)

Uncle Philip's plot to manipulate Finn to rape, seduce or "fuck" Melanie parallels the bizarre conspiracy of the "bad fathers"- Spalanzani and Coppola- to get Nathaniel to fall in love with the doll Olympia in "The Sandman." If we analyse these texts from the point of view of the Oedipal conflict, in both cases the father attempts to set up an incestuous relation between the son and the daughter. Two modes of incest are implicit in this scheme. In the case of the son and daughter relation the incest is direct or almost so, since in neither case is the relation consummated, whereas the father's plot is a kind of vicarious incest, or incest by proxy. Hoffmann's narrator imputes the motivation of the "bad fathers" to their desire to steal Nathaniel's eyes and implant them in the doll, which of course Freud interprets as a desire to castrate him. However, Philip Flower's plot is motivated by the coalescence of his misogyny and his class antagonism. As Finn tells Melanie when she questions Philip's motives for wanting him to rape her, "You represent the enemy to him, who use toilet paper and fish knives" (*MT* 152). The constellation of hatreds Philip directs toward Melanie recalls the "complex process of projection and displacement" Huysens detects in the hostility that has historically been directed towards cultural representations of female androids. Philip's hatred enacts a paradoxical displacement in that he positions Melanie as a doll or female automaton so as to

symbolically castrate her, then, perversely, unleashes the class hatred that he, as one of the few surviving members of the artisan class, feels towards the machine. The displacement of class antagonism onto Melanie illustrates the ease with which the already abject feminine becomes the locus of other complex cultural meanings.

Philip's incest-by-proxy plot, were it to have come off, would have had multiple effects. Obviously, it would humiliate and degrade its victim in class and sexual terms, thus setting the seal on her symbolic castration. Furthermore, it would cause Finn to lose whatever moral advantage he wields by making him into Philip's unwitting accomplice. Finally, it would be a means of getting back at Melanie's middle-class father whom Philip continues to loathe above all others, even though he is dead. In part, Philip's vicarious rape of Melanie, his incest by proxy, is a homo-social act directed at other men through its female victim.

Philip's incest plot is thwarted by Finn's refusal to play his assigned part, but it is also countered by the secret incest plot of the Jowles. Carter has described incest as one of the "grand themes" of the Gothic tale, and she situates it at the very heart of her own tale as the tie that binds the Jowles together under the oppressive yoke of the Gothic ogre. Incest, it is revealed to Melanie at the end of the narrative, is part of the red people's magic, along with their music making and their midnight voodoo. " 'That is our secret,' said Finn, 'You know our heart's core, now, the thing that makes us different from other people, Francie and Maggie and I' "(*MT* 195). Melanie's initiation into this secret signals her final admittance into the magic circle of the red people. She cannot comprehend its significance, but her awareness of it changes everything. As she tells Finn: "Now we have shared all this, we can never be like other people. We can only be like ourselves and one another. We have only each other, now"(*MT* 199).

Carter's re-deployment of the Gothic theme of incest is not a literal endorsement, for she is clearly utilizing it as a symbolic transgression of the most fundamental interdiction of patriarchy- the

prohibition of the body of the mother. For although Aunt Margaret is Francie and Finn's sister rather than their biological mother, she has raised them and she functions as the mother figure in the household. Incest is a covert act of rebellion against Philip Flower's patriarchal tyranny, a means by which the primacy of the Jowles family is asserted over that of the Flowers. Philip may believe that by "de-flowering" Margaret he has made her over into a Flower; stamped his mark of ownership on her, but she de-Flowers herself by her incestuous relation with her own brother. Incest is also the Jowles' only means of carving out a space for the *heimlich*, the homely, within the distinctly *unheimlich*, unhomely Flower household. In a curious way, by positioning incest at the kernel of her version of "The Sandman" Carter literalizes Kofman's assertion that Hoffmann's "whole story can be read as a screen-fantasy concealing the incestuous desire for the mother and the threat of death that results from this desire" (161). For Kofman, that which "ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" in the text is not castration but the death instinct, which is inextricable from the desire to return to origins in the prohibited body of the mother, that is to say, with incest. She claims that the figure of the mother is occluded in favour of the figure of the diabolical father and his doubles by both Hoffmann and Freud, and that this inversion signifies the repression of the latent content of the tale- Nathaniel's incestuous desire for his mother (Kofman 161-62).

In Kofman's account incest cannot be admitted to the manifest content of the story because it signifies death: the end of the story. And in Carter's text too the revelation of incest brings the house down. After Finn dismembers the swan puppet that has been used to symbolically rape Melanie, the household celebrates in a day of Carnavalesque excess. When Philip returns from his business trip, he discovers his human puppets have cut their strings as surely as those of his beloved swan. Not only is his symbolic phallus the swan dead and buried, but Melanie is wearing her forbidden trousers, the cuckoo clock is smashed and his wife is locked in an incestuous embrace with her own brother. The enraged tyrant sets fire to his own house. Whilst Melanie and Finn escape to

the pleasure gardens, the fate of the others is left in suspense. Finn's small, drunken act of killing the symbolically charged Swan puppet precipitates the fall of the house of Flower, which turns out to have been a house of cards all along, if only they had known. The toyshop's magic, like Philip Flower's power, can only be sustained by the belief, the *magical thinking*, of those over whom it exerts mastery. Like patriarchy itself, the Toyshop and its master have convinced them of its inevitability and invincibility. But Finn's small gesture opens up a crack through which the possibility of emancipation can be glimpsed:

'When he comes back, I shall hit him,' said Finn. 'Francie will distract his attention while I hit him. Then we shall all walk out on him together, while he grovels on the floor. That'll fix him! It will be easy. I never thought it would be so easy.' (MT 192)

Although the overthrow of the Gothic ogre is not quite as "easy" as Finn predicts, it is nevertheless his act that opens up the possibility that things need not "be so." Finn acts where Melanie cannot, and in positioning Finn as Melanie's proxy, the text makes a point about the relative degree of agency available to the masculine and feminine subject. Despite his Irishness and his working class origins, Finn is simply not as enmeshed in disabling representations of his own inevitable victimage as Melanie. Just as Lady Purple is condemned to repeat the patriarchal scenario because she only knows the story that the puppet master has taught her, Melanie is unable to actively resist because she is in thrall to Gothic fantasies of women as passive victims and romantic heroines awaiting rescue. At various times in the story she imagines herself as *La belle au bois dormant*, as Jane Eyre, as Juliet and as one of Bluebeard's wives. When she poses before the mirror she sees herself primarily in terms of masculine images of women, as an object rather than a subject. The image of femininity she inherits from her mother is an image of passivity and subordination. Her mother, that emphatically clothed middle-class woman who adores nice bathrooms, features in the Sunday supplement as a celebrity-wife rather than a celebrity in her own right. Not *somebody*, but somebody's *wife*. Wife-hood is imaged as entrapment and even death in this narrative. When Melanie tries on her

mother's wedding veil, she is entangled in it, "like a mackerel in a net"(MT 15). And the wedding dress itself, after having been ripped to shreds, is "laid out" like a shroud (MT 22). Unsurprisingly, the most extreme image of wife-hood as psychic negation is given in the Gothic world of the Toyshop, where Aunt Margaret is struck dumb on her wedding night. Melanie's forced enactment of the role of Leda raped by the phallic swan is all of a piece with these representations of femininity in the passive case.

The novel deploys Finn as Melanie's double, her masculine proxy, because its project is both emancipatory and deconstructive- it wants to burn down the house of patriarchy whilst simultaneously showing how the female subject is enmeshed in disabling representations of femininity. The symbolic violence visited upon the daughter, which we might term the violence of representations, is harder to fight than the physical violence inflicted upon the son. Blows are much easier to ward off than seductive images, tutus and wedding veils. How does one name one's enemy when one is oppressed by representations and myths?

Which is not to say that the Irish and the working class are not also shown to be oppressed by representations and myths; clearly, Melanie's disgust at the "great unwashed," and her metaphorization of the Jowles as pigs, is testament to Carter's acknowledgement of the ubiquity of negative images of these two groups. However, by allowing issues of gender to take precedence over those of class and colonization, *The Magic Toyshop* seems to be suggesting that myths of gender are singularly disabling, and that the oppression of gender is universal. Aunt Margaret, for example, is Irish, working class and female, but it is her gender that is the crux of her oppression in Uncle Philip's house. And similarly, Melanie can more easily overcome her middle-class aversion to Finn's stench and the working class standard of life in the Gothic house than she can rid herself of crippling culturally ordained ideas of the feminine subject as an aestheticized, passive object. Whilst class is clearly inscribed in this early novel, it is not its major focus. It is not until *Wise Children*, her final

novel, that Carter will allow class to occupy centre stage: *Toyshop's* overriding concern is how masculine-authored iconographies of femininity undermine feminine agency and subjectivity.

It follows that we ought not consider the absence of overt rebellion on Melanie's part as signifying a failure of the feminist consciousness of the author. *The Magic Toyshop's* "argument in fictional terms" is not addressed to Melanie who is, after all, only a fiction inscribed within it. The project of this text is to demonstrate how the female subject is interpellated by cultural representations; hence its rhetorical address is to the reader. The realization of this project is not dependent upon the female subject in the text being brought to full feminist consciousness or agency.

Clearly, Carter's citation of the heavily fetishized image of woman-as-doll that was so prevalent in nineteenth century cultural forms is ironic, and is not an instance of authorial fetishism. It is the first instance in her oeuvre that can be considered as an example of the Benjaminian dialectical image. The constellation of past images of women as passive, silent dolls, and the present image of the young girl being forced to assume the role as passive marionette in her Uncle's puppet theatre, force a moment of recognition upon the reader in which the present image is endowed with a history. The dialectical image is one of the devices Carter deploys to lay bare the structures of representation that call the female subject into being. In this text, those uncanny moments in which the female subject recognises the ways in which these structures constrain her do not enable her to overturn them. Carter's *Magic Toyshop* thus stands as a corrective to the too-facile victory of Swanhilda. Melanie is not able to single-handedly burn down the toyshop that threatened to make her over into a doll, but nevertheless burnt down it is. At the end, the human puppets cut their strings. Melanie and Finn face each other in "a wild surmise.

Section 3: The Muse Exhumed

The Muse is dead. Killed, according to Arlene Croce, by feminism. She paraphrases the feminist argument against the Muse thus:

Like Nekrasov, who said, "I'd rather be a citizen than a poet," today's woman says, "I'd rather be a citizen than a Muse." We know the arguments: Muses are passive, therefore passé. Muses are a fantasy rooted in wrongheaded notions of biological "essentialism" (i.e., femininity). Most degradingly, Muses do not choose to be Muses; they are chosen. Since the nineteen-seventies, modern feminism has based its appeal to women on the premise that all barriers to the dream of self-realization are political. Whatever can't be acquired for oneself, invoking one's civil rights, isn't worth having, and who wants to be a symbol anyway? The Muse is only a man speaking through a woman, not the woman herself. What male artists call Woman is a construct designed to keep real women in their place. (166)

But Croce does not hold feminism alone responsible for the demise of the Muse; psychoanalysis is also to blame:

If the Muse is dead, it is not the feminists alone who have killed her. As this century passes away into the next, it will be seen, I think, how the popularization of psychiatric notions of the unconscious has undermined the social and therapeutic function of art. Freud I think of as a poet, but the effect of his influence has been to set psychology in place of poetry, and psychology isolates, even alienates, each human soul from its fellows, whereas poetry does the opposite. (168)

For Croce, the feminist/psychoanalytic dismantling of the concept of the Muse is a mistake, not only because it is premised upon anti-essentialist ideas about gender with which she disagrees, but because she believes that the artist-Muse relation underpins some of the greatest masterpieces of western culture.

Given Carter's declared project of demythologizing cultural myths of gender, it is not surprising that she also has something to say about the Muse. Nor is it surprising that her view is the anthesis of Croce's. In a 1985 interview with Kerry Goldsworthy, she was quite emphatic on the subject of this most explicitly gendered of literary tropes. Responding to a question about how the Muse fits in with her pictures of "real people like Dorothy Wordsworth and Jeanne Duval," Carter replied:

The Dorothy Wordsworth piece isn't terribly serious; I have this fanciful notion that William was writing for her, that after her putting so much emotional investment in him, he had to be a genius. And it was just her good luck that he was.

Whereas Jeanne Duval is, as far as one can tell, genuinely a much less problematic figure in that she didn't want to be a Muse; as far as one can tell, she had a perfectly horrid time being a Muse. She felt that she should take Baudelaire for as much as she could get. Her treated her, as they say, Quite Well, except that he appears not to have taken her in any degree seriously as a human being. I mean you can't take a Muse seriously as a human being, or else they stop being a Muse; they start being something that hasn't come to you to inspire you, but a being with all these problems. Towards the end all Baudelaire's letters are worrying about her health, and her teeth; but by this time she'd of course stopped being a Muse. You can't take people seriously and regard them as divine- as something other than human. After all.

I think the Muse is a pretty fatuous person. The concept of the Muse is- it's another magic Other, isn't it, another way of keeping women out of the arena. There's a whole book by Robert Graves dedicated to the notion that poetic inspiration is female, which is why women don't have it. It's like haemophilia; they're the transmitters, you understand. But they don't suffer from it themselves. (Goldsworthy 11-12)

Carter's polemic here is unequivocal- the Muse is a fatuous concept that serves to keep women "out of the arena;" that is to say, that fixes them as the objects rather than the subjects of literary discourse. However, her fictional treatment of the Muse trope is more nuanced than this polemic might suggest. This section of the thesis will examine how Carter's fiction interrogates some of the pre-existing conceptions of the Muse played out in the masculine literary tradition. I begin by examining the deployment of the Muse trope in her 1972 novel *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, followed by a reading of one of the short stories in the 1985 collection *Black Venus*, "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe," and conclude with a reading of the eponymous story from *Black Venus*. However, in order to trace the nuances of Carter's interrogation of the trope, I will first map the fundamental shifts in the historical evolution of the Muse.

For almost three millennia the inspiration for artistic creativity has traditionally been attributed to the Muse. However, to speak of "the Muse" in the singular is to confer a spurious unity on a concept that is undeniably plural: the Muse is a signifier with many signifieds. The Muse started out in the plural, became singular, and at various historical periods has been invoked in radically different ways, from exalted goddess to abject mortal mistress. In the Greek Classical period the Muses were believed to be the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory.

Mnesmomyne was the daughter of Ouranos and Gaea, the primordial gods of heaven and earth, and through the maternal line the Muses were linked to the creation of the cosmos. As Pamela Di Pesa contends:

The key to the symbolic significance of the Muses lies in their simultaneous embodiment of three principles: creation, memory, and prophecy. They were the symbolic facilitators of poetry exactly because poetic creation- which has still not lost its link with prophecy- depends on a knowledge of origins. For the poet, the Muses were not only the witnesses of cosmic creation, but also the witnesses of poetic creation from its inception. With their knowledge of poetic history, the Muses could help the poet achieve continuity with the past. (63)

Possibly the oldest known poem in the Western literary canon, Hesiod's *Theogony*, supports Di Pesa's contention. The *Theogony* opens with the invocation, "From the Muses of Helicon let us begin our singing" (Hesiod 3). And although Homer invokes a singular Muse rather than Hesiod's plurality, exactly the same relation between poet and Muse informs his *Odyssey*, which begins: "The hero of the tale which I beg the Muse to help me tell is that resourceful man who roamed the wide world after he had sacked the holy citadel of Troy... This is the tale I pray the divine Muse to unfold to us. Begin it, goddess, at whatever point you will" (Homer 25). Scholars dispute whether Homer predates Hesiod or *vice versa*, but it is universally acknowledged that they were amongst the first of the Greek storytellers whose tales were committed to writing. Therefore their invocations of the Muses probably reflect the conventions of the ancient oral tradition of storytelling to which they were heir. Writing sometime in the eighth century BC, Hesiod prefaces his account of how the world came into existence with an account of how his poem came into existence. The Muses taught him "fine singing," he claims, then "they breathed into me wondrous voice, so that I should celebrate things of the future and things that were aforesaid. And they told me to sing of the family of blessed ones who are for ever, and first and last always to sing of themselves" (Hesiod 4). Here Hesiod conveys an essential aspect of the contract between Muses and poet; the Muses endow the poet with his poetic gift and he, in return, must address and celebrate them so as to convey his gratitude. When the Muses smile upon a King, they shed "sweet dew" upon his tongue, so that "out of his mouth the

words flow honeyed...his word is sure, and expertly he makes a quick end of even a great dispute." But their favour is not restricted to kings alone, "for every man is fortunate whom the Muses love; the voice flows sweet from his lips"(Hesiod 5-6). The preface ends in direct address to the Muses:

Farewell now, children of Zeus, and grant me delightful singing. Celebrate the holy family of immortals who are forever, those who were born of Earth and Heaven and of black Night, and those whom the briny sea fostered; and tell how the gods and earth were born in the first place, and the rivers, and the boundless sea with its furious swell, and the shining stars and broad firmament above; and how they shared out their estate, and how they decided their privileges, and how they gained all the glens of Olympus in the first place. Tell me all this from the beginning, Muses who dwell in Olympus, and say, what things among them came first. (Hesiod 6)

This passage posits the Muses, rather than the poet, as determining both the form and content of the poem. Their function is tutelary; it is they who enable his poetic skill, his "delightful singing," and who direct his words; as daughters of the Goddess of Memory it is they who can "tell him all this from the beginning." Already, in this very first invocation of the Muse trope, Hesiod sets out the basic premises of the Classical conception of the Muse. The Muses are deities in direct touch with the Godhead and with Memory; they speak their "divine utterance" through the poet, who is no more than their mouthpiece, the earthly vessel or conduit of their words to other mortals. As Bronfen observes, in the Classical model the Muse serves a three-fold function: "she is simultaneously maieutic producer, object of reference, and privileged addressee of the poet's speech"(Bronfen *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* 363).

The Classical conception of the Muse-Poet relation was later elaborated upon in Plato's *Ion*. In this dialogue Socrates claims that inspiration only comes to the poet if he abandons reason: "For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles"(Plato 108). Socrates uses the metaphor of the magnetic ring to explain how the Muse inspires the poet:

Do you know that the spectator is the last of the rings which, as I am saying, receive the power of the original magnet from one another? The rhapsode like yourself and the actor are intermediate links, and the poet himself is the first of them. Through all these the God sways the souls of men in any

direction which he pleases, and makes one man hang down from another. Thus there is a vast chain of dancers and masters and under-masters of choruses, who are suspended, as if from the stone, at the side of rings which hang down from the Muse. And every poet has some Muse from whom he is suspended, and by whom he is said to be possessed, which is nearly the same thing; for he is taken hold of. (Plato 110)

This passage is crucial to an understanding of the Classical conception of the Muse. Clearly, the relation of the poet to the Muse that emerges from *Ion* reverses the conventional gender roles that prevailed in Classical Greek society. The poet is passive and feminized in relation to the Muse, who assumes a productive and powerful role, albeit one that is secondary to that of "the God." *Ion* inscribes the poet as the Muse's creature, utterly dependent upon her. The Muse is the originator of poetry, which she channels through the poet in her possession. This relation is the antithesis of the modern or post-Petrarchan concept of the Muse with which we are most familiar, which grants pre-eminence to the poet who is represented as the autonomous creator of art. Read summarizes the Classical conception of the Muse thus:

This, then, is the Classical conception of the Muse, a deity who for the occasion deprives a human being of his senses and uses him as the witless mouthpiece of divine utterance. It is not a conception that is very flattering to the poet as an intelligent human being, and this explains why it was possible for Plato to have a low opinion of the poet whilst retaining the highest respect for poetry. It is, of course, a conception that has persisted wherever the Classical tradition has survived, and it is still possible to regard the best poets and artists of all kinds as childlike or naïve people who inexplicably give birth to works of genius. Indeed, we may say that in a certain sense this has become the popular conception of the poet; any other conception will seem relatively sophisticated. (100)

The poetic convention of invoking the Muse fell into disuse at the end of the Classical period, only to be revived in the late Middle Ages, albeit in an attenuated form. Subtle variations on this Classical conception of the Muse occur in the early modern period. For instance, Milton's Muse is co-opted to the Christian cause, and the Muse becomes more frequently invoked as a singular, unnamed entity rather than the plurality previously invoked. Although it became something of an empty convention devoid of any conviction, the Muse continued to be invoked according to this Classical model whilst new conceptions of the Muse emerged alongside it.

It is not until the flowering of the Northern Italian *dolce stil nuovo* school of poetry in the latter half of the fourteenth century that an entirely new figuration of the Muse emerges. The essence of

the "sweet new style" consists of a "formal Christian spiritualization of courtly love," in which "the Beloved actually becomes an Angel of God" (Preminger, Warnke and Hardison 409). The figure of Beatrice in Dante's *Vita Nuova* and *The Divine Comedy* marks the apotheosis of this movement. Dante renders his childhood sweetheart, Bice Portinari, as Beatrice, who functions both as the inspiration for much of his poetry and as his spiritual savior. Whilst Dante's actual relationship with Beatrice has been the subject of much speculation, it is immaterial to her function in his poetry, which elaborates on the courtly love tradition in which love is represented as ennobling regardless of whether it is requited. Over the course of Dante's poetic career Beatrice becomes an increasingly ennobling force till she assumes a miraculous, God-like radiance and power: "Seeming a creature sent from Heaven to stay / on earth, and show a miracle made sure" (Oelsner 135). In *Paradise*, the final canticle of the *Divine Comedy*, Beatrice is transfigured into the handmaiden of God who leads the pilgrim Dante towards the divine light and his eternal salvation.

Whilst Beatrice retains the tutelary function of the Muse-deity in that she schools the poet in Grace, her idealization to the point of beatification marks a new departure in the poetic invocation of the Muse. Whereas previously the Muse-deity figure served to personify the abstract idea of inspiration, Dante's version of the Muse-as-Beloved works in reverse to transform the real into an abstract idea. During the course of Dante's poetic career Beatrice is transformed from an erotic object into a nurturing maternal figure and finally into a disembodied presence. The poet endows his Muse with a material body, but then compels her to transcend it. It is as if the female body of the Muse-as-Beloved is so threatening to the poet's sensibilities that he must disavow it by rendering it into an idealized abstraction.

The poetry of Petrarch crystallizes the Muse-as-Beloved paradigm that Dante set in train. Petrarch similarly takes a real woman as his Muse. He devotes an entire poetic sequence of 366 poems, the *Canzoniere* (sometimes referred to as the *Rime sparse*) to tracing the agonies of his obsessive, twenty-one year unrequited love for Laura. Like Beatrice, Laura predeceases her poet-

admirer, but unlike Beatrice, Laura is not transfigured into an angel or saint but remains an intensely desired erotic object. However, the poet's desire for her is in conflict with his Christian faith:

Petrarch's love for Laura presented a constant threat to this [Christian] doctrine. He struggled to convince himself that because she was so virtuous and so beautiful she might serve as his spiritual guide to the eternal joys of heaven, and in a number of his most famous poems he apparently succeeds, but the conviction must always have been short-lived. Laura, inevitably, remains very much of this world and, as such, an incitement to sin, all the more dangerous precisely because of her unique qualities. (Minta 4)

Indeed, Laura's alluring power is such that in the final poem of the *Canzoniere* she is figured as a Medusa: the poet renounces her and pledges his allegiance to the Virgin Mary.⁶

In addition to this final renunciation, Petrarch's poetry enacts a two-fold response to the poet's conflicted desire for his Muse. Firstly, it unconsciously adopts a strategy of fragmentation and synecdochical representation to counter the overwhelming totality of her presence:

We never see in the Rime sparse a complete picture of Laura. This would not be exceptional if we were considering a single "song" or even a restricted lyric corpus; gothic top-to-toe enumeration is, after all, more appropriate to narrative, more adapted to the "objective" observations of a third person narrator than to those of a speaker who ostensibly loves, and perhaps even addresses, the image he describes. But given an entire volume devoted to a single lady, the absence of a coherent, comprehensive portrait is significant. Laura is always presented as a part or parts of a woman. When more than one part figures in a single poem, a sequential, inclusive ordering is never stressed. Her textures are those of metals and stones; her image is that of a collection of exquisitely beautiful disassociated objects. Singled out among them are hair, hand foot and eyes: golden hair trapped and bound the speaker; an ivory hand took his heart away; a marble foot imprinted the grass and flowers; starry eyes directed him in his wandering. In terms of qualitative attributes (blondness, whiteness, sparkle), little here is innovative. More specifically Petrarchan, however, is the obsessive insistence on the particular, an insistence that would in turn generate multiple texts on individual fragments of the body or on the beauties of woman. (Vickers 96, emphasis mine)

The fetishism in play here not only works to disavow Laura's phallic power as an unobtainable object of desire, but also instigates a new paradigm in the representation of women in western European literature:

The import of Petrarch's description of Laura extends well beyond the confines of his own poetic age; in subsequent times, his portrayal of feminine beauty became authoritative. As a primary canonical text, the Rime sparse consolidated and disseminated a Renaissance mode. Petrarch

⁶ Minta notes that in Petrarch's other major vernacular work, the *Triumphs*, which was completed at the very end of his life, Laura is transfigured into an elect soul in heaven who offers the poet the possibility of redemption. I have chosen not to examine this representation of Laura because it is little read and has not had the same degree of influence on later representations of the Muse-as-Beloved as that in the *Canzoniere*.

absorbed a complex network of descriptive strategies and then presented a single, transformed model. In this sense his role in the history of the interpretation and the internalization of woman's "image" by both men and women can scarcely be overemphasized. (Vickers 95)

The second unconscious strategy at work in the *Canzoniere* is the formalization of the structure implicit in Dante's invocation of the Muse-as-Beloved. Petrarch formalizes the dyad of male desiring subject (poet) and unobtainable female object (Muse), in which distance is the *sine qua non* of poetic production. Unsatisfied desire generates text, and therefore the poet unconsciously fetishizes the unobtainability of the erotic object as much as the object itself, so as to continue to produce poetry. As Byron acidly observes: "Think you, if Laura had been Petrarch's wife/He would have written sonnets all his life?" (Byron 111,8). If distance between desiring subject and desired object were overcome, Byron suggests, poetry would cease to be generated.

And whilst Petrarch might be making a virtue out of necessity, his formalization of this structural divide set in train a new poetic paradigm. As we have seen, in the Muse-as-Deity model the muse spoke through the poet who functioned as her passive mouthpiece. The Muse-as-Beloved model instigated by Dante and Petrarch reverses this so that the poet speaks the Muse; she is *his* imaginative construction, the product of *his* discourse. The Muse-as-Beloved is the passive, silent object of the speaking subject: the poet assumes primacy. As Bronfen puts it:

The paradox inherent in this changed poet-Muse relation is such that while the poet is portrayed as being possessed, it is he who possesses; while the poet seems dependent on the inspiration by another, he is the lover and begetter with the Muse as the beloved, the begotten. (*Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* 364)

Herein lies the feminist objection to the concept of the Muse: it condemns women to a passive role as the inspiration for, but never the creators of, art. If inspiration is feminine and creativity is masculine, then women are debarred from artistic production by their very "nature." As Robert Graves proclaims in *The White Goddess*, to which Carter so scornfully refers in her interview with Kerry Goldsworthy, "Woman is not a poet: she is either Muse or she is nothing" (Graves 446). Men achieve transcendence through artistic creation, whereas women are limited to the condition of immanence; they are the matter out of which art is created by masculine genius. The Muse-as-

Beloved then, is yet another figuration of the "eternal feminine" in which women are not desiring subjects in their own right but merely figures for masculine desire.

Bronfen argues that in the early nineteenth century a further variant on the Muse-as-Beloved trope arose, which she labels the Deceased Beloved as Muse. This variant is nascent in Dante and Petrarch, but both these poets cast their respective Muses into their roles prior to death. However, in several nineteenth century texts, the woman is not elevated to the position of Muse until after her death. Only then does she function as textual inspiration. Bronfen identifies this trope at work in the journals of Novalis, the poetry of Poe, and Henry James' short stories, "The Alter of the Dead" and "Maud-Evelyn." In his essay "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe elaborates, claiming that in order to inspire poetry, it is not enough that the Muse be desirable, she must also be dead. It is this conjunction of death and beauty that gives Poe's Muse her power. Thus he muses:

...I asked myself- "of all melancholy topics, what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the *most* melancholy?" Death- was the obvious reply. "And when," I said, is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?" From what I have already explained at some length, the answer, here also, is obvious- "When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*: the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world- and equally it is beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover." (Poe "The Philosophy of Composition" 18-19)

Poe's poetics will be specifically addressed in my reading of Carter's "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe", but the point needs to be made here that the trope of the Dead Beloved as Muse that he articulates so obsessively arose within a cultural context that eroticized the dead or dying female body. Nineteenth-century European art abounds in representations of dead and dying women. The literature of the period is saturated with narratives in which the young, beautiful heroine meets an untimely end- *La Dame aux camélias*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Madame Bovary* to name but a few. In opera, the favoured cause of death was tuberculosis: *La Traviata*, *La Bohème*, and *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* all stage the death of their tubercular heroines in spectacular fashion. In the visual arts the depiction of beautiful female corpses was such a staple that according to Bram Dijkstra:

...representations of beautiful women safely dead remained the late nineteenth century painter's favourite way of depicting the transcendent spiritual value of passive feminine sacrifice. Once a

woman was dead she became a figure of heroic proportions, and for such heroines the nameless bourgeois suffering of the consumptive housewife so characteristically depicted by Roll and Dicksee was no longer appropriate. Thus, paintings of dead women continued to be most usually associated with the portrayal of famous sacrificial heroines from literature and Classical mythology, even when it was clear that the principal object of the painter's fascination was the generalized subject of "the death of a beautiful woman." (Dijkstra 50)

From goddess to cadaver: such is the tragic trajectory of the Muse. Killed, not by feminism or psychoanalysis as Croce maintains, but by the very artists who feed off her corpse. The historical effacement of the Muse's power affirms the feminist objections to a trope that kills women into art. This murderous process is exemplified by Poe's story "The Oval Portrait," in which the artist commandeers his wife as Muse, only to find that the process of posing for her portrait kills her, and he is left with her corpse- and her portrait.

In the readings that follow, I examine how three of Carter's texts draw on the variants of the Muse trope that I have mapped in this brief synopsis. I begin with her explosive restaging of Proust's Modernist Muse in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972). This chapter argues that Carter's re-reading of the *Recherche* literalizes the death of Proust's Muse as the precondition for his narrative. In the next chapter, I read her short story "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" as a parody of the psychobiographic tradition that posits the feminine in Edgar Allan Poe's work as a manifestation of his unconscious, maternal Muse. I show how "The Cabinet" brings to light psychobiography's unstated analogy between the mother and the Classical Muse as the over-determinants of textual meaning. The section concludes with a reading of her strategic inversion of the Baudelairean dyad of *poète maudit/Muse fatale* in "Black Venus." Here I argue that Carter's "musing" of Baudelaire is crucial to an understanding of how her entire fictional oeuvre, with its encyclopaedic intertextuality, makes a Muse out of the male-authored literary canon.

Albertine/a the Ambiguous

The intertextual allusiveness of *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* is so wide-ranging that Susan Rubin Suleiman describes it as "a veritable collage of pre-existing genres" ("The Surrealist Imagination in Postmodernist Fiction: Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*" 533) and Kai Mikkonen argues for it to be considered "polygenetic", with "texts embedded within each other in a potentially endless and all-pervasive combination" (170). Whilst Mikkonen focuses on *Desire Machine's* allusions to the fairy tale genre and to the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann, other critics have identified a myriad of other significant intertexts. Colin Manlove lists Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Gothic fiction, de Sade, LaFontaine's *Maldoror*, E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Golden Pot*, surrealism, Freud, J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*, and finally Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (149-50). To this list Elaine Jordan adds pornography, horror films, boys' imperial adventure stories, anthropological idylls according to Rousseau or Levi-Strauss and the philosophical ideas of Sade and Nietzsche ("Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions" 34). Alison Lee adds the composers Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz, and Wagner, and the South American magic realist writer Jorge Luis Borges (Lee *Angela Carter* 61).

This welter of intertexts suggests a multiplicity of possible approaches to the text, but instead a dominant reading has emerged that privileges certain aspects of the text above others. In a letter to Lorna Sage, Carter described *Desire Machines* as a "dialectic between reason and passion, which it resolves in favour of reason" (Sage *Angela Carter* 34). And this, in the main, is how it has been read: as an allegory of the dialectic between desire and reason, reality and representation, the unconscious and the forces of repression. Thus Cornel Bonca makes the claim that the mythic conflict at the heart of the text "is as old as the hills- Dionysis vs. Apollo, Orc vs. Urizen, Eros vs. Civilization" (57) and Andrzej Gasiorek reads the novel as a sustained critique of Plato's *The Republic* (128-129). For Elaine Jordan, the novel's frame of reference is more recent. She describes the text as one in which

"Carter traces the history of reason and desire in literary and philosophic representation, from the Enlightenment through to psychoanalysis and its post-romantic consciousness of the unconscious-Enlightenment seen from its dark side, its blind spot" ("Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions" 34).

Other critics situate *Desire Machines* in terms of the philosophical and political debates that raged in the 1960s. Sarah Gamble reads it as a surreal metafictional elaboration on Carter's description of that era, in which "the pleasure principle met the reality principle like an irresistible force encountering an immovable object, and the reverberations of that collision are still about us"(A. Carter *Nothing Sacred* 84). David Punter and Ricarda Schmidt similarly consider *Desire Machines* in terms of the sixties political theories of desire and liberation, specifically those of Reich and Marcuse. Suleiman extends this line of argument with a consideration of how the text plays out the ideas the surrealists and of the situationist Guy Debord (Suleiman "The Surrealist Imagination in Postmodernist Fiction: Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*").

Most critics have considered the issue of gender as secondary or incidental to the debates about desire and reason played out in the text. Indeed, several critics have confidently asserted that this novel is not concerned with gender. Schmidt, for example, sees the text as a deconstruction of the essentialist humanist subject (56-57). Punter similarly asserts that the novel is not so much concerned with gender as with desire, the unconscious and an ungendered representation of sexuality (209-11). On the other hand Sage and Jordan both cite this text as marking Carter's burgeoning engagement with feminism, although neither elaborates on this claim (Sage *Angela Carter* 35; Jordan "Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions" 31).

Of the few critics who have attended in any detail to the gender politics of *Desire Machines*, several have viewed Carter's depiction of gender as yet another instance of her vaunted "male impersonation." Cornel Bonca, for example, regards the novel as exclusively concerned with masculine power, masculine Eros and masculine Civilization, and as one that "confirms the

despairing formula for survival codified in *Civilization and Its Discontents*." She argues that whilst *Desire Machines* demonstrates and indeed satirizes the imbrication of dominance and sexuality in patriarchal society, it is unable to provide an alternative vision: "There is only the dead end of sexual domination" (61). Paulina Palmer adopts a similarly critical view. She argues:

Here the point of view is chauvinistically male. The sexual atrocities represented in this novel (and some of them are very brutal indeed) are described by a male narrator. His response is not one of anger, but of detached curiosity. The fact that, in the final pages, the atrocities are revealed to be illusions, contrived by the evil Doctor Hoffman and illustrating (parodying perhaps?) misogynistic male fantasies, does not, in my opinion, justify their inclusion in the text. In 'Notes From the Front Line' Carter admits that in her youth she suffered from what she calls 'a degree of colonialisation of the mind', which caused her to possess 'an element of the male impersonator'. Certain episodes in the novel appear to illustrate, in an unpleasant and disturbing manner, this aspect of her cultural conditioning. (190)

Palmer's analysis is open to question on many grounds, not least that she reads the sexual atrocities in the text solely in terms of male violence enacted upon women, and hence she ignores the brutal rapes to which the masculine narrator is subject. Moreover, it is demonstrably untrue that Desiderio's only response to the acts of sexual violence that he witnesses is that of "detached curiosity". When Albertina is raped by the centaurs he tries, albeit ineffectually, to protect her: "I could do nothing but watch and suffer with her for I knew from my own experience the pain and indignity of a rape" (*IDM* 179).

However, the most highly elaborated critiques of *Desire Machines*'s gender politics, those of Sally Robinson and Elisabeth Bronfen, are more sympathetic to Carter's project. As my reading engages with their respective arguments, I outline them here. Robinson reads *Desire Machines* as an Oedipal narrative, and in this she draws extensively on Teresa De Lauretis' feminist re-reading of this myth as one of the structuring paradigms of western culture. De Lauretis claims that the Oedipal myth, as we know it today, is intrinsically gendered: its mythical female figures have no story of their own but function as "figures or markers of positions- places and topoi- through which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning" (Lauretis 109). The mechanics of the Oedipal narrative allow only two possible positions: woman or non-man as the passive ground of the

hero's trajectory, and man as the active, questing forger of his own destiny. According to De Lauretis, the Oedipal quest can never be ungendered, for sexual difference, the distinction between male and non-male, is its very essence (Lauretis 109). Like Barthes, who asks "Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus?" (Barthes 47), De Lauretis views the Oedipus story as paradigmatic of all narrative. But whereas Barthes is uncritical of the assumption that Oedipus is a universal subject, De Lauretis thinks otherwise. She sets out to show that, despite their avowed self-reflexivity and analysis of their own discursive practices, the discourses of structuralism and post-structuralism, of which Barthes is exemplary, have failed to deconstruct the Oedipal binarism of gender on which they are predicated. Thus Robinson argues: "One master narrative, however, remains intact in this world: an Oedipal narrative that places man in the position of questing, speaking subject, and woman in the non-position of object who is subject to male regulation, exploitation and violence" (Robinson 78).

De Lauretis' revisioning of Oedipus enables Robinson's radically different reading of *Desire Machines*, which claims that the text explores the narrative construction of gender and reveals "the dangerous economies of masculine desire lurking behind narrative and representation" (Robinson 103). She reads Desiderio as an Oedipal, hence masculine subject, the author of a narrative of sexual exploitation and violence (Robinson 102). She claims that Carter politicizes desire by using a masculine narrative voice to articulate male sexual fantasies of the domination and objectification of women. Her argument is that "Woman" is everywhere in *Desire Machines* but women as speaking, fully human subjects are absent; the textual foregrounding of these representations of "Woman" effects the reader's awareness that they are male fictions bearing little resemblance to women. In her view, Carter's text constructs subject positions for the female reader which enable her to adopt either a very uncomfortable identification with Desiderio, or an almost impossible identification with either the female "sexual appliances" of the text or its elusive phantom, Albertina (Robinson 104). The impossibility of the female reader identifying with "Woman" in Carter's text is analogous to the

position she finds herself in relation to the Oedipal narrative, for how can one establish a positive identification with matter or matrix, the passive ground of an other's quest?

Although Elisabeth Bronfen focuses on the trope of the Dead Beloved as Muse, her reading parallels Robinson's in regarding Carter's "Woman" as a highly self-conscious inscription of women as the paradigmatic non-agents in narrative. She argues that *Desire Machines* is a "feminist re-reading of the cultural cliché that Woman is man's symptom, the phantom of his desires. Her text performs the theme of the dead beloved as Muse, with the heroine functioning as a free floating signifier, absent in any actual sense from the text she inspires"(Bronfen *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* 420). However, Bronfen's claims about how *Desire Machines* positions the female reader are in some ways antithetical to those mapped out by Robinson. The corollary of Robinson's argument that the female reader cannot comfortably identify with Carter's "Woman" is surely a degree of readerly ambivalence toward the text; it is this very ambivalence, one might assume, that provokes reflection and questioning about the representation of gender in the text, and, perhaps, gender politics in a broader sense. But Bronfen takes the opposite tack in arguing that Carter's deconstruction of the Muse trope, "the cultural cliché that Woman is man's symptom, the phantom of his desires", disallows any interpretative ambivalence. Bronfen's argument is worth quoting at length here:

The narrative strategy Carter uses to exceed the conventional representation she rereads in her own novel is less the literalisation of a joke, the excessive turn of a trope, which makes a cliché serious and true. Rather, she discloses the convention by attaching an explicit commentary, imbued with the technical vocabulary of psychology, to the description of her character's behaviour. In a tale about a man who finds his desires made explicit at the body of a beautiful woman, she renders the cliché explicit, attaches univocal explanatory meanings to gestures otherwise read as ambivalent. This elimination of ambivalence by virtue of explanatory commentary not only assures that we interpret the event in the book as the critique she means her narrative to be. By stating as obvious what would otherwise require interpretation (the beloved is such as only memory and imagination could devise), her rhetoric imposes an impasse on the reader. The duplication of event with explicit commentary is, in fact, a reduction of sematic freedom and mirrors rhetorically the impasse which is the novel's theme: woman can only exist as and in the meaning her lover, as author of her, intends. A move on her part into articulating alterity, into signifying a meaning beyond the one he narcissistically constructs, is fatal. (Bronfen *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* 421)

There is an obvious rejoinder to Bronfen's claim. If Carter's narrative commentary eliminates all ambivalence and forces a univocal interpretation of her text, as she maintains, how can feminist objections to its gender politics such as those of Bonca and Palmer be explained? Furthermore, it is debatable whether any fictional text can eliminate interpretative ambivalence without becoming purely polemical.

Whilst my analysis of *Desire Machines* similarly privileges Carter's deployment of the Muse trope, in contra-distinction to Bronfen I argue that Carter does not eliminate interpretative ambivalence but rather strategically unleashes it in the service of a specific intertextual critique. I contend that the highly ambiguous representation of *Desire Machines*'s Muse, Albertina, can only be understood if *Desire Machines* is read as an ironic parody of that master text of sexual and gender ambiguity, Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927). In contradistinction to Bronfen, I argue that Carter's spectacular restaging of the ambiguity of Proust's Muse Albertine - she of the "famously floating gender" (Schmid 109n) - does not foreclose on interpretative ambivalence but rather produces it. I will demonstrate that Carter's strategy is to unsettle representations of gender through ironic parody of its high canonical intertext, and the tradition of representation inscribed therein. Several critics have noted the allusions to the *Recherche* in this novel, but none have as yet elaborated upon them.⁷ It is surprising that the intertextual relation of these texts has not been examined more thoroughly, given that an examination of sex, gender and desire is central to both. This is especially so since the *Recherche* is considered to be one of the foundational texts for gender and queer studies; because, as Sedgwich argues, it presents "the definitive performance of the presiding incoherences of modern gay (and hence nongay) sexual specification and gay (and hence nongay) gender" (213). In the discussion that follows I will show that, although Proust's monumental novel is but one of *Desire Machines*'s multitudinous intertexts, it is *the* most significant in respect to its

⁷ See Peach; Sage *Angela Carter*; Suleiman "The Fate of the Surrealist Imagination".

gender politics. Firstly, though, I will map the links between Carter's text and Proust's novel in a more general sense.

There are some minor resemblances of style between *Desire Machines* and the *Recherche*, such as the echo of Proust in some of Carter's long and heavily qualified sentences, and in her extravagant use of metaphor. But the most crucial resemblances are structural and thematic, for whilst the *Recherche* is not mentioned by name in *Desire Machines*, references to it are legion. Apart from the overt reference of the relation between the narrator and Albertina, there is the less obvious reference to the Count, whose representation contains echoes of Proust's monstrous Baron Charlus, particularly in the final revelation of his masochism. Other allusions are yet more understated, such as the hawthorns behind which Desiderio glimpses the face of the drowned Mary Anne; the hallucination of naked *fin de siècle* women parading "as if they had been in the Bois de Boulogne" (*IDM* 19); and the narrator's recurring vision of a young woman resembling Albertina being trampled by horses, which recalls the death of Albertine in a horse-riding accident in the *Recherche*. However, *Desire Machines*'s most obvious allusion to the *Recherche*, aside from that of the Albertina-Narrator dyad, lies in its thematization of time and memory, and its self-conscious assertion of its own status as a memorial.

These allusions are unambiguously signalled in Desiderio's Introduction. The theme of time, and of the ability of memory to recapture lost time, is of course the central structuring idea of Proust's text. But time must first be lost if it is to be found. Nothing could be more calculated to deflate the whole Proustian enterprise than Desiderio's opening line: "I remember everything. Yes. I remember everything perfectly" (*IDM* 11). The madeleine flies, figuratively at least, out of the window. But although at the outset Desiderio eschews the need for a trigger in order to conjure up the past, thus overturning the notion of involuntary memory that underpins Proust's narrative, this assurance is undercut on the first line of chapter one by the admission "I cannot remember how it began" (*IDM* 15). And later in the same chapter, which describes the beginning of Doctor Hoffman's assault on the notion of reality, Desiderio teasingly reiterates the Proustian motif of the capacity of

material objects to conjure the past: "the great majority of the things which appeared around us were by no means familiar, though they often teasingly recalled aspects of past experience, as if they were memories of forgotten memories" (*IDM* 19). Desiderio's oscillation between remembering and forgetting is a calculated echo of the endless "dialectic of remembering and forgetting" (Collier xxii) in Proust's text, as is his notion of memory as a means of constructing or resurrecting the past, rather than an unmediated record of the past:

So I must gather together all that confusion of experience and arrange it in order, just as it happened, beginning at the beginning. I must unravel my life as if it were so much knitting and pick out from that tangle the single, original thread of myself, the self who was a young man who happened to become a hero and then grew old. (*IDM* 11)

Desire Machines also mimics the *Recherche* in foregrounding its own narration. But whereas the *Recherche* takes several thousand pages to arrive at the moment of its own origin, Carter cuts to the chase on the first page. Not only is her narrator identified by name, as opposed to the equivocating Narrator of the *Recherche*, who may or may not be Marcel, but the motivation for his narrative is asserted unequivocally: "Because I am so old and famous, they have told me that I must write down all my memories of the Great War, since, after all, I remember everything" (*IDM* 11). But if the Proustian mystification of the writer's vocation and of the redemptive function of art is thus unceremoniously nipped in the bud, *Desire Machines* nevertheless advertises itself as a memorial of the narrator's past in a manner utterly consonant with that of Proust's Narrator. Antoine Compagnon's idea of the *Recherche* as a memorial is pertinent here:

For us the Recherche is a magical lieu de mémoire, not only because it can be seen as something like our literary guide, a compendium of our culture; not only because it is a book that contains its own world and ends with its own beginning, because it is circular, like a monad; but because ultimately the work itself is based on a richly suggestive elaboration of the notion of a lieu de mémoire... Proustian memory includes and presupposes forgetfulness. It comes after things have been forgotten, plucking them from oblivion. It does not preserve but resurrects. The entire novel is summed up in this image: "A book is a vast cemetery in which the names on most of the tombstones can no longer be read" (IV, 482) (Compagnon 242)

Desiderio's narrative is also a kind of cemetery, albeit one in which the names on the tombstones are still legible. He articulates a notion of autobiography as the fossilization of the self, and as a process in which private history is transformed into public monument:

...now I am an old man and no longer the "I" of my own story and my time is past, even if you can read about me in the history books- a strange thing to happen to a man in his own lifetime. It turns one into posterity's prostitute. And when I have completed my autobiography my whoredom will be complete. I will stand forever four square in yesterday's time, like a commemorative statue of myself in a public place, serene, equestrian, upon a pediment. (*IDM* 14)

Desiderio claims ambivalence as the source of his heroism:

But, when I was a young man, I did not want to be a hero. And, when I lived in that bewildering city, in the early days of the war, life had become nothing but a complex labyrinth and everything that could possibly exist, did so. And so much complexity- a complexity so rich it can hardly be expressed in language- all that complexity... it bored me.

In those tumultuous and kinetic times, the time of actualized desire, I myself had only the one desire. And that was, for everything to stop.

I became a hero only because I survived. I survived because I could not surrender to the flux of mirages. I could not merge and blend with them; I could not abnegate my reality and lose myself for ever as others did, blasted to non-being by the ferocious artillery of unreason. I was too sardonic. I was too disaffected. (*IDM* 11-12)

As Susan Rubin Suleiman argues, Desiderio is "ambivalence itself, a perfect emblem of the Romantic, but also no doubt the postmodern subject" ("The Fate of the Surrealist Imagination in the Society of the Spectacle" 534). Suleiman notes that his name means "desire" in Italian, and it is the peculiarly Proustian conjunction of desire and ambivalence that fuels his narrative. He is lured on by his desire for Albertina, yet his ambivalence renders him immune to the barrage of images unleashed by Doctor Hoffman, including, at the denouement, the image of Albertina herself.

This image of Albertina, which is an ironic and excessive refiguring of Proust's ambiguous Muse Albertine, is where *Desire Machines* draws most crucially on the *Recherche*. Carter uses the central heterosexual relation of Proust's text as the template for her investigation into how the cultural trope of the Muse as Beloved has been deployed in narrative. By definition, the Muse is the artist's other; however, Albertine's otherness is accentuated to the point that it becomes her defining attribute. Despite (or perhaps because of) the thousands of words Proust expends upon her, Albertine is rendered as an inscrutable mystery whose contradictory thoughts and desires are, in the end,

unreadable: a fragmented, constantly evolving being that the artist can never conclusively capture. Proust's rendition of his Muse as essentially unknowable reflects the Modernist drive to find new ways of depicting the unfathomability and complexity of character, which is exemplified by Virginia Woolf's call for modern writers to find new tools for presenting characters of "unlimited capacity and infinite variety" ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown" 128), and for the development of an art worthy of this task. Woolf asks: "Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration and complexity it may convey?" ("Modern Fiction" 108). Proust's singularly Modernist invocation of the unlimited, infinite character as Muse is essential to Carter's purpose because its ambiguity allows her to explore and explode the contradictions inherent in the trope. To this end, Carter's *Albertina* literalizes and foregrounds the critical controversies engendered by Proust's *Albertine*.

Albertina's status as Muse, and her relation to the Narrator, is signalled right from the outset. In the Introduction, which is dedicated to her memory; "I, Desiderio, dedicate all my memories to *Albertina Hoffman* with my insatiable tears" (*IDM* 14). Desiderio turns again and again to the memory of *Albertina*, "in spite of the almost insupportable pain I suffer when I think of her, the heroine of my story, the daughter of the magician, the inexpressible woman to whose memory I dedicate these pages...the miraculous *Albertina*" (*IDM* 13). That *Albertina* is the product of memory and desire, rather than an objective woman, is apparent from the first: "And if *Albertina* has become for me, now, such a woman as only memory and imagination could devise, well, such is always at least partially the case with the beloved. I see her as a series of marvellous shapes formed at random in the kaleidoscope of desire" (*IDM* 13). This conception of *Albertina* as fluid, multiple, and fantasmically generated by the narrator's desire literalizes the conception of *Albertine* in the *Recherche*. In order to trace how Carter refigures *Albertine* as *Albertina*, I will recapitulate her role in Proust's text, and also to give an outline of the critical tradition that has read the *Recherche* as a *roman à clef*, and has sought the model for *Albertine* in Proust's personal history. As I will show, Carter's parody

exploits both the *Recherche* and the psychobiographical tradition that effectively disambiguates Proust's Muse.

Albertine makes her first appearance in the *Recherche* on the beach at the seaside resort of Balbec where the narrator is holidaying with his grandmother. She belongs to the band of rowdy, athletic young girls- *les jeunes filles en fleur*- with whom the Narrator becomes fascinated, although he cannot at first differentiate between them. The burgeoning romance that eventually develops between Albertine and the Narrator is aborted when she refuses his kiss, and he departs abruptly for Paris. Several volumes, and an unspecified amount of time later, the relationship is re-established in Paris, and continues during a further visit to Balbec. The Narrator's feelings towards her are perpetually fluctuating, until he begins to suspect her of secret lesbianism. Such is the jealousy engendered by this suspicion that he convinces her to return with him to Paris immediately, where he keeps her in his house as a virtual prisoner. Here begins the economy of spying and lying that henceforth characterizes their relationship. The Narrator's obsessive surveillance of Albertine and his paranoid attempts to control her every movement are thwarted by what he interprets as her innate deceit. He makes ever more frenzied attempts to elucidate her sexual history and practices, and she appears to make ever more elaborate moves to avoid detection and classification. His feelings for Albertine now oscillate between boredom and the wish to be rid of her, and desire intensified by jealousy. Finally, after he has threatened to break with her several times, the Narrator is devastated when Albertine takes the initiative by fleeing his house. His attempts to induce her to return are cut short by the news that she has been killed in a horse-riding accident. But far from ending his torments, Albertine's death triggers a paroxysm of grief, guilt and unremitting self-analysis on the part of the Narrator, who continues unsuccessfully to seek conclusive knowledge about her sexual history. Finally, the passage of time enables him, if not to forget Albertine, then at least to remember her without anguish.

This bare plot summary does little to suggest what qualifies Albertine to be called Muse, nor does it convey how Proust uses the figure of Albertine to destabilize the realist conception of character and advance a thoroughly modernist notion of the other as plural, mutable and unknowable. As J.E. Rivers says:

...Proust uses Albertine to redefine conventional conceptions of literary character. Etymologically the word "character" denotes an impress, a distinctive mark, a well-defined outline. That is what it meant to Theophrastus in his *Characters*, and this is what it has traditionally meant in literature. Proust dismisses this concept and shows that except on the most superficial levels of understanding there is no well-defined outline for human identity. Proust depicts the unlimited, the limitless personality. (249)

Whilst Proustians concur with Rivers' view of Albertine as an exemplary Modernist character, she is not usually considered in terms of the Muse. Proust himself, towards the end of *Finding Time Again*, identifies time and involuntary memory as the two Muses of his work. However, as Jean-Yves Tadié points out, Albertine is, with the exception of the Narrator, the most important single character in the *Recherche*. She is, he argues: "The woman in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, since the name of Albertine is mentioned in it 2360 times.... No other heroine comes close to matching this figure, nor does any hero; only the Narrator intervenes more frequently"(606). The vicissitudes of her relationship with the Narrator permeate a far greater portion of the *Recherche* than the two volumes of the so-called *roman d'Albertine: La Prisonnière* and *Albertine disparue*.

Whilst the Narrator never calls Albertine "Muse", he nonetheless adumbrates her narrative function in the terms of this trope when he signals the crucial role she plays in the generation of his text:

... it was actually quite clear that the pages I would write were something that Albertine, especially the Albertine of those days, would not have understood. That is precisely why (and this is a recommendation not to live in too intellectual an atmosphere), because she was so different to me, that she had fertilized me through grief, and even at the beginning through the sheer effort of imagining something different from oneself. If she had been capable of understanding these pages then, for that very reason, she would not have inspired them. (Proust *Finding Time Again* 225)

As is always the case with the Muse, Albertine inspires the text, but she is not commensurate with it. It always exceeds her: she is the germ, the seed, the fructifying force that "fertilizes" the artist, in this

case, "through grief," by virtue of her sexual difference and the mystery of her desires. This narrative focus on the enigma of female desire has led critics such as Lisa Appignanesi to consider Albertine as a manifestation of the feminine archetype, the so-called "Eternal Feminine"(157-215). As always, however, the problem with the archetypal approach is that in its exclusive concern with the universal, it fails to attend to the particular, and so fails to explicate what is novel about Proust's invocation of the Muse.

This novelty resides in part in the deconstructive analysis to which the Muse-narrator relation is subjected. The narrator's self-consciousness about his invocation of the Beloved, and subsequent realization that the unhappiness she caused him has "fertilized" his book, is a kind of self-reflexive meta-commentary on the origin of the text, and an allegory of the narrative function served by the Muse in the masculine-authored literary canon. In the figure of Albertine, Proust simultaneously inscribes and deconstructs the trope of the Muse, and this simultaneous inscription/deconstruction is the key to Carter's parody. For instance, Proust bodies Albertine forth as a Muse-as-Beloved in the Petrarchan sense, then proceeds to lay bare the workings of this trope. Just as Petrarch never gives a coherent picture of Laura, but represents her synecdochally, the Narrator fixates on certain parts of Albertine's body to the exclusion of the rest: her cheeks, her hair, her mysteriously migratory beauty mark, the curve of her thigh, and her face. Her face is the hub of a series of associations- with the sea, with Balbec, with the band of young girls, with youth and with desire itself- that generate reverie and self-reflection within the artist, and is hence pivotal to the germination of his book.

Of course, it is with that face, as I had seen it for the first time by the sea, that I associated certain things which I should no doubt be writing about. In a sense, I was right to associate them with her, because if I had not walked along the sea-front that day, if I had not met her, all these ideas would not have been developed (unless they had been developed by another woman). (Proust *Finding Time Again* 225)

However, the synecdochal reinscription of the Muse-as-Beloved is immediately undercut by self-conscious narratorial commentary. Not only does the Narrator subvert the notion that the Muse

is a singular, incomparable being by hinting that the choice of the Beloved is arbitrary, but also more importantly, he claims her as an aspect his own consciousness: "I was also wrong, though, because this generative pleasure which we try retrospectively to situate in a beautiful feminine face comes from our own senses..."(Proust *Finding Time Again* 225). Proust destabilizes the idea that the face, or the fragmented female body, generates reflection with the repeated assertion that Albertine's face, and indeed Albertine *in toto*, is a projection. The Beloved, he claims, is "a product of our temperament, an inverted image or projection, a negative, of our sensitivity"(Proust *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower* 471-72). The artist or Narrator as desiring subject produces his ideal object, and this object functions as a mirror in which his desires are refracted. The individual woman is forced to simulate "Woman":

It is the wicked deception of love that it begins by making us dwell not upon a woman in the outside world but upon a doll inside our head, the only woman who is always available in fact, the only one we shall ever possess, whom the arbitrary nature of memory, almost as absolute as that of the imagination, may have made as different from the real woman as the real Balbec had been from the Balbec I imagined; a dummy creation which little by little, to our own detriment, we shall force the real woman to resemble. (Proust *The Guermantes Way* 368)

Here Proust inverts the traditional cliché that the Muse inspires the artist's reverie, which ultimately triggers the production of art, with the assertion that the artist's reverie produces the Muse. The Muse is a "dummy creation." The "generative pleasure" essential to both romantic love and the production of art is dependent upon the woman successfully mimicking the "doll" inside the artist's head.

The ontological status of the Muse is further destabilized by Proust's invocation of Albertine as both multiple and in flux. Even physically, she is always in process, never a finite product, as is evidenced by the Narrator's claim; "I was always surprised when I caught sight of her; she changed so much from day to day"(Proust *The Guermantes Way* 350). From her first appearance in the text, his image of a singular Albertine gives way to a vertiginous proliferation of Albertines:

It was almost certain that Albertine and the girl going to her friend's house were one and the same. And yet, although the innumerable images that the dark-haired golfing-girl showed me at later times, however dissimilar they are, can be superimposed on one another, because I know she was the model

for them all, and though, if I wind in the clew of my memories of her, I can follow the same identity from one to the other, find my way through the labyrinth and come back always to the same person, on the other hand if I try to find my way back to the girl I passed when I was with my grandmother, I lose my way. (Proust *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower* 425)

This protean being is a fugitive, an *être de fuite*, in the figurative sense in that in her flux and evolution she eludes the narrator's knowledge and definition. But she is also a literal fugitive, a being in constant motion, in flight, always associated with modes of transport: the bicycle, the automobile, the aeroplane, and finally, fatally, the horse. The association of Albertine with speed and motion suggests that she is not simply the ground or topoi of the Narrator's quest, but rather that she herself is a questing subject, albeit a subject whose quest remains obscure.

The enigma of Albertine's quest is, of course, bound up with the enigma of her desires. And her desires are enigmatic precisely because *she* does not articulate them: they are the products of the narrator's discourse, of *his* imagination, of *his* desire. He imagines her desires as sexually transgressive, for although Albertine is outwardly compliant with his normative project of heterosexual monogamy, he suspects that she harkens for more exotic pleasures. His obsessive suspicions about her sexuality run the gamut from lesbianism to sex in brothels, casual sex in public places, bisexual orgies and acts of voyeurism, and the idea that she acts as a procuress. However, these suspicions are never conclusively confirmed or denied, despite his exhaustive quest for verification. Proust uses the Biblical term "Gomorrah" to encompass the polymorphously perverse desires and pleasures that the Narrator believes Albertine and her female friends enjoy.⁸ The Narrator attributes his exclusion from Gomorrah, his inability to experience or know Albertine's pleasures, to sexual difference: "the rival was not of my own kind, their weapons were different, I could not give battle on the same terrain, or

⁸ Gomorrah is an economy of sameness, in contra-distinction to Sodom, which is an economy of difference. Sedgwick, Ladenson, Rivers and others have pointed out that the long critical tradition in Proust studies that reads Sodom and Gomorrah as parallel or symmetrical constructions is erroneous. Proust's idea of Sodom is premised on the nineteenth century theory of sexual inversion- *anima virilis in corpore muliebri inclusa*- homosexual men are women trapped in men's bodies. According to the theory of inversion, homosexual relations mimic heterosexual relations in that "masculine" men desire "feminine" men, and *vice versa*. Proust's notion of Gomorrah, however, is structured around the desires of women for their own kind, ie. of "feminine" women for other "feminine" women. See Sedgwick 213-251, Ladenson 30-57, and Rivers *passim*, on this point.

afford Albertine the same pleasures, or even conceive of them accurately"(Proust *Sodom and Gomorrah* 512).⁹ However, if we reframe Albertine's enigma within the terms of the Muse as Beloved trope, it is clear that her enigmatic quality is as much a structuring principle of the trope as a product of sexual difference *per se*. As Sedgwick points out:

The awful dilation of interpretative pressure on Albertine is overwhelmingly brought to bear on her, not under the category of the "invert," but under the category of the "beloved object" or, as if this was synonymous, simply of "woman." And, of course, while "the invert" is defined in Proust as that person over whom everyone else in the world has, potentially, an absolute epistemological privilege, "the beloved object" and "woman" are defined on the contrary by the complete eclipse of the power to know them of the one person, the lover, who most needs to do so. (232)

The "feminine enigma," which is simply code for the inability of the Poet to "know" the Beloved/Woman/Muse in any definitive sense, is built into the structure of the Poet-Muse dyad. Whereas the masculine narrating subject has direct access to discourse, the Muse occupies the silent position of the object. He enunciates; she is enunciated. She cannot articulate her desire; in effect, because "she" is merely the product of his discourse, "she" *has* no desire, other than that imagined and depicted by the masculine artist.

Albertine, then, is an oxymoronic Muse. Caught between the iteration and the deconstruction of the trope, she both exceeds, and is ultimately constrained by, its conventions. She is simultaneously desiring, questing subject and silent object: the topos of the Narrator's quest, in De Lauretis' terms. On the one hand, the overarching paradox of Proust's invocation of the Muse trope is that in the end it is Albertine's refusal to mirror the Narrator's desire, to mimic the 'doll' inside his head, and to act out the codes of the "dummy creation" of the Muse-as-Beloved, that instates her as the Muse of the *Recherche*. For the corollary of Albertine's purportedly myriad desires is that she is irreducible to "Woman", to the Narrator's ideal erotic object. The Narrator's realization that Albertine is not only an object but also a subject of desire generates, in part, his quest to know her

⁹ The fact that the bisexual male Morel is not excluded from Gomorrah, but rather is considered by Albertine's lesbian friend Andrée as "one of us," supports the contention that it is not sexual difference alone that precludes the Narrator from knowledge of Gomorrah.

desires and hence his narrative. On the other hand, despite the ironic turn Proust brings to bear on his Muse, she is ultimately subsumed to the all-consuming project of the narrating "I", which is to explore the experience of the narrating masculine self to its farthest reaches. The aberrant subjectivity of the Muse becomes, in the end, the instrument of the Narrator's self-knowledge and the vehicle for his meditation on the ultimate unknowability of the Beloved. There is more than a hint of ironic self-consciousness in the Narrator's claim that "one is forced to be thankful that famous authors have been kept at a distance and betrayed by women when their humiliations and sufferings have been, if not the actual goad to their genius, then at least the subject matter of their writings"(Proust *The Guermantes Way* 466). Seen in this light, Albertine's death is the fortuitous, indeed the essential, precondition for the Narrator's experience of grief, and his subsequent narrativization of that experience. It is the means whereby Albertine, the oxymoronic Muse-as-Beloved, is recuperated as a fully-fledged Muse-as-Dead-Beloved.

As we shall see, *Desire Machines* pushes this paradoxical embodiment of the Modernist Muse to the limits of its coherence, but in order to understand how this is achieved, it is necessary to first examine the critical reception given to Proust's Muse, for Carter's Albertina draws her signification not only from Albertine, the figure *in* the text, but also from how Albertine has been figured *extra-textually*. Carter's re-reading of Proust engages with the critical traditions surrounding his text as much as the text itself, in order to show how a particular strand of Proust criticism draws on biographical material to explain the singularity with which Proust bodies forth the figure of Woman. In this respect, *Desire Machines* functions as a kind of meta-commentary on both its hypotext and the critical traditions that have determined that hypotext's reception. A brief survey of the critical reception given to Proust's Albertine reveals that, in their recourse to the biographical, critics have disambiguated his Muse and fixed her as the Dead Beloved in his closet.

Garçon or Garçonne?

"Proust [has] made of an Albert an Albertine"(Crevel 65). The words of the surrealist René Crevel, written in 1925, foreshadow what was to become an enduring concern of Proustian scholarship: the enigmatic sex of Albertine. This long-standing fascination with Albertine's sex is inextricable from Proust's posthumous outing as a homosexual. As with Poe, assumptions about Proust's sexuality have frequently determined how his text is read. The rumour that Proust was a denizen of Sodom, which began to circulate after the publication of *Sodome et Gomorrhe I* in 1921, soon became public "knowledge."¹⁰ Despite Proust's repeated avowals that his novel was not a *roman à clef*, those determined to read it as such sought the model for Albertine in his personal history. Robert Vigneron was the first to publically assert that Albertine was modelled on Proust's great love, his chauffeur-secretary Alfred Agostinelli (Vigneron 67-115). Thereafter, Agostinelli's purported bisexuality, his flight from Proust's home and subsequent death in a flying accident were frequently cited as proof that he was the model for Albertine (Huas 233-76). Vigneron's claim became such a truism of Proust criticism that J.E.Rivers situates Proust and his putative model firmly within the Poet-Muse tradition: "Like Dante and Beatrice, Socrates and Alcibiades, Petrarch and Laura, Shakespeare and his "master-mistress," Proust and Alfred Agostinelli have generated a wide range of critical controversy"(Rivers 82). Later critics amended Vigneron's claim by proposing that Albertine is a composite of several of Proust's *petits amis*, namely Agostinelli, Albert Nahmias, and Henri Rochat (White 101).¹¹

This biographical reading of the *Recherche* underpins one of the most influential essays in Proust criticism, Justin O'Brien's "Albertine the Ambiguous: Notes on Proust's Transposition of

¹⁰ I use quotation marks here to signify that this "knowledge," is contested. Rivers, for example, produces evidence that Proust was never exclusively homosexual, and that he enjoyed several sexual relationships with women. See Rivers, Chapter Two "The Private Life of a Genius" 29-106, for an extended review of the biographical evidence pertaining to Proust's sexual history.

¹¹ White relates, "Albert Nahmias contributed his name to the character Albertine, though when someone asked him if he had been the model for that character, he responded modestly, 'There were several of us.'"

Sexes." O'Brien's so-called "transposition theory" also draws sustenance from the conversations with Proust recounted in Gide's *Journal*, in which Proust allegedly confessed to transposing some of the masculine objects of desire in his novel into the feminine sex (Gide 265-67). O'Brien asserts that Proust's narrator is literally Proust got up in heterosexual drag: "By creating a near-replica of himself as center and narrator of the action and endowing him with heterosexual characteristics, Proust had simply to transpose his own recollections *à l'ombre des jeunes filles*" (O'Brien 937). O'Brien claims that Proust transposed the sex, not just of Albertine, but of many of the other "ambiguous" female characters in the *Recherche*. According to the logic of his argument, *les jeunes filles en fleurs*, that barely differentiated band of young girls that become the objects of the Narrator's desires at Balbec, are, literally, a bunch of pansies.

Despite the paucity of textual evidence to support the transposition theory, it has nevertheless spawned two antithetical interpretations of the *Recherche*. The homophobic interpretation exemplified by O'Brien claims that the putative transposition of the sexes, along with the introduction of homosexuality as a major theme, undermines the *Recherche's* claim to universality. On the other hand, gay-affirmative critics regard what has come to be known as the "Albertine strategy" as the necessary disguise of a gay writer in a homophobic culture, and the canny circumvention of the interdiction of the expression of homosexual desire. Edmund White, for example, whilst cautioning that it is "a mistake to see all of Proust's women as disguised men", nevertheless reiterates the transposition theory:

Sometimes one of these boys-in-drag, such as Albertine, presented as the great love of the Narrator's life, has a 'lesbian' affair: the Narrator is depicted as insanely jealous, even to the point of retrospectively, after her death, trying to figure out the identities of Albertine's lesbian partners. Are we to imagine that since Albertine is based on a real-life man, Agostinelli, who was primarily heterosexual, then his/her affairs with women were actually his (Agostinelli's) heterosexual affairs with *women*? (White 22-23)

In typical Proustian metafictional fashion, the *Recherche* anticipates, and indeed, sanctions, this gay-positive reading: "The writer must not take offence when inverts give his heroines masculine faces.

This mildly deviant behaviour is the only means by which the invert can proceed to give full general significance to what he is reading" (Proust *Finding Time Again* 219-220).. But, as Elisabeth Ladenson points out, regardless of whether it is advocated by homophobes or homophiles, or even by Proust himself, the transposition theory effaces arguably the "queerest aspect" of the *Recherche*, "the narrator's preoccupation with lesbianism"(Ladenson 17). Furthermore, as Rivers argues, the transposition theory is predicated on a fundamental misrecognition, in that it fails to recognise that Albertine's resistance to the dominant gender codes of the period mark her, not as a "boy-in-drag" but as a representation of the New Woman, as a *garçonne* rather than a *garçon* (Rivers 244). Finally, as pointed out earlier, O'Brien's theory paradoxically confounds its own title of "Albertine the Ambiguous" by *disambiguating* Albertine.

Setting fire to the object: desire, death and the production of text

Carter's inferential walk through lost time flamboyantly re-ambiguates Proust's Muse. Not only does *Desire Machines* parody the critical tradition that persists in reading Albertine as Albert, but it also reveals the contradictions inherent in Proust's invocation of the oxymoronic Muse. Carter's strategy is one of excess, inversion and literalization, which works by making Albertina excessively mobile, dramatically enigmatic, and finally, explosively, dead. When read through the prism of the Muse trope, Carter's revisionary re-reading of the *Recherche*, and the transposition theory it has inspired, demonstrates that even when the sex of the Muse is arguably masculine, her gender is inherently feminine. Carter reminds us that the trope is a convention of representation, and that according to its grammar, the gender of the artist and the Muse is determined, not by the respective sex of each actant, but by how they are positioned by the sexual politics of enunciation. According to the patriarchal construction of gender, the Muse, as the silent product of another's discourse, occupies an inherently feminized position.

Desire Machines literalizes the critical tug-of-war over Albertine's sex by bodying Albertina forth as fantastically mutable: as variously inanimate, bestial, and human; and as serially androgynous,

masculine and feminine. She first appears as a persistent hallucination of a transparent woman with a heart of flames, then as the Black Swan in Desiderio's dreams, then as the androgynous Ambassador of her Father, Doctor Hoffman. Later, Desiderio catches a glimpse of her in the eyes of Mary Anne, the beautiful somnambulist; in the decapitated head in the set of samples hiked around by the travelling showman; and in the face of Nao-Kurai, the Amerindian river man who saves his life after his escape from the Determination police. Still later, Albertine appears in the guise of the masked Madam of the House of Anonymity and travels under the disguise of the Count's much-abused boy valet Lafleur before, finally, shedding her disguises. Even when she is not disguised, Albertina is not static but continues to evolve from the relatively helpless victim of the Centaurs to the authoritative and briskly efficient Generalissimo of her father's army.

This excessively mobile and protean re-figuring of Albertine as Albertina restores the erotics of ambiguity to the Muse, in direct retort to the transposition theorists. Nowhere is this more evident than in Albertina's manifestation as the Ambassador, whose indeterminate sex is extravagantly oversignified. Eyes painted with "thick bands of dark cosmetic," nails "enamelled dark crimson," to match those on his feet encased in gold thongs, and garbed in "flared trousers of purple suede" with several ropes of pearl for a belt around his waist, the Ambassador is not merely sexually ambiguous, no simple androgyne, but rather a hyper-ambiguous hybrid of human, phantom, and beast "who seems to "move in soft coils" and whose gestures are "instinct with a self-conscious but extraordinary reptilian liquidity" (*IDM 32*). In Desiderio's eyes, the Ambassador's desirability is inextricable from both his ontological indeterminacy and the sense of threat he exudes:

I think he was the most beautiful human being I have ever seen- considered, that is, solely as an object, a construction of flesh, skin bone and fabric, and yet, for all his ambiguous sophistication, indeed, perhaps in its very nature, he hinted at a savagery which had been cunningly tailored to suit the drawing room, though it had been in no way diminished. He was a manicured leopard patently in complicity with chaos. (*IDM 32*)

Certainly I had never seen a phantom who looked at that moment more shimmeringly unreal than the Ambassador, nor one who seemed to throb with more erotic promise (*IDM 36*).

The throbbing is amplified when Desiderio examines the exquisite handkerchief left behind by the Ambassador and finds the name "Albertina," previously seen only in his dreams, embroidered upon it. Henceforth the name "Albertina" functions as a fabulous signifier of desire which:

...seemed to shelter three magic entities, the glass woman, the black swan and the ambassador. The name was a clue which pointed to a living being beneath the conjuring tricks, for such tricks imply the presence of a conjurer. I was nourishing an ambition- to rip away that ruffled shirt and find out whether the breasts of an authentic woman swelled beneath it; and if around her neck was a gold collar with the name ALBERTINA engraved upon it. (*IDM* 40)

The metaphor of drag parodically inverts the critical tradition that seeks to rip open Albertine's bodice to reveal the flat chest of Proust's rent-boy. This inversion is reiterated when Albertina, disguised as the Count's valet Lafleur, is stripped by the soldiers of the Cannibal Chief, and reveals not the "lean torso of a boy but the gleaming curvilinear magnificence of a golden woman" (*IDM* 164). But whilst it highlights the reductive effect of the transposition theory, which disambiguates Proust's Muse by seeking the singular model for Albertine in Proust's sexual history, the substitution of a "girl-in-drag" for White's "boy-in-drag", is not in itself reductive because it is never definitive or final but is always undercut by Albertina's next manifestation.

When each disguise is stripped away, what is revealed is not the "authentic" being within but simply the next layer of an onion-like enigma. The impenetrability of the enigmatic Muse is foreshadowed in the hallucination of Albertine as the glass woman: despite her "quite transparent flesh" which reveals the "exquisite filigree of her skeleton" and the "knot of flames" that stands in place of her heart, Desiderio recognises that she is a manifestation of a "language of signs which utterly bemused me because I could not read them" (*IDM* 25). Although transparent, the Muse remains illegible, always eluding the narrator's knowledge. However, *Desire Machines's* parody is directed not only at Proust's critics but also at the *Recherche* itself. Clearly, Albertina's seemingly limitless disguises mimics Proust's vertiginously proliferating Muse that is not *one*. At the same time, the notion that there is an "authentic woman" lurking behind her various embodiments parodies the Narrator's fixed belief that there is an "authentic truth" to be uncovered about Albertine's sexuality.

This relentless parody of the desire to penetrate the enigma of the Muse is but one aspect of the novel's treatment of the theme of desire. Albertina's cry "Oh Desiderio! never underestimate the power of that desire for which you are named!" (*IDM* 167) gives voice to the notion of desire as an all-pervasive and overwhelming force which lies at the heart of this text. Desire is everywhere in the novel: from the title to the name Desiderio; the peep-show proprietor's exhortations to "objectify your desires" (*IDM* 110); to the Acrobats of Desire; the representation of the Count as a terrorist of desire; Doctor Hoffman's version of the Cogito- "I DESIRE THEREFORE I EXIST" (*IDM* 211), and so forth. Desire is the motor of Desiderio's quest, and the desire to liberate desire is the driving force behind the Doctor's project, although he seems to Desiderio to be, paradoxically, "a man without desires" (*IDM* 211).

The debt to Proust is evident not just in this thematization of desire, but also in the deployment of his narrative dynamics of desire to structure the novel. Carter foregrounds and hyperbolically literalizes the central conceit of the Proustian iteration of the Muse: the notion that she is the product of the subject's desire. Her whole text hinges on the "gnomic utterance" of the peep-show proprietor: "Objectify your desires." Both Desiderio's quest and Doctor Hoffman's project are structured by this injunction, as Desiderio proleptically informs us in his Introduction:

Rather, from beyond the grave, her father has gained a tactical victory over me and forced on me at least the apprehension of an alternate world in which all the objects are the emanations of a single desire. And my desire is, to see Albertina again before I die.

But, at the game of metaphysical chess we played, I took away her father's queen and mated us both for though I am utterly consumed with this desire, it is as impotent as it is desperate. My desire can never be objectified, and who should know better than I? (*IDM* 13-14)

Of course, his lament notwithstanding, prior to her murder at his hands and for the greater part of the narrative, Albertina *is* the objectification of Desiderio's desires. At the denouement she forestalls Desiderio's sexual advances with the revelation: "You have never yet made love to me because, all the time you have known me, I've been maintained in my various disguises only by the power of your desire" (*IDM* 204). Her revelation is all of a piece with her father's theory that, since the set of

samples had been lost or destroyed in the earthquake, "all the subjects and objects we had encountered in the loose grammar of Nebulous time were derived from a similar source- my desires; or hers; or the Count's, for he had lived on closer terms with his own unconscious than we"(IDM 186). Doctor Hoffman's theory that the desires of the subject can affect concrete changes on the body of the object is a fantastic, hyperbolic rendering of Proust's axiom that the lover sees only what he desires to see in the beloved, that his particular Muse is a projection of his particular temperament.

Proust's solipsistic notion of the subject-object relation is given more concrete expression in Exhibit Two in the peep-show proprietor's set of samples, "THE ETERNAL VISTAS OF LOVE," which reflects the viewers eyes back to himself in "a model of eternal regression"(IDM 45). This pictorial depiction of the self-regarding subject sets up a model of love, or rather desire, as *mise en abyme*-eternal, narcissistic regression in lieu of recipricocity. The "Eternal Vista of Love" is ironically titled; what the subject sees is not the other but a mirror, in which the subject and his desires are endlessly refracted. Love is imaged here as displaced narcissism.

This model of desire as eternal, narcissistic regression is played out in the text through the notion of the double. The ludicrously narcissistic Count and his nemesis the Black Pimp/Cannibal King represent this notion *in extremis*. The Sadeian Count enacts, in spectacular fashion, the aphorism of Hoffman's Ambassador: "For us, the world exists only as a medium in which we execute our desires"(IDM 35). His infernal appetites negate the other and transfigure her flesh into meat, thus he rhapsodizes the flagellated prostitute in the House of Anonymity, whose back Desiderio describes as "the most dramatic revelation of the nature of meat that I have ever seen": a "cannibal feast"(IDM 135). But the paradox of the Count's carnivorous desire is that it generates his nemesis, the Cannibal Chief, who in turn transforms him into meat. The Count's description of his demonic double extends the metaphoric of devourment: "He is my twin. He is my shadow. Such a terrible reversal; I, the hunter, have become my own prey"(IDM 139). The corollary of the Count's negation of the

other is of course his own negation: the annihilating self he projects on the world is mirrored back and affects his own annihilation.

But the notion of the double also underpins the antithesis of the Count and his Nemesis- the affirmative, romantic pairing of Desiderio and Albertina. The narrative repeatedly stresses their physical likeness: they have the same brown skin; they are "exactly the same height"(IDM 136); after dressing himself in Hoffman's castle Desiderio looks in the mirror and observes: "Now I was entirely Albertina in the male aspect. That is why I know I was beautiful when I was a young man. Because I know I looked like Albertina"(IDM 199). She is his perfect object, "my Platonic other, my necessary extinction, my dream made flesh"(IDM 215). Albertina expands on the idea of love as eternal regression spelt out in "The Eternal Vistas of Love", stating: "There is the mirror and the image but there is also the image of the image; two mirrors reflect each other and images may be multiplied without end." She concludes, "Ours is a supreme encounter, Desiderio. We are two such disseminating mirrors"(IDM 202).

However, Carter mimics Proust in sundering this narcissistic economy through the figure of the aberrant, desiring Muse. In the first five chapters Albertina is a discontinuous, mutating phantom, "a ghost born of nothing but my longing"(IDM 140) as Desiderio describes her, and as such she functions as the mirror of *his* desire. But after shedding her disguise at the end of Chapter Five, she assumes ontological solidity as Hoffman's daughter Albertina. Henceforth Desiderio, and, by implication the reader, is confronted with the problem of interpreting her desire. This problem emerges in the incident of Albertina's rape by the centaurs. Although Desiderio, under the influence of the peep-show proprietor's injunction "Objectify your desires!" is convinced that he is "somehow, all unknowing, the instigator of this horror"(IDM 180), Albertina attributes her torments to her own unconscious desire:

She had become engrossed in the problem of the reality status of the centaurs and the more she talked of it, the more I admired her ruthless empiricism for she was convinced that even though every male in the village had obtained carnal knowledge of her, the beasts were still only emanations of her

own desires, dredged up and objectively reified from the dark abysses of the unconscious. And she told me that, according to her father's theory, all the subjects and objects we had encountered in the loose grammar of Nebulous Time were derived from a similar source- my desires; or hers; or the Count's. At first, especially, the Count's, for he had lived on closer terms with his own unconscious than we. But now our desires, perhaps, had achieved their day of independence. (*IDM* 186)

Desiderio tries to refute Albertina's belief in the omnipotence of her desire, but he is silenced by the appearance of the rescuing helicopter at the very moment the pair are about to be tattooed by the centaurs, simultaneous with the seemingly spontaneous combustion of the centaurs' sacred-horse tree. The latter event seems to bear out the quote from de Sade written in Albertina's hand, which Desiderio had found earlier in his coat pocket: "My passions, concentrated on a single point, resemble the rays of a sun assembled by a magnifying glass; they immediately set fire to whatever object they find in their way"(*IDM* 97).

Whilst she does not refer to it specifically, the notion that Albertina's rape is the result of her own unconscious desires is clearly behind Palmer's objections to the "sexual atrocities" represented in the text which I noted earlier. Palmer argues that the final revelation that the sexual atrocities are illusions that illustrate or parody misogynist male fantasies does not exonerate Carter from the charge of male impersonation. However, Palmer's criticism does not take into account the highly ambiguous representation of desire and the unconscious throughout the text, of which Albertina's rape-fantasy is only one instance. The text figures the unconscious as the source of affirmative, ecstatic desire, such as that between Desiderio and Albertina, and also as the origin of destructive orgiastic desires, such as those of the Count, which are directed both sadistically outwards towards the other and also masochistically and self-destructively inwards. Also, of course, Albertina's pack-rape by the centaurs is mirrored by Desiderio's gang rape by the Acrobats of Desire. Both male and female aspects of this double suffer the corollary of the injunction "objectify your desires!" which is that the objectified has his or her autonomy and agency violated or even erased. The unshackling of desire, Carter is at pains to demonstrate, is no recipe for liberation. Her text supports Kristeva's

contention that women will have nothing to laugh about should the Symbolic order collapse.

Albertina's desire is ambiguous because *all* desire is ambiguous.

But Albertina's desire becomes problematic to Desiderio, not when it reveals its propensity for orgiastic masochism, but when it fails to mirror his own. After their escape from the centaurs, when Albertina puts "away all her romanticism" and assumes the role of her father's Generalissimo, Desiderio instantly recoils from her:

'You will go wherever I go,' she said with such conviction I was silent for I had just seen her passions set fire to a tree and now I was in the real world again I was not quite sure I wanted to burn with her, at least, not yet. I felt an inexplicable indifference to her. Perhaps because she was now yet another she and this she was the absolute antithesis of my black swan and my bouquet of burning bone; she was a crisp antiseptic soldier to whom other ranks deferred. I began to feel perfidious, for I had no respect for rank. (*IDM* 193)

Her primary desire, he now realizes, is to be her father's agent and accomplice. His endlessly deferred union with her is to be harnessed to her father's grand project of liberating desire; he discovers that the "grotesque dénouement" of their "great passion" (*IDM* 216) is not to be sexual liberation but sexual slavery in Doctor Hoffman's love pens. Her desire will indeed set fire to its object; it is to be the instrument, not only of her father's megalomaniacal project, but also of Desiderio's annihilation as an autonomous subject. This double-edged, instrumental desire is the crux of Albertina's ambiguity, for she represents both the promise of ecstasy and the threat of the annihilation of the narrating subject.

But even before he learns of his projected fate in the love pen, Desiderio has come to the realization that sex with Albertina will never fulfil his overblown expectations:

The white evening dress of a Victorian romantic heroine rustled about Albertina's feet and clung like frost to her amber breasts yet I wished she had worn the transvestite apparel of her father's ambassador or had come to the table naked, with poppies in her hair, in the style she had adopted for dinner in the land of the centaurs. My disillusionment was profound. I was not in the domain of the marvellous at all. I had gone far beyond that and at last I had reached the powerhouse of the marvellous, where all its clanking, dull, stage machinery was kept. Even if it is the dream made flesh, the real, once it becomes real, can be no more than real. While I did not know her, I thought she was sublime; when I knew her, I loved her. But, as I pared my dessert persimmon with the silver knife provided, I was already wondering whether the fleshly possession of Albertina would not be the greatest disillusionment of all. (*IDM* 201)

Had Desiderio consented to be shackled to Albertina in the love pen till he expires (surely an analogy for marriage, if ever there was one), he could not, of course, have penned the narrative. Desire might be the engine of narrative, as critics such as Peter Brooks claim, but consummated desire, Carter hints, is the death of it. Here Carter satirizes the thesis outlined by Robert Graves in *The White Goddess*. Graves writes: "A poet cannot continue to be a poet if he feels that he has made a permanent conquest of the Muse, that she is always his for the asking"(Graves 444). The poet stops being a poet, he argues, when he loses his sense of the Muse, the 'White Goddess':

... the woman whom he took to be a Muse, or who was a Muse, turns into a domestic woman and would have him turn similarly into a domesticated man. Loyalty prevents him parting company with her, especially if she is the mother of his children and is proud to be reckoned a good housewife; and as the Muse fades out, so does the poet. ...The White Goddess is anti-domestic, she is the perpetual 'other woman', and her part is difficult indeed for a woman of sensibility to play for more than a few years, because the temptation to commit suicide in simple domesticity lurks in every maenad's and Muse's heart. (Graves 449)

Desiderio's murder of his Muse not only forestalls on the inevitable disappointment of consummation, but also saves him from "domestic suicide" and enables his transformation into hero and narrator.

Albertina's murder literalizes, or in Rainer Warning's terms, "brings to realization," the fate of the Muse in Proust's *Recherche*. Whereas Albertine dies "offstage" by a narrative sleight-of-hand, so that the Narrator, although grief-stricken and remorseful, bears no direct responsibility for her death, Carter has her narrator literally stick the knife in. In Formalist terms, we might say that the life and death struggle of her Muse and narrator is a struggle for control over the *fabula*, which determines whether there will be *synuzhet*. *Desire Machines* thus parodically anatomizes the transformation of the Muse as Beloved into the Muse as *Dead* Beloved in Proust's text, a transformation that is the precondition both for his Narrator's career in melancholia, and for the realization of his vocation of writer. Killing off the Muse enables the narrative turn to elegy. *Desire Machines*'s introductory dedication: "I, Desiderio, dedicate all my memories to Albertina Hoffman with my insatiable tears"

(IDM 14) ironically foregrounds the elegiac subtext to the final volumes of Proust's novel.

Furthermore, Carter's move to make the narrator "own" his murder of the Muse demystifies the ostensible separation between the masculine Narrator and the masculine author of the *Recherche*. By fusing the author and the narrator in the figure of Desiderio, Carter shows that the death of the Muse is a plot device that serves as the precondition for narrative.

By ironizing the literary convention which legitimates disposing of the Muse when she has outlived her usefulness, and has become an obstacle *to* rather than an inspiration *for* narrative, *Desire Machines* foregrounds the inherent obsolescence of the Muse as Beloved trope. In this convention, the Muse as Beloved is frequently recuperated as a Muse-as-Dead Beloved, so that her memory- that is to say, her absence rather than her presence- serves as a new source of inspiration, and as further grist to the narrative mill. Contrary to what might be imagined, this particular inflection of the Muse trope did not expire with Proust. For instance, Philippe Djian's *37° 2 le matin*, a bestseller in France during the 1980s which appeared in English and was adapted for film under the title *Betty Blue*, traces the same narrative trajectory. After an '*amour fou*', Djian's narrator suffocates his increasingly unstable, unpredictable and, finally, blind Muse with a pillow, then elegizes her in his narrative. Djian's book renders the narrative imperative to kill the Muse explicit; her murder enables the writer to disengage from the female presence, which, although it at first inspired him, now threatens to impede his transformation into a writer, and hence the production of his text.

Carter's revisionary rereading of the *Recherche* makes obvious the analogous role played by the Muse's death in Proust's text. The death of Albertina in *Desire Machines* draws our attention to how the death of Albertine in the *Recherche* reinstates the Petrarchan dyad of male desiring subject and unattainable female object in which distance is the *sine qua non* of textual production. Killing the Muse simultaneously eradicates the threat of domesticity and creates the distance necessary for writing. Carter's text might well be said to parodically reprise Byron: "Think you, if Albertine had been "Marcel's" wife/ He would have written the *Recherche* all his life?"

Desire Machines, then, is a critical fiction that addresses itself not only to a specific intertext, but also more broadly to the dialectic of absence and presence that underpins the trope of the Muse as (Dead) Beloved as it has been deployed in the male-authored literary canon. Carter's text restages the singularly Modernist aspects of Proust's Muse- that is to say, her mutability and the notion that she is the product of the narrator's desire- and simultaneously, through its rendition of Albertina as hyperbolically ambiguous, literalizes the critical dispute over Albertine's sex advanced by transposition theorists. But this fantastical refiguring of Albertine's mutability and ambiguity is ironic and strategic, for, as Albertina's murder by the narrator illustrates, the politics of enunciation determine that she occupies a fixed and feminized position in relation to discourse, which transposition theory only serves to obfuscate. For all her ambiguity, the Modernist Muse is reined in at the end by what we might term her tropological grammar; she is first enunciated and then murdered by the narrator in the service of narrative. Because Carter's text offers no other point of identification for the reader other than with Desiderio, the reader is forced into an uncomfortable complicity with the murderous project that subsumes the Muse to the vocation of the writer and the production of the text. I contend that such a discomfiting reading position generates the reader's ambivalence towards the text, and it is this ambivalence, rather than Carter's explicit narrative commentary, as Bronfen suggests, which provokes the reader to examine its restaging of the gender politics of the Muse-Poet dyad. One of the singular achievements of Carter's masterful intertextual play here is her demonstration that it is not, after all, feminism that has killed the Muse, as Croce claims, but rather, those very writers who apostrophize her, eulogize her, and thrive on her death.

The "Poe-etics" of Decomposition: "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" and the Reading-Effect

Few authors are as undead as Edgar Allan Poe. Despite having been interred over one hundred and fifty years ago, Poe continues to generate effects. Like all the "lost ones" buried in his fictions, prematurely or otherwise, he perversely refuses to lie down. Of course, in "The Philosophy of Composition" he claimed to meticulously calculate his effects, to write, so to speak, from the effect backwards. If we take Poe at his word, his notorious statement that "the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe "The Philosophy of Composition" 18-19) was written with the desire to achieve a certain preconceived effect.¹² As we shall see, however, whether we take Poe at his word or not is itself an effect of our ideological approach to the literary text. For even as calculating a writer as Poe claims to have been could not have foreseen the discursive effects his work would generate. He remains one of the most controversial figures in American literature, a writer whose status is always in dispute. Poe is a special case not only in literature, but also in psychoanalysis, where, Shoshana Felman argues, he generates a "Poe-etic effect":

Because of the very nature of its strong "effects," of the reading-*acts* that it provokes, Poe's text (and not just Poe's biography or his personal neurosis) is clearly an analytical case in the history of literary criticism, a case that suggests something crucial to understand in psychoanalytic terms. It is therefore not surprising that Poe, more than any other poet, has been repeatedly singled out for psychoanalytic research, has persistently attracted the attention of psychoanalytic critics. (Felman 125)

Felman's thesis is that the earliest psychoanalytic readings of Poe, the so-called "psychobiographical" accounts, exemplified by Marie Bonaparte's 1929 *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: a Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, are reductive attempts to fix unitary meanings to Poe's texts: to definitively nail a

¹² Carter quipped that in the light of Poe's enthusiasm for dead and dying women his essay should "by rights, be retitled 'The Philosophy of Decomposition' ". Angela Carter, "Through a Text Backwards: the Resurrection of the House of Usher," *Shaking a Leg: Journalism and Writings*, Ed. Jenny Uglow (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997) 487.

meaning to his *signifieds*. On the other hand she reads Lacan's post-structuralist Seminar on "The Purloined Letter" as a groundbreaking analysis of Poe's *signifiers*, which simultaneously allegorizes the structure of both poetics and psychoanalysis.

It seems to me that Felman's argument is utterly persuasive; Bonaparte's work, for all its careful close reading strategies and compassion for its subject, *is* naïve, literal and reductive. Her reading ignores the conscious work involved in writing, and the material conditions in which writing is produced. For example, although Bonaparte acknowledges that Poe's dire poverty made urgent publication of his work imperative, she fails to make any connection between his texts and the demands of the literary market. The possibility that Poe might have written exactly what he thought would sell, or that the conventions of the Gothic genre in which he wrote might have influenced his obsessive thematics, never enters into her discussion. Equally, Bonaparte is oblivious to textuality: Poe's technical virtuosity, his manipulation of Gothic conventions, and his literary innovations count for nothing in her account.

And yet, there is another sense in which Bonaparte's work is *productive* rather than merely reductive. Elizabeth Wright points out that Bonaparte's attempt at uncovering the latent content of Poe's tales, at forging a unitary and unequivocal meaning for Poe's signifieds, is itself a sustained fiction. She argues that Bonaparte, like many others, "has herself succumbed to the 'Poe-etic effect' ... but the rigour of her approach, its very reductiveness, makes her analysis of the tales into a compelling fantasy, rather like a strange poem in its own right, as much her own as Edgar Allan Poe's" (Wright 44-45). Bonaparte's work is a reading-effect, an instance of the "Poe-etic" at work. Moreover, the "Poe-etic" is a domino effect, for Bonaparte's "compelling fantasy" generates effects of its own. Her "strange poem" about Poe, her claim that his psychopathology determines the latent content of his tales, itself gives rise to fiction. Angela Carter's short story "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" is a parody of Bonaparte's work which foregrounds the relationship at the heart of Bonaparte's analysis: Poe's relation with his dead mother. Carter's parody exposes the limitations of

the psychobiographical approach by situating Poe within an already extant tradition of representation of the feminine, specifically, the maternal body, in order to reinstate Poe as a subject of poetics. Reading Poe through this narrative proliferation, this "Poe-etic effect" could potentially open up a new understanding, not of Poe the pathologized individual, which is Bonaparte's focus, but of his poetics, and, more specifically, of his representation of Woman. I will demonstrate that Carter's parody of Bonaparte enables us to read Poe's "Woman" anew: as an allegory of the most ancient of literary tropes, that of the Muse.

Let us begin with Bonaparte's text. Her psychobiography is distinct from earlier attempts in that it enacts Kristeva's axiom that psychoanalysis is a form of love: her chronicle of Poe's woes fairly aches with compassion for its subject. Like all psychobiographies, it is grounded in the established facts of Poe's life. The son of touring actors, Poe was deserted by his alcoholic father whilst still an infant, then, not quite three, orphaned by the death of his young mother, Elizabeth Poe, nee Arnold. He was adopted by a wealthy businessman and his wife, John and Frances Allan, but following his stepmother's death he was effectively expelled from the Allan family. Poe's adult life was one of extreme poverty and frequent indigence, mental illness, alcoholism and opium addiction. After the early death of his wife Virginia Clemm, a cousin whom he had married when she was merely thirteen years of age, his mental state deteriorated and he died, presumably of *delirium tremens*, at the age of forty.

Yet although Bonaparte's account is grounded in biographical fact, it is also a highly emotive narrative that is quite unselfconscious of its own slippage into speculation. Her account of Virginia's first haemoptysis, for example, begins with a straight forward depiction of the Poes entertaining at home:

Virginia, in white, was asked to sing. Taking her place at the harp, she raised her eyes and her clear soprano soared into song. Everything she knew, her little music and her French, she had learnt from Poe. Whenever she sang, he would listen spellbound. But suddenly, this evening, her voice broke, her hands went to her throat and blood spurted over her white robe. (Bonaparte 101)

But Bonaparte immediately transposes this bare account into the register of the fantastic, in the process embellishing biographical fact with biographical speculation and a kind of textual interpretation reminiscent of the morbid nostalgia of Poe's fiction:

For not in vain had Elizabeth Arnold issued from the tomb that night to be reembodyed in Virginia, even to the blood which, to her son, brought back those haemoptyses of old; blood which, before it reddened Virginia's dress, had stained the shroud of Lady Madeline. (Bonaparte 101)

This fantastic biographical narrative is followed by an exhaustive textual analysis of his tales and poems, which draws extensively on Freud's theory of dream-work, particularly the mechanism of displacement and condensation, to explain their symbolism. Freud writes in his foreword that Bonaparte's study makes us "realise how many of the characteristics of Poe's works were conditioned by his personality, and [we] can see how that personality derived from intense emotional fixations and painful infantile experiences"(Bonaparte xi). Freud here elucidates Bonaparte's aim, which is to show that Poe's writing was almost entirely determined by his unconscious fixations and complexes; hence she reads his texts as if they were dreams in which his unconscious is made manifest. And in Bonaparte's analysis, this is the unconscious of a man so singularly riven with conflicted desires and complexes that he comes across as a walking compendium of psychopathology. Bonaparte diagnoses him variously as a manic-depressive, a hereditary dipsomaniac who experienced intermittent alcoholic fugues, a latent homosexual, and an opium addict. However, Poe's *Ur*-pathology, the one that gave rise to all the others, she argues, was his infantile erotic fixation on his dead mother. She suggests that the sight of his mother's corpse was for Poe the equivalent of the primal scene, burnt into his retina, yet inaccessible to his consciousness:

Doubtless, Edgar was taken for a last look at his "sleeping" mother, a picture which was never to fade from his memory. Not, possibly, from the memory of consciousness, but from that other deeper memory which, unknown to us in ourselves, survives to form our natures and our fates. Similarly ineradicable were to prove Edgar's unconscious memories of his loved mother's long illness and decline. Such unconscious memories, though later buried by the amnesia which whelms our infantile experiences, are the most determinant of our lives. (Bonaparte 7)

Although Bonaparte does not cite any biographical evidence to support her contention, she nevertheless contends that this last look is the genesis of Poe's terrible, "unpermissible" secret: the

incestuous necrophiliac desire for his mother that continually threatened to irrupt from his unconscious. She argues that the unconscious work of repression, although successful in that Poe probably never acted upon his desires, exacted an unsupportable toll on his psychic equilibrium. In her account Poe found his own sexuality so fearful that he remained chaste all his life. His latent necrophilia was inflamed by the deaths of other "dear ones": his friend Helen Stanard, his stepmother Frances Allan, and finally his young wife Virginia Clemm. Bonaparte asserts that his attraction to Virginia was not, as has been suggested, due to paedophilia, but rather due to the fact that she made no sexual demands upon him, thus allowing him to remain faithful to his idealised mama and to keep his repugnant sexuality dormant. However, when Virginia began to cough, to spit blood and to waste away, just as mama had done, his necrophiliac desires were reawakened. Bonaparte considers Poe's compulsive drinking as hereditary, but also as a defensive measure against the irruption of this unconscious necrophilia. However, neither Poe's perversions nor his alcoholism would be of interest to us had he not also been a writer. As Bonaparte says so eloquently:

Virginia, opium, the "fugues", drink, were thus so many weapons Poe used to combat the intolerable depressions to which his manic-depressive constitution, his crushing sense of bereavement and his constant struggle against his repressed and fearful sexuality, condemned him. Yet, had these been his only weapons, the darkness that shadowed the end of his life would doubtless have fallen sooner- and posterity would never had known his name.

For Poe had another "drug" at his call, to keep his strange, unstable, hag-ridden nature from ending in madness or crime- a drug out of reach of most men. This was the ink, with which he eternalized on paper, in his fine, careful hand, the fearsome but comforting "imagos" which at times gave him respite from grief. It is because he achieved, as none before or after, this feat of sublimating in artistic form our soul's darkest and most horrible aspects, its sado-necrophilist urges, that Poe's name, whether unjustly reviled or overpraised by his critics, in its way, remains immortal. (Bonaparte 89)

Through the act of writing, an image that is highly subjective- that of his mother's eroticized corpse- was launched into the cultural Imaginary as a trope. Bonaparte's analysis conflates all the female figures in Poe's life and in his fiction; she argues that every woman in Poe's life was a surrogate for his dead Mama, and every female figure in his writing was an attempt to revivify his unconscious memory of her. Leigia, Morella, Berenice, Annabel Lee, Ulalume, Madeleine Usher, and Lenore, amongst others, all conform to this latter pattern:

For the "lost one" of the poems and tales is no one woman but the synthesis of many; Elizabeth, Frances, Helen and Virginia, whose features, though superimposed, nevertheless remain those of his mother, Elizabeth Arnold, worn and etherealised by disease, but still beautiful and young as, when a

child, he saw her on her death-bed. That image was to live on unchanged in his unconscious and issue therefrom endlessly repeated... (Bonaparte 60)

According to Bonaparte, Poe's compulsive rewriting of the burial and exhumation of his mother was an unconsciously motivated attempt to master an intolerable childhood trauma. Here she draws upon Freud's theory of repetition-compulsion to explain the satisfaction this repetitive textual play afforded him. Burying mama and digging her up again was Poe's very own textual *fort-da* game.

Bonaparte does not utilize the word "Muse," yet the implication of her thesis is that the act of writing transfigures the dead Mama of Poe's unconscious fixation into his unconscious Muse. Poe's Muse is all the more powerful because he does not know that she compels him to write, but his tell-tale pen gives the secret away. Bonaparte looks for and finds Mama everywhere in Poe's work; she is not only the model for every female figure, but also the House of Usher itself, the sea, the sky, and so on. Indeed, Bonaparte accords Mama such a global and all pervasive presence, such totemic power, that she inadvertently inscribes her as a Muse in the Classical sense. To wit, Poe, out of his wits, is possessed by his Muse, and his literary production is entirely determined by the unconscious need to revivify her image.

Bonaparte's reading is obviously problematic if Poe's iconography of femininity is historicized. When Poe's obsessive thematization of the "death of a beautiful woman" is situated in the cultural context in which he wrote, it becomes clear that there is more than an individual pathology at work. Bonaparte's insistence that the text is the "royal road" to the author's unconscious blinds her to Poe's articulation of a specific configuration of femininity at a particular cultural moment. A more historically attentive reading reveals that in the nineteenth century the beautiful dead woman was part of the décor. But Bonaparte never addresses the historical specificity of the image in Poe's work, because she relies on a specific inflection of the surface/depth model of the literary text. Or to be more precise, she reads the text as a dream made manifest, which can be decoded by the application of Freud's theory of dream interpretation. As Elizabeth Wright observes,

Bonaparte "takes Poe's tales as the manifest part of the dream and believes that, by finding associations from persons and incidents in Poe's life, she is recovering the latent part"(Wright 41). Her model is predicated on the idea that the surface or manifest content of the dream/text encodes a secret that cannot be openly spoken, but must be decoded in order to reveal a depth or latent content that is both uniquely individual and inherently culturally transgressive.

The notion that Poe's work contains a secret that demands decoding is a notion set in train by Poe himself. In the opening paragraph of "The Man of the Crowd" Poe adumbrates the idea of the terrible, "unpermissible" secret:

It was well said of a certain German book that "*er lasst sich nicht lesen*"- it does not permit itself to be read. There are some secrets that do not permit themselves to be told. Men die nightly in their beds, wringing the hands of ghostly confessors, and looking them piteously in the eyes- die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat, on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not *suffer themselves* to be revealed. Now and then, alas, the conscience of man takes up a burden so heavy in horror that it can be thrown down only into the grave. (425)

In this confessional age it is not easy to imagine a mystery so "hideous," or a burden "so heavy in horror" that it does not permit itself to be told. Yet it is this very idea of the unspeakable secret that lends Poe's tales their power. As Julian Symons writes:

Poe always seems to be trying to express something that he does not dare to say, and this sense of something unstated in the stories, of a final curtain never pulled aside, adds to their effectiveness. His chief characters suffer, as it seems to us, from some sexual frustration, his bloodless women have the somnambulist air associated with vampire-victims, yet no word of sexuality or vampirism stains Poe's pages. (Symons xi)

In other words, the "unstated" in Poe's tales is the motor of a specific kind of reading-effect. That is, it is an embedded device calculated to invite and sustain reading and re-reading, simply because it resists resolution. Might not the idea of the secret be Poe's most calculated reading-effect? Might not the secret be an empty secret? This is a notion that the psychobiographical tradition cannot countenance, because it is predicated on the idea that the unsaid is the repressed, not of the text, but of the author's unconscious.

It is this model of reading Poe that Carter seeks to satirize. In her essay "Through a Text Backwards: The Resurrection of the House of Usher," Carter claims that Poe's stories "are overdetermined, so that it is very difficult to find out what is going on. That is, to find out what is *really* going on, what is going on under the surface. Because at first it looks as if *everything* is on the surface..." ("Through a Text Backwards" 482). She argues that his theatricality ensures that the reader is always aware that Poe is continually reworking the stock landscapes, characters and imagery of the horror genre. She inverts Bonaparte's surface/depth reading of Poe's texts, claiming, "the latent content of the tale greets us first" ("Through a Text Backwards" 482). Thus she asserts that far from being a terrible secret, as Bonaparte would have it, Poe's necrophilia proclaims itself unselfconsciously on every page: "Poe's compulsive sexual pathology is presented as straightforwardly as if everybody loved corpses best" ("Through a Text Backwards" 482). Carter satirizes the naïve Freudian reading of Poe:

...as in that extraordinary story, "Berenice" where the husband becomes obsessed with his wife's teeth and finally pulls them all out, each one. This strategy for defeating the *vagina endentata* is presented with such unselfconscious relish it is tempting to tease out a subconscious meaning, as those jokes about Freudian dream symbolism: a man dreams about his wilting penis, it means he has a great longing for a new necktie. ("Through a Text Backwards" 482)

If, as Carter implies, a wilted penis is sometimes just a wilted penis, then equally, an image may simply be a stock item lifted from the cultural repertoire, rather than from the deepest recesses of the author's unconscious. At the end of her reversed reading "The Fall of the House of Usher," Carter finds that, far from telling us about the writer's unconscious, as the psychobiographical approach would have it, the tale is an empty, self-reflexive device: "The sense of doom, the sense of impending psycho-sexual catastrophe that seems to permeate the tale is a device. We are left with the story as a self-defensive strategy, a mask; it tells us nothing about the writer, only about itself. The story is the story in a story" ("Through a Text Backwards" 490).

This essay marks a significant shift from Carter's previous position. Her early admiration for the tales of Poe and Hoffmann- "Gothic tales, cruel tales, tales of wonder, tales of

terror"("Afterword" *Fireworks* 121)- has already been noted in Section 1. In 1974 she described the tales as "fabulous narratives that deal directly with the imagery of the unconscious"("Afterword" *Fireworks* 121-22). The implication here is that the singular constellation of images associated with Poe- the inevitable decline and death of beautiful young women, the revenants, premature burials and exhumations, the incest, and the acts of unmotivated evil – reveals something about the individual unconscious of the author, and, by extension, about the unconscious in general. If we map the evolution of Carter's thought on Poe, it can be seen to mirror the evolution of psychoanalytic literary criticism from its earlier preoccupation with the text as a coded map of its author's unconscious, to the later Lacanian concern with the articulation of desire through language. The reading of Poe that Carter stakes out in her short story and her essay is closer to the latter, which, as Shoshana Felman argues, is distinct from the former in that it is "an analysis of the signifier as opposed to an analysis of the signified"(Felman 139-40).

"The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" takes Bonaparte's naïve Freudian reading as its springboard and critiques it through strategies of hyperbolic mimicry, parody and burlesque. Furthermore, "The Cabinet" turns the tables on Bonaparte to reveal the latent content of *her* tale, for beneath the surface of her "strange poem" lurks, not just a fetishized maternal corpse, but the buried poetic tradition of the Muse. Carter shows how Bonaparte's quest for that which is culturally taboo- the symptoms of Poe's maternally inspired necrophilia- causes her to overlook that which is culturally sanctioned: the image of the Muse. And whereas Bonaparte produces an exhaustive, totalising narrative of Poe's sexual and textual pathology, Carter's tale performs a kind of stylistic mimicry of Poe's poetics so as to reveal how his texts produce the feminine. Or to be more accurate, it works to reveal how the feminine in Poe's texts is always structured by a fetishistic oscillation between idealization and abjection, composition and decomposition. To this end, Carter gives us a burlesque of Poe: a tale of "tits'n'teeth."

How is this burlesque effected? It is pertinent to recall here that Carter took Leslie Fiedler's claim that "The Gothic mode is essentially a form of parody, a way of assailing clichés by exaggerating them to the limits of grotesqueness" as an epigraph to her novel *Heroes and Villains*. According to M.H. Abrams, parody is a variety of burlesque, which he defines as an amusing or satirical imitation of either the form, style or subject matter of a serious literary work or genre(26). In the light of Fiedler's claim about the essentially parodic nature of the Gothic, then, a burlesque of Poe is a sort of parody squared.

The parodic nature of the tale is apparent in its very title, for the term "cabinet" is doubly allusive of the notion of the "unpermissible" secret privileged by both Poe and Bonaparte. Firstly, it is an obvious allusion to the German expressionist film, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*. Like many of Poe's tales, *Dr Caligari* hinges on the revelation of a dark secret. The plot is ostensibly a detective story, but the entire narrative, including the frame story, is revealed at the denouement to be merely the product of the narrator's delusional system. In this it mirrors the psychobiographical premise that the text is invariably the product of the author's unconscious, that narrative is itself a form of delusion.

The term "cabinet" also has a more literary connotation that has an equal bearing on Carter's "Cabinet." Towards the end of the nineteenth century "cabinet fiction" designated a particular French literary "microgenre," to use Emily Apter's term. Apter glosses "cabinet fiction" as follows:

The quasi-literary medical cabinet, a mixture of doctor's memoir, nosological observation, and *roman à tiroir* (frame novel) devolved dramatically into the fetishistic conceit of showing and telling what was in principle kept professionally sealed behind closed doors. In this respect, it bore a striking affinity to bedroom dramas or alcove pornography...which titillated the audience by lifting the curtain on forbidden scenes of adultery and libertinage. A close relation, too, of the prostitution novel, which typically featured narrative snapshots of the client choosing among girls proffered like objects in a display case, this cabinet fiction also highlighted the theme of transgressive, erotic collecting both inside and outside the protected, bourgeois confines of "home." (Apter *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France* 41)

By invoking this sub-genre, Carter's tale parodies the implicit project of the psychobiographical account, which is to lift the curtain on Poe's secret, to "show and tell" that which Poe could not speak. The erotic or pornographic connotations of the term "cabinet" infer that his secret must be

sexual in nature, hence Carter's usage of the term parodies the notion that Poe's tortured and transgressive sexuality constitutes an "unpermissable" secret.

In its portrayal of the adult Poe, the author-as-character, "The Cabinet" produces a Poe that Poe himself might have produced; that is to say, a Poe who is non-mimetic, two-dimensional, excessive and unstable. Poe lives "by his disordered wits"; he is "a gentleman in reduced circumstances upon whom the four walls of paranoia are always about to converge" ("Cabinet" 269-70). However, the narrative focus oscillates between the point of view of the parodied adult poet Poe, and the perceptions of the impressionable infant Edgar. The notion of cause and effect is implicit to this oscillation, which tells us, to paraphrase the old adage, that the child is father to the poet. This oscillation also maps out the trajectory of the fetishist, as it slips from the perspective of the child who sees the mother *in toto* yet cannot make sense of what he sees, to that of the poet who synecdochalizes the object of memory.

But Carter also renders Poe as a subject of history, a move that counters the essential ahistoricism of the psychobiographical account. The opening passage of the tale repeatedly images him in terms of the North-South cultural divide. Poe is a "stranger" in the Republic who "possesses none of its virtues"; he is a "gentleman up from Virginia somewhat down on his luck"; he "staggers under the weight of the Declaration of Independence"; he is a "prince in exile" ("Cabinet" 262). His aesthetic is also historicized, and the Gothic situated as a symptom of social cataclysm:

So you say he overacts? Very well; he overacts. There is a past history of histrionics in his family. His mother was, as they say, born in a trunk, grease-paint in her bloodstream, and made her first appearance on any stage in her ninth summer in a hiss-the-villain melodrama entitled *Mysteries of the Castle*.

It was the evening of the eighteenth century.

At this hour, this very hour, far away in Paris, France in the appalling dungeons of the Bastille, old Sade is jerking off. Grunt, groan, grunt, on to the prison floor...aaaagh! He seeds dragon's teeth. Out of each ejaculation spring up a swam of fully-armed, mad-eyed humunculi. Everything is about to succumb to delirium. ("Cabinet" 262-63)

As this passage suggests, Carter posits the Gothic as part of Poe's maternal inheritance.

Whereas Bonaparte infers that all Mama left her little Edgar was the memory of her corpse, Carter

anatomizes her complex and ambivalent legacy. Carter's tale can be read as the return of all that is repressed in Bonaparte's "compelling fantasy." Thus she renders Elizabeth Poe in the active rather than the passive case: as a figure of power, not just a powerful absence. In place of the dead cipher of Bonaparte's narrative, Carter gives us a Muse who works. In Carter's version Elizabeth Poe is a poorly paid touring actress and the deserted mother of three young children. It is tempting to consider that these dual roles of actress and mother underpin the conflicted representation of femininity- as both idealized and abjected- in her son's poetics. According to this reading, the actress- young, beautiful and celebrated, in a minor way at least- generates Poe's ideal, whilst the maternal body, the emphatically *embodied body*, is a figure of abjection. However, as we shall see, Carter's narrative conflates these two roles into the inherently ambivalent figure of the Muse.

Exactly what is it that Elizabeth Poe leaves her son? The section of the tale entitled "The Testament of Mrs Elizabeth Poe" is introduced with the admonition: "Do not think his mother left Edgar empty handed, although the dead actress was able to leave him only what could not be taken away from him, to wit, a few tattered memories" ("Cabinet" 266). "The Cabinet" parodies the investment Bonaparte makes in her fictitious, scopically structured primal scene of the maternal corpse by substituting a proliferation, a parodic *excess*, of alternatives. Not only does Poe inherit his Gothic aesthetic from Mama, but the narrative also suggests that his early exposure to her world of the theatre, in which "nothing is what it seems" and "everything you see is false" underpins the blurring of illusion and reality in his work ("Cabinet" 267). Furthermore, Carter mockingly literalizes both Poe's most notorious axiom and the psychobiographical reading of his maternal fixation by having Mama, like the good Muse that she is, stage "the death of a beautiful woman" as poetic spectacle for her infant son:

Having, at an impressionable age, seen with his own eyes the nature of the mystery of the castle- that all its horrors are so much painted cardboard and yet they terrify you- he saw another mystery and made less sense of it. Now and then, as a great treat, if he kept quiet as a mouse, because he begged and pleaded so, he was allowed to stay in the wings and watch; the round eyed-baby saw that Ophelia could, if necessary, die twice nightly. All her burials were premature. ("Cabinet" 268)

Carter drives this theatrical parody to its logical conclusion in suggesting that Edgar's exposure to his mother's theatrical deaths underpins Poe's later literary fetishization of the female revenant:

How could he, then, truly believe she would not come again, although in the black suit that Mr Allan provided for him out of charity, he toddled behind her coffin to the cemetery? Surely, one fine day, the spectral coachman would return again, climb down from his box, throw open the carriage door and out she would step wearing the white nightdress in which he had last seen her, although he hoped this garment had been laundered in the interim since he last saw it all bloody from a haemorrhage. ("Cabinet" 268-69)

Carter satirizes the psychobiographical truism that Poe's work is entirely *determined* by his unconscious maternal fixation by exaggerating his mother's influence to the extent that her memory *overdetermines* his writing. In her essay on Poe, Carter inscribes the mother's body as a haunted signifier in a way that parodies both Poe and the psychoanalytic tradition that has produced the "Poe-etics" around him:

'I have been here before.' In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud says this feeling of familiarity means that we are remembering the bodies of our mother. If so, Poe's mother's body is a haunted house, one haunted by allusion. Allusions to the blasted heath in *King Lear* perhaps. To the castle where Macbeth killed the king, in the play from whence flapped that 'raven over the infected house', perhaps. And mightn't the body of an actress contain within it just such abandoned, weathered stage sets? ("Through a Text Backwards" 482)

The metaphorization of Poe's mother's body as a haunted house works to show that the maternal body is always culturally marked, always haunted by representations. This awareness is absent from Bonaparte's "Poe-etics," which, while privileging the corpse of Poe's mother as his Muse or primary signifier, fails to take into account how the maternal body is made to signify in other contemporaneous literary and cultural texts. But as Stephen Greenblatt says: "the work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society"(12). That is to say, Poe did not write in a cultural void; the peculiar inflection of the maternal body as Muse in his work stems from the imbrication of his individual psychopathology with an already extant tradition of representation of Woman.

As I have shown, Carter's "Cabinet" exhumes the Classical Muse buried in Bonaparte's account and parodically restages it. But whereas Bonaparte's Muse is essentially a disembodied, passive yet powerful absence, Carter restages the maternal Muse in the active case. Elizabeth Poe is bodied forth as a totemically powerful being, the source of Poe's inspiration, his aesthetic and his iconography. Mama is literalized as Poe's lodestar, but also imaged as his curse: "On his brow her rouged lips left the mark of Cain" ("Cabinet" 268). But interwoven with this parodic reading of Bonaparte's "Poe-etics" is an allegorical reading of Poe's very own poetics. Carter mimics Bonaparte in conflating all the female figures in Poe's life and work into a composite maternal figure upon which Poe wreaks his "Poe-etics of decomposition." Poe's dismemberment of this all-powerful embodied Muse allegorizes the history of the Muse trope, tracing it from its disembodied debut as a deity through embodiment, synecdochalization and death. The history of the Muse trope is one in which decomposition precedes death. "The Cabinet" mimics the decomposition of the Muse trope in Poe by fragmenting the maternal body into tits'n'teeth.

Elizabeth Poe's maternal body is emphatically inscribed in all its corporeality in Carter's narrative: it is a body that actively gestates, lactates and births. Carter paints a picture of an affectionate mother- "Loving mother that she was- for we have no reason to believe that she was not" ("Cabinet" 264)- but one whose performance of the maternal role is always compromised by material circumstances. Her breast is inscribed as a paradigmatic Kleinian object, a split signifier of plenitude and lack:

Item: nourishment. A tit sucked in a green room, the dug snatched away from the toothless lips as soon as her cue came, so that of nourishment, he would retain only the memory of hunger and thirst endlessly unsatisfied. ("Cabinet" 266)

The narrative sets in train a chain of metonymic displacements by which Mama's elusive and unsatisfying dug becomes the jug from which Poe will drink himself to death. Mother's milk, the source of all goodness in the Kleinian account, is transmuted into a poison that kills:

She ran back to the greenroom and undid the top buttons of her waistcoat to let out a sore, milky breast to pacify little Edgar...A mug of porter or a bottle of whisky stood on the dressing-table all the time. She dipped a plug of cotton in whisky and gave it to Edgar to suck when he would not stop crying. ("Cabinet" 263)

In turn, the alcoholic father substitutes gin for whisky:

The father of her children was a bad actor and only ever carried a spear in the many companies in which she worked. He often stayed behind in the greenroom to look after the little ones. David Poe tipped a tumbler of neat gin to Edgar's lips to keep him quiet. The red-eyed Angel of intemperance hopped out of the bottle of ardent spirits and snuggled down in little Edgar's longclothes. ("Cabinet" 264)

This conflation of mother's milk with alcohol constructs a fictitious aetiology for Poe's alcoholism. Poe's compulsive drinking is represented as a perpetual quest for mother's milk, in which Mama is transfigured into the "black star of melancholy". The narrative voice asks, "Where is the black star of melancholy?" only to answer, "Perhaps...perhaps the black star of melancholy was hiding in the dark at the bottom of the jug all the time...it might be the whole thing is a little secret between the jug and himself..." ("Cabinet" 262).

But it is the scene of birth itself, the penultimate Kristevan scene of abjection, which is figured as giving rise to Poe's most notoriously synecdochalised representation of femininity. Carter constructs a fictitious personal aetiology for the *vagina dentata* fantasy in Poe's tale "Berenice": a scene in which Edgar and his older brother Henry witness their mother giving birth:

However, born at last this last child was, one July afternoon in a cheap theatrical boarding house in New York City after many hours on a rented bed while flies buzzed at the windowpanes. Edgar and Henry, on a pallet on the floor, held hands. The midwife had to use a pair of blunt iron tongs to scoop out the reluctant wee thing; the sheet was tented up over Mrs Poe's lower half for modesty so the toddlers saw nothing except the midwife brandishing her dreadful instrument and then they heard the shrill cry of the new-born in the exhausted silence, like the sound of the blade of a skate on ice, and something bloody as a fresh-pulled tooth twitched between the midwife's pincers. ("Cabinet" 264)

Carter points up the abjection of the birth scene by her depiction of David Poe's response:

David Poe spent his wife's confinement in a nearby tavern, wetting the baby's head. When he came back and saw the mess he vomited. Then, before his son's bewildered eyes, their father began to grow insubstantial. He unbecame. All at once he lost his outlines and began to waver on the air. It was twilit evening. Mama slept on the bed with a fresh mauve bud of flesh in a basket on the chair beside her. The air shuddered with the beginning of absence.

He said not one word to his boys but went on evaporating until he melted clean away, leaving behind him in the room as proof he had been there only a puddle of puke on the splintered floorboards. ("Cabinet" 264)

Later, when Edgar becomes Poe "[h]e flinches from that part of women the sheet hid. He becomes a man" ("Cabinet" 269). Poe's aversion to female carnality, Carter mock-seriously suggests, originates not in his repressed necrophilia but in his induction into the ancient masculine fantasy of the *vagina dentata* inspired by witnessing birth. As Wolfgang Lederer has shown, this widespread myth about the presence of teeth (and other dangerous objects such as saws and serpents) in the vagina articulates a variety of masculine fears about female sexual insatiability and women's castrating power. Poe's imagery, the tale intimates, is drawn from the cultural repertoire rather than from his individual psychopathology, as Bonaparte contends.

Carter has Poe act out his *vagina dentata* fantasy on his ever-virginal bride, Virginia Clemm. In mimicry of Bonaparte, Carter simultaneously elides Virginia with Mama, and, with a misquote from the final stanza of Poe's poem, bodies her forth as the model for "Annabel Lee":

The dug was snatched away from the milky mouth and tucked away inside the bodice; the mirror no longer reflected Mama but, instead, a perfect stranger. He offered her his hand; smiling a tranced smile, she stepped out of the frame.

'My darling, my sister, my life and my bride!' ("Cabinet" 269)¹³

Carter makes great sport of rendering Virginia into an acceptable proxy for the fetishized maternal corpse, and representing Poe's desire for her as a form of anticipatory necrophilia. She is as "light on her feet as a revenant" ("Cabinet" 270), her forehead is "like a tombstone" at which Poe smiles "with

¹³ The final stanza of "Annabel Lee" reads as follows:

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE;
And so, all the night-tide I lie down by the side
Of my darling- my darling- my life and my bride,
In the sepulchre there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

"Annabel Lee" *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*.

as much posthumous tenderness as if he saw already: *Dearlly beloved wife of...* carved above her eyebrows" ("Cabinet" 269). "The Cabinet" parodies Bonaparte's explanation for Poe's marital celibacy:

Imagine the sinless children lying in bed together! The pity of it!
For did she not come to him stiffly armoured in taboos- taboos against the violation of children;
taboos against the violation of the dead- for, not to put too fine a point on it, didn't she always look
like a walking corpse?
But such a pretty, pretty corpse!
And besides, isn't an undemanding, economic, decorative corpse the perfect wife for a gentleman in
reduced circumstances, upon whom the four walls of paranoia are always about to converge?
("Cabinet" 270)

The parodic elision of Virginia with the maternal body culminates in the extraordinary scene in which Poe extracts the teeth from her vagina:

All sleep. Her eyes go out. She sleeps.
He rearranges the macabre candelabra so that the light from her glorious hand will fall between her
legs and then he busily turns back her petticoats; the mortal candles shine. Do not think it is not love
that moves him; only love moves him.
He feels no fear.
An expression of low cunning crosses his face. Taking from his back pocket a pair of enormous
pliers, he now, one by one, one by one by one, extracts the sharp teeth just as the midwife did.
All silent, all still.
Yet, even as he held aloft the last fierce canine in triumph above her prostrate and insensible form in
the conviction that he had at last exorcised the demons from desire; his face turned ashen and sear
and he was overcome with the most desolating anguish to hear the rumbling of the wheels outside.
Unbidden, the coachman came; the grisly emissary of her high-born kinsmen shouted imperiously:
'Overture and beginners, please!' She popped the plug of spiritous linen between his lips; she swept
off with a hiss of silk.
The sleepers woke and told him he was drunk; but his Virginia breathed no more! ("Cabinet" 271)

The narrator of "Berenice" awakens from a trance to find that his betrothed has been prematurely buried and he has mysteriously come into possession of her teeth, but Poe awakens to the knowledge that *his* fragmentation of the beloved is an act of murder. Here Carter reads "Berenice" as an allegory of the synecdochalism inherent in the history of the Muse trope. Just as Petrarch counters the overwhelming totality of Laura's presence by representing her in fragments, Poe responds to the overwhelming totality of his Muse, who is always Mama or her proxy, by a strategy of synecdochalization: he "decomposes" her into disparate body parts and thereby effectively neuters her. This synecdochalization is fatal to the Muse, who is killed into art.

But "The Cabinet" also inverts the central conceit of Poe's brief tale "The Oval Portrait," in which the painter kills his Muse by the very process of painting her portrait. Carter turns this conceit on its head by giving Poe a dose of his own poetics. In an attempt to throw off the ghosts who have haunted him since his Muse's death, Poe shaves off his moustache before the mirror. In the process, he is transformed into the image of his dead maternal Muse: "But, when he was clean-shaven, a black star rose in the mirror and he saw that his long hair and face folded in sorrow had taken on such a marked resemblance to that of his loved and lost one that he was struck like a stock or stone, with the cut throat-razor in his hand" ("Cabinet" 272). Like his father before him, Poe "unbecomes" when confronted with the maternal. He starts to dissolve in a "tremendous attack of the shakes"; the "black star" engulfs him: "His dust blows away in the wind" ("Cabinet" 272). But whereas his father left nothing behind but a "puddle of puke", Poe bequeaths us, not his unconscious, as psychobiography would have it, but his *writing*.

The reading-effect of Carter's burlesque of Poe is to take the reader on one of Linda Hutcheon's "inferential walks." Hutcheon's formulation is useful for understanding how "The Cabinet" achieves its own "reading-effect." Namely, its ability to spark revisionary readings, not only of Bonaparte's "Poe-etics," but also of a series of overlaid cultural and literary traditions that lead us directly back to the fetishization of the feminine that lies at the heart of Poe's texts. The "reading-effect" of Carter's tale is one that Poe, for all his calculations, could never have foreseen. "The Cabinet" exhumes the Muse buried by "Poe-etics" and in so doing, demonstrates that Poe's poetics of the feminine is a poetics of decomposition.

Musing on Baudelaire: "Black Venus" and the Poet as Dead Beloved

At the far right of Gustave Courbet's massive allegorical painting *L'Atelier du Peintre*, Charles Baudelaire sits assiduously reading a book. The figure of Baudelaire, who was a long-standing friend of the artist, is unmistakable, but the identity of several of the other figures in the painting is much disputed. Several interpretations of the painting have hinged upon the identity of the well-dressed couple immediately to Baudelaire's right, but more contentious still is a murky patch on the blank wall between this couple and the poet. Even in reproduction, the hazy outline of a rather distorted female figure next to Baudelaire's shoulder is discernible, but the figure is just that: an outline, without detail or colour. Is this figure, as some art historians have claimed, an image of Baudelaire's mistress, Jeanne Duval? In a letter to his friend Champfleury, Courbet merely identified the original image as that of "a Negress looking at herself coquettishly in a mirror"(Lindsay 128). Nevertheless, Anthea Callen adduces that "a portrait of Baudelaire's 'Black Venus', the mulatto Jeanne Duval, at the writer's side was painted over by Courbet at his special request but can now be dimly seen on the blank wall between Baudelaire and the bourgeois couple"(Callen 81). Callen does not cite the source of this information. Neither does Lindsay, who makes the identical claim that "the Negress (Baudelaire's mistress, Jeanne Duval) was painted out, no doubt at Baudelaire's request, though her phantom outlines can still be detected"(Lindsay 128-29). The mysterious outline on the wall has even inspired a novel, the Haitian novelist Fabienne Pasquet's *L'Ombre de Baudelaire*, which fictionalizes the erasure of Jeanne Duval from the painting.

We shall probably never know definitively whether the figure is indeed a representation of Duval, nor whether Baudelaire instigated its erasure, but nevertheless, Courbet's painting has served as a paradigm for several critical readings of Carter's short story "Black Venus." For Jill Matus and Rebecca Munford, Duval's status vis-à-vis Courbet's painting encapsulates the issue at the heart of Carter's tale: Duval's contingent relation to representation. Matus writes:

Artistic representations of Jeanne Duval by Manet and Courbet provide an interesting gloss on Carter's representation of Duval in the story. Courbet originally painted her next to Baudelaire himself in the "Atelier" but later removed her at Baudelaire's request. A close scrutiny of the painting reveals the ghostly traces of her effacement, which underscores Carter's suggestion in the story that Jeanne exists for Baudelaire as something on which he may feast his eyes, or that he may remove from sight, according to his whim. (166-67)

Known to posterity, not as a historical subject in her own right, but as the Muse of the Black Venus cycle of poems in *Les Fleurs du mal*, it is in her contingent role as Baudelaire's Muse-mistress that Duval was painted by both Courbet and Manet. Her only stake in representation has been that of an object in the representations of male artists, who can inscribe and erase her whenever they please. Furthermore, Munford notes that the "historical displacement of Duval," as exemplified by her erasure from Courbet's painting, "has been perpetuated by Baudelaire's biographers, whose lengthy accolades most often allude to Duval as an exotic but deceitful temptress whose superficial beauty and charm masked petulance and stupidity" (Munford 6).

Of course, as Carter herself points out, the lack of verifiable historical information about Duval contributes to her status as a *tabula rasa*:

Nobody seems to know in what year Jeanne Duval was born, although the year in which she met Charles Baudelaire is precisely logged and biographies of his other mistresses, Aglaé-Josephine Sabatier and Marie Debraun, are well documented. Besides Duval, she also used the names Prosper and Lemer, as if her name was of no consequence. Where she came from is a problem; books suggest Mauritius, in the Indian ocean, or Santo Domingo, in the Caribbean, take your pick of two different sides of the world. (Her *pays d'origine* of less importance than it would have been had she been a wine.) ("B. Venus" 237)

This paucity of information has led to much speculation on the part of Baudelaire's biographers, most of which, as Munford states, has not been to Duval's advantage. Indeed, perhaps no Muse in literary history is as maligned as Jeanne Duval. Baudelaire's biographers almost uniformly portray her in a negative light. For instance, whilst A.E. Carter concedes Jeanne's beauty, he derides her as "a common slut, totally uncultivated and extremely stupid," and claims, "like most whores she lied with a deliberate, compulsive mendacity which is close to paranoia" (A. E. Carter *Charles Baudelaire* 37). As recently as 1994, Joanna Richardson confidently remarked upon Duval's "greed and stupidity, and the degradation of her nature" (73). Richardson dismisses the first-hand accounts of Baudelaire's friends Nadar and Banville, both of whom acknowledged Jeanne's

beauty. Instead she gives credence to the most pejorative reports available: "The picture of Jeanne which is given by others is- as Félix Gautier was to write- that of a prostitute: 'Pavement prostitute, extra as a *café-chantant*, exotic menial: it is impossible to be quite sure'" (Richardson 75). Amongst Baudelaire's biographers, Alex de Jonge is almost alone in remarking: "The view we have of Jeanne is prejudiced in that it is the view of Baudelaire and of friends of his who disapproved of her. History has denied her a voice of her own" (Jonge 57).

Critics of "Black Venus" have unanimously read it as an attempt to give Duval both the voice denied her by history, and the history denied her by the voices that have sought to represent her. However, Carter's attempt at re-voicing and re-historicizing Duval has met with a variety of critical responses. Most critics agree that the tale interrogates the mid-nineteenth-century discourses of female sexuality, race and colonialism that underpin Baudelaire's poetics of the feminine, but they are divided as to how far it succeeds in this endeavour. Tillotson, for example, whilst sympathetic to Carter's aims, questions the ethics of voice underpinning the tale:

Carter's narrative itself must be critiqued for its role in perpetuating the circumscription of Baudelaire's relationship with Duval within a colonial or exoticist fantasy. Carter lays a claim to represent the "authentic" voice of Duval. This plea for authenticity is problematic on a number of levels, and the question must be raised about what historical circumstances have occurred in the last hundred years to account for the possibility of Carter's "authentic" rewriting of Duval's history. On an axiomatic level this can be articulated by the following question: What claims can a white, middle-class British author writing in the heyday of Thatcherism have on the life of a culturally and economically dispossessed woman of colour? (Tillotson 299)

This accusation is generically spurious, in that it confuses what is patently a fiction with biography or historical recuperation, but it is symptomatic of Tillotson's wider misreading of Carter's project. For instance, she argues that Carter constructs a "fantasy, in which Duval figures as the exoticized 'native' intellectual with a clear understanding of what it means to be exploited" (Tillotson 299). A close reading of the text belies this claim. Carter's Duval sighs, yet she "does not know the meaning of the word 'regret' " ("B. Venus" 231). Not only is Duval lexically impoverished, Carter suggests, but she is also alienated from her own alienation:

The custard-apple of her stinking Eden she, this forlorn Eve, bit- and was all at once transported here, as in a dream; and yet she is a *tabula rasa*, still. She never experienced her experience *as*

experience, life never added to the sum of her knowledge; rather, subtracted from it. If you start out with nothing, they'll take even that away from you, the Good Book says so. Indeed, I think she never bothered to bite any apple at all. She wouldn't have known what knowledge was *for*, would she? She was in neither a state of innocence nor a state of grace. I will tell you what Jeanne was like. She was like a piano in a country where everybody has had their hands cut off. ("B. Venus" 231)

Far from being a "native" intellectual, Duval is portrayed as deracinated and culturally dispossessed, not only of the 'real' Africa from which she may or may not have originated, but even from the exoticist fantasy of Africa then circulating in the Parisian milieu in which she lived:

Robbed of the bronze gateway of Benin; of the iron beasts of the Amazons of the court of the King of Dahomey; of the esoteric wisdom of the great university at Timbuktu; of the urbanity of glamorous desert cities before whose walls the horsemen wheel, welcoming the night on trumpets twice the length of their own bodies. The Abyssinia of black saints and holy lions was not so much as even a legend to her. Of those savannahs where men wrestle with leopards she knew not one jot. The splendid continent to which her skin allied her had been excised from her memory. She had been deprived of history, she was the pure child of the colony. The colony- white, imperious- had fathered her. ("B. Venus" 238)

Tillotson's reading is exemplary of that strand of criticism, outlined in my introduction and challenged throughout this thesis, which disregards Carter's irony and reads her texts literally as if they are mirrors of actual social relations. For such critics, who read literature as sociology, Carter's representations of oppressive social relations, such as that between Baudelaire and Duval, are implicated in the very injustices they represent. Tillotson et al fail to see that Carter's representations are in fact *re-presentations*, parodic re-stagings that ironize past representations via inversion, hyperbole, and other rhetorical tropes.

However, Tillotson's accusation that Carter reinscribes Baudelaire's relationship with Duval within an exoticist or colonialist fantasy is not endorsed by other critics, most of whom have argued that "Black Venus" constantly works the exoticizing impulse of Baudelaire's discourse about Duval against an imagined account of Duval's largely unspoken resistance to it. According to Aleid Fokkema, through the clash of discourses of Baudelaire and Duval, the tale effects a larger critique of colonialism: "The Foucauldian paradigm of the interdependence of power and language is reinforced by the colonial subtext: this is not merely about woman being muted by man but a colony kept dumb by the colonizer" ("The Author: Postmodernism's Stock

Character" 48). Baudelaire's exoticizing discourse is parodied by narrative commentary, such as when the narrative voice comments "neither has a native land, although he likes to pretend she has a fabulous home in the bosom of the blue ocean, he will force a home on her whether she's got one or not, he cannot believe she is as dispossessed as he..." ("B. Venus" 233). Baudelaire's exoticizing of Jeanne has been the subject of extensive commentary, as has the highly sexualised nineteenth-century discourse of race on which he draws.¹⁴

Other critics have focused on how the tale works Baudelaire's own poetic voice against him. In a lovely phrase, Britzolakis speaks of the stylistic mimicry by which "Carter's language turns Baudelaire into décor", stating that "Carter borrows metaphors and phrases from the poems to summon up in loving detail the vaporous, nostalgic and melancholy atmospherics of the *Fleurs du mal*" (Britzolakis 182-83). Bray elaborates on this notion through a sustained examination of what she terms Carter's "para-citational gestures," in which she juxtaposes passages from "Black Venus" with excerpts from the Black Venus cycle of poems. She shows how Carter paraphrases, quotes and misquotes the poems in order to "weave a composite narrative about the relationship of the poet to his muse" (Bray 195). Matus makes a related point about Carter's use of language to contest traditional representations of Duval. In her view, Carter's "language cannot speak for Jeanne, but it can compete with and challenge the languages that have sought to possess and exploit her" (Matus 168).

In a similar vein, Linda Hutcheon contends that the story is characterised by a clash of two discourses: "the poetic language of male sublimated desire for woman (as both muse and object of erotic fantasy) and the language of the political and contextualizing discourses of female experience" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 141). Hutcheon goes on to argue that the tale's staging of the conflict between these two discourses enables it to be read as the site for the discursive

¹⁴ See Sharpley-Whiting for an overview of the complex interrelation between discourses of sex, race and colonialism in nineteenth-century French literature. Whilst Sharpley-Whiting does not address Baudelaire's poetic representation of Duval, she cites his prose poem, "*La Belle Dorothée*", as exemplary of this entangled discourse.

construction of gender. This discursive conflict is effected through fictitious verbal exchanges, such as when the poet rambles: "Baby, baby, let me take you back where you belong, back to your lovely, lazy island where the jewelled parrot rocks on the enamel tree and you can crunch sugar-cane between your strong, white teeth"; to which Duval retorts: "'No!'... 'Not the bloody parrot forest! Don't take me on the slaver's route back to the West Indies, for godsake!'" ("B. Venus" 231-33). And finally, Munford argues that "Black Venus" contests the dominant representational frameworks, exemplified by Baudelaire's poetry, which figure "woman" as a "inspiring void." Carter, she argues, "demystifies and humanizes Duval not only by *re-presenting* her as a historical subject but by *re-presencing* her as an agent in history" (Munford 6).

It seems to me incontestable that "Black Venus" re-presences, re-historicizes and re-voices Duval, as Matus, Bray, Munford and Hutcheon argue, and in so doing foregrounds the discursive frameworks that underpin the exoticized, colonialist and frequently misogynistic representations of her by Baudelaire and others. But in this section of the thesis I want to focus, not so much on the representation of the female Muse, but on that of the male Poet. This is not entirely unexplored territory: most of the aforementioned critics have made minor inroads therein. This section of the thesis examines and builds on what they have had to say about Carter's representation of Baudelaire, but it also addresses itself to what is at stake in Carter's recasting of Baudelaire as a character. I am interested here in what happens to the poet when he is no longer the *enunciator*, but is recast as the *enunciated*. Might this not place him in a position analogous to that of Muse? To this end, I examine the effects of Carter's recasting of a high canonical author as a character, not only in "Black Venus" itself, but also in relation to the inclusion of "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" in the same volume. What possible relation might these stories have to each other? Is it mere happenstance that Carter placed them within the same volume? I seek to uncover what is encoded in Carter's choice of two historical authors as the subjects of and characters in her short stories. If, as Barthes suggests, the author is dead, why flog

his corpse? What can be achieved by exhuming the deceased if he is no longer considered the originator or arbiter of textual meaning?

Of course, Carter is not alone in appropriating an historical author as a character in her fiction. Indeed, Aleid Fokkema notes that since the author "died" he is resurrected as a character so frequently that he has become "postmodernism's stock character" ("The Author: Postmodernism's Stock Character" 41). Barthes' polemic in "The Death of the Author" notwithstanding, the author has never been more present, as the contemporary proliferation of literary biographies, literary prizes, writers' festivals, and author-based Internet sites attest. Hutcheon argues that, whilst the idea of the author as sole determiner of textual meaning may have died, the "position of discursive authority lives on, because it is encoded in the enunciative act itself" (*The Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* 77). Fokkema concurs, and points out that postmodernism has moved away from its earlier repudiation of the author towards a resurrected theory of authorship concerned with a reconsideration of the author's function in relation to contemporary notions of representation, power, language and knowledge ("The Author: Postmodernism's Stock Character" 39-49).¹⁵ Fokkema also claims that, despite the hysteria about the death of the author and of the character in postmodernism, postmodernism instates a new literary paradigm: "postmodernism is not about the end of the story but, rather, the story of story." Authors turn up as characters so frequently in postmodern fiction because they embody its major themes: "concern with writing, origin and loss, the question of representation" ("The Author: Postmodernism's Stock Character" 41).

The casting of the author as a character may well be part of the postmodern turn in Carter's work, but the question remains, why Baudelaire? Carter's fascination with Baudelaire is well charted, and goes back to her school days. In an interview with John Mortimer she recalled that, under the tutelage of a "wonderful French teacher," she found *Les Fleurs du Mal* "so exciting

¹⁵ Fokkema draws heavily here on Foucault's notion of the "author-function" developed in his essay "What is an Author?"

that I really got the feeling of being scalped"(Mortimer 45). She told Mortimer that as an anorexic young reporter on the *Croydon Advertiser*, she used to sing along to a record of Baudelaire's poems, "as other girls of her age might have done with Buddy Holly or the Everly Brothers"(Mortimer 46). But her adolescent enthusiasm was to wane later, with the advent of a consciously feminist stance towards many of her erstwhile literary heroes. In an interview with Anne Smith, published in the inaugural edition of *Women's Review*, she said: "The Black Venus poems are incredibly beautiful and also terribly offensive...I do like to think of her [Jeanne Duval] sitting there thinking... I mean, she could have had limited revenges. But also, why should she have shored him up? He fucked her over!"(Smith 29).

According to Britzolakis, Baudelaire is one of Carter's most significant literary antecedents (51-52). And according to Munford, her engagement with Baudelaire's fetishistic representation of femininity is not limited to "Black Venus", but permeates her entire body of writing:

...a commingling of emulation and subversion of Charles Baudelaire as a precursor of late-nineteenth-century French decadence is figured throughout her work- from her early characterisations of the dandified Honeybuzzard in *Shadow dance* (1966) and Joseph in *Several Perceptions* (1968) to the female prostitutes and performers in her later works, particularly Lilith in *The Passion of New Eve*, Fevers in *Nights at the Circus*, the Chance sisters in *Wise Children* (1991) and, of course, Duval in "Black Venus". (Munford 1-2)

Thus we see that in *Nights at the Circus*, Fevvers blames the poet for the decline in trade at Ma Nelson's brothel:

'I put it down to the influence of *Baudelaire*, sir'
'What's this?' cried Walser, amazed enough to drop his professional imperturbability.
'The French poet, sir; a poor fellow who loved whores not for the pleasure of it but, as he perceived it, the *horror* of it, as if we was, not working women doing it for money but *damméd souls* who did it solely to lure men to their dooms, as if we'd got nothing better to do...'
(*Nights at the Circus* 38)

The omnipresence of Baudelaire in Carter's work is born of more than adolescent infatuation and disillusionment; it is the product of an appreciation of the special place he occupies in literary history and of his pervasive influence on the representation of "Woman." Baudelaire is regarded as the supreme hinge figure in French literature, the figure that marks the divide between

Romanticism and Modernity, and the single most important progenitor of the Decadent aesthetic, but his influence extends far beyond the boundaries of Decadent or specifically French literature. According to T.S. Eliot, "Baudelaire is indeed the greatest exemplar in modern poetry in any language, for his verse and language is the nearest thing to a complete renovation that we have experienced. But his renovation of an attitude towards life is no less radical and no less important" (426). Eliot's equation of Baudelaire with modernity is echoed by virtually every other critic of note. Berman, for instance, writes "if we had to nominate a first modernist, Baudelaire would surely be the man"(132-33). And Benjamin, of course, lauds Baudelaire as the first great poet of the city, the greatest poet of alienation.

Carter's continuing fascination with Baudelaire exemplifies her ambivalent relation to the male-authored literary canon. On the one hand, his mastery of language, his thematic, technical and generic innovations inspire admiration. On the other, his representation of Woman and his aesthetics of the feminine appal. Benjamin and others have regarded Baudelaire's celebration of female artifice, in which the painted woman and the prostitute are favoured figures, as marking the rupture with Classical and Romantic modes of representation and the emergence of modernity. It is true that Baudelaire reverses the positive spin that had hitherto attached to the traditional alignment of woman with nature, but for women, this rupture in representational modes is an ambivalent legacy, as the following notorious passage from *Mon Coeur mis à nu* attests:

Woman is the opposite of the Dandy. That is why she should be regarded with disgust. Woman is hungry, and she wants to eat; thirsty, and she wants to drink. She feels randy, and she wants to be fucked. Fine characteristics! Woman is 'natural'- that is to say, abominable. Moreover, she is always vulgar- that is to say, the opposite of the Dandy. (Baudelaire *Intimate Journals* 31)

Motivated as it is by an aversion to female biology, Baudelaire's preference for the painted idol over the abominable 'natural' body of Woman clearly anticipates Freud's model of

sexual fetishism.¹⁶ According to Baudelaire, Woman is only tolerable when she is aligned with artifice and hence culture:

Woman is quite within her rights, indeed she is even accomplishing a kind of duty, when she devotes herself to appearing magical and supernatural; she has to astonish and charm us: as an idol, she is obliged to adorn herself in order to be adored. Thus she has to lay all the arts under contribution for the means of lifting herself above Nature, the better to conquer hearts and rivet attention. It matters but little that the artifice and trickery are known to all, as long as their success is assured and their effect always irresistible. (Baudelaire "The Painter of Modern Life" 33)

But whilst the misogyny underpinning Baudelaire's notion that Woman is only redeemable through artifice is overlooked by Benjamin, the contemporary reader, as Weir points out, is "no longer able to regard misogyny as one more 'element' of decadence, like aestheticism" (Weir xiv).

How, then, does Carter's ambivalence towards the "Bard of Modernity," as Miller Frank calls him, play out in her representation of Baudelaire in "Black Venus"? Aleid Fokkema argues that when language and power are at stake in the postmodern text, the "author who *fathers* texts must be displaced, decentred, marginalized and debunked." Consequently, she contends, Carter undermines Baudelaire's authority to represent Duval by representing him as an "author who wrote enchanting poetry" but who was "also syphilitic, abusive, self-possessed, imperialist, dirty, impotent, and a poor judge of the objets d'art that he professed to collect"(Fokkema "The Author: Postmodernism's Stock Character" 48). Whilst I concede that there is some truth in this claim, I argue that "Black Venus" does more than belittle Baudelaire's person in its attempt to diminish his discursive authority. In my analysis, Carter's text deploys two distinct yet related strategies. Firstly, I contend that "Black Venus" diminishes Baudelaire's discursive authority, not only to author Duval, but also to author himself, by puncturing the notion of poetic curse or *guignon* that was central to his self-production as a *poète maudit*. As I show, through this strategy "Black Venus" produces a version of Baudelaire that is remarkably close to that mapped out by Jean-Paul Sartre, for whom the poet was the epitome of bad faith. However, Carter's portrayal of the poet functions as a corrective to the Sartrean account, which is oblivious to Baudelaire's

misogyny. Secondly, I contend that the tale, and the collection to which it gives its name, effects a highly subversive structural inversion by which Baudelaire is displaced from his position as *poète maudit* and recast as Carter's Muse. I show how the text strategically "Muses" Baudelaire by synecdochalizing him. I conclude by showing how "Black Venus" ironically undermines Baudelaire's transfiguration of Jeanne Duval from Muse as Beloved into *Muse venale*, a transfiguration which foreshadows the Decadent iconography of the *femme fatale*, which will be addressed in the final section of the thesis.

As I have said, the notion of *guignon* was central to Baudelaire's self-conscious production of himself as a *poète maudit*. *Guignon* means bad luck or curse, and Baudelaire's somewhat contradictory ideas on the subject are articulated in his correspondence, the poem "*Guignon*," the essay *Conseil aux Jeunes Littérateurs*, and his two essays on Poe. It is, of course, a post-Romantic cliché that the vocation of the writer or poet is intrinsically unhappy. However, Susan Blood argues that, whilst the unhappiness of writers has become a signifier of post-Enlightenment modernity, it is not until Baudelaire that the notion of the writer as cursed is fully elaborated:

By the mid-nineteenth century, the unhappiness of certain writers is no longer considered an incidental feature of the literary vocation. Poetry, in particular, is understood to be an accursed practice. Verlaine's anthology of *Les Poètes maudits* (1884) attests to this heightened awareness. It is fair to say that Baudelaire is responsible for giving the curse on poets a theoretical resonance, and that with his 1852 essay on Edgar Allan Poe he crystallized the concept with his treatment of the term *guignon*. (Blood 147-48)

Hemmings concurs that the notion of the *poète maudit*, which Baudelaire embraced so fervently, was a cultural cliché of the period:

In his[Baudelaire's] century it was almost a commonplace that a vocation for art or poetry was inseparable from moral suffering and only too often entailed desperate material privation as well. The concept of *le poète maudit* was given wide currency by Verlaine in the 1880s but had really been launched fifty years earlier by Alfred de Vigny in a semi-fictional, semi-historical work entitled *Stello*. In this book Vigny tells the life-stories of three poets, all of whom died young or in wretched or infamous circumstances... The moral Vigny draws from his triple apologue is that no matter how society is constituted, whether the form of government is an absolute monarchy, an oligarchy, or a revolutionary committee, the poet invariably suffers. He suffers, however, as Vigny argues, not because he is damned (which would imply persecution on a cosmic scale), but because he is an outcast, a pariah, an object of suspicion to men in power. The romantics thought that society had no room for the poet- although, curiously, there never was a period in France when poets were better represented in the corridors of power...(Hemmings 67)

In contra-distinction to Vigny, Baudelaire argues that poets are indeed damned, cosmically persecuted and marked out from birth: "their fate is written in the very tissue of their beings, it shines forth with a lurid brilliance in their glance and their gestures, it flows through their veins with each drop of their blood" ("Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Works" 71). But it would be a mistake to think that Baudelaire maintained a consistent position on *guignon*. In his essay *Conseils aux jeunes litterateurs*, known in English as "Advice to Young Men of Letters," he discounts the very notion, claiming, "there is no such thing as bad luck. If you are unlucky, it is because you lack something" ("Advice to Young Men of Letters" 314). Nevertheless, Baudelaire was unequivocal on the subject of his own *guignon*. For example, in a letter to his mother, dated December 4th, 1854, he wrote, "*En somme, je crois que ma vie a été damné dès le commencement, et qu'elle l'est pour toujours*" (cited in Bandy vii).¹⁷

It is in the essays on Edgar Allan Poe that he most fully develops the notion that *guignon* is intrinsic to the writer's vocation. According to Baudelaire, the poet is like a "poor wretch whose brow was tattooed with the following rare and curious device: *Never had a chance!*" He argues:

Literary history has similar destinies to show us, examples of true damnation, men who go through life with the word 'jynx' written in mysterious letters on the tortured lines of their foreheads. The blind angel of expiation has seized hold of them and mercilessly flogs them for the edification of others. In vain may their lives have talents, virtues or graces to show; Society reserves a special curse for them, denouncing those very weaknesses which have resulted from its own persecution.- To what lengths did not Hoffmann go to disarm fate, and what pains did not Balzac take to conjure fortune? ("Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Works" 70)

His essay on Poe, will, he claims, add "a new saint to the martyrology", because Poe is:

one of those glorious unfortunates, too rich in poetry and passion, who came into this lowly world, following in the footsteps of so many others, to perform the rude apprenticeship of genius among baser spirits. What a lamentable tragedy was the life of Edgar Poe! ("Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Works" 71).

¹⁷ "All in all, I believe my life has been dammed since the beginning, and that it will always be so." Translation my own.

Poe's tragedy, and by implication, the tragedy of all poets, including Baudelaire himself, is that of a natural aristocrat forced to tout his wares on Grub Street. Throughout the essay, Baudelaire positions the poet in opposition to the dominant ethos; he supports Vigny's thesis that "there can be no proper place for the poet either in a democratic or an aristocratic society, no more in a republic than in an absolute or tempered monarchy" ("Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Works" 71). Moreover, the cult of Beauty that underpins the poet's vocation is incompatible with popular taste:

Poe, who was of good stock and who held moreover that his country's greatest disaster was to have no aristocracy of birth, granted, as he said, that among a people without an aristocracy the cult of Beauty could only be corrupted, cheapened and must finally disappear... ("Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Works" 72).

But if Baudelaire's conception of the poet is elitist, it is also, with its investment in the concept of poetic martyrdom, essentially *religious*. For instance, he claims that the wretched fate endured by poets leads us to suspect:

the existence of a diabolical Providence which for some brews misfortune from the cradle to the grave, deliberately hurling spiritual and angelic natures into hostile surroundings, like Christian martyrs into the circus? Are there then sacrificial souls, dedicated to the altar, doomed to walk to death and glory through the debris of their own lives?" (Baudelaire "Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Works" 70-71)

The corollary of this religious conception of poetic vocation is that his portrait of Poe is essentially hagiography. Besides being an exemplary sufferer in the name of art, Saint Poe, like all saints, is perfection itself. He is possessed of a "well-nigh miraculous intelligence," with an "uncommon aptitude for physical and mathematical sciences," his physical person is marked by "striking beauty," he is "handsome, elegant, correct, every inch the genius" ("Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Works" 75-79). Baudelaire never met Poe, yet his description intimates first-hand knowledge:

There are several aspects of Edgar Poe on which there is unanimous agreement; for example, his high natural distinction, his eloquence and his physical beauty, of which, it is said, he was more than a little vain. His manners- a strange mixture of hauteur with an exquisite sweetness- were wonderfully assured. His expression, his bearing, his gestures, the way he carried his head, everything proclaimed him a chosen spirit. His whole being gave forth an aura of penetrating seriousness. He was truly marked by Nature... ("Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Works" 83)

The reader of Baudelaire's essays on Poe cannot help but be struck by their overblown, worshipful tone, a tone that is absent from his critical writing about other artists or writers. His pathos and eloquence on the subject of Poe's death, for example, suggests that for Baudelaire, the most poetical topic in the world is not so much the death of a beautiful woman as the death of a beautiful poet. Indeed, Poe might be said to be Baudelaire's true Dead Beloved, his secret ideal Muse, whose beauty and innumerable virtues stand in stark contrast to the frequently abject status he confers on the three women whom he addresses as Muse.

His two essays on Poe are marked by such a fervent identification with their subject that Baudelaire might well have anticipated Flaubert by declaring "*Poe- c'est moi!*" His obsession with Poe was so overwhelming that it has been described by contemporary critics as a literary "possession" unique in world literature (Wetherill 9). Even his contemporaries used this term to describe Baudelaire's identification with the then unknown American writer. For instance, his friend Charles Asselineau wrote: "*J'ai vu peu de possessions aussi complètes, aussi rapides, aussi absolues*" (cited in Bandy xxiii).¹⁸ Nevertheless, Baudelaire strenuously denied that his writing was influenced by Poe. In a letter to Théophile Thoré, he wrote: "*Eh bien! On m'accuse, moi, d'imiter Edgar Poe! Savez-vous pourquoi j'ai si patiemment traduit Poe? Parce qu'il me ressemblait*" (cited in Bandy xlii).¹⁹ In effect, the sense of resemblance to and identification with Poe which Baudelaire articulates here enabled him to appropriate Poe's exemplary suffering; the notion of poetic *guignon* that he elaborated with respect to the other writer served to shore up his own sense of persecution and entitlement, and hence to buttress his claim to the title of *poète maudit*.

This is precisely the point that Sartre makes in his book length essay, *Baudelaire*:

A hundred, a thousand times in his writings he speaks of the 'poet' and the 'artist.' He managed to have himself justified and consecrated by the writers of the past. He even went farther than this by forming a friendship with a dead poet. The real purpose of his long liaison with Edgar Poe was to procure his elevation to the mystic order. It has been said that he was attracted by the

¹⁸ "I have seen few possessions so complete, so fast, so absolute." Translation my own.

¹⁹ "Hmmp! They accuse me, me, of imitating Edgar Poe! Do you know why I translated Poe so patiently? Because he resembles me." Translation my own.

disturbing resemblances between the American poet's life and his own. That is true, but this identity of fate only interested him *because Poe was dead*. If he had been alive, the author of *Eureka* would have been no more than a vague body like his own. How could two unjustifiably gratuitous bodies have been placed side by side? Once he was dead, however, his portrait assumed its final form and its features became clear. It was perfectly natural to describe him as a poet and a martyr; his existence had become a destiny; his misfortunes seemed to be the result of predestination. It was then that the resemblances acquired their full value; they transformed Poe, as it were, into an image in Baudelaire's past, into something like the John the Baptist of an accursed Christ. Baudelaire leant over the depths of the years, over the distant, hated America, and suddenly he caught sight of his own reflection in the grey waters of the past. That's what he *is*. At once, his existence was consecrated. (137-38)

For Sartre, Baudelaire's eulogizing of Poe is nothing more than an attempt to achieve vicarious martyrdom, and is thus but one more instance of the bad faith with which he charges the poet. Sartre's concept of bad faith is difficult to define succinctly. He writes "the one who practises bad faith is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth"; however, "in bad faith, it is from myself that I am hiding the truth" (*Being and Nothingness: a Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* 89). Bad faith, then, is not simply lying but rather, self-deception, lying to oneself. But this definition does not tell us very much. In her book on de Beauvoir, Toril Moi provides a more comprehensive definition: "whatever we do, we cannot escape the responsibility for our own acts: to try to do so is a prime strategy of bad faith. To pretend to have no choice is to deny freedom, and that, precisely, is the very definition of bad faith" (*Moi Simone de Beauvoir: the Making of an Intellectual Woman* 105).

Baudelaire's crime, according to Sartre, is not so much that he was a bourgeois reactionary, a Narcissist, an impotent fetishist or a voyeur, although he is accused of all of these, but that he was a self-deceiving fake, an insincere and inauthentic imposter. According to Sartre, the sufferings on which Baudelaire based his claim to *guignon* were all carefully contrived and self-inflicted: "there was nothing down to his syphilis that he did not bring on almost of his own accord" (*Sartre Baudelaire* 89). Baudelaire's "parade of sufferings" was aimed firstly at extracting money and sympathy from his mother, but also at posterity, in an attempt to ensure his election to the "martyrology of literature," to borrow his own phrase. These acts of imposture are instances of bad faith because Baudelaire denied that he *chose* to suffer, that he wanted to suffer,

that suffering satisfied his deep psychological need to be punished. Instead, he presented his sufferings as his poetic destiny, as marks of his singularity and heightened sensibility. But, according to Sartre, Baudelaire's early denial that he chose to suffer marked the beginning of a life lived in bad faith:

In short, his initial choice was initially made in bad faith. Baudelaire never completely believed in anything he thought or felt, in any of his sufferings or in his gritty *voluptés*. That was, perhaps, the real source of his sufferings. Let us be under no misapprehension about it- not to believe completely is not the same as to deny; bad faith is still bad faith. It should rather be said that Baudelaire's feelings had a sort of interior emptiness. He tried by a perpetual frenzy, by an extraordinary nervousness to make up for their insufficiency. In Vain. They sounded hollow. He reminds us of the neurasthenic who was convinced that he had an ulcerated stomach and who rolled shrieking and trembling on the floor, drenched in perspiration; but there was no pain. If we could put out of our minds the exaggerated vocabulary which Baudelaire used to describe himself, forget words like 'frightful', 'nightmare' and 'horror' which occur on every page of the *Fleurs du mal*, and penetrate right into his heart we should find beneath the anguish, the remorse and the vibrating nerves something gentler and much more intolerable than the most painful of ills- Indifference. (Baudelaire 79)

Sartre's verdict is damning: all Baudelaire's notorious antics, from dyeing his hair green to spreading rumours about himself as a murderer and a pederast, ought to be understood as the histrionics of "an eternal minor, a middle-aged adolescent who lived in a constant state of rage and hatred, but under the vigilant and reassuring protection of others"(Baudelaire 64). Despite his protestations to the contrary, Baudelaire never strayed very far outside the law. His great need for the attention, whether positive or negative, of quasi-parental authority figures kept him within the orbit of conventional institutions. In its essential triviality, his idea of damnation is all of a piece with this: Sartre argues that for Baudelaire, "damnation meant blame from Other People"(Baudelaire 72).

But despite his global condemnation of Baudelaire, Sartre's analysis does not extend to the poet's treatment of Jeanne Duval, whom he describes in the most conventional terms as "that rapacious mistress"(Baudelaire 15). Duval figures in Sartre's account as just one more of Baudelaire's bad choices, which the poet, of course, falsely represented as a curse thrust upon him by fate: "The perverse individual deliberately chose the most banal and the most rigid of moral codes. The refined man of the world went with the lowest harlots. A taste for squalor kept

him hanging around Louchette's skinny body, and his love of the *affreuse Juive* anticipated his love of Jeanne Duval" (Baudelaire 15).

How can my claim that Carter's depiction of Baudelaire echoes Sartre's be reconciled with the surprisingly benign depiction of the poet in her tale, which stresses Duval's affection for the poet, such that "she was quite fond of him" ("B. Venus" 239). The answer to this rhetorical question is to be found in Carter's statement: "The greatest poet of alienation stumbled on the perfect stranger; theirs was a match made in heaven. *In his heart, he must have known this*" ("B. Venus")(239).²⁰ Baudelaire's bad faith springs from the fact that his role of suffering poet is predicated on his denial of what he knows *in his heart*: he and his mistress are unequivocally similar. Throughout the tale, Carter uses Baudelaire's own metaphor of the poet as an albatross to emphasize that, *in his heart*, he recognised the natural kinship between Duval and himself. The two are repeatedly imaged as creatures of the wind. They live together in a "high, lonely apartment" ("B. Venus" 231), which, "at the invitation of the mysterious currents of the heavens... will loose its moorings in the street below and take off, depart, whisk across the dark vault of the night..." ("B. Venus" 232). The narrative voice stresses the shared nature of their fantasy of being birds of flight: "they are only at home together when contemplating flight; they are both waiting for a wind to blow that will take them to a miraculous elsewhere, a happy land, far, far away, the land of delighted ease and pleasure" ("B. Venus" 233) and, "The woman and her lover wait for the rising of the wind upon which they will leave the gloomy apartment. They believe they can "ascend and soar upon it" ("B. Venus" 240). The tale explicitly invests Baudelaire with the knowledge that they are two of a kind. After an excerpt about the courtship rituals of the albatross from Austin's *Birds of the World*, the narrative voice remarks:

They are not great nest builders. A slight depression in the ground will do. Or, they might hollow out a little mound of mud. They will make only the most squalid concessions to the earth. He envisaged their bed, the albatross's nest, as just such a fleeting kind of residence in which Destiny,

²⁰ Italics are my own.

the greatest the greatest madame of all, had closeted these two strange birds together. In this transitory exile, anything is possible. ("B. Venus" 242)

But if their sexual relation is imaged in the thrilling terms of wind and storm- "Venus lies on the bed, waiting for a wind to rise: the sooty albatross hankers for the storm. Whirlwind!" ("B. Venus" 239)- the domestic life of two such "wonderful arielistes who live in the heart of the storm" ("B. Venus" 240) is confined, unhappily, to the earth. Duval's fictitious voice likens the bourgeoisie to the Antarctic penguins who, eggs on feet, watch the "artists such as we dare death upon the high trapeze"; she remarks wryly: "If Daddy were like a penguin, how much more happy we should be; there isn't room for two albatrosses in *this* house" ("B. Venus" 240).

In Carter's account, Baudelaire's bad faith resides in his refusal to acknowledge, in any public manner at least, what he knows *in his heart*. In his poetry, the Prince of Clouds disavows mutuality and insists on exoticizing, romanticizing, and demonizing Duval. The narrative voice repeatedly reminds us that Baudelaire refuses to countenance the idea that he and she are more alike than different; he has constantly to invent differences between them: "They have this in common, neither has a native land, although he likes to pretend that she has a fabulous home in the bosom of the blue ocean, he will force a home on her whether she's got one or not, he cannot believe she is as dispossessed as he" ("B. Venus" 233). The tale demonstrates how Baudelaire's romanticism transmutes the intimate bodily aromas of his lover into an exotic fantasy of her sexual and racial difference:

The young man inhales the aroma of the coconut oil which she rubs into her hair to make it shine. His agonised romanticism transforms this homely odour of the Caribbean kitchen into the perfume of the air of those tropical islands he can sometime persuade himself are the happy lands for which he longs. His lively imagination performs an alchemical alteration on the healthy twang of her sweat, freshly awakened by dancing. He thinks her sweat smells of cinnamon because she has spices in her pores. He thinks she is made of a different kind of flesh than his. ("B. Venus" 240)

A quote from "*Sed non Satiata*", from the "Black Venus" cycle, makes explicit Baudelaire's poetic impulse to mythologize Duval and depict her as radically Other:

He thinks she is a vase of darkness; if he tips her up, black light will spill out. She is not Eve but, herself, the forbidden fruit, and he has eaten her!

Weird goddess, dusky as night,
reeking of musk smeared on tobacco,
a shaman conjured you, a Faust of the savannah,
black-thighed witch, midnight's child... ("B. Venus" 237)

Baudelaire's insistent invocation of Duval's racial, sexual and cultural otherness demonstrably served his claim to *guignon*. The highly sexualised discourse of race circulating in mid-nineteenth century France characterised women of colour as intellectually and morally inferior, and sexually rapacious. Hence a liaison between a white man and a black woman was imagined as inherently monstrous, unnatural and unhappy. Harping on the difference between himself and his muse, rather than their likeness, enabled Baudelaire to monopolize the position of the wretched, alienated artist, the veritable high priest of Culture.

On a more quotidian level, "Black Venus" also implicitly undermines Baudelaire's claim to *guignon* by foregrounding the situation of the Muse relative to that of the poet. Her abject poverty and dependence is contrasted with his relative wealth. He is "the master of the house", which is depicted as a "handsome apartment with its Persian rugs, its walnut table off which the Borgias were served poisons, its carved armchairs from whose bulbous legs grin and grimace the cinquecento faces, the crust of fake Tintoretos on the walls (he's an indefatigable connoisseur, if, as yet, too young to have the sixth sense that tells you when you're being conned)... " ("B. Venus" 232). Despite this comparative affluence, he will not pay for his mistress to have a hot bath:

...she would have liked a bath, anyway, she was a little worried about a persistent vaginal discharge that smelled of mice, something new, something ominous, something horrid. But: no hot water, not at this hour.

'They'll bring up hot water if you pay.'

His turn to sulk. He took to cleaning his nails again.

'You think I don't need a wash because I don't show the dirt.' ("B. Venus" 236)

Duval is nominally a "kept woman"- *une femme entretenue*- but Carter is at pains to point out the relativity of this term when it is applied to her life with the poet. Not only does she have to forgo the bath, her keep consists merely of "pretties" ("B. Venus" 233), that is to say paste jewellery, "nothing she could sell or she would have sold it" ("B. Venus" 233), "the occasional lump of

hashish" ("B.Venus" 233), and being kept off the streets. Not for her the fabulous wealth of a Nana or a Josephine Baker, with whom she is pointedly compared. No wonder that Jeanne, although "not prone to introspection," wonders "if she'd played her cards right. If she was going to have to dance naked to earn her keep, anyway, why shouldn't she dance naked for hard cash in hand and earn enough to keep herself? Eh? Eh?" ("B. Venus" 234). But the child of the colony, whose "negative inheritance" does not even encompass self-pity, "only the twenty-nine legally permitted strokes of the whip", expresses the steely nugget of her free will "as lethargy" ("B. Venus" 239). Hence she does no more than wonder, she submits to her fate: "If he was a connoisseur of the beautiful, she was a connoisseur of the most exquisite humiliations but she had always been too poor to afford the luxury of acknowledging a humiliation as such. You took what came" ("B. Venus" 235). As Francine Prose observes in her study of the careers of nine well-known Muses, Musedom offers little in the way of short term returns (*passim*).

Duval's impoverishment is not only material, but also linguistic:

Her granny spoke Creole, patois, knew no other language, spoke it badly and taught it badly to Jeanne, who did her best to convert it into good French when she came to Paris and started mixing with swells but made a hash of it, her heart wasn't in it, no wonder. It was as though her tongue had been cut out and another one sewn in that did not fit well. ("B. Venus" 239)

That she should end up mistress, not to some ordinary "swell", but to the greatest poet in the French language, puts Duval at a profound disadvantage. Her direct knowledge of the world cannot compete with his ability to construct an imagined world through linguistic tropes. Being habitually out-trope, as it were, is profoundly demoralizing for the Muse:

Therefore, you could say, not so much that Jeanne did not understand the lapidary, troubled serenity of her lover's poetry but, that it was a perpetual affront to her. He recited it to her by the hour and she ached, raged and chafed under it because his eloquence deprived her of language. It made her dumb, a dumbness all the more profound because it manifested itself in a harsh clatter of ungrammatical recriminations and demands which were not directed at her lover so much- she was quite fond of him- as at her own condition, great gawk of an ignorant black girl, good for nothing: correction, good for only one thing... ("B. Venus" 239)

In place of the *poète maudit*, Carter gives us the *Muse maudite*. "Black Venus" suggests that it is the Muse rather than the poet upon whose brow ought to be tattooed "*Never had a chance!*"

The Muse's unhappiness is anatomized to show that if anyone has a claim to *guignon*, it is she. Consider, for example, how the tale represents the respective claims to damnation of poet and Muse. Whereas Baudelaire's experience of damnation is vicarious, something to be gleaned from books, "those rare, precious volumes, the jewelled missals, the incunabala, those books acquired from special shops that incurred damnation if you so much as opened the covers," hers is firsthand: she has been summoned "from the abyss of which her eyes retain the devastating memory" ("B. Venus" 236-37).

"Black Venus" emphatically endorses Sartre's thesis by pointing up the essential triviality of much of Baudelaire's purported suffering. This is achieved in part through the inclusion of "The Cabinet of Edgar Allen Poe" in the same collection. Much as she decries the psychobiographical approach to Poe's texts, Carter has no argument with the biographical motif of Poe's wretchedness. Simply through juxtaposition, Poe comes across as an aristocrat of misery, Baudelaire as the rankest, most self-serving amateur. Baudelaire strove to achieve misery, or at least the semblance thereof; Poe had it thrust upon him. And within "Black Venus", the poet's grievances are shown to be petty when contrasted with the kind his Muse might make, had she but the language to do so. For instance, his neurotically conflicted attachment to his mother, the source of so much of his complaint, is shown to be a paltry source of grievance compared to Duval's orphaned state. After sex, he cries:

...he is ashamed, he talks about his mother, but Jeanne can't remember her mother and her granny swapped her with ship's mate for a couple of bottles, a bargain with which her granny said she was well satisfied because Jeanne was already getting into trouble and growing out of her clothes and ate so much." ("B. Venus" 242)

But Duval's experience, whether it was unhappy, as Carter speculates, or otherwise, has historically been overshadowed by that of the poet, whose "shadow made her blacker than she was, his shadow could eclipse her entirely" ("B. Venus" 234). Musedom robs the Muse of her authority to "author" herself. She is dependent on the poet to "author" her, to confer on her the dubious distinction of a poetic re-presentation invested with disgust:

If you could see her, if it were not so dark, she would look like the victim of a robbery; her bereft eyes are like abysses but she will hold him in her bosom and comfort him for betraying to her in his self-disgust those trace elements of common humanity he has left inside her body, for which he blames her bitterly, for which he will glorify her, awarding her the eternity promised by the poet. ("B. Venus" 242)

However, if Carter anatomizes Duval's musedom as a lousy deal, she also allows the Muse a few "limited revenges." Duval is allowed a synecdochal revenge on the poet, a turning of the tables in which Baudelaire is recast as a body, and a body of work, which is plundered for her material sustenance. Through this synecdochal revenge, Duval becomes a figure for Carter herself, whose greater project is to Muse Baudelaire, to turn him into a source of inspiration (and no little disgust) for her own work. How is this effected? In the first section of the tale, which depicts an imaginary scene from the domestic life of Baudelaire and Duval from Duval's point of view, Baudelaire is not referred to by name but rather as "he", "Daddy", "her very first protector", "the master of the house", and "the poet." The use of Duval as the focus for the narrative point of view in the text, and the referral to Baudelaire as a generic "he," erodes his carefully cultivated singularity, and undermines his aesthetic and linguistic authority to author Duval. "He" is no longer the monolithic Charles Baudelaire, poetic genius and exemplary modern Adam, but simply a déclassé bourgeois, a French Catholic male anxious about dirt and defilement and consumed with sexual shame. The text also counters his discursive authority by never representing him *in toto*; whilst we are told that "he was young and handsome" ("B. Venus" 234), we are given no comprehensive description of his person. Instead, he is represented in terms of his most significant parts. Firstly, his eyes are made to stand for his sexual appetites: "he fixed his quick, bright, dark eyes upon her" ("B. Venus" 233), "he liked to have her make a spectacle of herself, to provide a sumptuous feast for his bright eyes that were always bigger than his belly" ("B. Venus" 239); and secondly by his gaze, "his regard made her luminous" ("B. Venus" 234).

Even more notable is the textual deployment of clothing to stand in for the poet and his aesthetic. Whereas Duval is either naked or semi-naked for much of the narrative, Baudelaire is always emphatically clothed:

It is essential to their connection that, if she should put on the private garments of nudity, its non-sartorial regalia of jewellery and rouge, then he himself must retain the public nineteenth-century masculine impedimenta of frock coat (exquisitely cut); white shirt (pure silk, London tailored); oxblood cravat; and impeccable trousers. There's more to *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* than meets the eye. (Manet, another friend of his.) Man does and is dressed to do so; his skin is his own business. He is artful, the creation of culture. Woman is; and is therefore, fully dressed in no clothes at all, her skin is common property, she is a being at one with nature in a fleshly simplicity that, he insists, is the most abominable of artifices. ("B. Venus" 240)

Baudelaire's dandyism is a screen for his fetishistic, voyeuristic sexuality, as is evident from his response to the naked Jeanne's invitation to dance with her: "But he never would, never. Scared of muzzing his shirt or busting his collar or something"("B. Venus" 235). *She* must undress for him, "take off her clothes and dance for Daddy"("B. Venus" 233), lie naked on the bed to "provide a sumptuous feast for his bright eyes"("B. Venus" 239), but he retains both the cultural armature of clothing and the agency of the gaze. In Bakhtinian terms, the Classical body of the poet- contained, constrained, parsimonious in its pleasures- stands in stark opposition to the secreting, pleasuring and pleasurable Grotesque Body of his Muse. In pointing up this opposition, "Black Venus" echoes Sartre's point that Baudelaire's dandyism was part of his "cult of frigidity," a cult in which "coldness stood for *himself*- sterile, gratuitous and pure. In contrast to the warm, soft, mucous life..."(Sartre *Baudelaire* 113). But whilst Sartre does not attribute a sex to the "warm, soft, mucous life," Carter's tale emphasizes the gendered nature of the Baudelairean opposition between the dandy and Woman.

Carter's strategy of "musing" Baudelaire by breaking him down into constituent parts is most fully realized in the synecdoches of the gloves and the spirochaete. The image of the glove is introduced immediately after a scene in which Baudelaire witnesses Duval urinating in the street:

...she urinated in the street, right there, didn't announce it; or go off into an alley to do it on her own, she did not even leave go of his arm but straddled the gutter, legs apart and pissed as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Oh, the unexpected Chinese bells of that liquid cascade! (At which point, his Lazarus arose and knocked unbidden on the coffin-lid of the poet's trousers.)

Jeanne hitched up her skirts with her free hand as she stepped across the pool she'd made, so that he saw where she had splashed her white stockings at the ankle. It seemed to his terrified, exacerbated sensibilities that the liquid was a kind of bodily acid that burned away the knitted cotton, dissolved her petticoat, her stays, her chemise, the dress she wore, her jacket, so that now she walked beside him like an ambulant fetish, savage, obscene, terrifying. He himself always wore gloves of pale pink kid that fitted as tenderly as the rubber gloves that gynaecologists will wear. ("B. Venus" 241)

The pale pink kid gloves, which simultaneously figure his fascination with and recoil from the female body, synecdochalize Baudelaire's perverse sexuality and his misogynistic poetics. His ambivalent, panicked response to her micturition- part sexual arousal, part terror- reveals the fetishistic disavowal at the heart of his aesthetic of the feminine. In Baudelaire's imagination, Duval's act of public urination strips away the veil of culture from Woman, and exposes the leaking, grotesque female body, which, throughout his work, is repeatedly imaged as a harbinger of death. The sonnet "*Une charogne*", or "Carrion", epitomizes the Baudelairean equation of the female body with putrefaction and death. The poem is an apostrophe to the poet's beloved, and recounts the couple's encounter with the carcass of a rotting animal by the side of the road. The poet likens the oozing carcass to the lubricated genitals of a prostitute with her legs in the air, and its swollen belly, alive with maggots, to that of a pregnant woman giving birth to a mass of decay. Finally the poet reminds his beloved that she too will rot; only the words of the poet will live on to preserve the beauty of all his decomposing "*amours*". "*Une charogne*" is not considered part of the Black Venus cycle, and was probably not written specifically about Duval. Nevertheless, the poem's eroticization of death, which is the extreme of sadism, and its equation of woman with putrefaction, subtends everything that Baudelaire wrote, as Weir has observed (Weir xi-xv).

In Carter's account, the pale pink kid gloves symbolize the Baudelairean project of penetrating the feminine body, which in itself becomes the quintessential Kristevan metaphor for abjection, whilst simultaneously securing immunity from its capacity to pollute. The image of the gloves conjure up the related binarisms of purity/defilement, intimacy/detachment and proximity/distance that underpin the power differential between physician and patient. The metaphor produces an image of Woman opened up, available to the investigations of the male

gaze and the probing male finger, which will subsequently inform the poetry. It is interesting to note the difference to Sartre's reading here, given his similar claim that "Baudelaire put on gloves for love-making" (*Baudelaire* 76). But whilst in Carter's analysis Baudelaire recoils from an explicitly female body, albeit one that is exoticized as racially other, Sartre links Baudelaire's "meticulous cleanliness" and dandyism to a "refusal to ever be caught in the wrong" (*Baudelaire* 144), and sees it as an expression of his "horror of life" and "perpetual fear of soiling and compromising himself" (*Baudelaire* 179). That is to say, Sartre denies that Baudelaire's need to protect himself from his lover's body has anything to do with her sex.

"Black Venus" reverses the terms of the encounter between the dangerous, polluting female body and the glove by having Duval trade the Baudelairean synecdoche for hard cash. After Baudelaire's death, Duval and her "hypothetical" brother make a tidy sum from the sale of his relics, among them "drawerful upon drawerful of pink kid gloves, hardly used. Her brother knew where to get rid of them" ("B. Venus" 243). If Baudelaire made his fame out of fetishizing the raw material of his Muse's Grotesque body, the text suggests, she will make her fortune out of whatever she can plunder from his fetishistic armature. With this "limited revenge" (Smith 29) Carter affects a kind of poetic justice, whereby the "ambulant fetish" ("B. Venus" 241), that is to say, Duval herself, appropriates the impedimentata of the fetishist, strips it of its mystery and reduces it to a seedy article, a mere thing to be disposed of in the most dubious quarters. Baudelaire's famous fetishism is reduced to a cheap trick.

But the Baudelairean synecdoche *par excellence* is that of the spirochaete, the corkscrew shaped *Treponema pallidum* that demented, paralyses and kills the poet, but which Duval then converts into a saleable commodity. The spirochaete is a ghostly signifier throughout the text; it is the unmentionable gift of the poet to his muse, one that she hardly dares name, even to herself: "She felt almost warm towards him; her good luck he was young and handsome. Her bad luck his finances were rocky, the opium, the scribbling; that he...but, at 'that', she snapped her mind off" ("B. Venus" 234). But, like all the other chorus girls, the "pretty, secretly festering thing she still

was" knows the implications of her symptoms: "The girls told over the ghoulish litany of the symptoms together in the dressing room in hushed scared voices, peeking at the fortune telling mirror and seeing, not their rosy faces, but their own rouged skulls" ("B. Venus" 235). However, Duval's fatalism is such that, "even if the spirochetes were already burrowing diligently away at her spinal marrow" ("B. Venus" 239), she laughs at her own fate:

I'll rot, thought Jeanne, and laughed. This cackle of geriatric cynicism ill became such a creature made for pleasure as Jeanne, but was pox not the emblematic fate of a creature made for pleasure and the price you paid for the atrocious mixture of corruption and innocence this child of the sun brought with her from the Antilles.

For herself, she came clean, arrived in Paris with nothing more than scabies, malnutrition and ringworm about her person. It was a bad joke, therefore, that, some centuries before Jeanne's birth, the Aztec goddess, Nanahuatzin, had poured a cornucopia of wheelchairs, dark glasses, crutches and mercury pills on the ships of the conquistadors as they took their spoiled booty from the New World to the Old; the raped continent's revenge, perpetrating itself in the beds of Europe. Jeanne innocently followed Nanahuatzin's trail across the Atlantic but she brought no erotic vengeance- she'd picked up the germ from her very first protector. The man she'd trusted to take her away from all that, enough to make a horse laugh, except that she was a fatalist, she was indifferent. ("B. Venus" 235)

Although the spirochaete triumphs over the great poet of alienation, so that, in his last months, he is alienated even from himself: "when he was shown his reflection in a mirror, he bowed politely, as to a stranger" ("B. Venus" 242), Carter imagines a different ending for Duval. First, she gives the usual historical account, drawn from Nadar's reported sighting of Duval in her last days, in which she is bald, facially disfigured and toothless, "hobbling on crutches to the dram-shop" ("B. Venus" 242). This is followed by an alternate ending, which sees Duval buying substitute teeth and hair, and setting herself up in a business partnership with her "hypothetical brother" in Martinique. As Baudelaire's kept woman, Duval had never known her own worth, "she had only the haziest notion of her own use value" ("B. Venus" 234); after his death, "she was surprised to find out how much she was worth" ("B. Venus" 243). The sale of Baudelaire's relics is enough to set her up as the madam of a respectable brothel, where until her death "she will continue to dispense, to the most privileged of the colonial administration, at a not excessive price, the veritable, the authentic, the true Baudelairean syphilis" ("B. Venus" 243-44).

This alternate ending reverses the usual representational economy, in which the Muse provides the Poet with the raw material he transmutes into the poetry that is his stake in posterity. As we have seen, since Petrarch the Muse has conventionally been represented by the trope of the synecdoche. Thus Baudelaire, for example, represents Duval in terms of her jewels, her hair, her exotic perfume, her black thighs, rather than giving a comprehensive description of her person. The poet's words, his synecdoches, outlive both the body of the muse he extols and the poet himself. The synecdoche is thus invested with greater value than the person for whom it stands, because the poem, hypothetically at least, is immortal. This is the substance of the final two stanzas of "*Une charogne*", in which the poet tells his beloved that religious rites have no power to preserve her; rather, it is the poet who will preserve the form and the divine essence of all his decomposing lovers. As David Weir says, the poem makes the claim that "the church may have the last rites, but Baudelaire has the last word" (Weir xii). Carter's project in "Black Venus" is clearly to undermine this claim by enabling the Muse to peddle, if not exactly the last word, then at least the very last word in synecdoches. Duval's synecdochal revenge, her Musing of Baudelaire, figures in miniature Carter's broader project of reconfiguring the male authored literary canon as a body of work to be plundered for her fictions. In this project, the canon itself is "Mused."

The full text of *Sed Non Satiata*, appended at the end of the tale without any commentary, functions as a sort of floating signifier that is crucial to Carter's ironic reading of Baudelaire's poetic representation of Duval. The poem's representation of Duval as sexually rapacious is undercut by the depiction of Baudelaire's impotence and sexual shame in "Black Venus". The reader is implicitly asked to contrast Baudelaire's depiction of Duval as a sexually insatiable "démon sans pitié," a "mégère libertine" (a demon without pity; a shrewish libertine), with the longsuffering Duval of Carter's story, who "stoically labours over her lover's pleasure as if he was her vineyard, she laying up treasure in heaven from her thankless toil" ("B. Venus" 242). The cloth is cut somewhat differently when Duval's sexual insatiability is reconfigured in terms of

Baudelaire's famed impotence. But there is more at stake here than salubrious biographical claim and counter-claim. In effect, by appending of Baudelaire's poem, Carter posits the Black Venus cycle as the alembic in which Baudelaire transfigured the Muse as Beloved into the fatal woman, the *femme fatale* that was one of the dominant images of femininity in the later part of the nineteenth-century.

It has long been acknowledged by scholars of French Decadent literature that Baudelaire was instrumental in affecting this transformation in the representation of the Muse. In his encyclopaedic psychological study of nineteenth-century European literary decadence, *The Romantic Agony*, Mario Praz argued that "Baudelaire and Flaubert are like the two faces of Herm planted firmly in the middle of the century, marking the division between Romanticism and Decadence, between the period of the Fatal Man and of the Fatal Woman..."(154). According to Praz, Baudelaire's portrayal of his lover as a monster, and himself as her innocent victim, marks a turning point in the representation of the sexes. Praz notes that Baudelaire images Duval as a tiger ('*Les Bijoux*', '*Le Léthé*'); as an implacable, cruel beast ('*Je t'adore à l'égal de la voûte nocturne*'); as a blind, deaf machine, fertile with cruelty and a drinker of the world's blood ('*Tu mettais l'univers entier dans ta ruelle*'); as a demon without pity, a shrewish libertine ('*Sed non satiata*'); as a frigid idol, sterile and unfeeling ('*Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés*'); as a vampire who pierces the poet's heart like a dagger and invades his humiliated soul with the violence of a band of demons ('*Le vampire*'); and, finally, as an inhuman Amazon ('*Duellum*'). Baudelaire, meanwhile, images himself as condemned by fate to suffer at her hands: "*À mon destin, désormais mon délice,/ J'obéirai comme un prédestiné;/ Martyr docile, innocent condamné,/ Dont la ferveur attise le supplice.*"²¹

²¹ Translated by Walter Martin as:

From here on in, I must submit
And take delight in Fate's commands,
For lovesick martyrdom demands
A victim, once the fire is lit-

Charles Baudelaire, "Le Léthé," trans. Walter Martin, *Charles Baudelaire: Complete Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997).

Praz reads the overblown, repetitive metaphorization of Duval as monstrous in Baudelaire's verse as symptomatic of his sadism, but if we turn from the psycho-biographical interpretation to a broader cultural reading, the demonisation of Duval can be seen to signal a significant shift in the representation of women. As we have seen, the female Muse has undergone successive transformations in the Western literary tradition, from Classical Muse to Muse as Beloved to Muse as Dead Beloved. Carter's re-presentations of the Muse have mapped part of this trajectory, with her parodic re-reading of Proust's Muse as Beloved (*Desire Machines*), to her recuperation of the maternal Muse as Dead Beloved ("The Cabinet of Edgar Allen Poe"). The ending of "Black Venus" acknowledges another shift, in which the once divine Muse, having been decomposed by Poe's poetics, is reconfigured into the putrefying Muse. It is no longer Woman's beauty or virtue that inspires the poet, but her propensity for evil, destruction and corruption, both metaphoric and corporeal. Of course, the figure of the fatal Muse or *femme fatale* is an essential prop in Baudelaire's quest to achieve his destiny as an accursed poet. If he is to represent himself as convincingly damned, the poet requires a Muse who torments him, rather than one who understands or nurtures him. His flamboyant self-staging as an exemplary sufferer in the name of art requires that she supply the anguish that he can then transmute into the poetry of damnation. Hence Richardson's comment *à propos* of Duval that "she did not, could not love him, much less understand him" (74) spectacularly fails to grasp the essential role ascribed to Duval in Baudelaire's poetics. It is the figure of the *femme fatale* that Baudelaire's representation of Duval unleashes, and which dominated the iconography of Woman in nineteenth century Decadence, to which I will now turn in the last section of the thesis.

Section 4: Dialectical Dames: Manifesting the Absurdity of the *Femme fatale*.

Whose fantasy is the *femme*?

"Should I ever have a daughter, I would call her, not Simone, nor even Rosa, but Lulu" (cited in Clapp x). This ambition of Carter's was never realized, but her fascination with the iconic figure of Lulu suffuses her work. Whilst working at the University of Iowa she taught G.W. Pabst's film version of Wedekind's plays in her course on twentieth-century narrative entitled "Life is Strange and the World is Bad," declaring "nothing else but *Pandora's Box* would do" ("Louise Brooks" 387). Her writing is littered with allusions to Pabst's classic silent picture, and the two Lulu plays on which it was based, *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box*, such as the allusion in *The Sadeian Woman* to the "beautiful and sexually free" Lulu being outfitted in a Pierrot costume as exemplifying the modern notion that the lovely woman is an essentially comic figure (*SW* 68). She also wrote her own version, a playscript entitled *Lulu*, which was commissioned by Richard Eyre, Director of the National Theatre. Although the play was never performed, the script has been published posthumously in *The Curious Room: Collected Dramatic Works*. However, it is in two reviews, the first, of Pabst's film (published in *New Society* in 1978); the second, of a biography of its star, Louise Brooks (published in *The London Review of Books* in 1990), that she was most expansive on the reasons for her fascination with this seminal portrayal of the *femme fatale*.

The most immediately obvious is her admiration for Brooks, whom she regarded as "a great star, and one of the iconographic faces of the cinema" ("Louise Brooks" 391). It was not Brook's exceptional beauty alone that intrigued Carter, but rather her exposition, unique in the cinema of her day, of an absolutely frank and fearless female sexuality: "her particular quality is,

she makes being polymorphously perverse seem like the only way to be" ("Louise Brooks" 389).

She claimed:

Brooks is the greatest of all of the Surrealist love-goddesses, pitched higher in the pantheon even than Dietrich and Barbara Steele because she typifies the subversive violence inherent in beauty and a light heart. She is the not at all obscure but positively radiant and explicit object of desire—living proof, preserved in the fragile eternity of the film stock, that the most mysterious of all is, as Octavio Paz said, the absolutely transparent. ("Femmes Fatales" 351)

Carter's admiration for Brooks can hardly be overstated; indeed, in her review of Barry Paris' biography Brooks comes across as the veritable Carterian ideal of womanhood.²² But what Carter venerated her for, above all, was her singular achievement in the role of Lulu; in fact, she seemed to regard her as almost synonymous with her most famous role.

Carter argues that, under Pabst's direction, Brooks created a highly subversive interpretation of "one of the key representations of female sexuality in twentieth century", that is to say, of Wedekind's notion of Lulu as a *femme fatale*. Wedekind, she argues, presents his heroine quite unselfconsciously as a fatal woman, with no capacity for love whatsoever:

Lulu keeps repeating that she has never been in love. This is the main thing that is wrong with her, according to Wedekind. No heart, see. A lovely flower that, alas, lacks perfume. Her loyalty to her old friends; her fidelity to her first seducer, the repulsive Schön; her willingness to support her adoptive father and effete stepson by the prostitution she loathes—Wedekind records all this but cannot see it as any evidence of human feeling at all. She is the passive instrument of vice, he says. That's all. ("Femmes Fatales" 351)

Wedekind's attitude towards his heroine is summed up in the remark made by one of her lovers, Alwa Schön, who says, *à propos* of Lulu: "A woman blossoms for us at precisely the right moment to plunge a man into everlasting ruin; such is her natural destiny" (Wedekind *Pandora's Box* 165).

²² According to Carter, Brooks was not only beautiful, glamorous and "self-ironic," but also a well-read autodidact who wrote with "an acute critical intelligence." Furthermore, this "vain, imperious bitch with a tongue like a knife" "always seemed to be buoyed up by a mysterious, self-sustaining glee"; "never lost the talent for living memorably" ("Louise Brooks" 388-89). If Brooks had never existed, Carter might have found it necessary to invent her!

But according to Carter, what is most remarkable about Wedekind's text is that it holds fast to this notion of Lulu as a *femme fatale* even as it presents evidence to the contrary, as, for instance, in the following exchange from *Earth Spirit*:

ESCERNY. Can you imagine a greater happiness for a woman than to have a man wholly in her power?

LULU. (jingling her spurs) Oh, yes! (Wedekind *Earth Spirit* 71)

Carter claims that Escerny pays no heed to Lulu's answer because his question is really concerned with the nature of *his* desires- "in a roundabout way, he is telling Lulu what *he* wants, which is for her to destroy him" ("Femmes Fatales" 350). The expanded version of this exchange that Carter gives in her own play script, *Lulu*, is an attempt to excavate the latent content of the original by foregrounding the sadomasochistic subtext to Escerny's rhetorical question, and to establish that the scenario of domination and submission that he seeks has nothing to do with Lulu's desires:

ESCERNY: I need, you understand, to relax. When I go off to Africa, to explore, I can never relax for a moment. The discipline... iron discipline.

(LULU turns at the word 'discipline', biting her fingernail.)

One has to force oneself to be a real man all the time. So, when I come home, I let myself go. I don't give orders any more, I like to take them. I like to submit. It's a perfectly natural reaction.

(LULU thrusts out her booted foot. ESCERNY kneels and kisses it. He sighs.)

What is the question of the age? I'll tell you- it's 'What does a woman want?'

(He stretches out until he is flat on his back. He takes her booted foot and places it on his forehead.)

Can a woman imagine more happiness than to have a man utterly in her power?

(LULU poses as a dominatrix for a moment. Then she bursts out laughing and kicks him, not hard, so that he rolls away from her.)

LULU: You must be joking. (A. Carter *Lulu* 432-33)

Carter argues that in Wedekind's version Escerny ignores Lulu's lack of interest in wielding power over him for the same reason that Wedekind himself does, which is, "because she does not exist except as the furious shadow of his imaginings" ("Femmes Fatales" 350). Lulu, in other words, is a fiction of male desire:

Desire does not so much transcend its object as ignore it completely in favour of a fantastic recreation of it. Which is the process by which the *femme* gets credited by fatality. Because she is perceived not as herself but as the projection of those libidinous cravings which, since they are forbidden, must always prove fatal. ("Femmes Fatales" 351)

Of course, in Lulu's case the *femme* herself *is* a fatality. Carter regards Lulu's fate as a consequence of her failure to adhere to repressive patriarchal codes of feminine sexuality; she is "the Life force

incarnate, Wedekind's earth spirit, the Dionysiacally unrepressed Lulu, who must die because she is free" ("Louise Brooks" 388). True to form, Wedekind visits a gruesome retribution on his heroine, having her butchered by Jack the Ripper on Christmas Eve:

She pays the price of expressing an unrepressed sexuality in a society which distorts sexuality. This is the true source of the fatality of the *femme fatale*; that she lives her life in such a way her freedom reveals to others their lack of liberty. So her sexuality is indeed destructive, not in itself but in its effects. ("Femmes Fatales" 353)

Carter reads Wedekind's representation of his *femme fatale* as unambiguous, although she does allow that he "gives her credit for some kind of imaginative life beyond his grasp" ("Femmes Fatales" 350).²³ She argues that it was left to "one exceptional actress and "one exceptional filmmaker" to bring the contradictions in his portrayal to the surface. Pabst/Brooks seize on the slightest hints in Wedekind's play, such as the suggestion in Lulu's exchange with Escerny that she has no interest in destroying men, to "flesh out" a life for her "which is in absolute contradiction to the text" ("Femmes Fatales" 350).

Brook's luminous presence is instrumental here rather than just decorative; her radiant transparency "shows up all the spiritual muck in the corners," with the unfortunate corollary that "she gets blamed for the muck, poor girl" ("Femmes Fatales" 351). Carter argues that Lulu's "negative virtue, her lack of hypocrisy," shines the light on the hypocrisy of every other character in the movie, especially the men who live parasitically off the proceeds of her prostitution. The hypocrisy underpinning the ubiquitous cultural deployment of the trope of the *femme fatale* is thus made explicit: the *femme* is shown to be a myth, a fabrication born of the forbidden "libidinous cravings" of those who desire her. In fact, Carter reads Pabst's version of *Pandora's Box* as exemplifying the kind of de-mythologizing project she herself practises:

Pabst's screen version of the Lulu plays, *Pandora's Box*, remains one of the great expositions of the cultural myth of the *femme fatale*. It is a peculiarly pernicious, if flattering myth which Pabst and his

²³ This view is not universal amongst feminist critics; Gail Finney, for example, argues that Wedekind clearly portrays Lulu as the product of her socialization, and that the plays are open-ended, allowing for a multiplicity of interpretations of the heroine. Gail Finney, *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theatre at the Turn of the Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 79-101.

star, Louise Brooks, conspired to both demonstrate irresistibly in action while, at the same time, offering evidence of its manifest absurdity. ("Femmes Fatales" 350-51)

Carter's review of Pabst's film was published in 1978, the year between the publication of *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) and that of *The Sadeian Woman* (1979), each of which contains a version of the *femme*: the composite figure of Leilah/Lilith in the former and Sade's irrepressible Juliette in the latter. Clearly, this was a period in which the "manifest absurdity" of the *femme fatale* was on her mind.

In this final section of the thesis, which examines Carter's deployment of the iconography of the *femme fatale*, I consider some of the reasons why this may have been so. To this end, I situate Carter's *femmes* in relation to the disputes that were raging within feminism in the late 1970s and early 1980s about archetypal notions of femininity. However, I also argue that Carter's deployment of the *femme* cannot be understood without reference to the histories of representation of this figure. As I argued at the end of the previous section, in the nineteenth-century iconography of Decadence, the figure of the *femme fatale* segues out of that of the Muse; Baudelaire's representation of Jeanne Duval as a sort of toxic Muse is a hinge moment in this transformation. The figure of Leilah in *The Passion of New Eve* draws heavily on this Decadent iconography instigated by Baudelaire, as well as on later cinematic versions of the *femme fatale*, and for this reason I will briefly outline historical changes in the representation of the *femme* as well as the critical disputes arising from these representations.

Kate Stables observes that the *femme fatale* is "a timeless fantasy, a cross-cultural myth, but also a historical construct, whose ingredients vary according to the time and climate of her creation"(165). This observation is readily born out by a brief survey of her manifestations over the past two hundred years, in which three distinct periods in which the *femme* has been a dominant motif can be discerned: the latter part of the nineteenth century, the *film noir* of the 1940s and 1950s, and in the *neo-noir* of the 1990s. Of course, I do not mean to suggest here that the *femme fatale* did not exist prior to 1800; on the contrary, I will show that many versions of the

femme, including Carter's, draw on the mythic *femme fatales* of antiquity. My purpose in limiting the time frame is simply to show how the *femme* is iterated differently at specific historical junctures, and to demonstrate that Carter's representations of the *femme fatale* draws on these iterations in specific ways. It may seem anachronistic to include a discussion of the *femmes fatales* of 1990s neo-noir, given that they postdate the publication of either *The Sadeian Woman* or *New Eve*, but my purpose in doing this is firstly, to point out the ambivalent reception this figure continues to receive from critics right up until the present day, and secondly, by demonstrating the historical ubiquity of the *femme*, to show the appositeness of Carter's revisionary readings. Above all, I aim to set up a context for both Carter's deployment of this deeply ambiguous figuration of the feminine, and my reading thereof.

The latter part of the nineteenth century saw a veritable explosion in representations of the *femme fatale*. As I stated in the previous chapter, Praz identified the poetics of Baudelaire and Flaubert as the point at which the Byronic fatal man gave way to the fatal woman. Perhaps no poem in *Les Fleurs du mal* figures this transformation as blatantly as "Les metamorphoses du Vampire," in which sexual intercourse is imaged as an act of vampirism in which the male's "marrow" is sucked dry by the voluptuous woman, who is imaged as death itself. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, images of alluring, death-dealing women, often literal rather than merely figurative vampires, were a cultural cliché, to the point at which the *femme fatale* became the iconic representation of femininity in Decadent art. Indeed, Jean Pierrot goes so far as to claim that the *femme fatale* was not just the pre-eminent Decadent image of the feminine but rather its favourite theme, reaching its apotheosis in the figure of Salome (38-41).

By the end of the century the image of the *femme fatale* had infiltrated all cultural forms, from "high" cultural artefacts, such as Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, Gautier's *A Night with Cleopatra*, Flaubert's *Salammbô*, the poetry of Baudelaire, Swinburne and the Symbolists, pre-Raphaelite paintings, and the art of Gustave Moreau, Munch, Beardsley, Klimt and Rops, through to domestic bric-à-brac, cutlery and crockery. As Bade says:

Wherever he went, the exhibition visitor of the 1890s found walls crowded with malefactors of the female sex. They also appeared with alarming frequency in poetry, plays, novels, and operas. By the end of the century they were even to be found on necklaces, advertising hoardings, perched on ashtrays and ink-wells and gazing up from the bottom of soup bowls. This preoccupation with evil and destructive women is one of the most striking features of late nineteenth-century culture. The theme was all-pervasive, appealing to men of opposing artistic creeds, symbolists and realists, rebels and reactionaries, and penetrating deeply into the popular consciousness. (6)

Just how all-pervasive the image of the *femme fatale* was in this period can be adduced from the ubiquity of Salome, the daughter of Herodias who dances for Holofernes in exchange for the decapitated head of John the Baptist. So popular was the mythic virgin-whore that Charles Bernheimer claims:

Salome is the favourite *femme fatale* of the *fin de siècle*. In poems, stories, plays, paintings, posters, sculptures, decorative objects, dance, and opera, well over a thousand versions of the Judean princess were made in Europe between 1870 and 1920- and that reckoning does not include all the sketches of Gustave Moreau, whose personal Salome output totals in the hundreds. (Bernheimer, Kline and Schor 104)

Indeed, one of the defining moments in the history of literary representations of the *femme fatale* is to be found in Huysmans' description of one of Moreau's many paintings of Salome in *A Rebours*. In the protagonist Des Esseintes' florid imagination, the painting enacts the transformation of history into myth:

In Gustave Moreau's work, which in conception went far beyond the data supplied by the New Testament, Des Esseintes saw realized at long last the weird and superhuman Salome of his dreams. Here she was no longer just the dancing-girl who extorts a cry of lust and lechery from an old man by the lascivious movements of her loins; who saps the morale and breaks the will of a king with the heaving of her breasts, the twitching of her belly, the quivering of her thighs. She had become, as it were, the symbolic incarnation of undying Lust, the Goddess of immortal Hysteria, the accursed Beauty exalted above all other beauties by the catalepsy that hardens her flesh and steels her muscles, the monstrous Beast, indifferent, insensible, poisoning, like the Helen of ancient myth, everything that approaches her, everything that sees her, everything that she touches. (Huysmans 65-66)

Given the ubiquity of images of this "Goddess of immortal Hysteria" and all the other mythic *femmes*, it is surprising how little critical work has been done on the *femme fatale* in this period, particularly that written from a feminist perspective. Until recently, Praz's *The Romantic Agony*, which was first published in 1930, has been the mainstay of those wishing to research the field. Essentially Praz provides a genealogy and a catalogue of Fatal Women. Although his work

is a valuable resource, staggering in its breadth and erudition in all the major European languages, it offers little in the way of socio-historical analysis. He explains the predominance of images of the fatal woman only in terms of a change in the psychological tenor of masculinity in this period: "The male, who at first tends towards sadism, inclines, at the end of the century, towards masochism"(Praz 216). Although Praz explicitly repudiates the degeneration theories of Lombroso and Nordau, his work implicitly pathologizes Decadence, which he views as a continuation of Romanticism rather than as a discrete cultural movement. The turn towards masculine masochism and effeminacy that he detects as the century progressed is inextricable from his notions of cultural pathology.

Praz concedes that Fatal Women have always existed in mythology and literature but he identifies several characteristics that are specific to nineteenth-century literary representations of Fatal women, such as the tendency to hark back to previous epochs for their models. Whilst Praz cautions that there is no need "to go back to the myth of Lilith, to the fables of harpies, Sirens, Gorgons, of Scylla and the Sphinx, or to the Homeric poems," it is striking just how frequently the artists of the period do just that (Praz 199). Praz lists a host of Biblical, mythological and historical figures which were used over and over again as models for the *femme fatale*, including Eve, Circe, Lucretia Borgia, Judith, Cleopatra, Clytemnestra, the Queen of Sheba, the Sphinx, Judith, Delilah, Salome and Lilith. The choice of historically remote, exotic heroines enabled writers such as Gautier and Flaubert to convey "an atmosphere of barbaric and Oriental antiquity, where all the most unbridled desires can be indulged and the cruellest fantasies can take concrete form"(Praz 207). In his analysis, the relation of the *femme* to the masculine protagonist in these texts is almost invariable: he is a passive, obscure youth, "inferior either in condition or in physical exuberance to the women, who stands in the same relation to him as do the female spider, the praying mantis, &c., to their respective males: sexual cannibalism is her monopoly" (Praz 215-16).

Praz's blanket characterization of Fatal women was later qualified by George Ross Ridge, who differentiates the fatal woman from the true *femme fatale*. He argues that because Decadence emerged gradually from Romanticism many fatal women retain vestiges of the Romantic heroine: they corrupt and destroy men through their innate voluptuousness, rather than actively seeking to annihilate them. By contrast, he claims that the true *femme fatale* is marked by her supra-abundant malevolence towards men, her malignant energy and sexual perversity. Her irresistible attractiveness is coupled with a demonic energy that is murderous or castrating to varying degrees; her sexuality is imaged as a devouring and destructive force, rather than in terms of fecundity or procreation. In the *femme fatale*, Woman, hitherto associated with nature, is figured as anti-natural, and hence anti-maternal:

The *natural woman*- wife, mother, earth-woman- disappears and the *modern woman* emerges, as Brook Adams says in *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, with the triumph of economic man and the artificial society. The new woman is at first the object of man's vanity- a lovely, costly bauble- but in time becomes an *unnatural sex*. The decadent writers feel, some explicitly, many implicitly, that she is no longer woman as nature meant her to be. She incarnates destruction rather than creativity. She has lost the capacity for love, and with it her function as wife and mother. The new heroine is malevolent...the constant theme is sado-masochism. This is the dominant trait of the *femme fatale*... (Ridge 353)

He cites Clara, the heroine of Mirbeau's *Le Jardin des supplices* (The Torture Garden), who is a "sodomasochistic nymphomaniac" with "maniacal destructive energy," as the final word in *femmes fatales*. Unlike Praz, he conceives of the resurgence in representations of the *femme fatale* as a reaction to changes in the position of women, coupled with anxieties about social decline and invasion. The misogyny of Decadent art, he argues, is essentially paranoid:

When the family decays the society it represents will surely disintegrate, for the family crumbles when the wife, mother, earth-woman, upon whom it rests, is supplanted by the vampire, succubus, modern woman- the *femme fatale*...The decadent society, the megalopolis, is rotten because of its *tare initiale*- the disintegration of woman. With wife and mother gone the family is a shambles...and the whole social structure totters. Retribution for this crime against nature, the decadent writer believes, will come with the Barbaric Hordes of the East. And this time, modern man, his energy drained by the vampirish *femme fatale*, will not have the strength to confront the great challenge. (Ridge 359-60)

This latter notion of invasion anxieties is more fully explored by Rebecca Stott, whose *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian "Femme Fatale": The Kiss of Death* provides the most sustained

analysis of the phenomenon from a feminist perspective. Stott relates the dominance of images of the *femme fatale* in the late nineteenth century to Foucault's thesis that this period saw the production of a plethora of discourses of sexuality. She argues that the fabrication of the *femme fatale* in this period is symptomatic of the interweaving of "discourses of many kinds that express differing cultural anxieties and preoccupations" (Stott xi). In her Foucauldian reading of late Victorian British literature, the *femme* emerges as a complex cultural sign with multiple determinants that expresses a host of cultural anxieties not only about gender and sexuality, as might be expected, but also about race, the potential loss of Empire, and the invasion fears that beset the popular consciousness at this time. Stott shows that in late Victorian Britain, discourses of gender, culture, nation, and Empire were mutually constitutive, so that a threat to the fabric of the family, such as that offered by the demand for women's rights, was perceived to threaten the whole social fabric, from nation to Empire. She argues that in various texts by Rider Haggard, Bram Stoker, Conrad and Hardy, the sexuality of the *femme fatale* is imaged as an essentially foreign threat to the British masculine subject; she must therefore be punished, expelled, or killed.

However, Stott also claims that during this period the *femme* was not invariably depicted as historically, racially, or culturally exotic: New Women, suffragettes, prostitutes and "fallen women" were also portrayed as *femmes fatales*. In her analysis, the *femme* is marked, not by her historical or cultural exoticism, but by her position in relation to dominant discourses:

The *femme fatale* comes in many guises, but she is always Other. She is always outside, either literally...or metaphorically, for as sexually fatal woman she represents chaos, darkness, death, all that lies beyond the safe, the known, the normal. In effect, the major common feature of the *femme fatale* is that of positionality: she is a multiple sign singularised by her position of Otherness: outside, invading, abnormal, subnormal and so on. (Stott 37-38)

Here Stott draws on Kristeva's notion of women as occupying the margin between man and chaos:

Woman's position on the frontier is a double position depending on the type of woman. The idealised woman (the woman seen as representative of a higher and purer nature, as Virgin or Mother of God) is conceived as an inherent part of the inside of the frontier (protecting and shielding the symbolic order from chaos). The second type, the woman vilified as Lilith or the

Whore of Babylon, is to be found on the outside of the frontier, part of the chaotic wilderness outside, representing that darkness and chaos. (Stott 38)

Stott breaks new ground in her detailed theoretical analysis of the historical and theoretical underpinnings of the *femme*, but like her predecessors in the field, she reads the *femme* as an exclusively masculine fantasy of Otherness. More recently, several critics have challenged this assumption, and have turned their attention to a variety of female-authored texts in which the *femme fatale* functions as a vehicle for female fantasies. Rita Felski, for example, looks at the work of the *fin de siècle* French woman writer Rachilde, whose work dwelt so explicitly on transgressive sexual behaviour that she was popularly known as Mademoiselle Baudelaire (Felski *The Gender of Modernity* 179). Hitherto, Rachilde has predominantly been read as a kind of male impersonator, whose representation of the *femme fatale*, and women more generally, simply mimics that of male writers. Felski challenges this view through an analysis of Rachilde's novels, including *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), *La Marquise de Sade* (1887), and *La Jongleuse* (1900), which reads her representations of the *femme* as figures for women's fantasies about power, violence and revenge. According to Felski, Rachilde's work demands a reconsideration of all male-centred theories of sadism and perversion, including those of psychoanalysis.

Felski pays particular attention to *La Marquise de Sade*, a lurid tale that traces the development of sadism in its heroine, Mary Barbe. Traumatized by a childhood incident in an abattoir, Mary develops a taste for blood and cruelty that is exacerbated by her resentment over the preferential treatment accorded her brother within the family. As she grows up she realizes that seduction is the only means by which women can obtain power. She embarks on a campaign to seduce and destroy a series of older men, which culminates in an orgy of blood-letting and sadistic murder, until, at the end, she becomes a vampire prowling the night streets of Paris in search of the vicarious pleasure of witnessing murders and acts of sexual transgression and violence, and the immediate pleasures of performing these acts herself.

La Marquise de Sade imitates Le Marquis de Sade on many levels, not least in its depiction of the female libertine as motivated by supreme egotism and self-interest, utterly devoid of fellow feeling for other women. Indeed, Felski regards the novel as the perfect illustration of Carter's notion that the female equivalent of the Sadeian libertine neither functions as a model for female emancipation, nor manifests solidarity with other women. In *The Sadeian Woman* Carter writes, *à propos* of Juliette and her ilk: "their liberation from the limitations of femininity is a personal one, for themselves only. They gratify themselves fully, but it is a liberation without enlightenment and so becomes an instrument for the oppression of others, both women and men" (*SW* 89). However, Rachilde's text proffers a specifically gendered version of sadism, which distinguishes it from its Sadeian model. Whereas Sade's male libertine utilizes the conventional hierarchies of power to which he has privileged access, as well as naked violence, in order to possess, master and finally negate the other, Rachilde demonstrates that the female libertine is forced to employ indirect means. As Felski argues: "Women's strategic deployment of their own desirability emerges as a necessary precondition for their acquisition of the ability to inflict violence upon others" (*The Gender of Modernity* 190). She contends that Rachilde's text shows how female sadism is enacted through "duplicitous tactics of performance and masquerade," and that its motivating force is revenge for a "prior condition of powerlessness and impotent rage" (*The Gender of Modernity* 190-91). Rachilde's *femme fatale* is an avenging demon whose violence against men stems directly from her experience of female oppression. Unlike the male libertine, her *modus operandi* is seduction.

Felski is not alone in proposing that in the nineteenth century, the *femme fatale* could figure as a vehicle of female fantasy in works by female writers. Adriana Craciun has examined the *femme fatale* in the work of the female Romantic writers Mary Lamb, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Dacre, Letitia Landon and Anne Bannerman. Craciun argues that the conviction that the *femme* is solely a male-authored fantasy has blinded feminist critics to the deployment of this figure by female writers. She cites the near-universal feminist espousal of an ideology of female

benevolence, and "the usually unspoken aim to demonstrate that women as a class (that is, as a sex outside of class) eschew violence, destructiveness, and cruelty, except in self-defence or rebellion" as obstructions to a full appreciation of how female writers have used the *femme* or fatal woman as a means to imagine a female subject of violence (Craciun 8-9). Far from being a misogynist fantasy that disempowers women, Craciun argues that these representations of the *femme* function as imaginary means of accessing power, rage and sexuality for the female writer. In her analysis, through the inscription of the *femme fatale* as a volatile, phantasmic subject of power, nineteenth-century female writers were able to circumvent the cultural construction of femininity as passive, powerless and asexual.

This same debate over whether the *femme fatale* is merely a masculine fantasy or whether she can be recuperated for female fantasy has also been played out in the feminist film criticism of the *film noir* of the 1940s and 1950s, and the "Neo-noir" of the 1990s. *Film noir* is a contested term, but nevertheless there is broad consensus that a group of Hollywood movies, the best known of which include *The Maltese Falcon*, *Laura*, *Kiss Me Deadly*, *The Killers*, *Double Indemnity*, *Gilda*, and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, are formally, stylistically and thematically related. The common attributes of *film noir* include a convoluted investigative narrative structure with a proliferation of points of view, the use of flashback and voice over, an expressionist visual style, and an iconography of hard-boiled heroes, *femmes fatales* and seedy or decadent settings. *Film noirs* usually plot the male protagonist's investigation of a crime or an enigma, but their real concern, according to most feminist critics, is the investigation of the "dame": the duplicitous, alluring woman, who is, to a greater or lesser degree, a version of the *femme fatale*. Whilst not all *femmes* in *noir* films are literally *fatale*, they "carry the mark of sexuality" and are "charged with deceit and potential violence" (Straayer 152). As Susan Hayward puts it, the neurotic, conflicted hero fetishizes the sexual allure of the *femme*, thereby allowing her to gain power over him; the resolution of the plot involves the threat of her sexuality being contained or destroyed. Yet Hayward argues:

... that's only half the story, because film noir is not so clear-cut in its misogyny. Film noir gives a very central role to the *femme fatale* and privileges her as active, intelligent, powerful, dominant and in charge of her own sexuality- at least until the end of the film when she pays for it (through death or submission to the patriarchal system). (Hayward 130)

The theorization of the *femme fatale* by early feminist film critics was largely determined by the psychoanalytic approach mapped out by Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). Mulvey proposed that mainstream Hollywood cinema positions women as the erotic object for the male protagonist who functions as "the bearer of the look" of the male spectator. The male spectator derives a sense of omnipotence from his unconscious identification with the active and eventually triumphant male protagonist. However, because Woman signifies castration she evokes masculine anxiety. According to Mulvey, classic cinema offers two possible strategies by which the masculine spectator defuses this anxiety: fetishistic scopophilia and voyeurism. Fetishistic scopophilia, in which the male spectator fetishistically overvalues the beauty and sexuality of the woman, and derives his pleasure from obsessive looking, functions as a means by which the threat of castration she represents can be disavowed. *Film noir*, on the other hand, positions the masculine spectator so that his gaze is voyeuristically aligned with that of the male protagonist who is investigating the guilty or mysterious dame- the *femme fatale*. The plot resolution hinges on the sadistic unmasking and punishment of the *femme* and the re-assertion of masculine control. The visual pleasure of the male spectator of *film noir* is essentially a form of sadistic voyeurism. These two strategies are not exclusive, but frequently coexist in the same sequence or film.

Mulvey's privileging of the masculine spectator implies that mainstream film is a masculine system designed for and determined by male pleasure; there is no place for female spectatorship or female pleasure in her analysis. The *femme fatale* is thereby reduced to a male fantasy, or a symptom of male castration anxiety; thus Mary Ann Doane asserts that the *femme fatale* is "not the subject of feminism but a symptom of male fears about feminism"(Doane 2-3).

An early challenge to this view came from Elizabeth Cowie, who repudiated the notion that *film noir* is a masculine fantasy in which women invariably play a subordinate role, and

rejected the conventional classification of female figures in *noir* as either good girls (home girls) or *femmes fatales* as inadequate to the range of characters women play (Cowie 121-65). The publication of the collection *Women in Film Noir* in 1978 marked a further shift in feminist analysis of the *femme fatale*. In this volume Janey Place, for example, whilst conceding that *film noir* is largely the product of male fantasy in which the *femme fatale* figures as the "dark lady, the spider woman, the evil seductress who tempts man and brings about his destruction," nevertheless argues that it is "one of the few periods of film in which women are active, not static symbols, are intelligent and powerful, if destructively so, and derive power, not weakness, from their sexuality" (Place 36-47). But her strongest challenge to Mulvey's model is the idea that the *femme* transcends the denouement to become a powerful image of, and for, women:

Visually film noir is fluid, sensual, extra-ordinarily expressive, making the sexually expressive woman, which is its dominant image of woman, extremely powerful. It is not their inevitable demise we remember but rather their strong, dangerous, and, above all, exciting sexuality. In film noir we observe both the social action of myth which dams the sexual woman and all who become enmeshed by her, and a particularly potent stylistic presentation of the sexual strength of woman which man fears. This operation of myth is so highly stylised and conventionalised that the final 'lesson' of myth often fades into the background and we retain the image of the erotic, strong, unrepressed (if destructive) woman. The style of these films thus overwhelms their conventional narrative content, or interacts with it to produce a remarkably potent image of woman. (Place 48)

The so called Neo-noir films of the late twentieth century have inspired further consideration of the *femme fatale* as a figure of resistance to patriarchal gender norms. Films such as *Black Widow* (1986), *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *After Dark, My Sweet* (1990), *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Body of Evidence* (1992), *Romeo is Bleeding* (1994), *The Last Seduction* (1994), *Diabolique* (1996), *Bound* (1996) and *Lost Highway* (1997) resurrect the *femme fatale* with a difference. Whereas in classic *noir* she is almost invariably punished for her sexuality and desire for power, which are represented in coded terms, in neo-noir not only does she get away with murder, but she also indulges her "enormous appetite for power, money and sex" (Stables 170), flaunts her superiority over men, and, frequently, wrests control over the narrative. Her hyperbolic sexuality is expressed overtly through sexual speech and the graphic display of "transgressive" practices such as exhibitionism,

lesbianism, and most notably, sado-masochism. Whatever kind of sex she indulges in, she clocks up orgasms with industrial efficiency:

Classic film noir sexualised its heroines through highly coded glamour, and an armoury of visual iconography arranged to signal sex and define her as a sexual *presence*. Put repeatedly on sexual display, the new *fatale* is redefined as a sexual *performer* within a visual system which owes as much to soft-core pornography as it does to mainstream Hollywood. (Stables 172-73)

Stables traces the emergence of this Neo-*noir über-femme* to the polysemic nature of postmodern cinema, which must cater to a heterogenous audience because of its vast budget, and also to a perceived crisis in masculinity that manifests itself in paranoid scenarios of female omnipotence. But no matter how the conjunction of social and historic factors underpinning the Neo-*noir* phenomenon is figured, the films themselves give rise to widely divergent readings. *Basic Instinct*, for example, as Stables says, is simultaneously "reviled as a misogynistic fantasy and celebrated as a feminist *tour de force*, condemned for blatant homophobia and celebrated as the ultimate lesbian cult movie"(Stables 166). Feminist critics are divided as to whether the emergence of the Neo *femme fatale* is anything to celebrate. On one hand, Julianne Pidduck argues:

Where in our everyday lives as women we are bombarded by the evidence of our increasing vulnerability, poverty and limited social power, the fatal *femme*'s embodied social, sexual and physical powers offer an imagined point of contact, if not simply identification- an imagined momentum or venting of rage and revenge fantasies- the importance of which cannot be underestimated. (sic) (72)

On the other hand, Stables finds that the neo *femme* cannot be recuperated for feminism quite so easily. She argues that whilst the *femme* breaks new ground in her polymorphous sexuality, triumphant activity and control over the narrative, she remains an ambiguous construct. Women may "salute and enjoy the *fatale* as she takes our revenge for us"(179) by enacting a "collective female fantasy" of "mutilating the male body on our behalf"(179), yet she also signifies the reduction, yet again, of woman to the body and its most basic instincts:

The *femme fatale* has come to stand in for all women- once the figure of woman is comprehensively sexualised on screen, all females are reduced to form and (fuckable) function. This mass objectification doesn't remove danger from desire- it simply serves to represent all women as dangerous. (Stables 179)

Just whose fantasy is the *femme fatale*? Is she an exclusively masculine, misogynistic fantasy utilized to justify the containment and destruction of the sexualised woman, or is she an image of a powerful, sexually free woman outside the Law that can serve as a vehicle for female fantasy and as a figure for the inscription of female desires within texts? The question raised in these debates about the *femmes fatales* of Decadence, *film noir* and neo-*noir* are central to my examination of both Carter's texts that deal explicitly with the *femme*: *The Sadeian Woman* and *The Passion of New Eve*. The cinematic *femme fatale* is a recurrent intertext here. In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter turned to the "celluloid brothel of the cinema" (*SW* 60) to trace Justine's contemporary legacy. In my brief discussion of this text, which examines the partial recuperation of feminine archetypes by cultural feminists, I find that Juliette also has a place in contemporary representations of women. In my more extended discussion of *The Passion of New Eve* I argue that the sexual politics of cinematic representation is a crucial frame for reading the novel's representation of the *femme fatale*. Furthermore, I show that *New Eve* is modelled on one of the strangest texts of French Decadence, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's *L'Eve future*, a text noted for its anticipation of the creation of the cinema. Stranger still, Villier's fictional prototype of the cinema was created for the sole purpose of unmasking the duplicity of the *femme fatale*. As I shall show, Carter's revisionary text parodically brings to light both Decadent and cinematic codes of the *femme fatale*.

Thesis and Antithesis in *The Sadeian Woman*

No book gave Carter as much trouble as *The Sadeian Woman*. Originally commissioned by Virago to appear in 1977 as part of its inaugural list, the book was so difficult to finish that it did not appear in print until two years later. All in all, Carter took five years to bring it to completion. When Les Bedford, in an interview for Sheffield University Television, questioned her about the project, she groaned:

"I must have done something terrible in a previous life to have embarked on this impossible task. It's like emptying the sea with a cup with a hole in it." In response to further inquiries about the book's progress, she replied, "I haven't finished. I have two drawers of material for it. I've been working on it for three years.... It's very difficult, and I keep doing lots of other things in the interval. I have a novel that I have been meaning to write during this year, and I have been trying to finish off de Sade. He's like Rasputin, I mean, he won't die...." (cited in Gamble *The Fiction of Angela Carter* 113-14).

The finished book wouldn't die either. The trouble it took her to write rebounded, and it became her most controversial work. Its reception by feminists, in particular, was markedly divided. Many objected to her founding premise that Sade's work offered important insights into the cultural construction of femininity. The term "moral pornographer" gave particular offence; in an interview with Anna Katsavos, Carter admitted "moral pornographer was a phrase that got me into a lot of trouble with the sisters, some of the sisters" (Katsavos 17). And some of the brothers too, we might add. Robert Clark predictably found that Carter's attempt to put pornography "in the service of women" was hopelessly misguided: "Carter's belief that a 'moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes' (*Sadeian Woman* 7) seems mistaken, the ideological power of the form being infinitely greater than the power of the individual to overcome it" (Clark 152-53).

The Sadeian Woman subsequently became a central text in the pornography debates that divided feminism through the 1980s and early 1990s. On one hand, Linda Williams used Carter's text to substantiate her own claim that pornography could be reclaimed by women; on the other, as I noted in the Introduction, Suzanne Kappeler and Andrea Dworkin attacked the text virulently in their anti-pornography polemics. Even feminist critics usually favourably disposed to

Carter's work, such as Sara Maitland, found the text problematic. As Sally Keenan argues, much of the disappointment and puzzlement articulated by feminist reviewers such as Maitland in the wake of the text's publication were related to its ambivalent treatment of de Sade, and its lack of "a clear conclusion that could be slotted into a feminist agenda" (Keenan 135).

The controversies engendered by *The Sadeian Woman* upon publication, and the central place it has since come to occupy in feminist debates about pornography and censorship, have been subject to detailed discussion by many critics.²⁴ It is not my intention to do more than acknowledge this controversy here. My interest in Carter's analysis of Juliette as *femme fatale* is a much narrower one. In part, my discussion is aimed at providing a context for my reading of Carter's complex and ambiguous fictional deployment of the *femme* in *The Passion of New Eve*. But I also wish to explore some of the other reasons, quite apart from its advocacy of the possibility of a "moral pornography," that *The Sadeian Woman* provoked such outrage amongst a certain strand of feminism. My discussion will focus on how Carter's preference for the wicked *femme fatale* over the blameless female victim desecrates the holiest cow in the cultural feminist pantheon.

In her essay, "Notes from the Front Line," published four years after *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter articulated an unabashedly anti-mythological stance: "I believe that all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice. I'm in the demythologising business...I'm interested in myths...just because they are extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree" ("Front Line" 71). This view of myth as inherently deceptive and disempowering also underpins *The Sadeian Woman*, which reads pornography as the *reductio ad absurdum* of sexed bodily differences to mythic essences.

In the "Polemical Preface," Carter's argument is addressed to the mythologizing of gender and the notion of the archetype *per se*, rather than to any specific variant thereof. Pornography, like all mythic notions of femininity, reduces women to "the slaves of history, and

²⁴ See Keenan; Altevors; Henstra; Makinen "Sexual and Textual Aggression in *The Sadeian Woman* and *The Passion of New Eve*"; Rubinson)

not its makers" (SW 3), she argues, and since "pornography derives directly from myth," its heroines and heroes are simply mythic abstractions, from which all individuality has been stripped away:

The nature of the individual is not resolved into but is ignored by these archetypes, since the function of the archetype is to diminish the unique 'I' in favour of a collective, sexed being which cannot, by reason of its very nature, exist as such because an archetype is only an image that has got too big for its boots and bears, at best, a fantasy relation to reality. (SW 6)

As simple, reductive fantasies, archetypes might be thought to be harmless. Not so, according to Carter: "Myths deal in false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances" (SW 5-6). In so doing, they deny us our full humanity, and obscure the real, historically determined conditions of our existence: "these archetypes serve only to confuse the main issue, that relationships between the sexes are determined by history and by the historical fact of the economic dependence of women on men" (SW 6-7). At this point in her argument Carter seems to regard all archetypes of femininity as equally deleterious to women: "All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway" (SW 5). Yet her assertion "All archetypes are spurious, but some are more spurious than others" (SW 6), hints that she believes there is a distinction to be made between the absolutely spurious and those relatively less so.

This distinction becomes clear in her reading of the Sadeian dyad of Justine, the holy virgin, and Juliette, the profane whore. The sisters embody Sade's dialectic of the feminine: sexual victim and sexual terrorist, thesis and antithesis. According to Carter, the story of the thesis, Justine, as worked and reworked in *The Adventures of Justine and Juliette, Her Sister* and the three versions of *Justine*, is a "black, inverted fairytale" (SW 39). Like a fairytale princess, Justine believes that her beauty, youth and virtue will protect her from the depredations of evil, and she clings to this delusion despite all evidence to the contrary. What she so spectacularly fails to grasp, Carter argues, is that it is these very same qualities that incite the libertines to violate her. Furthermore, her erroneous belief in her inviolability paradoxically robs her of the ability to defend herself:

Herself mystified by herself, narcissistically enamoured of the idea of herself as Blessed Virgin, she has no notion at all of who she is except in fantasy. To the extent that she has been made holy and thinks of herself as such, so she is capable of being desecrated. Purity is always in danger." (SW 72-3)

Thus, although Justine starts out a princess, after a "dolorous pilgrimage" through Sade's various dystopias, in which she is ceaselessly violated and tortured by a succession of libertines, she ends up as a martyr (SW 39). She is a "good woman" as defined by men, that is to say, she is chaste; consequently, she is rewarded with "rape, humiliation and incessant beatings" (SW 38). Because Justine adheres so single-mindedly to the code of femininity that equates virtue with chastity, she has no purchase on the real:

Justine's response is not the continuous exercise of a moral faculty. It is a sentimental response to a world in which she always hopes her good behaviour will procure her some reward, some respite from the bleak and intransigent reality which surrounds her and to which she cannot accommodate herself. The virtuous, the interesting Justine, with her incompetence, her gullibility, her whining, her frigidity, her reluctance to take control of her own life, is a perfect woman. (SW 54-55)

Carter detects Justine's legacy in the literary domain in those "martyrised good little girls", such as Beth in *Little Women*, and Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, through to the succession of "heartstruck, tearful heroines of Jean Rhys, Edna O'Brien and Joan Didion" (SW 56). But it is in the cinema that her "dolorous" image is most visible:

In the celluloid brothel of the cinema, where the merchandise may be eyed endlessly but never purchased, the tension between the beauty of women, which is admirable, and the denial of the sexuality which is the source of that beauty but is also immoral, reaches a perfect impasse. That is why Saint Justine became the patroness of the screen heroine. (SW 60)

The ultimate product of this tension is the Good/Bad Girl: "the blonde, buxom and unfortunate sorority of Saint Justine, whose most notable martyr is Marilyn Monroe" (SW 63). Monroe embodies the paradoxical combination of erotic allure and sexual ignorance that makes Justine so irresistible to the Sadeian libertines. Justine is innocent and ignorant; this, in the Sadeian universe, makes her a temple ripe for desecration. The Hollywood Good/Bad Girl, on the other hand,

only masquerades as ignorant in order to comply with the production code. As a result, her sexuality is denatured, and she is reduced to a comic figure.

Sade presumably intended Justine to be a lesson in the folly of virtue, but she has come instead to symbolize the sexual appeal of female victimage. According to Carter, her bequest is a pernicious one for women, because she is the prototype for the eroticisation of female masochism:

These self-consciously blameless ones suffer and suffer until it becomes second nature; Justine marks the start of a kind of self-regarding female masochism, a woman with no place in the world, no status, the core of whose resistance has been eaten away with self-pity. Justine's place in the aetiology of the female condition in the twentieth century is assured; she is the personification of the pornography of that condition, She is obscene to the extent to which she is beautiful. Her beauty, her submissiveness and the false expectations that these qualities will do her some good are what make her obscene. (*SW* 57)

The moral of Justine, Carter asserts, is this: "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" (*SW* 77). Clearly, in Carter's view, if archetypes were to be ranked by their degree of spuriousity, Justine would take first place.

Where does that leave the antithesis, her sister Juliette? Carter argues that Juliette belongs to de Sade's class of "Sadeian women" such as the Abbess Delbène, Durand, Duclos and Clairwil, who, "once they know how to use their sexuality as an instrument of aggression, they use it to extract vengeance for the humiliations they were forced to endure as the passive objects of the sexual energy of others" (*SW* 27). These "profane whores" are rationality incarnate; their formidable intellects are yoked to a mission of inexorable self-advancement. Thus instead of Justine's whimpering passivity, Juliette embodies supreme self-interest, the profoundest egotism, and utter self-mastery. Emotion and obligation have no place in her schemes. The extraordinary success of her quest for sexual and financial gratification is proof positive that the wicked prosper. Although she breaks the law at every turn, she goes unpunished because she sleeps with the lawmakers and "caters to their picaresque sexual needs" (*SW* 80).

The lesson taught her by Norceuil, a patron of the brothel where she learns her trade, becomes her lifelong credo: "to escape slavery, she must embrace tyranny"(SW 84). Which is to say, not only must she embrace tyrants, but she herself must become one. Carter argues that Sade imagines femininity as praxis, rather than essence; therefore he has his heroine achieve victory by eschewing the praxis of the weak, that is to say, of women. Juliette "fucks" in the active sense, like a man; she is never "fucked" in the passive case like a woman. Her voracious sexuality, anti-maternity and insatiable hunger for power, whose prime strategies are seduction and duplicity, mark her as a *femme fatale*. Following her apprenticeship in the brothel she embarks upon an infernal career of lust, murder, treachery and greed, in which she revels in performing acts of gratuitous evil, culminating in the murder of her infant daughter.

Carter is at pains to point out that neither sister offers a model for women; both are nothing more than descriptions of highly ambivalent female behaviour. They exist in a complex dialectic: "Justine is the thesis, Juliette is the antithesis: both are without hope and neither pays any heed to a future in which might lie the possibility of a synthesis of their modes of being, neither submissive nor aggressive, capable of both thought and feeling" (SW 79) She disputes Apollinaire's extravagant claim that Juliette is "a figure of whom minds have as yet no conception, who is rising out of mankind, who will have wings and who will renew the world"; if she is the New Woman, Carter opines, she is so "only in the mode of irony"(SW 79).

And yet it is clear that Carter regards Juliette, with her rationality, self-possession and control of her own sexuality, as modelling a more positive identity for women than that provided by her sister. Whereas Justine merely reaffirms cultural assumptions that women are natural victims, Juliette is a "blasphemous guerrilla of demystification" (SW 105) who radically undermines patriarchal ideas about the nature of femininity. Therefore, Carter concedes, "Juliette remains a model for women in some ways...by the use of her reason, an intellectual apparatus women themselves are still inclined to undervalue, she rids herself of some of the more crippling aspects of femininity"(SW 79). Carter reads Juliette as both a satire on the ideology of the free

market, and as Sade's attempt at demystifying essentializing notions of woman. As a "free woman in an unfree society" (*SW* 27), Juliette is necessarily a monster, but she is a monster with demythologizing work to do: "With apologies to Apollinaire, I do not think I want Juliette to renew my world; but, her work of destruction complete, she will, with her own death, have removed a repressive and authoritarian superstructure that has prevented a good deal of the work of renewal" (*SW* 111).

For Carter, writing before the advent of the 1990s neo-*femme*, the paucity of Juliettes in contemporaneous iconographies of women spoke volumes about our internalised ideals of the feminine:

Justine is the holy virgin; Juliette is the profane whore. If Juliette has notably fewer great-granddaughters than her sister in the imaginary brothel where ideas of women are sold, then perhaps it serves to show how much in love with the idea of the blameless suffering of women we all are, men and women both. (*SW* 101)

This latter statement is amongst the most provocative Carter ever wrote. It was a salvo aimed directly, not at executives of the fantasy industry, who, after all, would be unlikely to read her book, but at those feminists who would. No matter how much she qualified it, Carter's elevation of the malevolent Juliette over the abused Justine was a calculated assault on deeply held feminist convictions about women's inherent benevolence, and the moral superiority of the woman-as-victim. In addition, her claim that Juliette's anti-maternity demystifies the "entrancing rhetoric" of the womb, and in so doing, secularises women, by forcing them to abandon "the deluded priestesshood of a holy reproductive function" (A. Carter *SW* 109-10), is aimed squarely at contemporaneous feminist discourses which revived myths of maternity as the essential ground of woman's inherently benevolent being:

This theory of maternal superiority is one of the most damaging of all consolatory fictions and women themselves cannot leave it alone, although its springs from the timeless, placeless, fantasy land of archetypes where all the embodiments of biological supremacy live. It puts those women who wholeheartedly subscribe to it in voluntary exile from the historic world... (*SW* 106)

Carter's anti-maternal, anti-essentialist rhetoric was adjudged so offensive by many feminists as to amount to treason against the sisterhood. But the outcry her text provoked

indicated that her rhetoric had reached its intended target, which was the tendency, then emerging within feminism, which has come to be known variously as cultural, metaphysical, ecological or spiritual feminism. This tendency originated in the USA out of the radical feminist and lesbian separatist movements, although it was by no means co-extensive with either of them. Just why Carter should have had cultural feminism in her sights is immediately clear when we appreciate how far it goes in recuperating archetypal notions of gender.

For the cultural feminist credo that gender is innate and immutable marked a radical departure from the conception of gender as a cultural construct to which Carter and most other Second Wave feminists subscribed. According to Alice Echols, the foremost historian of cultural feminism, this credo was first articulated in Valerie Solanas' S.C.U.M. manifesto (Echols 63).²⁵ In 1967 Solanas was a minority voice, but by the mid-1980s her essentialist vision had been taken up to such an extent that it precipitated a rift within feminism. This was especially so in the United States, where cultural feminism was strongly associated with the anti-pornography movement, and with the writers Mary Daly, Susan Griffin, Adrienne Rich, Robin Morgan, Judith Arcana, Susan Brownmiller, Janice Raymond and Andrea Dworkin. In Britain it has been primarily associated with the work of Dale Spender. There is some divergence between the relative positions of these writers, and none identifies herself as a cultural feminist, but at the risk of collapsing the differences between them, I will use the term cultural feminism to denote the common viewpoint that runs through their work.

This is the view that "equates women's liberation with the development and preservation of a female counter-culture" (Echols 63). Because it posits gender as predetermined and immutable, cultural feminism urges women to disengage from men and patriarchal culture and to withdraw into a separate female culture free from "male values." Cultural feminism invokes the

²⁵ S.C.U.M. is an acronym for The Society for Cutting up Men. The author of the manifesto, Valerie Solanas, gained worldwide notoriety for shooting Andy Warhol.

- same gender categories, albeit in a positivized form, which underpin the patriarchal ideology of separate spheres:

Cultural feminism is the ideology of female nature or female essence reappropriated by feminists themselves in an effort to re-validate undervalued female attributes. For cultural feminists, the enemy of women is not merely a social system or economic institution or set of backward beliefs but masculinity itself and in some cases male biology. Cultural feminist politics revolve around creating and maintaining a healthy environment- free of masculinist values and all their offshoots such as pornography- for the female principal. Feminist theory, the explanation of sexism, and the justification of feminist demands can all be grounded securely and unambiguously on the concept of the essential female. (Alcoff 408)

The essential female as produced by cultural feminism (warm, compassionate, nurturing, gentle, sensual and in touch with nature) is indistinguishable from the Romantic ideal of womanhood, and similarly confines Woman to the affective sphere. As Carter herself put it in her essay "The Language of Sisterhood", the notion that women are inherently good, and that all the evils of the world would disappear if women were in charge, is the kind of "sentimental wishful thinking" that has long characterised much feminist thought:

...thus: if I and my sisters, with our firm grasp on eternal verities, ran things instead of our husbands (or elder brothers), we would never let our sons go off to fight one another, or perpetrate the nuclear megadeath, or pollute the rivers with industrial effluvia or club to death baby seals, etc. This is the utopian aspect of traditional feminism; in mythic terms, it is Kali, the mother goddess of destruction, in her benign aspect, or, in Kleinian terms, it is the Good Breast. It is an imaginative compensation for historical powerlessness yet it is rooted in a perfectly real sense of a camaraderie of impotent yet sensitive condition. ("Sisterhood" 230)

The corollary of cultural feminism's equation of Woman with benevolence is the censoring out as "unfemale" of all negative emotions and behaviours, such as anger, aggression, hatred, violence, envy, greed and even, in some cases, genital sexuality itself, and their projection onto the male. Cultural feminism echoes Romanticism and Jungian archetypal gender theory in linking Woman to Nature through a cult of motherhood, and in reifying Nature itself as a benign female force. Adrienne Rich makes no bones about locating Woman's unique being in her biology:

...female biology- the diffuse, intense sensuality radiating out from clitoris, breasts, uterus, vagina; the lunar cycles of menstruation; the gestation and fruition of life which can take place in the female body- has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate... We must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence. (Rich 21)

This re-affirmation of female biology as destiny is counterpoised with an equally essentialist vision of maleness; indeed, cultural feminists frequently cite men's innate aggression and need to dominate as the cause of all the planet's woes. For instance, Robin Morgan claims, "the Man's competitiveness and greed are the cause of sexism, racism... hunger, war and ecological disaster" (93). Brownmiller's equation of male genital sexuality with rape further demonizes men: "By anatomical fiat- the inescapable construction of their genital organs- the human male was a predator and the human female served as his natural prey"(16). This argument reaches its apogee in Dworkin's assertion that "sex and murder are fused in male consciousness... the annihilation of women is the source of meaning and identity for men"("Taking Action" 288). At its most extreme, cultural feminism's absolute polarization of gender equates women with life and men with death, and images relations between the two as a murderous struggle in which women are the inevitable victims of men's violence. Women, in other words, are so many Justines.

Such an implicit idealization of female victimage was bound to be problematic to Carter, but cultural feminism's rejection of the corrupted male values of the "phallocracy" was perhaps even more so. The male values which cultural feminists urge women to jettison are precisely those that materialist feminists such as Carter regard as essential to the emancipation of women: reason, technology, science, Western medicine, reformist politics, the notion of progress, history and even linear time itself have all been dismissed by cultural feminists at various times as patriarchal values and concepts that are either irrelevant or downright deleterious to women. Thus Dale Spender argues that the male notion of progress is irrelevant to women because women's lives are governed by an innate female essence and thus their experience has been constant throughout history (30). Mary Daly's dismissal of race, class, ethnicity, etc. as merely "male-identified differences" of no import to a feminist analysis is typical of cultural feminism's ahistorical construction of women as a homogenous group whose commonality of experience cancels out all differences between them (365).

Carter's antipathy to the ethos of cultural feminism can hardly be overstated. In "Notes From the Front Line" she stressed that since the 1960s her political views had been grounded in "an absolute and committed materialism", and a firm belief that "*this* world is all there is" ("Front Line" 70). For her, feminism must necessarily be tied to a materialist politics cognisant of the specific historical and social conditions under which women live. Hence she rejected the very notion of universality as fraudulent, whether it be applied to men or to women, because it denies the particularity of individual experience which is always historically determined: "The notion of a universality of human experience is a confidence trick and the notion of a universality of female experience is a clever confidence trick" (SW 12).

But, from her perspective, possibly the most objectionable aspect of cultural feminism's ahistoricism is that its rejection of history leaves women no place else to go but mythology, and when women retreat into the mythological, they relegate themselves to the category of the pre-rational. As Aiden Day has comprehensively shown, in Carter's view the sleep of reason truly produces monsters. Her commitment to reason as the only possible underpinning to any emancipatory discourse is evident from a comment she made to John Haffenden regarding aspects of the critical reception given her work, when she said "the idea that my stories are all dreams or hallucinations out of Jung-land, or the notion that the world would be altogether a better place if we threw away our rationality and went laughing down the street... that's all nonsense" (Haffenden 85). According to Carter, cultural feminism's repudiation of reason in favour of female spirituality, witchcraft and myth is a dangerous strategy that threatens to incarcerate women permanently in "Jung-land":

Sometimes, especially under the influence of Jung, a more archaic mouth is allowed to exert an atavistic dominance. Then, if I am lucky enough to be taken with such poetic pseudo-seriousness, my nether mouth might be acknowledged as one capable of speech- were there not, of old, divinatory priestesses, female oracles, and so forth? Was there not Cassandra, who always spoke the truth, although admittedly in such a way that nobody ever believed her? And that, in mythic terms, is the hell of it. Since that female, oracular mouth is located so near the beastly backside, my vagina might indeed be patronizingly regarded as a speaking mouth, but never one that issues the voice of reason. In this most insulting mythic redefinition of myself, that of occult priestess, I am indeed allowed to speak but only of things that male society does not take seriously. I can hint

at dreams, I can even personify the imagination; but that is only because I am not rational enough to cope with reality. (SW 5)

Women who align themselves with the oracular and the occult at the behest of cultural feminists such as Daly, Carter suggests, exile themselves from rational discourse and fatally undermine their own credibility. This passage contains the only explicit reference to Jung in *The Sadeian Woman*; nevertheless, it signals that for Carter, by espousing the pre-rational and the mythic as the natural domain of femininity, cultural feminism aligns itself with the archetypal gender theory of Jung.

Cultural feminists themselves disavow any such kinship with Jungian theory. For example, Mary Daly, although sympathetically disposed towards Jung in her early works such as *Beyond God the Father* (1973), had repudiated his archetypal gender theory by the time *Gyn/Ecology* was published in 1978:

Particularly seductive is the illusion of equality projected through Jung's androcratic animus-anima balancing act, since women are trained to be grateful for "complementarity" and token inclusion... This it is possible for women to promote Jung's garbled gospel without awareness of betraying their own sex and even in the belief that they are furthering the feminist cause. (Daly 280)

But this disavowal notwithstanding, there are many parallels and connections that can be made between the gender essentialism of Jung and that of cultural feminism. Both, for instance, draw on a common intellectual history to buttress their claims, namely Johann Jakob Bachofen's nineteenth-century theory of cultural evolution, set out in his influential book, *Das Mutterrecht* (1861), which posits that patriarchy was preceded by a matriarchal period in which woman-centred cults and Goddess worship flourished.

In addition, both Jungians and cultural feminists claim that myth has unquestionable truth status because it emanates from a primordial realm that is somehow anterior to culture. Jung argues that myth stems directly from the gender archetypes lodged in what he terms the collective unconscious:

The collective unconscious, being the repository of man's experience and at the same time the prior condition of this experience, is an image of the world which has taken aeons to form. In this

image certain features, the archetypes or dominants, have crystallized out in the course of time. They are the ruling powers. (Jung 93)

According to Jung, their location in the collective unconscious means that gender archetypes cannot be directly represented or brought to consciousness; however, they are expressed in archetypal images, which are universal patterns of behaviours, myths, symbols, dreams, and visions. Thus, for Jungians, myths and symbols are visible, temporal manifestations of immutable but hidden truths, rather than products of culture.

There is a striking correspondence between Jung's idea of the collective unconscious and Daly's notion of the Prehistoric Sacred, for both are claimed to be storehouses of elemental knowledge about the cosmos and the eternal mysteries of being, including the immutable truths about maleness and femaleness. However, whereas Jungians grant all myths truth status, Daly makes a more selective claim. According to Daly, patriarchal myths are but pale derivatives or reversals of earlier female-centred or "gynocentric" myths. In her account, gynocentric myths, which originated in the matriarchal period, enable female self-knowledge and empowerment, hence their suppression by the patriarchs. She advocates the recuperation of these ancient gynocentric myths as a means by which women can get in touch with the "essential ground" of their womanhood and reclaim mythic female powers originating in what she variously terms their "Prehistoric Sacred" or "Background." Gynocentric myths alone have incontrovertible truth status in her discourse; they are "stories arising from the experience of Crones- stories which convey primary and archetypal messages about our own Prehistory and female-identified power"(Daly 61).

Despite Daly's privileging of gynocentric myth, her view of myth as a means by which women can access power is entirely consonant with the Jungian thesis that myths are a source of enlightenment and wisdom that empowers the individual subject. Furthermore, Daly and Jungians alike privilege the feminine as having unique access to the mystical realm from which myth issues forth. There is more than serendipity at work when Daly quotes from Jungian Helen

Diner's *Mothers and Amazons: the First Feminine History of Culture*, in order to buttress her claims that Woman has a unique connection to the "mystic center of creation." Daly takes the following excerpt from Diner:

All knowledge of fate comes from the female depths; none of the surface powers knows it. Whoever wants to know about fate must go down to the woman. This is the reason for the female predominance in the realm of the mysteries. There never were mysteries of Zeus. Of the female mysteries of Eleusis, Adesius wrote to the Emperor Julian: "Once you have participated in the mysteries, you will feel ashamed to have been born a mere man." (Diner 17-18)

Here Daly reveals just how closely aligned her conception of Woman is with the Jungian notion of the feminine. Both theories position Woman as embodying a cosmic fusion of the spiritual and the biological. In both theories Woman has privileged access to the mystical realm of the pre-rational, and therefore the unconscious itself is personified as female, or, to be more precise, as a female space. The goal of the initiate, for both Jung and Daly, is to journey downwards and inwards into that purportedly female space that is home to unspeakable, esoteric knowledge. According to Daly, "it is the task of Gyn/Ecologists to continue to initiate the journey into participation into the mysteries... following the spiral net converging towards the mystic centre of creation" (401). It is noteworthy that the feminist spiritual movement of Wicca, which arose following the publication of Star Hawk's *Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (1979), shares Daly's premise that Goddess worship and the practise of the rituals of mythic cults of the feminine will inevitably lead to female empowerment through the recuperation of eternal verities.

Carter's antithetical take on Goddess worship, which she set out unequivocally in *SW*, is by now well known:

If women allow themselves to be consoled for their culturally determined lack of access to the modes of intellectual debate by the invocation of hypothetical great goddesses, they are simply flattering themselves into submission (a technique often used on them by men). All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway. Mother goddesses are just as silly a notion as father gods. If a revival of the myths of these cults gives women emotional satisfaction, it does so at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life. That is why they were invented in the first place. (*SW* 5)

This repudiation of the very notion of the Mother Goddess, coupled with her highly qualified endorsement of the *femme fatale* as demythologizer, was bound to stick in the craw of cultural feminists such as Daly. Other overtly feminist explorations of female malevolence would come later - for instance, in fiction, Helen Zhaqavi's *Dirty Weekend* (1991), and Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* (1994)- but in the 1970s Carter's self-conscious and very explicit attack on the notion of intrinsic female benevolence went against the grain of feminist thought.²⁶ Her endorsement of the *femme fatale* Juliette over the saintly Justine, no matter how heavily qualified, was anachronistic yet prescient of the turn feminist theory and fiction were later to take.

²⁶ Merja Makinen has examined how Carter anticipates the theme of female violence taken up by later feminist fiction writers in "Sexual and Textual Aggression in *The Sadeian Woman* and *The Passion of New Eve*," *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter*, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton, First ed., Studies in Twentieth Century Literature (Harlow: Longman, 1997).

There Never was a Woman like Leilah: *The Passion of New Eve*

In her polemic Carter adopts a relatively unambiguous position on the *femme fatale*, but in her fiction the waters are somewhat more muddied. Although she did not identify *The Passion of New Eve* as an exposition on the *femme fatale per se*, in various interviews Carter was explicit that the novel set out to examine the notion of femininity as a cultural construct, describing it as "a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity, among other things" ("Front Line" 71), which contains a "careful and elaborate discussion of femininity as a commodity, of Hollywood producing illusions as tangible commodities" (Haffenden 86). Furthermore, without explicitly mentioning the *femme fatale* as one such illusion, she nominated Charles Vidor's classic noir film *Gilda* (1946), notorious for Rita Hayworth's erotic performance as the *femme fatale*, as one of the triggers for its writing:

In *The Passion of New Eve* the central character is a transvestite movie star, and I created this person in order to say some quite specific things about the cultural production of femininity. The promotional slogan for the film *Gilda*, starring Rita Hayworth, was "There never was a woman like Gilda!", and that may have been one of the reasons why I made my Hollywood star a transvestite, a man, because only a man could think of femininity in terms of that slogan. (Haffenden 85-86)

As Carter indicates here, by revealing that the ultimate male fantasy of woman, the iconic, Garbo-like Hollywood movie star Tristessa, is actually a man masquerading as a woman, *New Eve* literalizes the logic behind the cinematic commodification of female fantasy figures that bear little relation to actual women. The revelation of Tristessa's transvestism is central to the text's premise that Woman is a cultural construct:

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

Tristessa, the sensuous fabrication of the mythology of the flea-pits. How could a real woman ever have been so much a woman as you? (*PNE* 128-29)

Here Carter endows the narrative voice of Evelyn/Eve with a distinctly Sadeian inflection, for the "perfect man's woman" is a clear re-inscription of Sade's Justine. Like Justine, Tristessa's specialty is suffering; she suffers "exquisitely"; "suffering was her vocation" (*PNE* 8). The litany of tragic roles she plays- Catherine Earnshaw, Madeline Usher, Marguerite, Mary Queen of Scots- render her a fitting, albeit imaginary, addition to the twentieth-century iconography of female victimage:

Tristessa had long since joined Billie Holliday and Judy Garland in the queenly pantheon of women who expose their scars with pride, pointing to their emblematic despair just as a medieval saint points to the wounds of his martyrdom, and no drag-artiste felt his repertoire complete without a personation of her magic and passionate sorrow. (*PNE* 6)

In her heyday as a Hollywood star, long past at the time the narrative unfolds, Tristessa had been billed as "The most beautiful woman in the world", and it was her conjunction of beauty and suffering that had invited a sadistic sexual response from the male viewer of her films. Evelyn/Eve recounts, "the spectacle of Tristessa's suffering always aroused" a twitch in his "budding groin", hence his adolescent dream had been of meeting "Tristessa, she stark naked, tied, perhaps, to a tree..." (*PNE* 7-8).

When the paranoid misogynist Zero and his harem storm the aging Tristessa's glass hide-out in the desert and strip off her chiffon negligee and sequined g-string to reveal that 'she' is really he, Evelyn/Eve has a crucial realisation:

While Zero ingeniously tortured you in your gallery of glass, you must have been in absolute complicity with him. You must have thought Zero, with his guns and knives and whips and attendant chorus of cringing slaves, was a man worth the ironic gift of that female appearance which was your symbolic autobiography. I read it at a glance. You had turned yourself into an object as lucid as the objects you made from glass; and this object was, itself, an idea. You were your own portrait, tragic and self-contradictory. Tristessa had no function in this world except as an idea of himself; no ontological status, only an iconographic one. (*PNE* 129)

Tristessa and Zero, in other words, exist in a dialectic; each is the necessary correlation of the other, without which the iconography of female victimage could not exist. Subject and object, sadist and masochist are essential terms in the equation of misogynistic pornography; each enters into a reciprocal pact to act out the "spurious charade of maleness and femaleness" that Carter derided in

The Sadeian Woman (8). Just as Justine's injured innocence and perpetually renewed virginity inflame the Sadeian libertine to desecrate her "temple," the cinema's eroticisation of Tristessa's suffering invites Zero's sadism. Like Justine, Tristessa had mistakenly imagined that his beauty and passivity could protect him: "I thought," he said, "I was immune to rape. I thought that I had become inviolable..."(PNE 137). Tristessa articulates the very same code of female passivity that Sade's 'perfect woman' Justine lives by to her peril: "Passivity," he said. "Inaction...So I was seduced by the notion of a woman's being, which is negativity. Passivity, the absence of being"(PNE 137).

A number of critics have read Tristessa as an ironic reiteration of Justine. Aidan Day argues that "Tristessa is a version of Sade's Justine, a comparable product of the masculine imagination"(118), with the added twist that his name "Tristessa de St Ange" is an allusion to the libertine, Madame de Sant-Ange, who initiates the young Eugenie into the practices of sadism in Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir*. Thus Tristessa, the man "trapped" in a woman's body, embodies both sadist and masochist: "Tristessa the man in drag is an agent of this masculine cultural conspiracy" which entraps women into passivity and victimage (Day 119). Merja Makinen also makes the point that Tristessa's self-presentation as "a suffering icon of mournful femininity" resonates strongly with "Carter's blistering analysis of Sade's Justine as the ultimate emblem of mythical femininity" ("Sexual and Textual Aggression " 157-58). Gregory J. Rubinson notes that with the creation of Tristessa, whom he describes as a "descendant of Sade's Justine", Carter has found "a potent image for the problematic link between male desire and female suffering- a link perpetuated in pornography and Hollywood cinema." Rubinson also draws a parallel between Justine's "dolorous pilgrimage" and Eve's passion, when he remarks that "[a]fter raping her a second time, Zero announces that she is now his eighth wife, forcing Eve into a situation tantamount to Sade's Justine- the virgin archetype made unwilling whore"(Rubinson 138-39). Alison Lee alone argues that the combination of beauty and suffering projected by Tristessa mark her as a *femme fatale* (Lee "De/En-gendering Narrative"

247), which is an argument that runs counter to the commonly accepted reading of the *femme* as an embodiment of female sexuality and power.

Clearly, with the exception of Lee, the notion that Tristessa is a parodic postmodern Justine is widely accepted in Carter criticism. But if we search for a version of her correlative, the ruthless and hyperbolically sexual Juliette, the picture is not so clear-cut. Is there an equivalent figure? The remainder of this chapter is an attempt to answer that question. My focus is on perhaps the least analysed figure in the text, Leilah, the black nightclub dancer whose seduction of Evelyn propels him towards Mother's castrating knife.

Hitherto, critics examining the text's demythologising of gender have tended to focus on the issue of gender transformation that is so spectacularly foregrounded by the revelation of Tristessa's transvestism and the surgical transfiguration of Evelyn into Eve. Consequently, for the last decade the novel has predominantly been read in the light of late twentieth-century theories of performative gender, transgender and queer theory. For example, in the 1997 collection *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter*, no less than six of the twelve contributors discuss Carter's fiction in the light of Judith Butler's notion of gender as performance. More recently still, this tendency in Carter criticism has in turn been critiqued. In her article "Gender as Performance: Questioning the 'Butlerification' of Angela Carter's fiction", Joanna Trevenna discerns significant differences between Butler's model and the performances of gender staged in Carter's novels, and argues that Carter's representation of gender is more akin to that of Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*.

It is not my intention to review this argument here; rather I want to point out that what Trevenna calls the "Butlerification" of Carter's work has led to a critical neglect of those aspects of the novel that resist being read in terms of drag or technologies of transsexuality. This is particularly the case in relation to Leilah, the *femme fatale* whose serial transformations into Mother's handmaiden Sophia and the feminist warrior Lilith have received scant critical attention because they do not

involve a re-assignment of sex or gender. Maria Aline Seabra Ferreira's "Myth and Anti-Myth in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*" is exemplary of this neglect. Whilst Ferreira examines Carter's deconstruction of gender myths, such as that of the Great or Phallic Mother, and argues that the novel "represents a thorough deconstruction of myths of origin and creation, of boundaries and frontiers, of foundational philosophies", she does not once allude to the myths incarnated by Leilah/Sophia/Lilith (Ferreira 297). Yet surely the full complexity of Carter's attempt at demythologizing gender can only be appreciated if Leilah's transformations are brought into the equation. For as Emma Pi-tai Peng observes, this is a novel in which the "technology of reconstructing the female self is not just conducted on the artificial Eve; it is also exercised on the 'real' women like Mother of Beulah and Leilah"(Peng 121).

On the surface, the transfiguration of the Salome-like Leilah into the feminist warrior Lilith is profoundly problematic. For Christina Britzolakis, the Leilah-Lilith double is emblematic of the contradiction at the heart of Carter's endeavour: "Leilah and Lilith represent the sundered halves of Carter's project- her baroque, eclectic appropriation of the western cultural heritage and her commitment to demythologising it in the cause of political transformation"(182). Carter's invocation of Lilith, one of the oldest archetypes of femininity, does indeed sit oddly with her avowed iconoclasm, her "de-mythologizing project" ("Front Line" 71). If, as Carter argues in "Notes From the Front Line", myths of femininity, like all myths, are "designed to keep people unfree"(71) why does she invoke the myth of Lilith as a symbol of female emancipation in her fiction? Keeping in mind her grand pronouncement that "All archetypes are spurious, but some are more spurious than others"(SW 6), are we to imagine Lilith as one of the less spurious? And is her invocation of Leilah as a *femme fatale* an attempt to deconstruct the archetype and recuperate the *femme* for feminism? In the discussion that follows I read Leilah/Lilith, not as a subject proper, but as a wide-ranging

deconstruction of the *femme fatale* that draws on the Decadent, cinematic and Biblical iconographies of the *femme*, in an attempt to answer these questions.

Historical Liliths

In her incarnation as a New York prostitute, Leilah is unquestionably one of the most fetishistic representations of femininity in Carter's fiction, and it is not surprising that the dominant reading of this figure casts her as a fetish object rather than as a subject. Ricarda Schmidt, for example, regards Leilah's nightly ritual of self-adornment before the mirror as the means by which she knowingly transforms herself into a symbol of "woman as object, as meat" (62). Gregory J. Rubinson argues that "Leilah is literally enslaved to style: she is meticulous about embodying male pornographic fantasies, and the image of herself as an object in the mirror holds her captive" (133). For Gasiorek, Leilah is the willing accomplice of her own fetishization (132), whereas Rubenstein reads her as merely the object of the narrator's desire and thus an extension of himself, rather than as a subject in her own right (108). Aiden Day goes so far as to consider Leilah a "not-self" designed to suit masculine taste (110). David Punter, similarly, claims that:

Leilah's existence as a whore is predicated on an everyday refraction of herself into the perceived Other, in which shape she figures male fantasies as she arrays herself in the form of the totally fleshly; her self slides away in a haze of narcotics and she reimplants herself nightly in the mirror, soulless, a self-creation of painted nipples and exotic furs. (215)

But Carter's admission that the promotional slogan for *Gilda* was one of the inspirations for her representations of women in the novel ought to alert us to the possibility of other ways of reading Leilah. If we look beyond the slogan to the film itself, the notion of *femme fatality* as a performance that deconstructs itself emerges. Rita Hayworth's flamboyant rendition of the eponymous *femme fatale* resonates strongly, not only with the tragic Tristessa, but also with the hyperbolically seductive Leilah. Married to the crime baron and casino operator Ballen, but

previously the lover of Ballen's assistant Johnny, Gilda performs the role of the *femme fatale* in order to re-incite Johnny's interest. As Mary Ann Doane states:

Gilda literally confirms Johnny's comparison of her to Ballen's cane-knife by continually and duplicitously producing an image of herself as loose, as promiscuous, for Johnny's benefit. Her performances are all dependent on Johnny's potential look, and the strip-tease rendition of "Put the Blame on Mame" is the ultimate and most convincing of these performances. (107)

Doane reads Gilda's truncated striptease as a metaphor for the structure of the narrative, in which successive disguises are peeled away from Gilda to finally reveal "the 'good' woman underneath, the one who will 'go home' with Johnny" (107). At the film's denouement, the detective investigating Ballen's murder remonstrates to Johnny, who up until this point, is taken in by Gilda's performance of promiscuity, that Gilda "didn't do any of those things. It was just an act." The *femme fatale*, it turns out, had been a "home girl" all along.

In *The Passion of New Eve*, of course, the *femme* turns out to be anything but a "home girl"; she is a feminist guerrilla intent on blowing up the phantasmagoria of the American dream: the "Relaxaramas" and the "all-purpose pleasure domes" of Southern California. In her final incarnation as Lilith, she tells Evelyn/Eve, "as for me, as you know, I used to rouge my nipples and dance a dance called 'The End of the World, to lead the unwary into temptation'" (PNE 174). As is the case in *Gilda*, Leilah's performance of *femme fatality* is instrumental to the sentimental education of the hero. Yet Leilah's revelation that her real name is Lilith tells us that Carter had something more ambitious in mind than just demonstrating that the *femme fatale* is invariably faked up:

"Lilith is my name," she said. "I called myself Leilah in the city in order to conceal the nature of my symbolism. If the temptress displays her nature, the seducee is put on his guard. Lilith, if you remember, was Adam's first wife, on whom he begat the entire race of the djini. All my wounds will magically heal. Rape only refreshes my virginity. I am ageless, I will outlive the rocks." She laughed self-deprecatingly. (PNE 174)

The moniker Lilith signals the text's engagement with an iconography of the feminine that stretches from the earliest days of Judaism through the Western cultural tradition into the present. Even a cursory examination of this iconography reveals that the representation of Lilith has had a split

history. The dual figure Leilah/Lilith is clearly predicated upon this split, and its significance can only be understood through an examination of both patriarchal and feminist representations of the Lilith archetype.

In the Jewish tradition, Lilith is a she-demon with many contradictory faces. According to the foremost authority on the subject, Raphael Patai, from whose work the following account is drawn, the Hebrew image of Lilith derives from the Sumerian myth of the Lilu, a class of vampiric succubae demons, the earliest known records of which date to ca. 2400 BC. (Patai 221-54). In Babylonian records Lilith is depicted as a beautiful but barren harlot, sometimes winged or horned, sometimes flanked by lions or sphinxes. For reasons that are open to speculation, the early Rabbis incorporated the mythical figure of Lilith into Genesis, claiming her as Adam's first wife, the unnamed woman mentioned in Gen.1.27: "male and female created he them." According to the Talmud and the *Midrashim*, the rabbinic commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures, Lilith and Adam were created simultaneously from the red earth of Eden. Because of their common origin, Lilith felt herself to be the equal of Adam and refused to submit to his authority or lie beneath him during sexual intercourse. Before long, saying the ineffable name, she ran away from Eden and took up residence on the shores of the Red Sea, where she copulated indiscriminately with serpents, demons and men. When she refused to heed the Lord's call to return to Eden, a divine curse was laid upon her: every day she would give birth to hordes of hideous snake-like progeny, a hundred of whom would die each night. In retaliation, Lilith vowed to wreck vengeance on birthing mothers and their infants, and until recently birthing Jewish women used amulets, talismans and inscriptions to guard themselves and their infants against her.

Since she played no part in the Fall, Lilith was spared the curse of mortality, subordination to men and painful parturition that had been laid upon Eve and her daughters. This distinguishes her from all other female figures in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Immortal and immoral, free from

sexual guilt and shame, Lilith recognises neither the authority of the Father vested in Adam nor the patriarchal interdiction on female freedom, sexual or otherwise. Thus she is an archetype of unbridled female sexuality, which the rabbinic fathers characterised as bestial, as well as one of the founding anti-maternal archetypes in Western culture. Lilith's attack on human procreation extends beyond women and babes onto the male himself; her rapacious appetite for semen links her to her origins as a Sumerian succubus. Some rabbinic writings suggest that Lilith returned to Eden by night to drain Adam of his seed as he slept. Later Kabbalistic texts portray Lilith hovering over the marital bed stealing any drops of seed that escape from their rightful, procreative channels. Lilith's offspring, the hordes of female succubi called *lilim*, were credited with milking men and boys of their semen through nocturnal rapes and wet dreams. Furthermore, Lilith was believed to vampirize and cannibalise her victims, including her own offspring. Some commentators go so far as to blame Lilith for the Fall, claiming that it was she, in the guise of a serpent, who led Eve astray.

The somewhat puzzling rabbinic incorporation of Lilith into Genesis has been viewed as a rabbinic attempt to subsume the competing cults of fertility Goddesses, particularly that of the Babylonian Ishtar, into the monotheistic patriarchal cult of Yahweh. Although Judaism proscribed the worship of fertility Goddesses as idolatry, their cults continued well into the first millennium BC. Leeming and Page claim that the rabbis' attempt to marry this incarnation of the Goddess to the first man in Yahweh's creation is an attempt to assimilate her cultists into the increasingly patriarchal cult of Yahweh: to force the Goddess to submit to God. However:

Lilith's marriage to Adam, reflecting the failure of the rabbinical strategy in regard to the stomping out of the cults, was not a success, and eventually she had to be banished in favour of a more suitable spouse, who would be vulnerable to the moral weakness seen by the patriarchy as endemic to female nature. Tradition had it that the banished Lilith would not disappear; instead, she lurked about the periphery of human affairs, as the raging, scorned, jealous, vengeful temptress- the quintessential femme fatale. (Leeming and Page 112)

The *Zohar*, the basic text of Kabbalistic mysticism, a mass Jewish movement that flourished from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, claims Lilith variously as the female aspect or

partner of the demon king, Samael. Kabbalistic representations of Lilith mute her anti-maternal and bestial aspects and foreground her sexual allure; indeed, she is aggrandized into a Satanic harlot so extraordinarily alluring that even God himself is in her thrall. As Patai comments: "No she-demon ever achieved as fantastic career as Lilith, who started out from the lowliest of origins, was a failure as Adam's intended wife, became the paramour of lascivious spirits, rose to be the bride of Samael the Demon King, ruled as Queen of Zemargad and Sheba, and ended up as the consort of God himself" (Patai 221). According to the *Zohar*, the Messiah alone has the power to destroy Lilith; until his coming her depredations will continue: "[Lilith]. . . is now in the cities of the sea, and she is still intent on injuring mankind. When the Holy One, blessed be he, destroys wicked Rome, and it becomes an eternal desolation, He will bring up Lilith and settle her in the ruins, because it will be desolate forever"(Tishby 539-40).

Although she is a figure of great consequence in Jewish culture, representations of Lilith were rare in Gentile culture prior to the nineteenth century. Possibly her first appearance in European literature occurs in the Walpurgisnacht scene in Goethe's *Faust, Part 1* (1808), when Mephistopheles warns Faust against a particular woman cavorting with the witches:

MEPHISTOPHELES. Look carefully at her. Her name is Lilith.
FAUST. Who?
MEPHISTOPHELES. She's Adam's first wife, Sir.
Be on your guard against her shining hair-
It's the one jewel she wears to deck her charms.
Once that has lured a young man to her arms
He'll find it very hard to leave her snare.
(Goethe 139)

Goethe's brief reference is typical of the bulk of Gentile representations of Lilith, in that it tends to follow the *Zohar* in emphasizing her sexual allure, epitomized here by her shiny entwining hair, above the bestial and infanticidal aspects of the archetype that dominate Jewish folklore. Following Goethe,

Lilith featured in innumerable nineteenth-century texts.²⁷ The revelation that a mysterious seductress threatening to ruin the hero is Lilith in disguise is a recurrent plot of literary representations of Lilith in this period. As Roderick McGillis points out, for the most part, the prodigious harlot of Jewish tradition is writ small in these representations; the monumental appetites of the original domesticated into vanity, narcissism, and a polymorphously perverse sexuality more titillating than Satanic (McGillis 3-11). A notable exception is Kenyon Cox's oil painting *Lilith* (ca. 1892), which foregrounds the bestiality traditionally attributed to her by depicting her carnally embracing a serpent.

Several critics have drawn a connection between this proliferation of representations of Lilith (and the related figure of the Lamia) with the emergence of nineteenth-century feminism. In her discussion of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's use of the archetype, Virginia Allen notes that for Rossetti, Lilith's flowing hair was symbolic of the *femme fatale's* destructive power: "the deadly nature of woman is manifested in her hair"(291). Lilith represents "the New Woman, free of male control, scourge of the Victorian patriarchal family," and incorporates the fears and the fascinations of Rossetti's generation, which were "born of confrontation with the Women's Emancipation Movement and the controversy over family planning in the 1860's"(Allen 286). She cites the 1868 *Saturday Review* anthology of articles on the movement for women's rights, which equate women's struggle for contraception with Lilith's fabled infanticides: "The New Woman, it would seem, was like Lilith, a child killer. Rightly or wrongly, in the 1860's, refusal to bear and raise children was considered an inevitable concomitant of feminism"(Allen 292). Bram Dijkstra similarly links the Lamias and Liliths of late nineteenth-century art with male fears about feminism, noting: "Lilith, who, in her

²⁷ These include Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Keats' "Lamia", Rossetti's *Eden Bower*, *Lady Lilith*, and *Body's Beauty*, Hugo's *La fin de Satan*, Remy de Gourmont's *Lilith*, Anatole France's "La fille de Lilith", Marc Chardourne's *Dieu crée 'd'abord Lilith*, Marie Corelli's *The Soul of Lilith*, George McDonald's *Lilith* and G.B. Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*.

unwillingness to play second-fiddle to Adam, was, as Rossetti's work already indicated, widely regarded as the world's first virago"(Dijkstra 309).

It is, of course, as the first virago that feminists now champion Lilith. Unlike Eve, prior to the late twentieth century Lilith was conspicuously absent from feminist attempts at revisionary mythmaking, which suggests that she embodied a nightmare vision of Woman that feminists found too threatening to acknowledge. The emergence of second wave feminism heralded a feminist re-evaluation of the implications of the Lilith myth. In their enormously influential *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar argue for Lilith as an archetypal female creator and symbol of authority:

What her history suggests is that in patriarchal culture, female speech and female "presumption"- that is, angry revolt against male domination- are inextricably linked and inevitably daemonic. Excluded from the human community, even from the semidivine communal chronicles of the Bible, the figure of Lilith represents the price women have been told they must pay for attempting to define themselves. (35)

Gilbert and Gubar image Lilith as an essentially tragic figure, but later feminist writers cast her defiance in a more celebratory light. Jewish feminists, in particular, cite Lilith as a paradigm of female rebellion²⁸ and Gentile feminists have also taken her name as a symbol for repressed female histories and voices.²⁹ The contemporary re-appraisal of Lilith's use-value for feminism can be related to a number of factors specific to the late twentieth century: the unprecedented secularisation of western society; dramatic changes in sexual mores; and the emergence of a radical feminist discourse that was no longer compelled to justify its emancipatory claims according to the precepts of Christian theology. Yet the contemporary feminist revalorisation of Lilith also signals the paradox at the heart of Western feminism, which is both embedded in, and defiant of, the Judeo-Christian tradition.

²⁸ See Judith Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith: Toward a New Feminist theology," *Womanspirt Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, eds. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).. In addition, the pre-eminent Jewish feminist journal bears her name, and an anthology of women's writing, *Which Lilith?*, examines her mythology from contemporary Jewish feminist perspectives.

²⁹ As in, for example, the touring women's music festival *Lilith's Fair*, the Australian feminist history journal *Lilith*, the Berlin feminist bookstore *Lilith*, and Deborah Dratell's 2006 opera *Lilith*.

Decadent Liliths

Whilst Carter's citation of Lilith as a feminist guerrilla in *New Eve* draws quite explicitly on the late twentieth-century feminist recuperation of the Jewish myth, her novel also revisits two nineteenth-century French texts that exemplify the Decadent tradition of citing Lilith as the original *femme fatale*: Anatole France's short story "La fille de Lilith" (1889) and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's novel *L'Eve future* (1886). France's story concerns the confession of a young man who has been seduced by Leila, the wife of his best friend, who ensnares him in sensuality. Her betrayed husband threatens to kill her, but Leila reveals that she cannot die. The young man's confessor, the curé M. Safrac, an expert on Biblical apocrypha, recognises that Leila is a daughter of Lilith, and is therefore "exempt from sorrow and death; having no soul to be saved, she is incapable of virtue or vice" (France 77). For M. Safrac the young man's confession proves that the apocryphal story of Lilith is based on historical fact and that his thesis regarding the existence of "pre-Adamites" is true. Carter does not allude directly to this story, but France's plotline of a daughter named Leila pre-determined by maternal imperative to seduce and destroy a young man, added to the final revelation that she is a modern day Lilith, has an undeniable resonance with her plot.

As far as I am aware, France's story has not previously been linked to *New Eve*; however, several critics have identified Villiers' *L'Eve future* as a template for Carter's novel. Christina Britzolakis, for example, whilst reading the figure of Leilah as a parody of Baudelaire's Jeanne Duval cycle, remarks pejoratively that the text is "locked into a regressive circulation of literary metaphors of fatal, apparitional and mechanical femininity, from Poe and Baudelaire to the Symbolists (the technological creation of Eve alludes to Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's *L'Eve Future*, 1986)" (Britzolakis 182). Britzolakis does not elaborate on this intertextual connection but Marie Lathers devotes an entire article to a comparison between Villiers' *L'Eve future* and *The Passion of New Eve*. Lathers

highlights their similarities of plot and theme, such as their depictions of the cinema as a primary site for the production of myths of femininity, their futuristic revisionary versions of Biblical creation myths, and so forth (Lathers 7-28). Whilst Lathers' comparative reading focuses on the use of technology and on the garden as site of creation of the feminine, she also notes in passing that both novelists draw on the pre-Edenic myth of Lilith as a structuring device.

Until recently *L'Eve future* was seldom read, but the past twenty years or so have seen something of a revival, in which it has twice been translated into English and has been the subject of a resurgence of critical interest, much of which has centred on Villiers' prescient anticipation of the cinema and the cyborg. For feminist critics of French nineteenth-century literature the novel has become a key work, due, as Felicia Miller Frank puts it, to its "remarkable staging of the female body as a spectacle, fusing as it does certain traditional misogynistic themes with concerns about technology that link it to the next century"(143). Peppered throughout with strident invective against woman as a Lilith-like seductress, Villiers' novel represents the *reductio ad absurdum* of the nineteenth century Decadent tradition of the fetishization of the *femme fatale*. Furthermore, Naomi Schor has argued that in a feminist revision of the French Decadent canon, "*L'Eve future* would displace J.K. Huysmans' *À rebours* as the ultimate text of post-realism, for Villiers' futuristic fantasy of a female android is the logical conclusion of a century of fetishization of the female body"(*Breaking the Chain : Women, Theory, and French Realist Fiction* 145-46).

In order to show how Carter reworks Villiers' representation of the feminine, I will outline the salient aspects of his novel here. The plot centres on the creation of a female android in an underground laboratory by a fictional version of the American inventor Thomas Edison. Edison's creation of Hadaly, the android (supposedly the "ideal" in Persian), is motivated by the destruction of his friend Edward Anderson by a *femme fatale*, the dancer Evelyn Habal. After Anderson suicides, Edison embarks on an investigation, using Evelyn Habal as an exemplum, of how the *femme fatale*

derives her power over men. Using a prototype of the moving film, Edison proves that the *femme's* seductive power is the result of artifice and an almost demonic ability to manipulate her own image. He compares two films of the *femme*: in the first, which demonstrates how the camera constructs illusions of femininity, she is shown as a sexually attractive woman, "a morsel fit for a king" dancing a fandango tricked up in her make-up and finery; in the second, she is revealed as she *really* is: "a little bloodless creature, vaguely female of gender, with dwarfish limbs, hollow cheeks, toothless jaws with practically no lips, and almost bald skull, with dim and squinting eyes, flabby lids, and wrinkled features..."(Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 117-18).

In Edison's discourse, which constitutes the bulk of this singularly monological text, all mistresses, and indeed, all sexual women, are *femmes fatales* who degrade and persecute innocent men:

Such are these "women," modern Furies of a sort, for whom the man they select is simply a victim to be weakened and degraded. By a kind of fatality, they obey blindly the obscure urgings of their malignant essence. These creatures of man's second fall, these inciters of evil desires, these dispensers of forbidden pleasures...are fatal only to the man who lingers over them... (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 111)

His metaphorization of these modern-day Liliths as vampires and vipers supports Praz's contention that Decadent representations of the *femme fatale* are motivated by a sadistic male impulse that always needs to portray the *femme* as monstrous in order to justify punishing her (Praz 152):

But it is in the nature of these neutral yet negative beings to abuse men, since their very existence is degrading and, worse, contagious, I conclude that it's the right of the man as against the woman (if, by some miracle, he is enabled to see what has been victimizing him) to inflict a summary execution on her, in the most secret and certain manner that he can, without the least scruple or form of legality, any more than one would hesitate about killing a vampire or a viper. (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 113)

Having ascertained the "true" nature of the *femme fatale*, Edison then devotes his energies to her destruction through the creation of a synthetic being, the mechanical Eve of the future, who will supplant her in men's affections, whilst simultaneously neutralizing any sexual desire men feel outside marriage. Towards the end of the novel, Edison bestows this ideal female android on his friend, Lord Celian Ewald, whose dissatisfaction with his mistress, another *femme fatale* by the name of Alicia

Clary, has driven him to the brink of suicide. Paradoxically then, in this novel, the *femme fatale* inspires, is thus the Muse of an attempt to create an android, a living-doll, who will supplant her. This mirrors the apocryphal rabbinic version of the Jewish creation story, in which God's dissatisfaction with his first female creation, the unruly Lilith, inspires him to create the more docile Eve.

As Lathers notes, "*L'Eve future* follows a pre-Edenic myth, that of Lilith, in its chronology of creation. Alicia, Ewald's first Eve, is an unsatisfactory being whose conscience constitutes her original sin. The second Eve is fabricated in response to this Lilith as a simulacrum with a perfected soul" (10). In her comparative reading of Villiers' text with *New Eve*, Lathers further notes that Carter maps Villiers' version of Lilith onto two disparate characters: Leilah, "a modern Lilith (her real name) who is shunned by Evelyn, as Ewald shuns Alicia" (15), and Tristessa, who is cast as cabbalistic castratrix in Zero's paranoid fantasy, a "Queen of Dykes," who has emasculated him via the cinema screen. Lathers' analysis of Carter's reworking of the Lilith myth does not go beyond this mapping, but in the discussion that follows I elaborate on her observations by showing how Carter deconstructs the Decadent representation of the Lilith archetype exemplified by Villiers' text.

There is a clear parallel between Zero's deluded projection of Lilith-like powers onto the passive and asexual Tristessa, and Evelyn's fateful misrecognition of Leilah as a *femme fatale*, with the crucial difference that the latter, by virtue of his transformation into a woman, finally gains insight into the extent of his previous misapprehension:

Leilah, Lilith: now I see you are your mother's daughter, that immobility, that vast and sentient repose- what's become of the slut of Harlem, my girl of bile and ebony! She can never have objectively existed, all the time mostly the projections of the lusts and greed and self-loathing of a young man called Evelyn, who does not exist, either. (PNE 175)

The revelation that Leilah had been Lilith all along enables Evelyn/Eve to see that his conception of her as a *femme fatale* had been a fabrication born of his own "libidinous cravings" ("Femmes Fatales" 351). The parallel with Carter's reading of Wedekind's *Lulu* is obvious. Yet the force of her

deconstruction of the *femme fatale* archetype through the figure of Leilah/Lilith does not rest on Eve/Evelyn's realization at the end of the story alone. A close reading of the New York episode reveals that Leilah is simultaneously encoded and decoded as a manifestation of the *femme fatale* archetype. It is instructive to contrast this episode with the Evelyn Habal section of *L'Eve future* in order to see how Carter attempts to demythologise the archetype.

New Eve's most immediately obvious divergence from its model lies in the complexity and ambiguity of its narrative perspective, which in part is the result of the narrative voice slipping almost imperceptibly between that of Evelyn and the surgically constructed Eve. In *L'Eve future*, Edison's almost absurdly over-determined authority to fix the meaning of his Liliths is never in question; they are always the objects rather than the subjects of his discourse. The reader of *New Eve*, however, is always pondering the question of who is speaking, because the transformation of the male narrator into a woman, which is at the heart of the *fabula*, determines that the *syuzhet* he/she narrates emanates from an indeterminate subject position. The retrospective narration leads the reader to assume that the narrative voice of the text as a whole is Eve's, yet this assumption is confounded in the Leilah episode by slippage in the narrative point of view between Eve's remorseful insights about her masculine prior self- "I was a perfect, sanctimonious hypocrite"(PNE 33)- and a viewpoint more easily attributable to the unreconstructed misogynist Evelyn-"My full-fleshed and voracious beak tore open the poisoned wound of love between her thighs"(PNE 25). As Alison Lee argues, the "complication of the narrative level" due to the narrative voice being simultaneously an "I" and a "not-I" is particularly noticeable in the Leilah episode:

When Evelyn focalizes, especially on Leilah, his vision is to some extent determined by Eve's looking back on him looking at women. Since Eve is a woman when she tells Evelyn's story, her narration, of course, is tinged with the knowledge of what it is to be both the subject and the object of such a look. ("De/En-gendering Narrative: Angela Carter's *New Eve*(Lyn)" 243)

The reader's perception of point of view in this episode is further complicated by the disjunction between what is said by the narrative voice(s) and the reader's pre-conceptions about the

author's point of view. What the reader knows or assumes about the politics of the author cannot be disentangled from his or her perceptions of the representation of gender in the novel, which contributes to the reader's apprehension of textual irony. As narratologists Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg point out, irony is the inevitable result of perceived disparities between points of view of narrator and author:

In any example of narrative art there are, broadly speaking, three points of view- those of the characters, the narrator and the audience. As narrative becomes more sophisticated, a fourth point of view is added by the development of a clear distinction between the narrator and the author. Narrative irony is a function of disparity among these three or four viewpoints. And narrative artists have always been ready to employ this disparity to make effects of various kinds. (Scholes and Kellogg 240)

In *New Eve* Carter consciously deploys a narrative voice that is inherently ambiguous and which, when it articulates Evelyn's misogyny, diverges from her own perspective, in order to foreground how narrative perspective *produces* gender. The irony that is produced by this disparity, in conjunction with the multiple ironies unleashed through the novel's reworking of the Decadent iconography of the *femme fatale*, has the effect of undermining Evelyn's narrative production of Leilah as a fetish object and a manifestation of the *femme fatale* archetype.

The distinctly Baudelairean inflection of the narrative voice as it inscribes Leilah as a fetish object is a case in point. From the first, Leilah's status as the object of Eve/lyn's fixated gaze is textually oversignified by an unremitting preoccupation with her appearance. When Evelyn encounters Leilah in the midnight drugstore she is rendered hyper-visible as a sexual object, dressed up to the nines in the full regalia of pornography: the black mesh stockings and scarlet garters, the "fetishistic heels six inches high" (*PNE* 19), the fur coat, the skimpy, easily discarded dress, the crotchless knickers, the extravagant coiffure, painted nipples and lurid makeup. Her status as a "fetish-on-display" is sealed by Eve/lyn's account of her ritualised *maquillage*:

Regular as clockwork, once a night she witched me, night after night. Oh, my domestic brothel! All the delights of the flesh available in one institution of bone and muscle. The finicking care she used to give to the creation of this edifice! Applying the rouge to her nether lips and the purple or peony or

scarlet grease to her mouth and nipples; powders and unguents all the colours of the rainbow went on to the skin in the sockets of her eyes; with the manual dexterity of an assembler of precision instruments, she glued on the fringe of false eyelashes. The topiary of her hair she would sometimes thread with beads or dust with glinting bronze powder she also applied to her pubic mound. Then she sprayed herself with dark perfumes that enhanced rather than concealed the lingering odour of sexuality that was her own perfume. (PNE 29)

Later in the narrative, when she is preparing for work in the sex shows where she sells her image as an eroticised commodity, she works through the repertoire of pornography as if it were a wardrobe from which she extracts the garb and props necessary to the creation of the fantasy selves she will take to market. From the perspective of the narrating "I", the thigh-high boots, the slave woman's thonged calves, the vertiginous technicolour shoes, the chiffon dresses and the slimy synthetic dresses and the metallic dresses partake of the same function as her sequinned knickers, which are "no more than a decorative and inadequate parenthesis around her sex"(PNE 29). That is to say, these accoutrements of pornography do not dress her naked body so much as frame it within a series of potential narratives for the simulated sex-shows in which she is objectified as the "filling in a chocolate sandwich or a layer in a mocha layer cake"(PNE 26).

As Munford and Britzolakis have both noted, Eve/lyn's fascinated arousal in response to Leilah's ritual of self-adornment further underscores his Baudelairean aesthetic of the feminine:

I used to adore watching her dressing herself in the evenings, before she went out to the clubs, the theatres, the restaurants where she performed, which I never visited. I would lie on her bed like a pasha, smoking, watching, in her cracked mirror, the transformation of the grubby little bud... (PNE 28).

...so aroused was I by her ritual incarnation, the way she systematically carnalised herself and became dressed meat, that I always managed to have her somehow, at the last minute, even if it was up against the wall... (PNE 31).

This is in marked contrast to the thundering denunciation of female artifice that resounds throughout *L'Eve future*. In Villiers' account, one of the most damning indictments of the *femme fatale* is her use of artifice. According to Edison, "the axiom which summarizes these female *witches* in their relation to man is that *their morbid and fatal influence on their victim is in direct ratio to the quantity of moral and physical artifice with which they reinforce- or, rather, overwhelm- the very few natural seductive powers they seem to*

possess" (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 115 italics in the original). In an inversion of the Petrarchan tradition, Edison blazons the grotesqueries of the female body by inventorying the props that have sustained the *femme fatale's* impersonation of youth and beauty. In a private lecture-demonstration on the nature of the *femme fatale* staged for Ewald's benefit, Edison exhumes the contents of a drawer containing the deceased Evelyn Habal's relics in order to prove that her attractions were a "ravishing deceit" (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 110) created out of a "banal assemblage of powder, rouge, false teeth, false complexions, false hair, whether red, blonde, or brunette" (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 115). Her "lily complexion" and "seductive power of passionate lips" are shown to originate in a "make-up box filled with half-empty jars of rouge, pots of greasepaint, creams and pastes of every sort"; her "gleaming white teeth, so girlish, so glittering and fresh" are revealed to be dentures; her "lovely breast" is made from "scraps of gray wadding, bulging, grubby and giving off a particularly rancid odour"; and so forth (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 119-21).

Edison's denunciation of artifice as evidence of deceitful harlotry follows the long patriarchal tradition of condemning women's self-ornamentation as proof of their duplicity. More specifically, it echoes the denunciation of Lilith, "Woman of Harlotry, End of All Flesh, End of the Days" in *The Zohar*:

She adorns herself with many jewels like a despicable harlot, and takes up her position at the crossroads to seduce the sons of man. ... Her ornaments for seduction of the sons of man are: her hair is long and red like the rose, her cheeks are white and red, from her ears hang six ornaments, Egyptian cords and all the ornaments of the Land of the East dangle from her nape. Her mouth is set like a narrow door, comely in its décor; her tongue is sharp like a sword, her words smooth like oil, her lips red like the rose and sweetened by all the sweetness of the world. She is dressed in scarlet, and adorned with forty ornaments less one. (Cited in Patai 233)

Of course, this image also resonates strongly with Evelyn's depiction of Leilah, "Bedizened like Rahab the Harlot" (*PNE* 29), trawling the streets of New York. The crucial difference is that Evelyn endorses, rather than censures, her skill at self-adornment; he is enraptured by her "ingeniously put together... seductive apparatus" (*PNE* 29). The irony of his statement, "I never knew a girl more a

slave to style!" (PNE 31) is immediately apparent to the reader because it is he, rather than she, who is ensnared, if not actually enslaved, by her stylised self-objectification.

However, if we accept Robert Stoller's claim that "a fetish is a story masquerading as an object" (155), there is more here than meets Evelyn's bedazzled eye. Concomitant with the narrative inscription of Leilah as a fetish object, she is inscribed, albeit unwittingly on the part of the narrator, as a subject. In order for this deconstructive strategy to work, she must first be established as a manifestation of the Lilith archetype. Hence, before Leilah's introduction into the *fabula*, the narrative voice introduces her as the "profane essence of the death of cities" (PNE 18), the maiden who dances in the ruins of New York. And in the initial phases of his relation with her, Evelyn images her solely in archetypal terms: she is the sexual predator trawling the city streets for prey; she is the arch-seductress who manipulates the accoutrements of femininity to ensnare men; she is a succubus who "tears the orgasm" from him; she is a borderline creature, neither entirely human nor entirely animal: "not a flying thing, not a running thing, nor a creeping thing, not flesh nor fowl, some in-between thing..." (PNE 21); she is a Lilith-like vortex of destruction: "I felt all the ghastly attraction of the fall. Like a man upon a precipice, irresistibly lured by gravity, I succumbed at once" (PNE 25).

But as the episode progresses, a character effect is build up which undermines this archetypal conception. At the linguistic level, for instance, Leilah's utterances evolve from an initial mutism into incomprehensible patois and finally into coherent reported speech. This representation of the *femme fatale* as a speaking subject is markedly at odds with the notion of her as a purely discursive construct in *L'Eve future*. The denaturalisation of the prey/predator binarism is another key strategy by which the *femme fatale* archetype is demythologised. The cliché of the sexually predatory *femme fatale* is inscribed in the description of Leilah's sexuality as "voracious, insatiable, yet coldly so, as if driven by a drier, more cerebral need than a sexual one, as if forced to the act again and again by, perhaps, an

exacerbated, never-to-be-satisfied curiosity. And, almost, a vindictiveness..."(PNE 18). Very soon, however, this cliché is undercut by an inversion in which Evelyn, her supposed prey, is imaged as her predator, a bird of prey whose "voracious beak" tears open the "poisoned wound of love" between her thighs (PNE 25).

The repeated image of Leilah as a fox is another means by which her status as prey is established. As I have noted, the recurrent imaging of Evelyn Habal as a viper in *L'Eve future* bears out Praz's contention that Decadent literature always depicts the *femme fatale* as monstrous in order to justify the punishment that will be inflicted on her by the avenging male. Carter inverts this trope by representing Leilah in terms of the fox, a timid nocturnal animal that, although carnivorous, is itself prey to the human hunter. The narrator metonymically displaces the immense fur coat Leilah wears so that it becomes her own skin: "she seemed a fully furred creature, a little fox pretending to be a siren, a witching fox in a dark wood"; "I will always associate her, for some reason, with foxes"(PNE 19-20). For an exemplar of the British ruling class such as public-school boy Evelyn, the fox carries the associations of wily opponent, but, ultimately, also of quarry and victim.

The inevitability of Leilah's victimage is presaged in Evelyn's account of his pursuit of her through the New York streets. At the moment Leilah pauses to roll down her fishnet stockings, he notes that the "coarse mesh had left indentations as tragic as if the flesh had been pressed against barbed wire in an attempt at an escape from a prison camp in which she had always lived, would always attempt to flee, would always fail"(PNE 24). This intimation of her natural victimage is confirmed later in the course of their relationship, when her clinging, childlike innocence incites Evelyn to violence rather than tenderness. He likens her "awful delicacy" to that of "china ornaments that invite you to smash them, because they are so fragile"(PNE 31). When Leilah's carnal curiosity reminds him of the myth of the succubus, he punitively ties her to the bed before going out for the day, then, when she is incontinent, punishes her further:

If she had fouled the bed, I would untie her and use my belt to beat her. And she would foul the bed again, or bite my hand. So these games perpetuated themselves and grew, I suppose, more vicious by almost imperceptible degrees. She seemed to me a born victim and, if she submitted to the beating and the degradations with a curious, ironic laugh that no longer tinkled- for I'd beaten the wind-bells out of her, I'd done *that* much- then isn't irony the victim's only weapon! (PNE 28)

The depiction of Leilah's suffering at Evelyn's hands seals the illusion of verisimilitude called character. Her protests against the rapes and beatings to which he subjects her are ineffectual, but nevertheless signal that she has been transformed from an archetype into a fully-fledged character equipped with sentience, an experiential capacity and self-consciousness. As Aleid Fokkema states, the illusion of character in the mimetic tradition "depends on the suggestion that character has an inner life" (*Postmodern Characters: a Study of Characterization in British and American Postmodern Fiction* 23). This rendition of Leilah as a character undermines the mythic dimensions of the *femme fatale* and reinserts her into history as a sign.

Furthermore, the text lays great emphasis on the materiality of this sign by foregrounding the material circumstances in which Leilah labours as a sex worker. It is on record that Carter was reading Walter Benjamin's book on Baudelaire at the time she was writing *New Eve* (Goldsworthy 12), and the oversignified fetishization of Leilah and the deliberate linking of her living body to the inorganic clearly echoes Benjamin's notion that the female body is commodified through the phenomenon of fashion, which "prostitutes the living body to the inorganic world" (Benjamin *Charles Baudelaire: a Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* 166). As Buck-Morss has noted, for Benjamin the figure of the whore functions allegorically for developments in nineteenth-century commodity capitalism, and is thus always construed as an object in his discourse (Buck-Morss "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering" 120). Carter clearly draws on Benjamin's notion of the whore as an allegorical figure, in that Leilah can be read allegorically as a figure for New York's descent into anarchy and decadence; as we have seen, the *femme fatale* has always carried

associations of decadence, and Lilith, in particular, has historically been a figure for the Apocalypse, the "End of Days."

Yet *New Eve* supplements the Benjaminian reading of the whore as allegorical object with an inscription of the whore as historically framed subject. The representation of Leilah's sex work as economic exchange is in marked contrast to the essentializing interpretation of prostitution advanced by Edison in *L'Eve future*, in which Evelyn Habal's recourse to selling herself is ascribed to her "malignant essence" (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 111). Carter makes it clear that Leilah exhibits herself as a sexual object, not because she is impelled by sexual perversity, but for the "great many dollars tucked in the top of her stocking" (PNE 30) she earns each night. Furthermore, *New Eve* parodically inverts Edison's depiction of the *femme fatale*/prostitute as parasitic by having the previously penurious Evelyn live comfortably off Leilah's earnings:

All the time I lived with Leilah, I never lacked for money. We ate well and often from the counter of the neighbourhood deli, sandwiches (pastrami on rye and so on), salami, cole-slaw, fried chicken, potato salad, apple pie, blueberry pie, boysenberry pie, raspberry and redcurrant pie, peach pie, pecan pie, etc etc etc, cheesecake and strudel. We brought home egg foo-yong and wan-tun soup and fried rice in waxed cartons from the Chinese restaurants and drank, I recall, a great deal of Coca-Cola from cans sweating with refrigeration. (PNE 30)

This textual foregrounding of the economics of prostitution demands that Leilah's relation to the mirror ought to be reconsidered. Evelyn relates that her self-conscious production of herself as an object for the male gaze reaches its apotheosis before the mirror, and that he himself serves as a proxy for the paying spectators who will later watch her equally ritualised disrobing:

The cracked mirror jaggedly reciprocated her bisected reflection and that of my watching self with the mauve exhalations of a joint curling around my head. To watch her dressing herself, putting on her public face, was to witness an inversion of the ritual disrobing to which she would later submit her body for, the more clothed she became, the more vivid became my memory of her nakedness, and, as she watched me watching the assemblage of all the paraphernalia that only emphasized the black plush flanks and the crimson slit beneath it, so she, too, seemed to abandon herself to the mirror, and allowed herself to function only as a fiction of the erotic dream into which the mirror cast me. So, together, we entered the same reverie, the self-created, self-perpetuating, solipsistic world of the woman watching herself being watched in a mirror that seemed to have split under the strain of supporting her world. (PNE 30)

Several critics have read the triangular relation of a woman watching herself being watched in this passage as an unproblematic rendering of John Berger's influential thesis on the tradition of the female nude in Western art, as advanced in *Ways of Seeing* (1972). Berger argues that women's socio-economic dependence and status as objects of exchange between men results in a split in female subjectivity in which the female subject is constantly aware of her own image and its effects on others. Berger's argument echoes that of Laura Mulvey in relation to the cinema, in that neither allows for female subjectivity nor the female gaze. He writes:

...men act, and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (Berger 47)

In this specular economy the mirror occupies a singular place. According to Berger, it is a commonplace of Classical art to put a mirror into the female nude's hand and then title the painting "Vanity" thereby subsuming the male spectator's voyeurism into the female object's narcissism. The "real function of the mirror" Berger contends, "is to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight"(51).

The two critics who have discussed Carter's allusion to Berger's work, Roberta Rubinstein and Aiden Day, have both seen it as an unproblematic illustration of his argument that women constantly produce themselves as objects for the male gaze, although Day acknowledges that Carter nuances Berger's thesis by showing how the male surveyor is as implicated in the emptiness of subjectivity as the female surveyed (Day 111-12). And yet there is an understated instance in *New Eve* when the narrator makes a connection between Leilah's creation of herself as a "sight" and her accession to subjectivity. In the following passage, the mirror assumes an almost mystical dimension in its ability to confer selfhood:

She became absorbed in the contemplation of the figure in the mirror but she did not seem to me to apprehend the person in the mirror as, in any degree, herself. The reflected Leilah has a concrete form and, although this form was perfectly tangible, we all knew, all three of us in the room, it was

another Leilah. Leilah invoked this formal other with a gravity and ritual that recalled witchcraft; she brought into being a Leilah who lived only in the not world of the mirror and then became her own reflection...

These preparations extended over several hours. To decorate the other was her sole preoccupation at these times; she did not hear me if I spoke to her. When at last she assumed the darkly luminous appearance of Lily-in-the-mirror, she became her; everyday Leilah disappeared immediately. My Leilah was now wholly the other one. She turned to kiss me quickly, with an absent-minded dignity that she only acquired through the mirror; the mirror bestowed a grace upon her, now she was her own mistress. (PNE 28-29)

Here Leilah is simultaneously a votary of the mirror and her own subject, for the woman who becomes her own mistress is, by implication, no one else's. The process of self-objectification by which she transforms herself into a sight for the male gaze is not represented as having effaced her subjectivity. Her resistance to Evelyn's unwelcome sexual advances further attests that the mirror is shown to augment rather than diminish her sense of self; her affronted "No!" whilst it does not prevent her being raped, is a signifier of agency, and hence of subjectivity. Leilah's resistance, her dignity, and her self-absorption before the mirror are at odds with Berger's anxiously self-regarding female non-subject. Narcissism is not equated with loss of subjectivity in this episode.

Carter's use of the mirror as a privileged site of female self-creation runs counter to the negativity inherent in both patriarchal and feminist ideas about women's engagement with mirrors. Feminists have by and large viewed the mirror as both a tool and a symbol of women's enslavement to oppressive patriarchally imposed norms of female beauty, and have sought to free women from their thralldom to the mirror by enabling them to achieve self-definition in domains other than appearance. Yet it may be, as Jenijoy La Belle argues, that women's reliance on the mirror is not as antipathetic to a specifically feminist female subjectivity as has been supposed. In *Herself Beheld: the Literature of the Looking Glass* La Belle argues that the female need for self-surveillance in the mirror is predicated on a sense of self radically different to that of men. According to her argument, traditional notions of male subjectivity are predicated on a Cartesian division body and mind in which the latter is privileged over the former. Masculinity has valorized transcendence and imagined

an interior self or subjectivity independent of the body and thus able to transcend the constraints of time, space and materiality. Male philosophers have historically denigrated women's failure to achieve transcendence, and have regarded them as mired in immanence, believing that for women the experience of the self is compromised by being inextricably bound up with the demands of the body. Part of the feminist project has been to expose the transcendental masculine subject as an illusion, and to reinstate the body as the ground of being for both men and women. La Belle is unusual in claiming the mirror as an ally in this project, her premise being that it can act as a means of "positive non-transcendence" by enabling communion with the specular image of the self. According to La Belle, the mirror offers the possibility of a "constant affirmation of personal presence through the division of the self into both subject and object"(La Belle 185). Paradoxically, this "act of objective self-recognition effects a bifurcation, but at the same time can be used by women to break down the conceptual barriers between mind and body"(La Belle 185). Furthermore, she argues that the mirror can function as an exteriorized self that acts as a positive counterpart to the illusory masculine transcendental concept of self, providing an "other self" that is materially grounded in the body, hence vulnerable to time and to history.

It is instructive to reconsider the representation of Leilah in the light of La Belle's claims, particularly her notion of the subject-object dyad as complementary rather than dichotomous, as it explains how Leilah can remain an active agent even whilst objectifying herself as an eroticized commodity before the mirror. In this she is a forerunner of Carter's later heroines such as Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*, and the Chance twins in *Wise Children*, for whom the mirror is instrumental to the creation of an image of femininity that is deliberately manipulated to their own advantage. La Belle asserts that mirroring has "the differential nature of the lingual sign", and that the mirror image is frequently taken to be a sign by the self-regarding female subject (La Belle 153-63). In the light of this assertion we can posit the mirror as the place where Leilah transfigures her body into a sign of

woman as sexual commodity, then checks out its exchange-value before taking it to market. The archetype of Lilith is thus reconfigured in the mirror into a sign that will earn Leilah, the active purveyor of this sign, "a great many dollars."

Other possibilities for reading Leilah emerge if we regard her as a subject as well as an object. On the sticky subject of fetishism for example, might it not be possible to argue that Leilah auto-fetishizes, that she is a dandy or a sartorial fetishist in her own right, rather than merely a sexual fetish object or commodity fetish? Could it be that Leilah, as much as any male spectator, gets off on her own glad rags, constructs herself as the pleasing object of her own gaze? The fact that not a single critic entertains this idea is indicative of the dominance of the Freudian conception of fetishism as an exclusively masculine perversion, and also of the way theories of the gaze have tended to efface the possibility of the female gaze and female pleasure. Yet in "On the Genesis of Fetishism", a paper given in 1909 before he had settled on the idea of fetishism as a compensatory mechanism by which the male child invests his mother with a penis, even Freud raised the idea, albeit half-jokingly, that all women are clothes fetishists (Rose 147-60). Although he abandoned this notion soon after, it has been resurrected by contemporary female fetishists who claim to obtain sexual gratification from their apparel alone (Gamman and Makinen 50-93). If Leilah is "her own mistress" at the completion of her ritual of self-adornment before the mirror, might it be because she obtains direct sexual pleasure from the spectacle of herself? Let us not forget that Carter lauded Louise Brooks for "always enjoying the spectacle of herself" ("Louise Brooks" 388). Surely then, we can posit a reading of Leilah, not only as the object of other's fetishism, but also as the subject of her own fetishism?

The conception of Leilah as a subject who knowingly manipulates her image for her own ends resonates with Bronfen's work on the *femme fatale* in film noir in her recent essay, "*Femme fatale: Negotiations of Tragic Desire*." According to Bronfen, feminist readings of the noir *femme fatale* as a

symptom of male anxiety or a misogynist fantasy unwittingly re-enact the fetishism of the male protagonists in *noir* films, who, in their fetishistic disavowal of sexual difference, fatally misrecognise the *femme*:

...the problem with reading the *femme fatale* as a stereotype of feminine evil, as a symptom of male anxiety, or as a catchphrase for the danger of sexual difference is that it treats this tragic feminine heroine as an encoded figure who exists only as the phantasmic emanation of others, who is acted upon and, when necessary, extinguished, rather than treating her as a separate subject who has agency and who is responsible for her own decisions. (Bronfen "Femme Fatale: Negotiations of Tragic Desire" 114)

Bronfen suggests that a way out of this impasse would be for feminists to read her instead as "a prototypical instance of modern feminine subjectivity" ("Femme Fatale: Negotiations of Tragic Desire" 114). Taking her cue from Stanley Cavell's work on tragedy, and Rita Felski's notion that tragedy be regarded as a mode or sensibility, Bronfen reconsiders the *noir femme fatale* as a tragic subject, asking "What if, rather than treating her as fetish, projection, or symptom, one were to treat her instead as the subject of her narrative?" ("Femme Fatale: Negotiations of Tragic Desire" 114).

The revelation at the denouement that Lilith, disguised as Leilah, was a willing agent who had orchestrated her own suffering at Evelyn's hands in the service of Mother's grand design suggests the appositeness of Bronfen's thesis about the *femme fatale* in *noir* to *New Eve*. In the New York section of the book, which closely reworks aspects of the *noir* genre, Evelyn's account of his relationship with Leilah follows the arc of the *noir* script from the hero's sexual obsession with the *femme* through his need to punish her. From the Beulah episode onwards, however, the *noir* script is subsumed into a literalization of the paranoid Decadent conception of the *femme fatale* as emasculating and castrating, with the male as her passive and effeminate prey.³⁰ Thus, when Evelyn comes face to face with Mother in Beulah, he articulates the realization, resonant with Freudian paranoia, that Leilah's seductive wiles were instrumental to a conspiracy to castrate him:

³⁰ As Villiers puts it, the man the *femme fatale* selects "is simply a victim to be weakened and degraded" Comte Auguste Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, *Tomorrow's Eve*, trans. Robert Martin Adams (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982) 111..

When Leilah lured me out of the drug-store, into the night, towards her bed, she had organised the conspiracy of events that involved the desert, the dead bird, the knife, the sacrificial stone. Leilah had lured me here, at last; Leilah had always intended to bring me here, to the deepest cave, to this focus of all the darkness that had always been waiting for me... (PNE 58)

Leilah had disguised herself as a *femme fatale*, with full knowledge of the punishment this would entail, in order to obscure her real purpose, which was to select an exemplary misogynist for surgical reconstruction. The inscription of the *femme fatale* as an autonomous subject is underscored by the ending, in which Leilah/Lilith who "had danced the dance called the End of the World to invoke retribution on Gomorrah" is imaged as a purposeful and powerful agent of the apocalyptic cultural purging in which the Cities of California, including Los Angeles, home of the "celluloid brothel of the cinema", burn "like the cities of the plain" (PNE 176).

Yet this reading of Leilah as a subject is complicated by her transmutation into "blonde, stern, monomamiliat Sophia", Eve/lyn's "governess under the earth" (PNE 175) in Beulah. The whole Beulah episode obviously parodies the cultural feminist recuperation of Mother Goddesses, and Mother herself is a deeply comical invocation of the Great Mother as depicted in the works of Jung and his follower Erich Neumann. References to Blake aside, Beulah itself is a parodic rendition of Daly's Prehistoric Sacred, a "place where contrarities are equally true," which explains how the black prostitute Leilah and the white virgin Sophia, who "looked like a woman who has never seen a mirror in her life" (PNE 54), can be one and the same. From the Beulah episode onwards the novel slips entirely into the fantastic mode and consequently Leilah/Sophia/Lilith cannot subsequently be considered as a subject or a character in the mimetic sense but only as a highly wrought representation of ideas about how the feminine is produced.

The yoking of the two apparently unrelated myths of Lilith and Sophia exemplifies the referential complexity of this representation. Eve/lyn's realization that the being who has led him on his journey is "one girl who had previously been dual- Lilith, all flesh, Sophia, all mind" (PNE 175) simultaneously reworks Sade's Juliette/Justine dialectic and parodies one of the staple plots of

fantasy fiction, which in turn is informed by the archetypal gender theory of Jung and his follower Erich Neumann. According to Karen Schaafsma, the quest plot of much fantasy fiction frequently turns on the hero's encounter with a Lilith figure that magically transforms into her opposite, the wise Virgin Sophia. The plot of *New Eve* adheres so closely to this variant of the fantasy quest plot, as outlined by Schaafsma below, that one can only conclude that Carter must have been indulging in some deliberate generic parody:

Among the archetypal figures that await the hero on his downward path is Lilith, the seductive and deadly young witch, who murders children and sucks the blood of men as they sleep. In Neumann's analysis of feminine archetypes, Lilith is symbolic of negative transformation; her influence leads to dissolution of consciousness through seduction, intoxication, ecstasy and madness. She is associated with the "spiritual-psychic death" rather than the physical death that is the province of the Great Mother.... However, as Neumann explains, the effects produced by the negative transformation can also be "the forerunners of inspiration and vision and so manifest themselves as stations on a road leading to salvation, through extinction of death to rebirth"... Similarly, the figure of Lilith can shift into that of her opposite, the Virgin-Sophia, bearer of illumination, source and goal of the highest spiritual development. (Schaafsma 53)

Schaafsma's reference to Neumann is to the Jungian typology of feminine archetypes set out in his enormously influential *The Great Mother*. Following Jung, Neumann conceives of female archetypes as male perceptions of women, rather than as objective truths, and maps them dynamically along two axes: the maternal and the anima. Thus the Maternal axis has a positive pole (Good mother) and a negative pole (Bad mother). Similarly, the anima axis has a positive pole (Sophia - wise virgin) and a negative pole (Lilith- seductive young witch). Neumann argues that the male "ego consciousness" is overwhelmed when it approaches the archetype:

[T]he outcome is seizure by the archetype, disintegration of consciousness, and loss of the ego. But since this fascination or disintegration of consciousness means that at the polar points consciousness loses its faculty of differentiation and in this constellation can no longer distinguish between positive and negative, it becomes possible for a phenomenon to shift into its opposite. (Neumann 75-76)

Thus Lilith can be perceived as Sophia, and vice versa; it is a matter of perspective, rather than ontology. According to the logic of Neumann's argument, Evelyn's perception that Sophia is another manifestation of Leilah/Lilith is just that- a perception, born of the psychological disorientation engendered by his tumultuous encounter with the *femme fatale*.

Those unversed in the more obscure points of archetypal gender theory or the fantasy genre may well miss this allusion, but in a sense, its very obscurity is evidence of the scrupulous detail with which Carter plotted her investigation into the cultural production of femininity. That this investigation hinges on the politics of looking is indisputable; the entire novel can be read as a dialogue with the feminist theories of the gaze and spectatorship dominant at the time of its writing. The figure of Tristessa, in particular, is clearly informed by Mulvey's exposition of how the male spectator, as bearer of the look, utilizes scopophilia and voyeurism to contain the threat posed by Woman in classic Hollywood cinema. Indeed, Mulvey herself has written:

Angela Carter manages to put into a few words something about the cinema that critics and theorists can spread over chapters...It is hard to think of any more succinct summing-up of the paradox of cinema and its projection of fantasy and illusion on to the female body than the opening of *The Passion of New Eve*. (Mulvey "Cinema Magic and the Old Monsters: Angela Carter's Cinema" 231-32)

But whereas David Punter has argued that *New Eve* is a novel in which "at every point the woman is locked into the metaphysical insult of the masculine gaze" (216), I argue that the *femme fatale* serves as a figure of resistance to the hegemony of masculine surveillance and control in this text. The *femme fatale*, we might say, returns the insult with interest; she is always one step ahead of the male protagonist because she knowingly manipulates his gaze in order to exert power over him: the gaze is the hook by which she hauls him in. The dual figuration of Leilah/Lilith is a demonstration of how the perception of the *femme fatale* shifts according to the subject's relation to patriarchal codes of gender and power. Thus Evelyn, schooled in misogyny and sexual sadism in the British public school system and through his immersion in Hollywood cinema, perceives Leilah as a hyper-sexualized siren over whom he must exert mastery. Once embodied as a woman, his/her relation to patriarchal power structures is radically altered, with the corollary that his/her perception of Leilah undergoes a significant shift. At the end of the novel s/he realizes, like *Gilda's* Johnny, that Leilah's *femme fatality* has been "just an act." Thus s/he muses, "Leilah but no longer Leilah; what's become

of the houri of Manhattan? Had she all the time been engaged in guerrilla warfare for her mother? Had that gorgeous piece of flesh and acquiescence been all the time a show, an imitation, an illusion?"(PNE 172).

New Eve demonstrates how perspective determines the meanings attached to the *femme fatale*. When the narrative point of view is masculine and heterosexual, the *femme fatale* is read paranoically: her sexuality is invoked as excessive, threatening and castrating. When the narrator is embodied as a woman, the *femme fatale* is read very differently. Like later feminist critics such as Felski, Craciun and Bronfen, Carter posits the *femme fatale* as a polyvalent figure, able to be encoded simultaneously as a Baudelairean fetish object and as a disguise for female agency. This divergence in how the *femme* is read reflects the divergent meanings that have historically attached to the figure of Lilith. However, I do not mean to imply that Leilah and Lilith are one and the same. As she tells Eve at the end of the novel, after "history overtook myth" and "rendered it obsolete"(PNE 172-73), resulting in "a good deal of redundancy in the spirit world"(PNE 175), Lilith is able to abandon her disguise as Leilah, and with it her reliance on seduction as her only means of gaining access to power.

The figure of Leilah/Lilith cannot be correlated with Sade's Juliette, in answer to the question I posed at the beginning of this chapter, as it lacks the requisite monstrousness. It is only with a great deal of difficulty that Leilah/Lilith can be construed as the antithesis to Tristessa's thesis. Nevertheless, there is a certain dialectic at work in this text. On a minor level, this can be seen in Eve/lyn's characterisation of Lilith in terms of a dialectical synthesis: "I now met one girl who had previously been dual- Lilith, all flesh, Sophia, all mind"(PNE 175). However, a more wide-ranging dialectic underpins Carter's historicizing of a particular iconography of the feminine through the figure of Leilah/Lilith. As previously noted, Britzolakis argues that these two figures "represent the sundered halves of Carter's project- her baroque, eclectic appropriation of the western cultural heritage and her commitment to demythologising it in the cause of political transformation"

(Britzolakis 51). Might it not be argued instead that rather than "sundered halves," the figure of Leilah/Lilith is an attempt to trace the historical trajectory of the iconography of the *femme fatale* from one of its earliest exemplars in the Judeo-Christian tradition, through its Decadent manifestations to its feminist re-appropriations? The Leilah/Lilith dualism enacts the inherent ambiguity of the *femme*: simultaneously a misogynistic, libidinous projection and an icon appropriated by feminists to encode female power and sexuality.

Benjamin's observation that "every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it"(Benjamin *The Arcades Project* 462-63 (N3,1)) is pertinent here. The image of the *femme fatale*, which continues to permeate contemporary culture, as its re-emergence in the neo-noir films of the 1990s attests, can only be understood if it is equipped with a history. Carter's attempt to link Leilah, a futuristic version of the *femme fatale*, to her Decadent antecedents in the texts of Villiers and France, and ultimately to the myth of the "first virago," Lilith, is an attempt to show how an image with contemporary currency is historically determined. Thus Leilah/Lilith is best understood, not as a "sundered half," but as an example of Benjamin's dialectical image, a constellation in which current representations are illuminated by images from the past. The dialectical image is by definition a demythologising device, a way of making connections between past and present ideological formations through the juxtaposition of cultural representations. Carter's methodological affinity with Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image can be detected in her description of the official past as "a vast repository of outmoded lies, where you can check out what lies used to be à la mode and find the old lies on which the new lies are based"("Front Line" 74). The notion of the *femme fatale* as castrating seductress is just such an "old lie", but it is an old lie that has given rise to an infinite number of new lies. Carter's point in recuperating this image is to demonstrate how this ubiquitous reference myth, in its various historical inflections, continues to structure our perceptions of femininity.

Conclusion

Carter described the sixties as a period that "felt like year one," but the feeling proved to be illusory. Like every "Year One" before or since, it failed to fulfil its promise. Nevertheless, the intellectual ferment of the era provided the stimulus for both her feminism and her writing. As Sarah Gamble puts it, Carter identified the decade during which she was in her twenties, attended university and began to publish as a "watershed decade" in her development (Gamble *Angela Carter: a Literary Life* 47). Carter herself claims:

I can date to that time and to some of those debates and to that sense of heightened awareness of the society around me in the summer of 1968, my own questioning of the nature of my reality as a *woman*. How that social fiction of my 'femininity' was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing. ("Front Line" 70)

Her engagement with cultural theory and experimental art stems from this time. In various interviews she recollects that during the sixties she first read many of the theorists we now associate with post-structuralism -Barthes, Adorno, Lacan, Foucault, Benjamin - and became interested in the Surrealists and French New Wave cinema, especially the films of Godard. Her sustained interrogation of representations and contemporary mythologies, or "social fictions" as she puts it, can be directly traced to this early exposure to "continental" cultural theory and avant-garde art.

Carter's interest in the representational aspects of cultural production marks her out from most of her feminist contemporaries who, throughout the 1960s and 1970s for the most part addressed women's writing and the representation of woman in literature from what Toril Moi terms a "crypto-Lukácsian" perspective (*Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* 8); that is to say, a perspective that values mimetic art, and privileges "authentic" personal experience and a readily identifiable "message" over textual play, polysemic indeterminacy and slipperiness. Carter's literary direction had always been antithetical, which can be attributed in part to a reaction against the Leavisite valuation of realism in her university English training as well as her immersion in

structuralist and post-structuralist theory. Her attitude to literary realism can be adduced from the comments she made about the literary tale in the "Afterword" to the collection *Fireworks*. According to Carter, the tale is to be preferred to the short story because the tale "makes few pretences at the imitation of life" and therefore "cannot betray its readers into a false knowledge of everyday life" (121-22). This is not to say that she thought representation did not have material effects. In her interview with Haffenden she stated that "there's a materiality to symbols; there's a materiality to imaginative life and imaginative experience which should be taken quite seriously" (Haffenden 85). Her whole literary project was premised on the belief that symbols, representations, and iconographies not only *represent* but also *construct* material reality; an investigation into how they are constructed and deployed can tell as much, if not more, about what we take to be "real" as any mimetic depiction of life.

This thesis has singled out Carter's engagement with a specific iconography, and read this engagement in the light of two conflicting claims. The first, made by Britzolakis and others, is that Carter's ornate prose style coupled with her propensity to allude to fetishistic representations of woman derived from the tradition of literary Decadence constitutes a form of literary fetishism. This strand of criticism has sprung from the cultural feminist tradition that regards fetishism as a uniquely masculine perversion, and disavows the possibility that women could ironically harness fetishism for strategic ends. The second claim, made by Carter herself, is that her fiction is a kind of literary criticism that critically engages with iconic representations of femininity in order to render them hypervisible. The thesis has evaluated the relative merits of both these claims through detailed readings of selected works by Carter alongside specific Decadent intertexts, and has shown that Carter's writing not only interrogates the iconic representations of woman staged in these texts, but also engages critically with the critical controversies they have generated. In particular, I have argued that her re-stagings of the Decadent iconographies of woman as doll, as Muse and as *femme fatale* are

strategic and ironic attempts to show how these iconographies not only encode but also produce ideologies of gender. These iconographies play a role in how we are interpellated as gendered subjects; in order to understand how we are positioned, it is imperative that we grapple with how they work upon us.

In effect, Carter's whole oeuvre is a rebuke to the assumption held by cultural or separatist feminism that women can simply jettison the masculinist culture of the past. The textual deconstruction of Decadent iconographies of femininity in Carter's fiction, which I have argued can best be understood as instances of Benjamin's dialectical image, shows that this wish to jettison patriarchal artistic traditions, whilst understandable, is simplistic, because male-authored iconographies play a formative role, not only in men's views of women, but also in the creation of female subjectivity. Furthermore, as I have argued in respect to the *femme fatale*, an iconography can bear multiple meanings, and can be re-inflected in a sort of Foucauldian reverse-discourse to encode quite antithetical ideologies. Thus the figure of Lilith, the first *femme fatale* in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which has historically been a misogynistic image of female sexuality and lust for power, has been appropriated by feminists as a symbol of female rage and rebellion.

The debates between cultural and poststructuralist feminisms about the politics of representation and textuality are less potent now, because cultural feminism has lost its force in the age of third-wave or post-feminism. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge this historical conflict within feminism because it demonstrates Carter's prescience about the direction feminism would take towards the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, with its focus not on mimesis, on texts as mirrors of or windows onto the real, but on representations and textuality. In fact, Carter can be credited with having helped shape contemporary feminist concerns; it is perhaps her influence on postmodern feminism, rather than merely her prescience, that ought to be credited here.

Which, of course, brings us back to the question raised at the beginning of the thesis as to whether Carter's postmodern aesthetic is antithetical to her feminism. My reading of Carter's fiction as literary criticism demonstrates that her writing practice can be considered as an instance of what Rosalind Krauss terms a para-literary practice; one that dissolves the boundaries between creative and critical forms (37). Krauss argues for the para-literary as an exemplary postmodern practice, as opening up a space for "debate, quotation, partisanship, betrayal, reconciliation" rather than the "unity, coherence, or resolution that we usually think of as constituting the work of literature"(37). In other words, the conflation of literature and criticism opens up a space in which the constructedness of texts and representations can be revealed and interrogated. Linda Hutcheon makes a related point:

I suppose the very word representation unavoidably suggests a given which the act of representing duplicates in some way. This is normally considered the realm of mimesis. Yet, by simply making representation into an issue again postmodernism challenges our mimetic assumptions about representation...assumptions about its transparency and commonsense naturalness. And it is not just postmodern *theory* that has provoked this rethinking. Take, for instance, Angela Carter's story, "The Loves of Lady Purple"... (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 30)

For Krauss, the writings of Barthes and Derrida exemplify the para-literary; for Hutcheon, Carter's more overtly fictional texts perform the same work of revealing the unnaturalness, the creaking stage machinery, of representation.

This thesis does not claim to be an exhaustive account of Carter's intertextuality- a subject that constitutes an almost limitless field of inquiry, as the essays in the recently published volume *Angela Carter Re-Visited: Texts, Contexts, Intertexts*, attest. Nor does it pretend to have the final word on her relation to literary Decadence. Rather, it has sought, through a series of detailed intertextual readings, to demonstrate that Carter's referencing of a specific tradition of representation can be considered as a form of literary criticism that is specifically and deliberately feminist in its bringing to hypervisibility and its historicizing of misogynistic iconographies of the feminine. It has shown that Carter's fictional critiques are one way for feminists to grapple with the weight of disabling representations of femininity that always threaten to reduce women to Woman. This is a work that

will never be "done"; it is Utopian or naïve to think that millennia of cultural tradition can be simply erased or jettisoned by edict. Possibly the most radical aspect of Carter's project is its demonstration that we are always enmeshed in and constituted by representations; it is her ironic deployment rather than her rejection of misogynistic representational traditions, which enables her deconstructive strategy of showing how we are caught.

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