

# Penetrating to the Heart of the Story

Angela Carter's Short Fiction,

A Narratological Approach

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vorgelegt von: Kristina E. Beckenbach, M.A.

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For Niklas, Max and Anna,  
for my parents, Hella and Peter Koch  
and for my parents-in-law Ursula and Klaus Beckenbach.  
This project would not have been possible without the loving  
support of my mother-in-law who is the best grandmother in the world.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Fictional Autobiography</b>	<b>28</b>
1.1 The Japan Trilogy . . . . .	29
1.1.1 “A Souvenir of Japan” . . . . .	33
1.1.2 “The Smile of Winter” . . . . .	47
1.1.3 “Flesh and the Mirror” . . . . .	57
1.2 “Reflections” . . . . .	64
1.3 “Elegy for a Freelance” . . . . .	75
1.4 “Our Lady of the Massacre” . . . . .	89
<b>2 Experimenting With the Narrative ‘We’</b>	<b>102</b>
2.1 “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter” . . . . .	108
2.2 “Lizzie’s Tiger” . . . . .	118
<b>3 Alternating Perspectives</b>	<b>127</b>
3.1 “Black Venus” . . . . .	128
3.2 “The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe” . . . . .	144
3.3 “Overture and Incidental Music for <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i> ” . . . . .	155
<b>4 Third Person</b>	<b>165</b>
4.1 “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest” . . . . .	165
4.2 “Master” . . . . .	182
4.3 “The Loves of Lady Purple” . . . . .	192
<b>5 Summary</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>205</b>

# Introduction

This study will focus on selected narratives from three of the British author Angela Carter's collections of short fiction. In a close reading of 14 of the 26 narratives included in *Fireworks* (1974), *Black Venus* (1985) and *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* (1993),<sup>1</sup> I will take a look at the figure of the narrator, point-of-view and how narratological constructs affect the reading of the texts. I will show that Carter deliberately manipulates these constructs in order to disrupt a simple reading. In some cases, as I will demonstrate, critics have ignored the aspect of point-of-view and have thus offered interpretations which, at times, do not address the intention of the text.

While Carter offers her readers multiple levels and possibilities of meaning, it is my premise that in order to be able to begin to find meaning, one must start with the narrator. Lorna Sage writes of Carter:

She rightly discerned that a woman's inventiveness had still a whiff of original sin, and the grandmother-guise of the yarn-spinner was a splendid cover for a speculative, unsatisfied mind. She was the wolf in Grandma's nightcap.<sup>2</sup>

Not only is Carter herself a 'yarn-spinner', but she creates varying and multi-faceted narrators who serve as much more than mere vehicles for what is told. Carter creates

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<sup>1</sup>All three collections are found in: Angela Carter, *Burning Your Boats: Collected Short Stories* (London: Vintage, 1996). All subsequent references to the short stories in this collection will be made parenthetically and will refer to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Lorna Sage, introduction, *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994) 2.

tellers, whether homo-, hetero- or autodiegetic, whether intra- or extradiegetic, who test the boundaries of narration in order to attempt to transcend levels of meaning dictated by mere language.<sup>3</sup> I deliberately chose Carter's short fiction for this study, as it is here that the author experiments with such a variety of possibilities contained within the scope of narrative perspective/persona that the analysis seems most fruitful. Her short narratives have, with a few notable exceptions, been almost ignored in criticism. Yet they demonstrate that Carter is not only a feminist re-writer but truly experiments not only with content, as many studies have shown, but also with form. It is the often slippery nature of the narrator and the narratee which I find so fascinating in this author's oeuvre. Carter is deliberately manipulating staid forms of narrative perspective in multiple 'abstractions' of recognisable themes in her writing in order to delve more deeply into experimentation with form and meaning. Who tells and in the same vein, how the narrative is told is of integral importance.

I decided to approach the work of a modern author from the direction of point-of-view or narrative persona, it became clear to me that work done on this subject since Booth first expressed his misgivings has paved the way for new and interesting possibilities in interpretation. Thus, it can be claimed that Carter also takes the figure of the narrator and abstracts from preconceived notions. When one considers the innovative nature of short fiction, it seems only right that Carter chooses this venue for experimentation.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that she is doing anything radically new but that she is often utilising the full breadth of possibility open to her as a writer in order to experiment with her art.

This study utilises a close reading of Carter's narratives combined with a narratological approach. In the past, narratology has not lent itself to the interpretation of the content of fiction. Susan S. Lanser, as the forerunner of feminist narratology, made a first move toward reconciling the two disciplines:

Der in einem Artikel von Susan Snaider Lanser aus dem Jahr 1986 begründeten feministischen Narratologie, die eine Verbindung von femini-

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<sup>3</sup>Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972) 238.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Franz K. Stanzel, "Textual Power in (Short) Short Story and Poem," *Modes of Narrative: Approaches to American, Canadian, and British Fiction*, ed. Reingard M. Nischik and Barbara Korte (Würzburg: Königshausen u. Neumann, 1990) 28.

stischer Literaturwissenschaft und Narratologie anstrebt, kommt unter den ‘neuen’ oder ‘postklassischen’ Erzähltheorien in gewisser Hinsicht eine Vorreiterrolle zu, waren es doch zuerst feministische Narratologinnen, die sich programmatisch für eine Kontextualisierung narratologischer Untersuchungen eingesetzt haben.<sup>5</sup>

Lanser was harshly criticised for this approach.<sup>6</sup> While feminist narratology has opened the door to a useful application of narratological constructs in the realm of interpretation, this study will not make use of this approach in favour of a more general reading of Carter’s narratives. Angela Carter is acknowledged as an important feminist author, yet, as many articles and studies have rightly dealt with the clear feminist aspects of her longer fiction and non-fiction, her short fiction, while also lending itself on many occasions to such an examination, is moving in so many directions that a narrower focus would be unnecessarily limiting.

What was criticised in feminist narratology in the 1980s has become accepted practice in the 1990s and beyond. Monika Fludernik, in her 2000 article “Beyond Structuralism in Narratology: Recent Developments and New Horizons in Narrative Theory”, plots the opening of the field of narratology for a wide range of new possibilities, not only theoretical but formerly rejected possibilities of application.<sup>7</sup> Ansgar and Vera Nünning, in their recently published study, *Neue Ansätze in der Erzähltheorie*, state that,

In jüngster Zeit zeichnen sich hinsichtlich der Entwicklung der Erzähltheorie disparate Tendenzen ab: ein Rückzug und Beharren auf vorstrukturalistischen [...] bzw. strukturalistischen Positionen [...], eine Abwendung von den formalistisch-strukturalistischen Grundlagen sowie eine Verlagerung des Akzents von der Modellbildung auf die Applikation erzähltheoretischer Kategorien.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Gaby Allrath and Marion Gymnich, „Feministische Narratologie,” *Neue Ansätze in der Erzähltheorie*, ed. Ansgar Nünning and Vera Nünning (Trier: WVT, 2002) 35.

<sup>6</sup>“Lanser was strongly rebuked [...] by Nilli Diengott (1988), who insisted that narrative categories like focalization are abstract concepts ‘totally indifferent to gender’ and that Lanser was falling over the precipice into dangerous territory – the category of interpretation [...]” Kathy Mezei, ed., “Introduction. Contextualizing Feminist Narratology,” *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 8.

<sup>7</sup>Monika Fludernik, “Beyond Structuralism in Narratology: Recent Developments and New Horizons in Narrative Theory,” *Anglistik* 11.1 (2000) 83.

<sup>8</sup>Ansgar Nünning and Vera Nünning, ed., „Von der strukturalistischen Narratologie zur ‘postklassischen’ Erzähltheorie: Ein Überblick über neue Ansätze und Entwicklungstendenzen,” *Neue Ansätze in der Erzähltheorie* (Trier: WVT, 2002) 7.

It is this application of specific constructs which will be at the centre of the following study.

The figure of narrator and the issue of point-of-view are fraught with difficulties. Faced with the incredible variety of possibilities of storytelling, Wayne Booth already suggested in 1961 that, “like other notions used in talking about fiction, point-of-view has proved less useful than was expected by the critics who first brought it to our attention.”<sup>9</sup> The theoretical, and in many cases, overly vague definitions, were unable to provide more than a surface examination of the figure telling the story.

Interestingly, point-of-view is an element of fiction which is always mentioned, yet rarely examined more closely.<sup>10</sup> A line containing some form of the construction ‘this narrative is written in the first or third-person point-of-view’ can be found in almost every piece of criticism regarding fictional texts. In light of the concerns voiced by Wayne Booth and what a renewed and burgeoning interest in narratology in the past 40 years, as well as the recent important move toward theoretical application shows, however, is that leaving it at this could never suffice. Booth, as mentioned above, considered an undifferentiated use of ‘point-of-view’ in general criticism as useless:

Perhaps the most overworked distinction is that of “person.” To say that a story is told in the first or the third person, and to group novels into one or the other kind, will tell us nothing of importance unless we become more precise and describe how the particular qualities of the narrators relate to specific desired effects.<sup>11</sup>

By 1983, Booth had retracted this statement.<sup>12</sup> While the time span between Booth’s original statement and his retraction is quite broad, it nevertheless documents a shift in emphasis in literary theory over the past almost 40 years. The last decade, as shown by the statements from Fludernik and Nünning above, show a resurgence in interest.

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<sup>9</sup>Wayne Booth, “Distance and Point of View: An Essay in Classification,” *Essays in Criticism* 11 (1961). rpt. in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, ed. Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy (London: Leicester UP, 1996) 117.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) 71.

<sup>11</sup>Booth, “Distance and Point of View” 120.

<sup>12</sup>Monika Fludernik, *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996) 222.

The Nünning's study documents a dizzying array of categories and possibilities.<sup>13</sup> While much older theory still defines the field, it needs to be taken out of the closet and re examined to address new trends.

Monika Fludernik argues, neither first- and third-person, nor Genette's homo- and heterodiegesis are able to cover the wide range of possibilities opening up in experimental writing:<sup>14</sup>

Experimental writing has meanwhile produced a broad spectrum of narrative texts employing different and frequently 'odd' personal pronouns, and this experimental work requires nothing short of an extensive and radical revision of the standard narratological treatment of person or voice.<sup>15</sup>

Angela Carter utilises recognisably mainstream narratological constructs in her writing but a great number of her narratives make use of more rarely seen constructions. Even her more normal narratives will often include a sudden disruption by an odd pronoun, a tense shift or a complete change of perspective, whether contained in one narrating persona or a complete change in point-of-view. This is not to say that an application of narratological constructs in literary interpretation must find a whole new set of terms in order to encompass this new direction. Fludernik suggests that the existing terminology needs to be expanded in order to address new issues. This study will make extensive use of Fludernik's arguments and suggestions especially in the direction of what she calls 'virgin territories' such as, for example, collective narrative agents (*we* narrators), pronominal shifts and second-person narration.<sup>16</sup> The more general basis for this narratological examination is geared towards Franz K.

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. Nünning, „neue Ansätze“ 10-13.

<sup>14</sup>Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology* 222. Homodiegetic narrative is defined as “a narrative the NARRATOR of which is a character in the situations and events recounted: a narrative with a HOMODIEGETIC NARRATOR.” The definition also gives a cross-reference to first-person narrative. Heterodiegetic narrative is defined as “a narrative the NARRATOR of which is not a character in the situations and events recounted; a narrative with a HETERODIEGETIC NARRATOR.” The definition also gives a cross-reference to third-person narrative. Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* 40-1.

<sup>15</sup>Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology* 222.

<sup>16</sup>These territories are not in themselves new, merely the re-evaluation of their importance and consequences for narratives is. Cf. Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology* 222-68.



Stanzel's *Theorie des Erzählens* (1995 [1979]).<sup>17</sup>

Not only the question of point-of-view but also of the narratee will be central to this study's purpose. Gerald Prince, in his "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee" (1973) defines the perimeters of this "someone whom the narrator addresses".<sup>18</sup> While I will argue that the narrator and Carter's deliberate choice of point-of-view are central to the meaning in her stories, likewise the narratee must be considered as these go hand-in-hand.

The narrator, whether first or third-person, is a vital link to the understanding of Carter's fiction. This figure has been dealt with to some extent in the analysis of her novels, especially *Nights at the Circus* with its multiple voices<sup>19</sup> but only Ingrid von Rosenberg's article, "Angela Carter: Mistress of Voices", has come close to offering a differentiated look at how the narrator effects the interpretation of the narratives.<sup>20</sup> Rosenberg's article takes a look at the narrators and voices in two novels and the short story "The Bloody Chamber" by Angela Carter. While, as she herself comments, the scope of the article does not allow for a truly in depth examination of this phenomenon, it does represent a laudable effort at addressing this important issue in Carter's writing. She argues that "it is perhaps not surprising that some feminist critics have found the tone [of "The Bloody Chamber"] not only 'seductive', but therefore 'troubling' [...] and have drawn the wrong conclusions about Carter's

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<sup>17</sup>Ansgar and Vera Nünning quote Stanzel's pivotal 1979 study as to the goals of narrative theory. „Ziel der international und interdisziplinär arbeitenden Erzähltheorie ist eine systematische 'Darstellung der wesentlichsten Elemente des Erzählens und ihrer strukturellen Zusammenhänge' [...]. Fest etabliert wurde das Konzept in Deutschland durch Stanzels 'Theorie des Erzählens', die 'eine Weiterentwicklung und Differenzierung der Typologie der Erzählweisen' [...] darstellt." Nünning, „neue Ansätze" 4. These statements make clear that Stanzel and his theories still hold a premier position in this field.

<sup>18</sup>Gerald Prince, "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee," *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, ed. Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy (London: Leicester UP, 1996) 214.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Michael Bell, "Narration as Action: Goethe's 'Bekenntnisse Einer Schönen Seele' and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*," *German Life and Letters* 45.1 (1992) 27. Bell offers an interesting look at *Nights at the Circus* from the direction of female controlled narration. He does not overtly utilise narratological theories, nor does he go into any detail on feminist narratology. As the article appeared in 1992, this could be seen as symptomatic of what I have been arguing above that there was an overt avoidance of direct application of narratological theories in text interpretation.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Ingrid von Rosenberg, "Angela Carter: Mistress of Voices," *(Sub) Versions of Realism – Recent Women's Fiction in Britain*, ed. Irmgard Maassen and Anna Maria Stuby, *anglistik & englischunterricht* Band 60, ed. Manfred Beyer, Hans-Jürgen Diller, Joachim Kornelius, Erwin Otto and Gerd Stratmann (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997) 173-87.

attitude to sexuality [...].”<sup>21</sup> While I would argue that this not only applies to the specific story Rosenberg cites and that it also goes beyond just Carter’s attitude to sexuality to her attitude toward a multitude of issues, she does, correctly, argue that it is often the fact that the narrators in Carter’s works are not sufficiently examined that causes the difficulty in interpreting her writing.

While a differentiated analysis of the consequences of narrative length on constructs such as the narrator cannot be a focus of this study, it will become clear, though, that Angela Carter has utilised, especially her short fiction, as a venue for narratological experimentation. The more limited scope of the short story serves to magnify the effects of such experimentation opening up further avenues of exploring meaning. As I will discuss below, Angela Carter is known for her continual experimentation with themes throughout her writing career. This study will show that a deliberate manipulation of narratological devices was able to offer her an even broader platform to abstract from.

While I do not attempt to claim that the narrator chosen for any particular piece of short fiction must, by definition, be of a vastly different nature than the narrator utilised in a novel, I do posit that by the very nature of the intensity inherent in short fiction, the narrator, by association, must also be proportionately vital. In the lack of narrative space, point-of-view seems to take on a greater urgency. Monika Fludernik mentions the ongoing discussion of this issue. She claims, and is in agreement with other critics, that the length of the narrative is not important but that the effect of length on textual structure is crucial. She nevertheless concedes that the issue has in no way been dealt with comprehensively.<sup>22</sup> Franz Stanzel, in an article on the similarities between poetry and the (short) short story, points out that short fiction tends to lead the field in innovations and that the longer novel form straggles behind.<sup>23</sup>

It is therefore interesting that even Stanzel, who is highly respected in the field of narratology, while claiming the importance and innovative quality of short fiction,

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<sup>21</sup>Rosenberg 182.

<sup>22</sup>Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology* 348.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Stanzel, “Textual Power” 28.

has failed to come to a definitive statement as to whether or not the form needs a differentiated theoretical base in narratology. Gerald Prince also bemoans this lack of attention in a 1998 article entitled “Narratology and Genre: The Case of *The Monkey’s Paw*”. He argues for a widening of the boundaries of narratology. In his analysis of *The Monkey’s Paw* he touches on narratology’s understandable lack of concern with genre as its focus is different. Yet he argues that “narratology can play an important and *explicit* role in the construction of a modern account of narrative genres without renouncing its basic presuppositions, methods, and goals”.<sup>24</sup> While I only scratch the surface of this issue here, it can be seen that a more detailed study is necessary in order to fully explore the possibilities inherent in the genre issue.

Lastly, in selected cases, I will make use of Carter’s manipulation of intertexts to further disentangle the multitude of levels in her narration. Intertextuality is a term coined by Julia Kristeva (1969) and further discussed and defined in a restrictive fashion by Gérard Genette in his 1982 *Palimpsestes. La Littérature au second degré*<sup>25</sup>. Genette restricts intertextuality to concrete literary texts while Kristeva has a more broad approach encompassing “the relations between any text [...] and the sum of knowledge, the potentially infinite network of codes and signifying practices that allows it to have meaning.”(Prince, 46) I will make greater use of Genette’s approach to intertextuality by looking at concrete examples of this in Carter’s texts. She, in many instances, makes overt reference to her chosen literary intertexts. In doing this she is provoking the reader to look beyond the surface level of her text which, due to the limited space provided by the venue of the short story, often offers a, at first glance, simplistic veneer. As a device of narrative economy, the addition of intertextual references allows the limited text to take on a deeper and more complex structure.

During a podium discussion on the state of in English Literary studies at a conference in 1996, the movement of young academics toward research on unproven, perhaps

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<sup>24</sup>Gerald Prince, “Narratology and Genre: The Case of *The Monkey’s Paw*,” *The Fantastic Other: An Interface of Perspectives*, ed. Brett Cooke, George E. Slusser and Jaume Marti-Olivella, *Critical Studies*, vol. 11, ed. Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz (Amsterdam: Rodopi 1998) 101.

<sup>25</sup>Gérard Genette. *Palimpsestes. La Littérature au second degré* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982) 9-17.

almost ‘popular’ authors, while great authors of the canon were being ignored, was criticised. Angela Carter was cited as a specific example. It does seem startling when looking through the criticism on her writings, that an author’s work, so long almost ignored in academic circles, should experience such widespread interest in so short a span of years. While I must admit that the attention given Carter’s work in recent years, especially since her death in 1992, seems extreme, it merely serves to honour the achievement of an outstanding, difficult and challenging author. Recent studies have shown, as mine will as well, that Angela Carter is one of the most diverse and challenging authors of her generation. Her writing strains the boundaries of language, form and content.

Ursula Le Guin wrote about women authors in 1986,

So if you want your writing to be taken seriously, don’t marry and have kids, and above all, don’t die. But if you have to die, commit suicide. They approve of that.<sup>26</sup>

Angela Carter seems, in this as in most things, to be the exception to the rule. She was married, divorced, had a child and did die but did not commit suicide. While she is considered a feminist writer, she has not always found wholehearted acceptance among feminists as she, in her career, did not always “see the point of feminism.”<sup>27</sup> Yet what critics see as an ambiguous feminism or pitfalls in her writing caused by this, is only the refusal to allow herself to be placed in a confining category. It was with her death that she was catapulted to academic if not popular fame: “She has become the contemporary writer most studied at British universities – a victory over the mainstream she would have enjoyed.”<sup>28</sup> Her writing has always been taken seriously. It has not, though, always been seen in a positive light. While even her greatest admirers are honest about her literary idiosyncrasies, critical work published

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<sup>26</sup>Ursula K. Le Guin, “Prospects for Women in Writing,” Conference on Women in the Year 2000. Portland. September 1986. *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places.* by Le Guin (New York: Harper & Row, 1989) 177.

<sup>27</sup>Susannah Clapp, “On Madness, Men and Fairy-Tales,” *The Independent on Sunday*, 9 June 1991, 26.

<sup>28</sup>Salman Rushdie, introduction, *Burning Your Boats: Collected Short Stories.* by Angela Carter (London: Vintage, 1996) iv.

in the last years has shown recently that the criticism levelled at Carter's oeuvre as short lived, or faddish, is unfounded.

Salman Rushdie writes,

No such thing as a perfect writer. Carter's high-wire act takes place over a swamp of preciousness, over quicksands of the arch and twee; and there's no denying that she sometimes falls off, no getting away from odd outbreaks of fol-de-rol, and some of her puddings, her most ardent admirers will concede, are excessively egged. Too much use of words like 'eldritch', too many men who are rich 'as Croesus', too much porphyry and lapis lazuli to please a certain sort of purist. But the miracle is how often she pulls it off; how often she pirouettes without falling, or juggles without dropping a ball.<sup>29</sup>

Yet occasionally she does drop the ball. The irony in this, though, is the often startling lack of agreement as to where, to use an image from her short story, "Reflections", Teresias dropped the stitch; where synthesis was destroyed.

Angela Carter left behind an impressive body of writing. She wrote nine highly acclaimed novels, the interest in which forms the overwhelming bulk of criticism that exists on her work. Three novels, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman* (1972), *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984) have received the greatest amount of attention. In addition to her novels, she produced four original collections of short fiction, of which *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) is considered the most controversial, as well as most important for the re-thinking of myth and fairy tale. Though the other three collections of short fiction are slowly gaining popularity in academic circles, it is, nevertheless, still *The Bloody Chamber* which claims the majority of interest. Her non-fiction work, *The Sadeian Woman* (1979) is a pivotal piece of criticism and theory on sexual stereotypes and constraints. She also published two collections of journalism, a compilation of which, titled *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings* was published in 1998. While *The Sadeian Woman* has rightly been recognised as a brilliant study of pornography and the Marquis de Sade, her journalism has been, for the most part, ignored. Yet much of the wit, sarcasm and

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<sup>29</sup>Rushdie xiv.

irony found in her fiction can be found in her journalism as well. Not limiting herself to mainstream forms of literary production, she also wrote radio and screenplays which were collected and published in 1997, in *Angela Carter: The Curious Room*.<sup>30</sup> A volume of poetry also exists, unfortunately almost impossible to find. Carter also wrote two children's books, *Comic and Curious Cats*, published in 1989 and *Sea Cat and Dragon King* (2000), the latter published posthumously by her estate. Last, but not least, she edited three collections of short stories and tales by women authors from around the world and worked on translating the fairy tales of Charles Perrault.<sup>31</sup>

She enjoyed a comfortable amount of success with her first five novels, but when she began to experiment with short fiction and moved away from realistic settings, her success diminished. Carter states, "So, shall we say, we took a significant nose-dive in lifestyle, complicated by the fact that those who'd known me as a mainstream writer kept telling me I'd only gone into genre for commercial reasons, which certainly wasn't so".<sup>32</sup> She was never to see her work become as generally popular again during her lifetime. In the critical whirlwind which followed her death, it is Carter's later writing which has attained, at least in academic circles, critical acknowledgement.

Carter writes, in her afterword to the collection *Fireworks*, about her choice of the short narrative form;

sign and sense can fuse to an extent impossible to achieve among the multiplying ambiguities of an extended narrative. I found that, though the play of surfaces never ceased to fascinate me, I was not so much exploring them as making abstractions from them, I was writing, therefore, tales.<sup>33</sup>

In the same vein, she purposefully avoids using the term short story. The tale makes "few pretences at the imitation of life", in contrast to the short story.<sup>34</sup> While it is

<sup>30</sup>A new study has recently appeared dealing with this collection: Charlotte Crofts, *Anagrams of Desire: Angela Carter's Writing for Radio, Film, and Television* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003).

<sup>31</sup>*Sleeping Beauty and Other Favourite Fairy Tales* (1982), *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (1990), *The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (1992) and *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (1977).

<sup>32</sup>Angela Carter, "Fools Are My Theme," *Shaking a Leg*, ed. Jenny Uglow (London: Vintage, 1998) 35.

<sup>33</sup>Angela Carter, "Afterword to *Fireworks*," *Burning Your Boats: Collected Short Stories* (London, Vintage 1996) 459.

<sup>34</sup>Carter, "Afterword" 459.

interesting to note that Carter did not add this distinction until later printings of *Fireworks*, it, nevertheless, should be seen as a difference in theory rather than in kind.<sup>35</sup> The definition of tale suggests that it mimics “the tone of voice of someone speaking. Usually the theme of a tale is fairly simple but the method of relating it may be complex and skilled.”<sup>36</sup> While Carter claims that this added definition removes her narratives from a restrictive reality, the term seems to more aptly address the production of meaning, more specifically the teller.

Suzanne Ferguson sums up the characteristics of modern short fiction in seven points:

(1) limitation and foregrounding of point of view, (2) emphasis on presentation of sensation and inner experience, (3) the deletion or transformation of several elements of the traditional plot, (4) increasing reliance on metaphor and metonymy in the presentation of events and existents, (5) rejection of chronological time ordering, (6) formal and stylistic economy, and (7) the foregrounding of style.<sup>37</sup>

While these characteristics all address what Carter is doing, by claiming the term tale for her narratives, Carter is placing a purposeful emphasis which should not be ignored. Carter describes her narratives as dealing “directly with the imagery of the unconscious [...],” with the fears, desires, passions of the individual.<sup>38</sup> The reader’s discovery of the narrator’s presentation of a seemingly recognisable external world, within the internal world inhabited by Carter’s characters, must call into question all that is seen.

Salman Rushdie writes in his introduction to *Burning Your Boats: Collected Short Stories*,

the best of her, I think, is in her stories. Sometimes, at novel length, the distinctive Carter voice, those smoky, opium-eater’s cadences interrupted

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<sup>35</sup>This study will not restrict itself to the use of the term tale for the narratives in *Fireworks*.

<sup>36</sup>“Tale,” *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (1999) 899.

<sup>37</sup>Suzanne C. Ferguson, “Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, 28.1 (1982). rpt. in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, ed. Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy (London: Leicester UP, 1996) 289.

<sup>38</sup>Carter, “Afterword” 459.

by harsh or comic discords, that moonstone-and rhinestone mix of opulence and flim-flam, can be exhausting. In her stories, she can dazzle and swoop, and quit while she's ahead.<sup>39</sup>

While one must keep in mind that Rushdie is writing an introduction to a collection of Carter's short fiction, he is not alone in his opinion. Walter Kendrick, in his article, "The Real Magic of Angela Carter", writes that "short forms seem to suit her talent best."<sup>40</sup> He makes this statement in the context of an examination of a wide range of Carter's works utilising her short stories to show how "she can't write a plot, not to save her life"<sup>41</sup> but that this does not diminish the success of especially her shorter writings. "She provides such intense and various pleasures in all her books that mere formal inefficiency seems a minor fault indeed."<sup>42</sup> In light of this rather double edged praise of Carter's short fiction, it is frustrating that Kendrick merely utilises his discussion of Carter's short stories as a frame for his examination of her novels. Clare Hanson, in her 1988 article, "Each Other: Images of Otherness in the Short Fiction of Doris Lessing, Jean Rhys and Angela Carter", goes a step further than Kendrick to state that, "Carter's short fiction is finer than her novels".<sup>43</sup> Hanson's article is a succinct but interesting look at three of the short stories in Carter's collection *Black Venus*.

Lindsey Tucker states that "Carter produced four story collections [...] and it may be for these that she is best known."<sup>44</sup> After a close examination of the criticism which exists on Carter's writing, it is interesting to note that Tucker is the only one to hold the stories in such esteem. It is necessary when making such a statement, to differentiate between Carter's four collections. In truth, Tucker would be correct in her statement if she were referring only to *The Bloody Chamber* but her remarks do not apply when referring to *Fireworks*, *Black Venus* and *American Ghosts and Old*

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<sup>39</sup>Rushdie, introduction ix-x.

<sup>40</sup>Walter Kendrick, "The Real Magic of Angela Carter," *Contemporary British Women Writers*, ed. Robert E. Hoasmer, Jr. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) 80.

<sup>41</sup>Kendrick 79.

<sup>42</sup>Kendrick 80.

<sup>43</sup>Clare Hanson, "Each Other: Images of Otherness in the Short Fiction of Doris Lessing, Jean Rhys and Angela Carter," *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 10 (1988) 77.

<sup>44</sup>Lindsey Tucker, introduction, *Critical Essays on Angela Carter*, ed. Lindsey Tucker (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998) 5.



*World Wonders*. While things seem to be looking up for the latter three collections in recent criticism, the attention they have received pales in comparison to *The Bloody Chamber* and Carter's novels.

Considering the lack of attention paid to Angela Carter's writings prior to her death in 1992, an almost surprising number of book-length studies have appeared since 1994 when Lorna Sage's biography of the author and collected critical essays appeared.<sup>45</sup> At last count there were thirteen published or upcoming studies, not counting the two by Sage. This is not taking into account the number of dissertations, the listings currently in the *MLA* and those articles not listed there. Yet when searching for criticism concerning *Fireworks*, *Black Venus* and *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders*, it quickly becomes apparent that the collections are not considered to merit much critical attention in this wave of newly discovered interest in her writings.

Symptomatic of this is perhaps the most prominent of the book-length studies, Aidan Day's *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass* (1998). Day claims that Carter "was principally a writer of fiction and it is with her fiction – nine novels and four collections of short stories between 1966 and 1993 – that [his] book is mainly concerned."<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, Day's claims do not hold true. While devoting an entire chapter to *The Bloody Chamber*, he only mentions select stories contained in the other three collections. These are also not discussed mainly for their own merit but in order to further emphasise points Day is making about Carter's novels.

A similar phenomenon can be found in Sarah Gamble's *The Fiction of Angela Carter: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (2001). The study provides a fascinating starting point for an examination of Carter criticism but seems to defeat itself by the very nature of the enormous task it attempts to undertake. Gamble offers a disclaimer in her introduction addressing the fact that compiling the criticism has been "a daunting task,"<sup>47</sup> but, all in all, she only attempts to deal with a small fraction of the stories in *Fireworks*, *Black Venus* and *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders*.

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<sup>45</sup>Lorna Sage, *Angela Carter* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers, 1994), *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994).

<sup>46</sup>Aidan Day, *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998) 1.

<sup>47</sup>Sarah Gamble, ed. *The Fiction of Angela Carter* (Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd., 2001) 8.

She bemoans the overall lack of comprehensive criticism on these collections, although more exists on *Black Venus* than on the other two.<sup>48</sup> Yet she relies largely on major critical texts like those by Linden Peach and Aidan Day, Lorna Sage's biography of Angela Carter, articles by Jill Matus and articles Gamble published herself. As I have already demonstrated, Day's study barely scratches the surface on the majority of Carter's short fiction and Peach's study never even claims to attempt this as he is concerned with the novels. It is all the more ironic, therefore, that Peach's study contains the most statements concerning Carter's short fiction while still not going into any depth. Furthermore, in citing her own publications, Lorna Sage's biography, as well as Jill Matus' article on "Black Venus", she does not even begin to provide an overview of some often smaller publications and articles which offer interesting insights on the stories.

Gamble reiterates that there are major problems in finding criticism on the three collections. In the case of *Fireworks* she states, "although little criticism has been published on *Fireworks* itself, it not infrequently enters into studies of Carter's work as a means of exploring the effect of Carter's stay in Japan upon her writing."<sup>49</sup> In the case of *Black Venus* and *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* she writes that "what criticism exists tends to trace connections between specific stories and the novels [...]."<sup>50</sup> While her assessment is entirely correct, there are, nevertheless, many more articles than she has mentioned and beyond these, much of what can be found on the individual short stories must 'simply' be gleaned from the pages about her novels. She does, though, rightly point toward the often one-sidedness of criticism dealing with these collections.

Unfortunately, as Gamble points out, Carter's critics often see her short fiction as rough drafts or aftershocks of her novels, since there is an undeniable repetition of themes which runs throughout her oeuvre. This seems to be one of the major reasons why so little individual criticism exists.<sup>51</sup> Linden Peach perhaps states what

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<sup>48</sup>Gamble 154.

<sup>49</sup>Gamble 67.

<sup>50</sup>Gamble 154.

<sup>51</sup>*The Bloody Chamber* must be excluded from this discussion. Its homogenous character, focusing on re-written fairy tales, in contrast to the eclectic or even disjointed nature of the other three collections, offers a coherence more conducive to criticism.

other critics feel or at least unconsciously express: “Much of what she [Carter] wrote about Japan and produced after her stay there provides a gloss on the early fiction.”<sup>52</sup> Gamble directly criticises Peach for this statement, arguing that “instead of regarding *Fireworks* as providing a ‘gloss’ on the novels she had already written, an aid to their interpretation [...] *Fireworks* provides excellent introductory examples of the way in which Carter’s narrative technique, never straightforward to begin with, became more intricately self-referential in terms of both form and content.”<sup>53</sup> For her, Peach is approaching the collection from the wrong angle. Instead of seeing it as a conclusion to and overview of her first decade of writing, the collection should be seen as “charting subtle shifts in thematic focus and literary technique which were unavoidably to shape subsequent fiction.”<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, Peach seemingly contradicts himself later when he states that, “Carter’s works are best read not as independent texts, but as part of an ongoing process of writing.”<sup>55</sup> With this statement he would appear to be in agreement with Gamble’s assessment.

While these comments are focused around *Fireworks*, this can be seen as symptomatic for the overall reception of her short fiction. In defence of what she sees as a positive characteristic of the whole range of Carter’s fiction, Elaine Jordan writes, “however much motifs are repeated from one end of her work to the other, [...] you cannot lay a grid across her work and read off meanings from it [...]”<sup>56</sup> Aidan Day continues this by stating that “Carter’s themes are fairly consistent throughout her writing. But consistency of theme is not the same thing as repetition. There are continually new angles and new emphases.”<sup>57</sup> It is therefore not legitimate to use Carter’s constant re-working of themes to criticise one area of her writing. Her short fiction must be considered on a parallel track to her novels, of course taking into consideration the unique aspects of the genre and therefore broadening, not narrowing the overall discussion of Carter’s style.

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<sup>52</sup>Gamble 67. Linden Peach, *Macmillan Modern Novelists: Angela Carter* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998) 20.

<sup>53</sup>Gamble 67-68.

<sup>54</sup>Gamble 67.

<sup>55</sup>Peach 22.

<sup>56</sup>Elaine Jordan, “The Dangers of Angela Carter,” *New feminist discourses: essays in literature, criticism, and theory*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992) 121.

<sup>57</sup>Day 13.

Angela Carter's first collection of short fiction, *Fireworks*, is distinctive among the four collections she published in that all of the narratives included in it appear here for the first time. This allows them to be read under a certain 'motto' which is, in this case, Japan. In 1969, Carter won a Somerset Maugham Award and decided to travel to Japan. As I already mentioned, much of the criticism which exists on *Fireworks* at least begins with a discussion of the effect her stay there had on her writing. The question that Linden Peach, for example, raises about the influence of Japan on Carter's writing is whether or not her time there truly constituted "a watershed in her literary career."<sup>58</sup> He goes on to argue that while her stay there may have focused aspects of her work, her "sense of the foreignness of her own culture and her interest in the blurred boundaries between realism and illusion [...]"<sup>59</sup> could already be found in her pre-Japan writing. Alex Falzon had posed this question to Angela Carter in an interview he did with her in the summer of 1989: "I think that the year 1972 marks a kind of watershed, in which your writing began to change [...]"<sup>60</sup> Her answer, "But I'd say that the 'true' Angela Carter voice [...] starts with *Heroes and Villains* in 1969 [...]"<sup>61</sup> points to the fact that she, herself, does not see Japan as a turning point, but as an intensification. Sarah Gamble argues that *Fireworks* is beginning to deal with aspects that will mould her later fiction.<sup>62</sup> In doing this, as I have already argued above, she reverses Peach's argument that the collection is a type of end, a summation and claims that it is a type of transition which picks up on the previous novels and 'charts' the future path. This is also, I believe, a better reading of Angela Carter's statement when asked about her opinion: "*Heroes and Villains* [is] the first novel which is an attempt to write directly about ideas [...] and the first one where the characters are obviously not 'life-like.'"<sup>63</sup> Her emphasis on describing the novel as a first attempt obviously suggests a beginning.

Much of the most interesting information on Carter's experiences in Japan can be found in her own journalism. *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings* con-

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<sup>58</sup>Peach 4.

<sup>59</sup>Peach 4.

<sup>60</sup>Alex R. Falzon, interview with Angela Carter, *The European English Messenger* 3.1 (1994) 19.

<sup>61</sup>Falzon 20.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Gamble 67.

<sup>63</sup>Falzon 20.

tains ten articles dealing with the subject. They cover topics from Japanese literature, tattooing, mirrors, autobiographical experiences, sex and artificiality. Interestingly enough, many of the images presented in her journalism can be found in her collection of short fiction as well. Carter, herself said, “Japan made me very conscious that we don’t live in a white world.”<sup>64</sup> This mindset comes through rather sharply in some form in all of the stories.

While all three collections show a connecting idea which runs more or less through all of the texts, I believe that the short period of genesis between 1970 and 1973, as well as the coincidence or choice to publish them for the first time in a unified collection, adds a deeper sense of homogeneity to this group of narratives which is not as obvious in the subsequent collections I am dealing within this study. This assumption, of course, does not hold true for *The Bloody Chamber*, though only two of the ten stories were first published with the publication of the entire collection. I believe it is safe to assume Carter deliberately chose the narratives in *Fireworks*, as three further documented short stories from this early period are not included in this first collection. These three narratives were never re-published in any of her collections of short fiction.<sup>65</sup> At least three further uncollected narratives exist, one of which can be attributed to the 1970’s.<sup>66</sup>

Carter had published six of her nine novels prior to the appearance of *Fireworks*. When comparing the themes of these six novels with what the author examines in her nine short stories, a sense of continuity can be found. What is often used to criticise her, namely the repetition and often seemingly endless re-examination of similar and overlapping themes, can be seen in this period’s writing. If one would wish to characterise this period, the 60’s and early 70’s of Carter’s writing, it seems safe to say that it is marked by an intense examination of relationships, only one example of which is that of male-female. Though my choice cannot do justice to the subtle variety of possibilities the author examines, it does begin to show her

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<sup>64</sup>Falzon 19.

<sup>65</sup>These stories are; “The Man Who Loved a Double Bass”, “A Very, Very Great Lady and Her Son at Home” and “A Victorian Fable (with Glossary)”.

<sup>66</sup>These stories are; “The Scarlet House”, “The Snow Pavilion” and “The Quilt Maker”. “The Scarlet House” was first published in 1977.

preoccupation with dichotomies. It may be best described in terms of her use of the mirror in several of her narratives.<sup>67</sup>

While the growing mass of criticism concerning Carter's oeuvre has dealt in detail with issues of power, sexuality and identity among many other topics, none has dealt with how her manipulation of point-of-view and narrator facilitate these. By placing the major themes of power relationships in a myriad of contexts in her first collection and furthering this multifaceted view through an experimentation with point-of-view, Carter has managed to break out of the confines of literary style which may have served to limit her in the period of the early 1970s. By leaving England for Japan, she changed her own point-of-view, discovering that this could be effective for her writing as well.

*Fireworks* contains nine narratives which deal in a variety of ways with dichotomies. "Souvenir of Japan", "The Smile of Winter" and "Flesh and the Mirror" address the issue of foreign versus familiar. Yet far from leaving things at that, Carter takes this juxtaposition further and moves it from a cultural or even gender plane to an interpersonal level on which the narrator examines herself and her lover and their relationship. Carter refuses easy interpretations and answers by constantly shifting the dichotomies and undermining the expectations of the reader as to who is in a dominant position. This flip-flop of power relationships is mirrored in each of the narratives. In "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter", we find an all-powerful executioner who physically dominates his daughter yet who is in his ultimate guise of power also a man trapped who would die of fright were he to encounter his authentic face divested of its mask of power. In "The Loves of Lady Purple", we meet a puppeteer and his lady puppet representing, on the surface the classical relationship in all its facets of powerful male and manipulated female, mirroring the classical Pygmalion intertext. Yet it would not be a Carter tale if it did not undermine this, in itself important feminist criticism. In the end, the puppeteer is killed by his puppet.

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<sup>67</sup>Mirrors play an important role in "A Souvenir of Japan", "Flesh and the Mirror" and "Reflections" in *Fireworks*; "Wolf-Alice" in *The Bloody Chamber* and "Impressions: The Wrightsman Magdalene" in *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders*. Carter writes in the afterword to the collection *Fireworks*, that she had "always been fond of [...] fabulous narratives that deal directly with the imagery of the unconscious – mirrors [...]" (Carter, "Afterword" 459).

“Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest” is the second incest narrative in this collection. In this story, Carter examines the development of sexuality and the ensuing power ‘struggle’ in Adam- and Eve-like twins who attain puberty on their symbolic journey to the middle of the forest in search of a mythical tree. In “Reflections”, Carter once again picks up on the mirror images so central to her Japan narratives. Here the mirror acts as a symbolic doorway between the worlds, a realistic world and the mirror world where power relationships are seemingly reversed. “Master”, a direct homage to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-20), directly addresses this mirroring in the systematic negative of the person of ‘Master’. Not only is this figure a dichotomy himself, but Carter also examines the master-slave dichotomy. In the end, like in “The Loves of Lady Purple”, it is the slave, aptly named ‘Friday’, who is alive, not the master. In the last narrative, “Elegy for a Freelance”, Carter returns to a more familiar male-female dichotomy. We can trace the development of the ‘I’ narrator from ‘weak’ girlfriend of the character X, to his judge, jury and executioner in an apocalyptic vision where illusions are constantly destroyed.

While in the first edition of *Fireworks* she still claimed to be interested in the gothic aspects of the mind, in subsequent editions she altered her afterward to this collection to reflect her new-found interest in how myth and fairy tale are an integral part of our lives.<sup>68</sup> It is then only fitting that this interest translate itself into an amazing collection of stories published in *The Bloody Chamber*. Even here, though, it can be observed that she is looking to examine issues from a multitude of differing angles. I do not wish to give the impression that *The Bloody Chamber* is, narratologically seen, less fruitful ground for examination, which is shown by Monika Fludernik’s close narratological reading of “The Erl King” and Timothy Mason’s essay on tense switching in this collection. I believe that this collection has stolen the fire away from the other three collections and would do so again in this study.<sup>69</sup>

In the interim between the publication of *Fireworks* and the appearance of *Black*

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<sup>68</sup>Carter, “Afterword” 459.

<sup>69</sup>Monika Fludernik, “Angela Carter’s Pronominal Acrobatics: Language in the ‘Erl-King’ and ‘The Company of Wolves,’” *European Journal of English Studies* 2:2 (1998) 215-37. Timothy Mason. *Timothy Mason’s Site*. 13 June 2005 <[http://www.timothyjpmason.com/WebPages/Publications/Bloody\\_Chamber.htm](http://www.timothyjpmason.com/WebPages/Publications/Bloody_Chamber.htm)>. “Living in the Present: An analysis of Tense Switching in Angela Carter’s ‘The Bloody Chamber’”.

*Venus*, Carter also published only two further novels.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the appearance of *Fireworks* can be seen to mark a shift in emphasis in Carter's writing away from the novel towards short fiction.

*Black Venus*, a collection of her own original fiction, was published eleven years after *Fireworks*. In contrast to *The Bloody Chamber*, the fact that all the narratives were previously published makes it difficult to view, according to Gamble, "as representative of a particular 'moment' in Carter's career."<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, Linden Peach suggests that the entire collection "is very relevant to a discussion of Carter's interest in the illegitimate and its relationship to the carnivalesque [...] [and] supposedly resurrect[s] episodes and versions of events that have not made it into the official records."<sup>72</sup> Lorna Sage also writes that in this collection, Carter "is mischievously engaged in supplementing the canon – writing *round the edges* of the known, resurrecting materials that didn't quite make it and voices we didn't get to hear."<sup>73</sup> Thus, despite Gamble's claim to the contrary, *Black Venus*, can, after all, be defined according to a 'motto'. Similar to *The Bloody Chamber*, this collection also retains a sense of re-writing as can be seen in the comments by Sage and Peach though not on the fairy tale level, but perhaps also on a type of literary plane suggested by Carter's choice of themes.

*Black Venus* marks a move by Carter away from overtly fictional worlds and characters in her short fiction to an examination of historical figures. The collection was published in the United States with the title *Saints and Strangers* (1987). In some ways this title seems to come closer to describing the emphasis of the narratives included than does *Black Venus*. While it places an emphasis on a portrait of individuals, in this collection Carter manipulates their familiarity to the narratee in order to open up new possibilities of identity. The reader meets Jeanne Duval, the mistress of the French poet Charles Baudelaire in the title story, "Black Venus". This is a fascinating example of Carter's skill in undermining typical third-person narration by mixing perspectives. We also meet Edgar Allan Poe in "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan

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<sup>70</sup>*The Passion of New Eve* (1977); *Nights at the Circus* (1984).

<sup>71</sup>Gamble 154.

<sup>72</sup>Peach 145-6.

<sup>73</sup>Sage *Angela Carter*, 44.



Poe”, a dark and morose tale filled with emasculating female sexuality and death. This narrative, in a manner similar to “Black Venus” plays with the possibilities of third-person narration. The collection is rounded out by a narrative dealing with a third non-fictional character, Lizzie Borden. Which American child is not familiar with the macabre rhyme,

Lizzie Borden with an axe  
Gave her father forty whacks  
When she saw what she had done  
She gave her mother forty-one. (300)

Carter’s narrator takes the reader through Lizzie’s past in the last moments before the beginning of the day on which she will supposedly kill her parents. This narrative is the first of three distinct script-like narratives. This affinity for a mixing of genres is demonstrated by Carter’s work in the field of radio and screen plays. Perhaps Carter had first intended “The Fall River Axe Murders” as a screenplay, but then decided that she would flesh out the material and develop it into a full-length novel. Unfortunately, all that remained of this project is a second narrative about Lizzie Borden’s childhood, as Carter died before she could begin serious work on the novel.<sup>74</sup>

In all three of the above narratives, the narrator introduces possibilities and perspectives which cause the reader to question general knowledge about these historical figures. These texts represent a search for identity. This is continued in the fictional autobiography of the Moll Flanders-like character, Sal, in “Our Lady of the Massacre”. In this narrative, Carter picks up on the subtle question of naming and its effects on identity as already introduced in Defoe’s novel. In the only other purely homodiegetic/autodiegetic narrative in this collection, “The Kitchen Child”, the question also revolves around identity. In this case, though, Carter leaves behind her characteristic seriousness and offers a tale about a soufflé and a seduction which is light and funny. Underlying this lighter mood is a thought provoking look at power relationships. “Overture and Incidental Music for *A Midsummer Night’s*

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<sup>74</sup>Janet L. Langlois, “Andrew Borden’s Little Girl: Fairy-Tale Fragments in Angela Carter’s ‘The Fall River Axe Murders’ and ‘Lizzie’s Tiger,’” *Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale*, ed. Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega (1998; Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2001) 206.

*Dream*” shifts from the first-person narration of the Golden Herm, the golden boy of Shakespeare’s original to a third-person narrator who acts as a type of tour guide through the setting and perspectives of the other characters of the play. “The Kiss” represents a conundrum, neither completely a short story nor completely a journalistic piece. “Peter and the Wolf” is a third-person narrative dealing with a boy’s coming of age and his wolf cousin whose animalistic sexuality cause him to question everything he believes in.

While the narratives in *Black Venus* also deal with the complexities of male-female relationships, power relationships, etc. similarly to *Fireworks*, I believe that Carter’s deliberate emphasis on non-fictional, yet nebulous characters, or intertexts which evoke strong emotions in a well read audience, shifts a main emphasis away from the dichotomies examined in the first collection to an examination of identity. A persona is spotlighted in a manner that supersedes the definition of main character. While the short-stories in *Fireworks* also often focus on one main character, the narratives in *Black Venus* tell less of a story than repaint verbal pictures of personae. This is achieved to a large extent through Carter’s manipulation of point-of-view. In contrast to the previous collections, *Black Venus* is characterised by shifting narrative perspectives and points of view. By introducing varying and sometimes overlapping stories, by mixing fact and fiction, Carter is attempting to steer the reader away from an accepted ‘reading’ of the character, a characterisation that is either comfortable or known. Is Jeanne Duval simply a whore, is Poe a lush or is the Golden Herm as silent and objectified as in Shakespeare’s original? As usual, Carter offers possibilities, and forces the reader to carefully examine her complex and often bawdy portraits of figures we thought we knew.

*American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* is Carter’s last collection of short fiction, published posthumously in 1993, eight years after *Black Venus*. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton, in the introduction to their collected critical essays, *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter* (1997) write that *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* “displays an astonishing range of cultural reference.”<sup>75</sup> While occasionally

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<sup>75</sup>Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton, introduction, *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter*, ed. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (Essex: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997) 9.

including re-writings, this collection seems to reflect the opposition inherent in its title. Carter wrote of herself once, “I went to America for a holiday, once, a crumbling relic of European decadence stranded among the babes in the wood.”<sup>76</sup> Also picking up on the undercurrent in *Black Venus*, this collection goes beyond the merely literary to embrace visual media. Selected narratives take on the quality of film scripts.

*American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* represents a mixture of the purely fictional quality of *Fireworks* and the portraiture of *Black Venus*. Yet the emphasis in this collection is entirely different. As is echoed in Carter’s last novel, *Wise Children* (1991), she had begun to examine her interest in the screen, both large and small, the stage and in art. In reading her journalism, it can easily be seen that these are interests that she had harboured throughout her writing career, but it is only in the last decade of her life that she translates this into her fiction. “Lizzie’s Tiger”, the second clear example of an experimentation with a collective narrative agent, perhaps falls out of the norm of this collection, yet is at the same time fitting as it was broadcast on BBC Radio Three in 1981, as well as its appearance in *Cosmopolitan*. The published version, unlike “The Fall River Axe Murders”, does not retain the quality of a screenplay. “John Ford’s ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore” and “Gun for the Devil”, both traditional third-person narratives, manage to translate the feeling of the big screen Western and the silent movie tradition onto the printed page. Carter’s manipulation of intertexts and points of view make this crossover possible. “The Ghost Ships” is a wonderful poke at the Puritan forefathers in America who truly believed that they could destroy Christmas by making it illegal. This narrative, though, along with the next, “In Pantoland”, a lively, tongue-in-cheek characterisation of well known British pantomime characters, and the last narrative in this collection, “Impressions: The Wrightsman Magdalene”, a musing on various artistic interpretations of the Magdalene, all force a closer examination of what defines a narrative as such and where the boundaries are in flux. “In Pantoland”, as a prime example, was first published as a journalistic article in *The Guardian* in December 1991. It is also included in almost the exact form as in *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* in *Shaking a Leg* the collection of Carter’s journalism.

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<sup>76</sup>Sage, *Angela Carter* 30. Sage quotes this from a letter Carter wrote in 1977.

In “Ashputtle or The Mother’s Ghost”, Carter returns to the fairy tale milieu for one last look. She examines, in three versions, Ashputtle’s relationship with her mother. This has been a topic which Carter has, at best, only skirted in her writing with the exception of *The Bloody Chamber*. Her mothers are usually dead by the time the narrative begins. Narratologically seen, this story is fascinating in that it also contains a ‘journalistic’ portion and three imbedded narratives. “Alice in Prague or The Curious Room” is a tribute to Jan Svankmayer, a surrealist filmmaker and poet. It is a third-person narrative in the best surrealist tradition.

In contrast to the other two collections, I will be discussing all of the narratives in *Fireworks*. The narratives represent, as I mentioned above, a turning point in Carter’s career. They form a synthesis of her early and of her later work in a collection of stories which do not fit comfortably into her style neither before nor after. I believe that it is here that Carter is truly beginning to experiment with point-of-view. She is not always entirely successful in her choices, as will be shown, yet, the level of experimentation is interesting to follow.

*Fireworks* contains, in all, five narratives told by a quasi-autobiographical or autodiegetic narrator.<sup>77</sup> As the first-person point-of-view is not the norm in short fiction, it is interesting that Carter would choose to deviate from this so early in her experimentation with the genre. Of the five novels which preceded this collection, only one, the last, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, is written in the first-person. It is important to call attention to the fact that Carter chose to experiment with quasi-fictional autobiography, or autodiegetic narration at the point in her career in which she was discovering not only a new genre for herself, but has also started a new life.

Even in this first collection it can be seen that Carter is deliberately experimenting with point-of-view. With *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, she discovers the possibilities of first-person narration for her fiction. It is inherently fitting in that it allows for an uncompromising self examination by the narrator in

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<sup>77</sup>Autodiegetic narration is defined as “a first-person narrative the NARRATOR of which is also the PROTAGONIST or the HERO; a variety of HOMODIEGETIC NARRATIVE such that the narrator is also the main character [...]” Cf. Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* 9.

the distancing inherent between the experiencing 'I' and the narrating 'I'. What will also be addressed is what can be seen as Carter's inability to fully achieve a separation of the what will become the clear Carter voice from the personas she creates in her fiction. This is perhaps deliberate in the Japan stories in this first collection, adding a further twist for critics.

Narratologically seen, "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter" is perhaps the most interesting of the narratives in this collection as it experiments with a collective narrative agent. As my analysis will show, it is here that she manages to develop the subtleties of this point-of-view to add a number of layers of meaning to the narrative. The stories "Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest", "The Loves of Lady Purple" and "Master", are all third-person narratives. Each contains a more or less clearly authorial narrator, and while "Master" and "The Loves of Lady Purple" also contain instances of *we* they neither intend to, nor reach the depth of development as "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter". This is not to say that these three narratives are less successful in their own right.

Out of the collection *Black Venus*, I have chosen to look at four of the eight narratives. "Black Venus", "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" and "Overture and Incidental Music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" are excellent examples of shifting perspectives and focalisation. "Our Lady of the Massacre" is a further example of autodiegetic narration as well as being a re-write of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and John Gay's *Polly* (1777). "Peter and the Wolf" and "The Kitchen Child" will not be examined as they lean more towards the style Carter utilises in *The Bloody Chamber*. A narratological study of Carter's fairy-tale style could prove interesting. "The Kiss" would also not fit into the confines of this study as it needs to be examined as to its viability as a narrative. "The Fall River Axe Murders" was simply passed over in favour of "Lizzie's Tiger" as the latter deals with much of the emphasis in the former but in a narratologically more interesting fashion.

I have decided to include only one narrative from the collection *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders*. "Lizzie's Tiger" is a second example of a first-person plural narrator. It goes in a different direction than "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter"

and serves to round out my examination of this aspect. “John Ford’s *‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore*” and “Gun for the Devil” are interesting examples of camera perspective and belong in a study of Carter’s work for radio and screen.<sup>78</sup> “The Ghost Ships”, “In Pantoland”, “Alice in Prague *or* the Curious Room” and “Impressions: The Wrightsman Magdalene” similarly to “The Kiss” in *Black Venus*, go beyond the scope of this study in that they need to be examined as to their narrativity. An interesting spin-off of this would be an examination of these stories in conjunction with Carter’s journalism as the styles overlap to a great degree. “Ashputtle *or* The Mother’s Ghost” again goes too much in the direction of fairy-tale to be included in the present study. “The Merchant of Shadows” is another autodiegetic narrative which does not further the points already made in my chapter on this and it would also be more fruitful to examine it together with Carter’s novel, *The Passion of New Eve*.

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<sup>78</sup>Oddly enough, the just published study by Charlotte Crofts, *‘Anagrams of Desire’: Angela Carter’s Writing for Radio, Film and Television* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003), does not even touch on these narratives. This is remarkable as “Gun for the Devil” also exists as a screenplay.

# Chapter 1

## Fictional Autobiography

Angela Carter chose autodiegetic narration for eight of her twenty-six narratives in the three collections being examined in this study. This chapter will be dealing with six of these in two distinct sections.

In the first, I will be dealing, in detail, with three narratives taken from the *Fireworks* collection. The three narratives that I have chosen, “A Souvenir of Japan”, “The Smile of Winter” and “Flesh and the Mirror” constitute what I call a type of Japan trilogy. This is not to say that Angela Carter intended for these stories to be viewed together. While “A Souvenir of Japan” opens the collection, “A Smile of Winter” is the fourth narrative and “Flesh and the Mirror” is the sixth. These three narratives, though they do not follow each other in the collection, can be seen to form a coherent group which sets itself apart from the other six stories through a repetition of setting, plot and theme. Furthermore, these narratives can be considered to be only slightly fictionalised autobiography. As these three narratives have much in common, it makes sense to examine them as a group.

The second portion of this chapter will be dealing with two stories from *Fireworks*, “Reflections” and “Elegy for a Freelance” and one narrative from *Black Venus*, “Our Lady of the Massacre”. These are all fictional autobiographical narratives which will serve to demonstrate the manner in which Carter creates three vastly different

personas: a stick swinging, tweed clad Victorian Darwinist whose latent misogyny is revealed by a step through the mirror; a woman caught in the whirlwind of emotion and ideology in a time of war; and Sal, a Moll Flanders among the Indians. While “The Kitchen Child”, also in *Black Venus*, is also told in the first-person, its focus is less on autobiography as its focalisation<sup>1</sup> switches between the ‘I’ narrator and his mother. “The Merchant of Shadows”, similarly to “Reflections” is the story of a male narrator confronted with gender as synthesis in the person of transvestite Hollywood star. It also makes use of second-person narration which will be discussed in “Elegy for a Freelance”.

This chapter will deal to a great extent with the concept of distance between the narrating and experiencing ‘I’. The doubling of the narrating figure is central to the purpose of this type of narration. Through an examination of this distance, the reader is able to draw conclusions about the meaning of the narrative. Especially in light of Carter’s choice of subject matter, this concept is vital to understanding her purpose.

## 1.1 The Japan Trilogy

There has been almost no critical attention paid to the Japan Trilogy as a group.<sup>2</sup> While the stories almost always receive special mention in light of the critical debate as to the importance of the influence of Japan on Carter’s writing, when the collection is more than simply named, it is usually “A Souvenir of Japan” and “Flesh and the Mirror” which are grouped together while “A Smile of Winter” is either mentioned separately or left out.<sup>3</sup> This is at least partly understandable as “The Smile of Winter”

<sup>1</sup>Focalization is defined as “the PERSPECTIVE in terms of which the narrated situations and events are presented; the perceptual or conceptual position in terms of which they are rendered [...]” Cf. Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* 31.

<sup>2</sup>Robbie Goh is one of the few critics who groups all three of these texts together while not seeing an inherent progression in them as I do. Cf. Robbie B.H. Goh, “Supernatural Interactions, Eastern Ghosts, and Postmodern Narrative: Angela Carter’s ‘Fireworks’,” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 30:3 (July 1999) 80.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. *Cambridge Guide to Women’s Writing in English*, ed. Lorna Sage (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 115.



does not overtly include the plot-line of the other two, yet here, the familiar setting of Japan, the repetition of the theme of loneliness and the, by now, familiar voice of the narrator make the inclusion of this text in the group defensible. As already discussed in my opening remarks, the effect Japan had on Carter and her writing is commented in criticism to such an extent that these three particular narratives warrant a closer look.

Not only do these three narratives share the unique experience of a dramatically foreign place, but also an intimate choice of narration, a first-person, quasi-autobiographical reflection on events, feelings, actions and the self. This is also reflected in the setting which is indisputably Japan, yet becomes secondary to the setting of the mind which prevails; home versus the foreign.

Angela Carter wrote three of her nine novels and eight of her short-stories in a quasi autobiographical mode. All but three of the short stories are obviously fictional. While it would be naive to claim with any authority that Carter actually experienced the events narrated in the stories, Lorna Sage, a long-time friend of the author, goes as far as to state about "Flesh and the Mirror", "the whole episode may of course have been a fantasy bred out of the city, but I think it probably did happen."<sup>4</sup> I would like to approach the narratives from another angle, though. Due to the fact that Carter was obviously interested in the possibilities of autodiegetic narration and chose, as I posit, her forms deliberately and carefully, the issue of why she would choose barely fictionalised autodiegetic narration for precisely the three Japan narratives becomes important.

The often intimate and introspective manner in which the narrator approaches the memories of her love affair, as well as, the subject matter in itself, lends itself to being told in an autodiegetic in contrast to a heterodiegetic narrative. I argue that this narrative mode is particularly suited to Carter's purpose. The tone and subject matter presented are so intensely personal that only an intensely personal type of narration would suit. Gérard Genette writes, "the autobiographical narrator [has] no obligation of discretion with respect to himself, [he] does not have [a] reason to

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<sup>4</sup>Sage, *Angela Carter* 27.

impose silence on himself.”<sup>5</sup> Yet due to the progression suggested by dealing with similar or the same plots in three progressive narratives, this distancing, though small in each immediate narrative, ends up being great between the beginning of the first and the end of the last. Thus Carter has achieved a dual sense of distancing adding a further dimension to her narratives.

One of the main characteristics of autodiegetic narration is the question of the spatial and temporal distance between the narrating self and the experiencing self. Stanzel writes, that narrative distance forms “ die Voraussetzung für die ausgeglichene und einsichtige Haltung des erzählenden Ich zu seinen früheren Erlebnissen [...]”<sup>6</sup> It is obvious from the text that the narrative distance is small. The narrating self is telling her story soon after its occurrence. This is demonstrated in numerous text passages. This dichotomy is the frame upon which Carter builds her narrative.

The Japan ‘trilogy’ is linked by far more than its setting and its choice of point-of-view; all are connected by a common factor, Carter’s journalism. Her article, “Tokyo Pastoral” appeared in *New Society* in 1970. Here she introduces the framework of, especially, the story “A Souvenir of Japan”. Much of the article’s descriptions of Japan and the impressions this country made on the author are imbedded in the fictional narrative. The essay itself often gives the impression of an outline or list of characteristics, perhaps a rough draft for the later fictional text. It helps to have read the journalistic essay in order to understand some of the sub-text in Carter’s Japan stories. In all, more than ten articles submitted to various publications over the span of approximately 16 years, deal with her experiences in, or fascination with Japan.

It is interesting to note that Angela Carter seems to have consciously chosen an experimentation with autodiegetic narration during a crossroads in her writing career. While only *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* utilises this point-of-view in her pre-*Fireworks* novels, it nevertheless chooses a male character as focaliser.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Genette, *Figures* 214.

<sup>6</sup>Franz K. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* (1979; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995) 270.

<sup>7</sup>A focaliser is “the holder of POINT OF VIEW.” Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* 32.

Yet in *Fireworks*, she moves away from this choice in all but one of her first-person narratives. While it cannot be argued definitively, she also often chooses a male voice for her third-person stories. It is, therefore, all the more startling that she would choose to experiment with a point-of-view and focaliser in the three Japan stories which comes the closest in all her writings to herself. Yet it is at the same time appropriate that she would choose to truly experiment with a female point-of-view, focalisation, in narratives which are quasi-autobiographical.

The early 1970's are a point in her career where she is discovering her more radical side. "In Japan I learnt what it was to be a woman and became radicalised."<sup>8</sup> In "A Souvenir of Japan", she is still dealing with the process of coming to terms with herself. "I often felt like a female impersonator"(31). It is appropriate that she does this in a quasi-autobiographical mode as such lessons are immensely personal. The message contained in her closing line of "A Souvenir of Japan", that the essence of otherness is ungraspable, can only be narrated in this context by an autodiegetic narrator. The distance and discretion of heterodiegesis would cause this acknowledgement of subjectivity to be lost, as it would require an omniscient authorial narrator who would come across as insincere and unbelievable. Thus, Carter chooses a narrator who is able to 'speak' about the intimacies involved in self discovery.

The Japan trilogy, when seen together, demonstrates an interesting narratological progression. Carter makes use of the present tense in all three narratives. While the present and past tense narration alternate in "A Souvenir of Japan" and "Flesh and the Mirror" in order to underscore the distance between the experiencing and narrating 'I', in "The Smile of Winter", the bulk of the narrative is in the present tense.

Yet beyond this, Carter also chooses specific narratological devices to support her individual narratives. While the temporal shifts mentioned above are appropriately part of each of the autodiegetic narratives, I will, in my examination of "A Souvenir of Japan", trace these shifts through the course of the text in order to demonstrate Carter's purposeful manipulation of this device to underscore the conflict between

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<sup>8</sup>Angela Carter, *Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings* (1982; London: Virago Press, 1993) 28.

the experiencing and narrating 'I'. As this story marks the beginning of the trilogy, it is only fitting that while a certain amount of insight can be recognised in the narrating 'I' at the end of the narrative, there is still room for development. The narrative utilises the problematic love affair with a Japanese man as a metaphor for her difficulties in 'finding herself' in this foreign setting.

I will show how the narrator inserts present tense commentary into the past tense 'remembering' of the narrative to utilise the unchanging setting against the changing plot in order to find meaning for herself. "The Smile of Winter" is narrated almost completely in the present tense. The narrator has reached a deictic *now* and creates a narrative in which she self-consciously defines her mood, her self, as foreign or separate from this once again obvious Japanese setting in order to underscore her loneliness.<sup>9</sup> "Flesh and the Mirror", while also utilising temporal shifts, makes deliberate use of, and places more of an emphasis on, pronominal shifts in order to create meaning. The background for this narrative has already been provided by the introduction of the relationship and cultural context in "A Souvenir of Japan", thus "Flesh and the Mirror" is able to shift its focus more towards the narrator's self examination.

### 1.1.1 "A Souvenir of Japan"

Angela Carter opens *Fireworks* with the short story titled, "A Souvenir of Japan". This title is fitting as she brought back the stories in this collection from Japan to England for publication. While all the stories can be seen as a type of souvenir of her time abroad, the Japan Trilogy must be seen as personal mementoes of Carter's stay. A souvenir can be anything from a tacky miniature of a famous building to the form Carter chose, a fictionalised account of a European woman searching for herself in a, for her, utterly foreign place.

Carter stated about her time in Japan that "Living in Japan made me very conscious that we don't live in a white world."<sup>10</sup> Carter came to Japan to turn around the

<sup>9</sup>The term deictic is defined as "any term or expression which, in an utterance, refers to the context of production [...] of that utterance [...]" Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* 18.

<sup>10</sup>Falzon 19.

notion that otherness applies only to others. “She was a great believer in the kind of reverse anthropology which involves studying your own culture as if from elsewhere, cultivating the viewpoint of an alien in order to defamiliarise the landscape of habit.”<sup>11</sup> “A Souvenir of Japan” introduces Carter’s manipulation of this theme in the framework of a problematic love affair between her obviously Western narrator and a Japanese man and how the relationship, and the man, himself, become a metaphor for how she sees this foreign country.

This first narrative is an interesting mixture of description and narrative, thinly framed by the story of the narrator and her lover, whom she gives the name Taro. While the love relationship between the narrator and her lover is the focus in “Flesh and the Mirror”, in “A Souvenir of Japan” the focus seems to be on an outlining of the impressions of one foreign woman in a place that is just as foreign to her as she is to it. The frame of the love relationship serves to underscore the personal struggle of the narrator apart from her attempts to describe the city and the people, giving the reader, when seeing this narrative in context with the other two, an overall context, an introduction to use as a starting point.

The choice of autodiegetic narration for this story is obvious in its suitability. In this choice, it could be argued, Carter manages to avoid the later accusation of a colonialist view of the foreign.<sup>12</sup> The opinions and descriptions are obviously attributed to her protagonist who is, herself, a faulted persona.

The judgements made about Japan are, thus, put into a subjective context. Robbie Goh, in his article, “Supernatural Interactions, Eastern Ghosts, and Postmodern Narrative: Angela Carter’s ‘Fireworks’”, argues that Carter’s Japan stories “evinced the most disturbing features of Carter’s narrative method [...]. Carter’s foregrounding of the West and orientalisation of the East is expectedly the most conspicuous and objectionable.”<sup>13</sup> Goh’s statement, when taken together with Sage’s quoted above must be called into question. When Sage states that Carter ‘cultivates the viewpoint of an alien’ it should be seen as a metaphor for what she is doing in her writing. By

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<sup>11</sup>Sage, *Angela Carter* 2.

<sup>12</sup>Goh 80.

<sup>13</sup>Goh 80.

explicitly choosing a quasi-autobiographical narrator and filling her narratives with conjecture and evaluation inherent in a thorough evaluation of the experiencing 'I's struggle to come to terms with just what Goh is calling an orientalist gaze, Carter has created a narrating 'I' who has broken out of the trap Goh claims the story is caught in. This seems to be best expressed in the final paragraphs of "Flesh and the Mirror" when the narrator states, "Then the city vanished; it ceased, almost immediately, to be a magic and appalling place. I woke up one morning and found it had become home" (74).

While Goh would turn this around again and claim that Carter is appropriating this foreign place for herself and her purpose, I believe that the emphasis should remain on the person of the narrator, on her development from being an alien, a definition she imposes on both herself and on the Japanese in the most negative of connotations, to someone who has come home to where familiarity, not sameness, creates an atmosphere of comfort. While it would be impossible not to acknowledge that Goh is making a valid point about how Carter foregrounds her own culture and her orientalising of Japan, something she clearly does, it is the fact that she chooses to do this in an autodiegetic mode that allows for more than a little self-criticism of this practice to enter the text.

The narrative is told in a rather disjointed fashion, shifting from the present of the narrating 'I' to different episodes taken out of chronological order experienced by the experiencing 'I'. An attempt at a plot summary would produce a disjointed portrait made up of memories prompted by experiences which themselves are memories. It takes on the very realistic quality of remembering. This "chronological reshuffling" is one of the traits of modernist fiction.<sup>14</sup> The narrator often inserts present tense explanatory comments, interpretations and justifications which, apart from their importance for the interpretation of the story, also give a sense of movement. There is no beginning and no end to the action, precluding a simple reading. Yet while often considered radical, "a disruption in chronology [...] does not [...] radically affect narrativity unless [it] results in a [...] failure to re-cognize a fictional situa-

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology* 21.

tion.”<sup>15</sup> Carter’s choices, far from convoluting meaning, represent a more natural, non-sequential form of remembering. This re-shuffling constitutes a type of tagging as the reader is given the signal that there is meaning to be uncovered in the text and, what is especially suited to Carter’s autodiegetic narrative, the reader is “afforded a heightened reality effect.”<sup>16</sup> “After all, ‘real life’ is a puzzle too; you don’t get your ‘story’ presented to you by an authorial narrator who spoonfeeds you with reliable information.”<sup>17</sup> This further underscores the criticism of the narrator inherent in the choice of point-of-view, as Carter is making her narrative persona all the more real, thus fallible.

In the opening lines, the reader is confronted with a relationship encapsulated in one statement: “when I went outside to see if he was coming home [...]” (27). The conscious use of the ‘if’ here already alludes to the problematic nature of the relationship, though taken out of context it could be seen as rather innocent. The repetition of this ‘state of affairs’ which follows, “but I usually found myself waiting for him to come home knowing, with a certain resentment, that he would not; and that he would not even telephone me to tell me he would be late, either, for he was far too guilty to do so” (28), emphasises the opening sense of unease. The narrator is setting herself up as foreign, West versus East, as claimed by Goh. The choice of the narrating ‘I’ to begin with such a scene, which could evoke pity for the experiencing figure, actually manages to provoke a slight feeling of contempt intimated by the self-deprecating tone of the narrating ‘I’ in relating precisely this particular fact, thus undermining Goh’s claims. The criticism is addressed towards herself, not towards the setting. Furthermore, neither the lover nor the setting has been identified at this point as being Japanese, which also seems irrelevant to the scenario which is of such a universal nature that it needs no specifics. By beginning *in medias res*, the narrator emphasises the generic intention of the first lines.

In the opening paragraph, the narrator introduces the style she will utilise throughout the narrative. She repeatedly switches tense from past, to narrate the actions of the

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<sup>15</sup>Fludernik, *‘Natural’ Narratology* 270.

<sup>16</sup>Fludernik, *‘Natural’ Narratology* 270.

<sup>17</sup>Fludernik, *‘Natural’ Narratology* 270.

experiencing 'I', to the present tense, where the narrating 'I', the 'I' who has already reached the point of 'realisation' as expressed at the end of "Flesh and the Mirror", relates 'objective' facts about the culture. Thus, the emotionally loaded first line and the subsequent characterisation of the Japanese neighbours, including the comment about the purity of restrained pleasure (27) which serves as a first clue to how the narrator sees these people, are narrated in the present tense. This is juxtaposed with a line of tagged direct discourse, "an old woman said: 'And so they pestered their father until he bought them fireworks'" (27), which seems to contradict the portrait of the children the experiencing 'I' gives as being 'restrained' by allowing, for however short a time, the voice of a Japanese character to emerge.

It sets up the narrator's interpretation in opposition to a comment by another bystander who is part of this system, which contradicts the experiencing 'I's views. This is followed by a present tense comment by the narrating 'I' giving a type of tourist guide explanation of 'interesting facts. "In this language, fireworks are called *hannabi*, which means 'flower fire'. All through summer, every evening, you can see all kinds of fireworks, from the humblest to the most elaborate [...]" (27). Hints in the line, the choice of 'this' language instead of 'their' or 'that' language, as well as the choice of the indeterminate summer, not here preceded by the definite article *the* which would give it a specific temporal placement, serve to underscore the neutrality of such present tense commentary. Juxtaposed with the subjective past tense commentary, this further underscores the distancing, thus a rejection of the stance espoused by the experiencing 'I', which is Carter's intention in order to avoid the orientalist trap which Goh sees for this narrative. The narrator returns, almost seamlessly in the same sentence, to the past tense in order to return to the core story.

In the subsequent paragraphs, the narrator sticks to a consistent mode of narration when describing an outing she and her lover, who will only be more specifically identified beyond an ambiguous *we* and the *he* of the first line who may or may not come home, much later. The narrator avoids inserting any more present-time neutral explanation which deliberately accentuates the subjective nature of the description. The narrator is filled with wonder and continually makes use of subtly familiar terms



in order, while on the surface seeming to suggest familiarity, actually to underscore the foreign nature of the situation and the people.

The description of the fair-like setting where the narrator and her lover go to enjoy a public display of fireworks is a continuation of this tactic. Yet the description of the fair differs radically from what the narrator in “A Souvenir of Japan” expects.<sup>18</sup> The narrator comments; “It was like a fairground – but such a well-ordered fair! Even the patrolling policemen carried coloured paper lanterns instead of torches. Everything was altogether quietly festive” (27). This should cause the reader to question the tantalisingly familiar pictures she presents. It continues the thread begun by what, for Westerners, is an odd interspersed of ‘repressed’ as a description of the joy of children already mentioned above.

This idyllic description comes to an abrupt end, which throws the reader back to the unease caused by the first line: “But, as I expected, he very quickly grew restive” (28). The romantic image of lovers lying on the grass watching fireworks is shattered by the narrator’s lover. Choosing the construction, ‘as I expected’ is an obvious repetition of the skewed sense of sureness the experiencing ‘I’ expresses in the opening lines, and again in a return to this image of waiting near the end of the second page where her lover would neither come home nor would he call (28). It can already be recognised at this early point that the only things this narrator expresses in a deterministic manner are facts about her relationship with her lover and about herself. Here again it is important to keep the narrator and perspective in mind when choosing whether or not to accept her characterisations and the conclusions which they imply.

“Are you happy?’ he asked. ‘Are you sure you’re happy?’” (28). The narrator believes that she understands the inherent nature of the question, and immediately moves to change the situation which brought her so much pleasure, in order to please

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<sup>18</sup>This example is perhaps also appropriate for Carter as an author, as her style and themes are often considered carnivalesque. Her 1984 novel, *Nights At The Circus*, is perhaps the most obvious example of her use of this concept of circus or fair, though, she also makes use of it in this collection in the story, “The Loves of Lady Purple.” (Cf. Day 168.) The term carnivalesque is attributed to Mikhail Bakhtin who coined it in his *Rabelais and His World* (1965). Linden Peach states, “the appeal of the carnivalesque for [...] Angela Carter is that it valorises the subordinate, the anti-authoritarian and the marginal.” (Peach, *Angela Carter* 141).

him: “I became guilty and suggested we return to the heart of the city” (28). She makes this oddly formulated statement at the moment she decides to cut short her own pleasure to appease a desire she ‘knows’ he feels. The choice of the verb *became* instead of the expected *was*, a suggestion of conscious decision to achieve a state of guilt instead of the simple statement of a state of affairs, contains a clear assessment by the narrating ‘I’. She is criticising the experiencing ‘I’ for her positivistic stance of ‘knowing’.

The narrating ‘I’ then lays bare the masochism of her experiencing self: “The last thing in the world that I wanted was to leave the scintillating river and the gentle crowd. But I knew his real desire was to return and so return we did” (28). The masochism, mentioned later in the text, which she obviously finds in him (30), is ever so evident in her here. She describes her character as being the stronger of the two for winning the “battle of self-abnegation” (28).<sup>19</sup> At the end of this paragraph, the narrator returns once again to the present tense in an overt comment about the actions of her own past self by stating,

although *I do not know* if it was worth my small victory of selflessness to bear his remorse at cutting short my pleasure, even if to engineer this remorse had, at some subterranean level, been the whole object of the outing. (28, emphasis mine)

The narrating ‘I’ is expressing a current lack of understanding for the actions of the experiencing ‘I’. She is making it all the clearer that she wishes to broaden the gap between her current and former self.

In the paragraph following, the narrating ‘I’ again expresses doubt about the experiencing ‘I’s perception of things. “He had taken me out for the evening and now he wanted to be rid of me. *Or so I saw it*” (28, emphasis mine). This statement is followed once again by a present tense insertion translating the word *okusen*, a

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<sup>19</sup>Though *The Sadeian Woman* did not appear until 1979, five years after the publication of *Fireworks*, it is already obvious that Carter was beginning to gather her thoughts on this subject of sadism and masochism. Though “Flesh and the Mirror” seems to go into more detail on a constructed, self created masochism, the focus here, in “A Souvenir Of Japan”, seems to be different, perhaps a more fledgling form.

timely Japanese term for the context, and explaining its significance. The choice to mingle the expression of doubt, with a fact/definition and then to follow it with a clear statement about the emotional consequences of subjective interpretation on a situation relying on conjecture about what the lover must be feeling as 'his' culture defines women specifically as repressed, contains a clear assessment of the state of mind of the experiencing 'I' rendered by the narrating 'I'. This is again underscored by the inclusion of 'perhaps they thought', a clear acknowledgement of subjective interpretation as she could not possibly really know what her neighbours thought but can only assume an interpretation along the lines of what would be familiar to her own Western context.

The narrator consciously formulates a characterisation of the Japanese people, primarily through their language and culture, in opposition to herself in order to characterise herself. "The word for wife, *okusan*, means the person who occupies the inner room and rarely, if ever, comes out of it. Since I often appeared to be his wife, I was frequently subjected to this treatment, though I fought against it bitterly" (28). She is uncomfortable in this characterisation as Western ideals clash here with the narrator's view of Japanese reality. She comes out of the inner room in the first lines and introduces the reader to the dichotomy which is irreconcilable: she as a Western woman living in an Eastern culture. Yet the 'I often appeared' effectively moves culpability away from him. It is an ambiguous statement in that it purposefully, as in the choice of 'became' for guilty discussed above, blurs the clear reference by choosing simply to state, 'appeared to be his wife', instead of adding a direct reference as to whom she appears as such. It remains unclear whether or not he saw her as his wife or if the people around them in the neighbourhood did.

The narrator returns to this image a few pages later, after she has finally given her lover a three-dimensional identity, to attribute this repression of herself to him, but again, the statement is filled with conjecture. "Once I was at home, however, it was as if I occupied the inner room and he did not expect me to go out of it, although it was I who paid the rent" (31). The inclusion of 'as if' undermines the whole. This is strengthened even further by the blatant criticism included in the last

portion of the statement. Instead of gaining the reader's sympathies, she achieves the opposite effect instead, ending up sounding childish. The narrator has effectively removed the exotic quality she deliberately gave this relationship, and returns, as in the first pages, to a universally recognisable bad relationship. She is being fleeced by an egoistic lover and does not end the relationship but just whines about it. Interestingly, Carter convolutes this further by continuing in the next paragraph, seamlessly, with the scene introduced in the opening lines of the narrative, that of an idyllic neighbourhood. For the next page, the narrator indulges in a detailed portrait of her Japanese neighbours focussing especially on the women.<sup>20</sup>

It is only after this descriptive scene near the end of the narrative that the narrator does finally admit that her lover's name is not actually Taro but that, "I only called him Taro so that I could use the conceit of the peach boy, because it seemed so appropriate" (32). She names him after a type of fairy tale figure who was born out of a peach, thus one could say, inhuman. Though the reader has already been able to form an opinion of this character from earlier hints and descriptions of actions, the narrator goes into more detail by creating a legend around him. In doing this, she effectively removes him from a graspable humanity, while at the same time creating another entirely subjective avenue of comparison with her country and his.

"He [...] had the inhuman sweetness of a child born from something other than a mother, a passive, cruel sweetness I did not immediately understand, for it was that of the repressed masochism which, in my country, is usually confined to women" (30). This mirror image of her own masochism which she faces opens up the possibility of consciously recognising the traits each partner brings into a relationship. This is mirrored in the description of fireworks over water: "the public displays [...] are held over rivers so that the dark water multiplies the reflections" (27). A multiplication also implies intensification. Continually setting up mirroring opposites, such as two sets of fireworks, mirroring each other, Carter's narrator is intensifying the images in order to remove them from their universal context and to redefine them. Taro is not a woman, so his masochism, which the narrator suddenly recognises as a part of

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<sup>20</sup>This information can be found in a similar form in her essay, "Tokyo Pastoral".

herself as well, is placed in front of her like a mirror, intensifying it and forcing her to acknowledge it.

Carter is making a few statements at once. The one sided perspective allows the narrator to effectively remove Taro from reality. He has become the exotic. This is not to say though, that Carter, in other places, does not allow Taro's perspective to slip through with respect to this. He thinks that the narrator is exotic, once again one exotic mirroring the other, in effect, one could argue, negating each other: "He found me, I think, inexpressibly exotic. But I often felt like a female impersonator" (31). It must be kept in mind that she is again voicing speculation. The narrating 'I' is forced to admit that any assumption made about Taro and his thoughts or beliefs must be conjecture. For once, in the position where she is the blaring, glaring other in every sense, physically and mentally, she must come to some sort of understanding of the methods of characterisation on which she is dependent:

My pink cheeks, blue eyes and blatant yellow hair made of me, in the visual orchestration of this city in which all heads were dark, eyes brown and skin monotone, an instrument which played on an alien scale. In a sober harmony of subtle plucked instruments and wistful flutes, I blared. I proclaimed myself like a perpetual fanfare. (31)

Standing utterly outside, she is able to examine the structures that form this society. The repressed emotions which culminate in a brutal honesty about the way things are; that boys are valued over girls and that women are valued "only as the object of men's passions" (31). Interestingly enough, instead of condemning this attitude, Carter's narrator praises its honesty. This, though, is again in sharp contrast to the lack of honesty in her relationship with Taro. Her understanding of why the relationship is as it is, is formed by her belief that she understands his culture, yet she fights against his treatment of her anyway, as she, herself, states. The examples around her of little girls and old women serve as miniature portraits of proper behaviour. Taro is only behaving as a man should. When Goh criticises Carter's portrayal of the Japanese as a restrictive patriarchal society, he has not taken the narratological devices which Carter is including to undermine any conclusive statement, into consideration. He

argues that her comments in the story pertaining to sexism “describes something of Japanese male chauvinism [...]”<sup>21</sup> and that “at one level, these insights into the perverse sexism of Japanese society seem merely to be a part of Carter’s criticism of patriarchy in all its global manifestations.”<sup>22</sup> This statement makes it obvious that Goh has been unable to recognise the multiple layers of criticism which Carter’s texts offer, and has reduced her to a simple common denominator. He quotes a passage from “A Souvenir of Japan”: “As they say, Japan is a man’s country” (30).

While the subsequent paragraph, not cited by Goh, does offer some clear comment by the narrator; “at least they do not disguise the situation. At least one knows where one is. Our polarity was publicly acknowledged and socially sanctioned” (30-1), the reader should not ignore the introduction of these statements which occurs with a deliberately vague, ‘as they say’. The paragraph jumps back and forth between present and past tense narration, and includes comments which express the speculative nature of the statements made, “as far as I can gather”, “I think” (31). The temporal shifts alone blur the intention to the point that the reader must acknowledge the subjectivity of the narration, thus acknowledging the self-criticism implicit in the choice of presentation. I do not argue that Carter is not offering a criticism of Japanese male-centred culture or a general criticism of patriarchy, but the narrative is not meant to focus on the Japanese nor on men, but on the narrator and the struggle of this persona to come to terms with her own interpretations of these people and of herself among them.

In another abrupt switch, the narrator moves from the description of her Japanese neighbours to a night a year before when she and her lover were looking for a hotel where they could sleep together. This is an interesting foreshadowing of the hotel scenes which are at the centre of “Flesh and the Mirror”. She is offering a criticism not only of the roles that men play in relationships but also the roles that women assume. What for Westerners is an almost painfully embarrassing situation which the narrator describes between Taro and herself in a hotel room is a harsh example of this. Told from the narrator’s perspective, Taro’s feelings, actions and thoughts are

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<sup>21</sup>Goh 73.

<sup>22</sup>Goh 74.

completely ignored, while the focus is on the maid who enters the lover's room three times, each time encountering an ever increasingly intimate situation. The narrator describes herself in varying states, being kissed, half undressed and, lastly, "I was stripped stark naked when she returned for a third time to bring the receipt for his money" (30). No mention is made of the male participant in this scene, focusing the reader's eye on the women, the one who is allowing herself to be exposed, and the other who is "clearly a most respectable woman and, if she was embarrassed, she did not show it by a single word or gesture" (30). It is clear that the reader must keep the Japanese setting in mind, as the narrator constantly refers to it even in the context of this sexual encounter, yet her perspective, her choice of what to exclude or include in this scene, is telling. The question of whether or not the man was naked or exposed is irrelevant.

What is interesting is that the narrator, when describing Taro's actions and motivations, often takes on an authorial tone. The passages describing his feelings, motivations and actions should, according to the constructs of this type of narration, at least hint at a tone of conjecture, but they do not. The narrator addresses this, however, in the last third of the narrative. The comment, which has gained in frequency from the beginning of the narrative to this point, takes over completely for one and one-half paragraphs in a section of self-conscious narration in which the narrating 'I' addresses the creation process of the narrative and relies heavily on a direct *you* address of the narratee.

She spends an entire paragraph and, indirectly, part of the one following, in an address of the narratee. With this choice of narrative technique, the narrating 'I' is able, for a moment, to break out of the narrative plane and discuss and analyse her tactics.

I speak as if he had no secrets from me. Well, then, *you* must realise that I was suffering from love and I knew him perfectly. At times, I thought I was inventing him as I went along, however, so *you* will have to take my word for it that we existed. But I do not want to paint our circumstantial portraits so that we both emerge with enough well-rounded, spuriously detailed actuality that *you* are forced to believe in us. I do not want to practise such sleight of hand. *You* must be content only with glimpses of

our outlines, as if *you* had caught sight of our reflections in the looking-glass of somebody else's house as *you* passed by the window. (32, emphasis mine)

In this paragraph, she establishes the subjectivity and fictitiousness of her portrayal of the narrative and even of her narrating self. The very admission of using the “conceit of the peach boy” to, in other words, create a narrative which was her life and the inclusion of the term ‘seemed’ calls everything that comes before into question. Carter is touching on the issue of myth and fairy tale, here already looking ahead to *The Bloody Chamber*. She is alluding to the ease with which one is able to incorporate such stories into a vision of reality.

This is an interesting tactic in light of the deliberate choice of autodiegetic narration. Not only is she already undermining any general criticism of orientalism by virtue of this narratological choice, she goes a step further and intensifies the level of subjectivity in the self-conscious narration and second-person address. The *you* also gives the impression of a certain degree of complicity in the narratee. James Phelan, in his article, “Why Narrators Can Be Focalizers – and Why It Matters”, writes that “its striking effects stem from the discourse's apparent insistence on merging the narratee, and the protagonist – and sometimes the flesh and blood reader – in that you.”<sup>23</sup> In this section where the narrator is uncovering the constructs she used to create her reality, she is, in truth, speaking to a wider audience who falls into this trap as well. Monika Fludernik writes, “the actual reader *qua* implicit narratee is therefore inevitably drawn into the fiction identifying with a generalizing position that transforms itself into the specificity of an experiencing *I*.”<sup>24</sup> This will be a favourite tactic Carter uses throughout her fiction to establish the culpability of the narratee.

In the subsequent paragraphs, the narrator takes a fresh look, in the wake of her confessions, at Taro and at Japan. These statements continually switch in tense,

<sup>23</sup>James Phelan, “Why Narrators Can Be Focalizers – and Why It Matters,” *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, ed. Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 59.

<sup>24</sup>Monika Fludernik, “Second Person Fiction: Narrative *You* As Addressee And/Or Protagonist,” *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 18:2 (1993) 237.



creating a feeling of movement or of insubstantiality which she attributes to her surroundings:

Even buildings one had taken for substantial had a trick of disappearance overnight. [...]. I would not say that he seemed to me to possess the same kind of insubstantiality although his departure usually seemed imminent, until I realised he was as erratic but as inevitable as the weather. [...]. No, it was not insubstantiality; it was a rhetoric valid only on its own terms. (32)

The narrative's final paragraphs are the most problematic. Here the narrator utilises the present tense to a large degree in making statements characterising her surroundings and the Japanese people. In the penultimate paragraph she moves seamlessly from this description back to the past tense narration of the experiencing 'I's experiences:

They boast the most passionate puppets in the world who mimic love suicides in a stylised fashion, for here there is no such comfortable formula as 'happy ever after'. And, when I remembered the finale of the puppet tragedies, how the wooden lovers cut their throats together, I felt the beginnings of unease, as if the hieratic imagery of the country might overwhelm me, for his boredom had reached such a degree that he was insulated against everything except the irritation of anguish. (33)

The narrative ends in this style of narration with one repetition of the images she evokes about Japan in the present tense and her past tense love affair: "But the most moving of these images were the intangible reflections of ourselves we saw in one another's eyes, reflections of nothing but appearances, in a city dedicated to seeming, and, try as we might to possess the essence of each other's otherness, we would inevitably fail" (34).

The tense shifts and the interspersion of the events experienced by the experiencing 'I' with present time commentary and evaluation by the narrating 'I' are no longer maintained in the final paragraphs. Carter switches to an almost laundry-list rendition of her Japan journalism, which introduces a very problematic narrator.<sup>25</sup> While

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<sup>25</sup>Many New Journalists embraced a type of autobiographical format which resulted in this type of journalistic writing gaining a reputation for being subjective. Cf. Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 42.

one could claim that the final statement rescues the ending by reorienting all the previous commentary into the fictional context of the love affair, and while it is obvious that here Carter uses a rather unsophisticated near-simile, that it re-asserts the previous subtle, but precise juxtaposition of the subjectivity of the experiencing ‘I’ and the attempt at more objectivity by the narrating ‘I’, it nevertheless remains a weak ending.

Thus, while the narrative begins on such a strong note with its deliberate use of present tense and commentary by the narrating ‘I’ continually undermining the narrative, thereby avoiding an orientalist point-of-view, the ending, unfortunately, is no longer so precise and could be seen in a somewhat more critical light. Nevertheless, I believe that I have been able to argue that, on the whole, criticism like that made by Goh needs to be re-examined in light of the choices Carter has made for the narrative concerning point-of-view. If this aspect of the text is not taken into consideration, a distorted interpretation is probable.

### 1.1.2 “The Smile of Winter”

“The Smile of Winter” is the fourth story in the collection *Fireworks*. It utilises, similarly to the other two stories in the trilogy, autodiegetic narration. In it, Carter continues to construct the image of Japan and of her narrator protagonist as she has begun in “A Souvenir of Japan” and which she will finish in “Flesh and the Mirror”. The narrator is alone at this time; she is staying in a house by the sea.<sup>26</sup> She describes herself as an abandoned woman, accentuated by the repetition of the intertext of “Mariana” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson<sup>27</sup>, and paints a portrait of herself by utilising her surroundings. The reader can also find a repetition of some, and a foreshadowing of other images found in the other two Japan stories.

This narrative is, in my opinion, the most difficult of the Japan trilogy. In this I am not only referring to a difficulty in interpretation but the difficulty of defining

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<sup>26</sup>Carter moved to a house by the sea during her stay in Japan and wrote *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* there. Cf. Falzon 21.

<sup>27</sup>*Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830)

this narrative at all. It tests the limits of short story as it consists almost entirely of description.<sup>28</sup> It could perhaps be more effective to describe it as a sketch<sup>29</sup> but Carter herself suggests the term composition<sup>30</sup> in the last paragraph of the story. Though she is referring to the act of putting different elements together into one pot, per-se, the term can also be seen as appropriate for the narrative. It calls up school room associations where one was expected, as a pupil, to write short compositions on a narrow subject defined by the particular teacher. Perhaps with this in mind, Carter, for once, only touches on the theme of a love affair gone wrong and concentrates on another closely focused aspect, mood as defined by setting or vice versa.<sup>31</sup> The deliberate inclusion of the poetic intertext mentioned above underscores the choice of narrative style.

Tennyson's poem is constructed in 12 stanzas which give the impression of static panels or tableaux. Carter's narrative mimics this even to the point where the narrator describes a tableau vivant she creates in her own yard: "I collected driftwood and set it up among the pine trees in picturesque attitudes on the edge of the beach and then I strike a picturesque attitude myself beside them as I watch the constantly agitated waves" (54). Here, as in all of her work, it is still imperative to keep the narrator in mind, the perspective from which the story is told. The point that Carter is making about the utter subjectivity, the constructed nature of observation becomes obvious through her choice of autodiegetic narration. Again, this is appropriate due to the extremely personal nature of what is being narrated. This sense of subjectivity is also present in "A Souvenir of Japan" and "Flesh and the Mirror", yet, the focus or perspective is different as the sense of distancing is greater.

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<sup>28</sup>"A lack of story material and the recuperation of narrativity in a recognition of the text as rambling or associative musing does not constitute as grave a departure from traditional forms (and norms) as one might be inclined to suspect." Cf. Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology* 276.

<sup>29</sup>A sketch can be "a short piece of prose [...] usually of a descriptive kind. [...]. In some cases it becomes very nearly a short story [...]." Cf. "Sketch," *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (1999) 833.

<sup>30</sup>One of the four categories of composition is defined as description. Cf. "Composition," *Penguin Dictionary*.

<sup>31</sup>Mood is defined as "the set of modalities – namely, DISTANCE or MODE and PERSPECTIVE or POINT OF VIEW – regulating narrative information. The mood of a narrative will vary depending on whether SHOWING or TELLING is in evidence, for example; it will also vary depending on whether INTERNAL or EXTERNAL FOCALIZATION is adopted." Cf. Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* 54-55.

“The Smile of Winter” is a problematic and not entirely satisfying narrative. It is easy, due perhaps to Carter’s overly subtle manipulation of narratological constructs, to overlook the self-conscious nod in the text which argues against an orientalist reading à la Robbie Goh, whom I have already discussed in detail in the context of the previous interpretation. In respect to this narrative, though, I must concede that Goh is at least partially correct in his assessment that the story can be irritating in its often overuse of intertexts and insistence upon repetition.<sup>32</sup> The narrator is not an entirely likeable character as her emphasis on her own loneliness and depressive nature, evoked in the often repetitive images criticised by Goh, can end up sounding self-indulgent. This is not a valid reason, though, for considering this one of Carter’s less successful narratives. One could argue that the small irritations felt in the previous story that I pointed to, are expanded here. The themes of the experiencing ‘I’s sadness and loneliness juxtaposed with the indifference of her surroundings is examined in greater detail. In “Flesh and the Mirror” the narrator will directly address her habit of constructing herself as a *tableau vivant* of loneliness in public places, something she knows is narcissistic (68, 74). This image that she deconstructs in the third story is taken to an extreme here as the entire narrative takes on the feel of a *tableau vivant*. The major problem, critically, with this narrative is the seeming lack of distance between the narrating and experiencing personas. As it is written almost entirely in the present tense, the balancing distance inherent to autodiegetic narration is lost.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the narrator makes use of the deictic *here* on numerous occasions, foregrounding the present of the narrating instance. The text’s self-conscious acknowledgement of the writing process only seemingly represents the distancing expected by the reader as the paragraph immediately reverts back to the tone of the entire narrative in the last line: “Out of these pieces of inimical indifference, I intend to represent the desolate smile of winter which, as you must have gathered, is the smile I wear” (57).

Carter has chosen to approach this narrative differently than the other two in the trilogy. The first emphasises the narratological distance, the third will utilise pronominal

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<sup>32</sup>Goh 81.

<sup>33</sup>I will also discuss this in my interpretation of “Reflections”. Cf. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 269-70.

shifts while this second one makes overt use of tense and explores the possibilities of a subtle second-person address to the narratee. Combined with this is a distinct emphasis on the themes of loneliness and indifference. Indifference is a term she already uses in “A Souvenir of Japan” and by choosing to repeat it a few times throughout this particular narrative, as well as to emphasise it at the end within the paragraph of self-conscious narration, the narrator is pointing out that it does not matter what she thinks or writes about Japan or the Japanese, they do not exist for her but for themselves. They are indifferent to her needs and to her characterisation. The combination of the narratological with the thematic aspects serve to produce a portrait of a narrator on the verge of realisation. Only in the third narrative will this persona reach the final phase of a development traced through this trilogy.

Nevertheless, while this narrative, in a subtle manner, is conscious of its constructed nature, and, relying on this aspect, it rejects the distance necessary in order to suggest a sense of development/change in the narrator. It becomes clear when the narrator acknowledges the nature of her narrative in the final paragraphs, that she is speaking directly to her narratee. By feeling the need to explain her motivation for constructing the text in this manner to this particular audience, the narrator admits that the narrative can be more than misleading.<sup>34</sup> The utterly subjective quality of the composition, in other words, the connotations associated with her choices are addressed. One can argue that, when seeing this narrative as the middle of the trilogy and examining it in light of the development of the narrator demonstrated by the end of “Flesh and the Mirror”, it appropriately characterises the persona at this point in time. She is caught in a relationship that she knows is bad yet is not able to end. The opening lines of “A Souvenir of Japan” are echoed here in the intertext of Tennyson’s poem in that Mariana is also always waiting for a lover who never seems to come.

Carter begins this narrative with a description of a seashore. It is only in the course of the narrative that the reader discovers that the setting is Japan. Neither the title, nor the first paragraph hint at this. In the first line the narrator states, “because there

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<sup>34</sup>According to Gerald Prince, a zero-degree narratee understands the “tongue [...] and the language [...] of the narrator. In his case, to know a tongue is to know the meanings [...] the signifieds as such [...] this does not include knowledge of the connotations.” Cf. Prince, “Introduction to the Study of the Narratee” 217.

are no seagulls here, the only sound is the resonance of the sea” (52). The inclusion of the ambiguous spatial deictic, *here*, gives the impression that the narrator is present at the scene she is describing, an interesting tactic which has the intention of adding a level of believability to the narrative. Yet it also deliberately refuses to name the specific location. “A Souvenir of Japan” utilised a similar tactic of exclusion in the first lines. There I argue that Carter does this in order to remove her narrative from the too easy characterisation of being about the Japanese as it actually should focus on the persona of the experiencing ‘I’ instead. “The Smile of Winter” is not as easily definable. While the universality of the description of the setting does seem, at first, to concentrate the focus on the narrator, this is soon replaced by a feeling of unease as she continues her description.

A foreshadowing of the mood and setting which is pivotal to the story is given in the next lines. The setting depresses the narrator and forces an introspective look at herself and the surroundings. She writes;

This coastal region is quite flat, so that an excess of sky bears down with an intolerable weight, pressing the essence out of everything beneath it for it imposes such a burden on us that we have all been forced inward on ourselves in an introspective sombreness intensified by the perpetual abrasive clamour of the sea. (52)

In light of Robbie Goh’s harsh criticism of what he sees as Carter’s, while unconscious, nevertheless overwhelming orientalist gaze, this description could be seen as problematic. Yet in Carter’s last collection, she re-uses the imagery of the flat oppressive landscape and the heavy sky in “John Ford’s, ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore”’, to describe the Midwestern prairie of the United States. If Carter could be criticised for anything, it would be an over-use of the same descriptions to foster the same effect.<sup>35</sup>

What is striking here is the inclusion of the first-person plural pronoun *we*. This occurs only twice more in the text, about half way through.

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<sup>35</sup>“She died of the pressure of that vast sky, that weighed down upon her and crushed her lungs until she could not breathe any more, as if the prairies were the bedrock of an ocean in which she drowned” (“John Ford’s ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore” 332).

This is, after all, the season of abandonment, of the suspension of vitality, a long cessation of vigour in which *we* must cultivate our stoicism. [...]. I strike a picturesque attitude myself beside them [pieces of driftwood] as I watch the constantly agitated waves, for here *we* all strike picturesque attitudes and that is why *we* are so beautiful. (54, emphasis mine)

The collective referred to by the pronoun remains ambiguous. As I will show throughout this study, Carter often makes use of the inclusionary *we* in her narratives in order to establish a type of complicity with her narratee or even, in two cases, which I will deal with in my second chapter, to create a culpable collective narrator who serves the dual role of narrator and narratee.<sup>36</sup>

In this case, the *we* is left frustratingly ambiguous. It must refer to a narratee, yet the question remains whether or not this is the same narratee addressed in the self-conscious remarks of the last paragraphs.<sup>37</sup> It seems to refer to the narrator's Western context, defining this narratee as coming from the same background as the narrator. This would make sense when taking the chronology of the trilogy into account, as the experiencing 'I', here, has not reached a point in her development where she no longer defines herself as foreign in a foreign place. Thus, the *we* could be seen as an attempt at evoking a sense of foreignness, a *we* versus *them*, a sense of collectivity expressed in the momentary inclusion of a tacit collective narrative agent. A further possibility would be, taking this point to an almost ridiculous level, others who share the same depressive sensibilities as the narrator does. She is depressed and everything around her serves as an emphasis for this depression. As this is not taken any further, though, to clarify it, both possibilities can only remain conjecture.

The indifference of her surroundings, stressed in the other two Japan stories is mentioned here as well: "The indifference of this Decembral littoral suits my forlorn mood [...]" (53). She makes references to the fact that she lives by herself and compares her situation to "Mariana in so many moated granges" (53). This phrase is repeated again a few paragraphs later emphasising its importance in the self-characterisation

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<sup>36</sup>Phelan 59.

<sup>37</sup>Prince argues that a single narrative can contain more than one narratee. Cf. Prince, "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee" 213.

of the narrator. In this reference to “Mariana” where the title figure sits in her home and mourns that her lover does not appear, Carter makes use of the tone and mood of the poem for the composition of her story. Just as Mariana exists in a kind of suspended animation, likewise Carter’s narrator in this composition circles around a static theme, her own loneliness emphasised again by the choice of tense and lack of distance. The objects surrounding her serve as tangible symbols of this. She, like Mariana, dwells on the loneliness without searching or wishing for a solution. Mariana serves as a model for the narrator to describe how the Japanese romanticise the situation of women living alone. In the second reference to Tennyson’s poem, the narrator uses it to find a reference for the setting. Like Mariana she feels enclosed in her ‘grange’ by a moat, on the one side a canal, on the other the ocean.

Goh criticises what he calls Carter’s metafictionalizing.<sup>38</sup> He cites this in “The Smile of Winter”, “A Souvenir of Japan”, and “Master”, yet I believe that it is only tenable when applied to “The Smile of Winter”. He argues, that it is “as if the tales were not narratives in which a story is to be told, [...] but merely the occasion for talking about other fictions.”<sup>39</sup> I believe that the inherent flaw in Goh’s argument lies in his inability or unwillingness to examine the narratological particularities which are being experimented within this particular text. This is not, by any means, to argue that this experimentation by Carter is successful in creating a satisfying narrative. This repetition may be irritating in this particular text, yet, it nevertheless serves its purpose. While the narrator is not entirely successful in this case in removing herself from Goh’s orientalist criticism she does attempt to establish a universality by comparing Tennyson, a part of her context, to Japanese poetry which deals with a similar theme (53).

Goh writes, “Japanese bikers are ‘as beautiful as the outriders of death in the film ‘Orphée’ [...] or lonely like ‘Mariana,’ Tennyson’s forsaken lover [...]”<sup>40</sup> The ‘Mariana’ image is brought in twice and the reference to the title, “everything has put on the desolate smile of winter” (54), “to smile in chorus the desolate smile of winter” (56),

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<sup>38</sup>Goh 81.

<sup>39</sup>Goh 81.

<sup>40</sup>Goh 81.



and “I intend to represent the desolate smile of winter [...]” (57) appears three times. While the self-conscious narration at the end of the narrative does point toward the overly constructed quality of the narrative and the narrator does even admit that, “I came here in order to be lonely” (53), thus stating that she had a pre-determined purpose in choosing the spatial sphere of the story and therefore feels the need to continually emphasise those constructs which underscore her purpose.

Goh is contradicting himself in his criticism of especially the self-conscious narration at the end of the story:

Here is the narrative’s self-consciousness at its most explicit, calling the reader’s attention (lest one misses the other cues) to the deliberately piecemeal nature of its composition, even at the expense of de-realising its ostensible core of meaning – the mental and emotional state of the gaijin lover. <sup>41</sup>

If this device has the effect of calling the entire narrative into question then his objection to Carter’s privileging of the Anglocentric perspective is undermined. It seems odd that Goh is using the existence of the clear tactic of self-conscious narration to criticise the text, yet fails to take it to its logical conclusion by not recognising that it is also an acknowledgement of artificiality and subjectivity which would weaken his own premise.

What Goh does not touch on, oddly enough, and what I feel is the most problematic portion of the narrative is the description of the women who come to the beach to tend their drying fish. They are mentioned in the rather more neutral second paragraph of the text in context with other groups who come to the beach for various reasons; children, fishermen, etc. It is only later in the story, in a longer description that the narrator describes them in a negative manner which is difficult to reconcile even with the overall depressive nature of the entire story. I will quote most of the paragraph in order to give a more complete impression of what the narrator is expressing:

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<sup>41</sup>Goh 82.

There are great numbers of these raucously silent, and well-muscled, intimidating women.

The cruel wind burns port-wine whorls on their dour, inexpressive faces. All wear dark or drab-coloured trousers pinched in at the ankle and either short rubber boots or split-toed socks on their feet. A layer of jacket sweaters and a loose, padded, cotton jacket gives them a squat, top-heavy look, as if they would not fall over, only rock malevolently to and fro if you pushed them. Over their jackets, they wear short, immaculate aprons trimmed with coarse lace and they tie white babushkas round their heads or sometimes wind a kind of wimple over the ears and round the throat. They are truculent and aggressive. They stare at me with open curiosity tinged with hostility. When they laugh, they display treasuries of gold teeth and their hands are as hard as those of eighteenth-century prize-fighters, who also used to pickle their fists in brine. They make me feel that either I or they are deficient in femininity and I suppose it must be I since most of them hump about an organic lump of baby on their backs, inside their coats. It seems that only women people the village because most of the men are out on the sea. (55)

The narrator is addressing a myriad of issues at once. She makes it clear, from the very first line quoted, that she is intimidated by these women. In “A Souvenir of Japan”, similarly to the second paragraph of this narrative, Carter’s narrator has already called attention to her very different appearance. She is large, pink and blonde in a country filled with dark, petite women. In this place, she is confronted with another kind of Japanese woman. These are hard working and strong. Just as in the previous narrative, the narrating ‘I’ questions her own femininity. Interesting is that she is, very subtly, questioning what is feminine. In the first Japan story, feminine is small and petite, something totally opposite to herself. In this narrative, feminine is reduced to the ability to reproduce. Without elaborating further on the implications of this in respect to feminist discourse, what remains problematic in this section is the negative terms used to describe these women and the narrator’s evaluation of their attitude towards her.

The comment, thus, about their being feminine since they carry around babies, the description of whom is offensive, takes on overtones which should give the reader reason for pause. Their hostile looks and the ambiguous aggressiveness is reminiscent of

the unease felt by the narrator at the scrutiny she felt subjected to by her neighbours in “A Souvenir of Japan”. Yet here, the narratological nod by way of distancing produced through the choice of, especially, present tense narration, to the subjectivity and thus unreliability of the narrated stance is almost completely missing. There are only two slight hints. Firstly, the choice to include that the narrator thinks that the women are intimidating can be said to colour the entire description. Secondly, choosing to state, “they make me feel” and “I suppose”, can also point toward an acknowledgement of a tone of conjecture and a very emotional and thus, irrational reaction on the part of the speaker.

The address to the narratee at the end is pivotal to understanding the narrative:

Do not think that I do not realise what I am doing. I am making a composition using the following elements: the winter beach; the winter moon; the ocean; the women; the pine trees; the riders; the driftwood; the shells; the shapes of darkness and the shapes of water; and the refuse. These are all inimical to my loneliness because of their indifference to it.  
(57)

What is, throughout, a relatively dark and depressing composition, filled with often hostile images is acknowledged as a subjective, deliberate composition along this self-conscious line. With it, the narrator acknowledges that the narratee will have been somewhat disconcerted by the choice of language, mood, tone and description. In this case, I will also argue that the implied reader, similarly to this narratee is also perplexed by much of the narrative. In this story, Carter seems to be relying a bit too heavily on narratological structures to free her text from the criticism some of its levels of meaning invite. While feminist narratology addresses this type of self-conscious narration as a method of escaping set constructs in order to expand meaning, Carter is expecting a bit much here.<sup>42</sup> While this may free her narrative from the criticism Robbie Goh has levelled at the whole collection, it, nevertheless does not suffice to make the narrative as satisfying as “A Souvenir of Japan” and “Flesh and the Mirror”.

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<sup>42</sup>Cf. Alison Lee, “Angela Carter’s New Eve(lyn): De/En-Gendering Narrative,” *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill/London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 239.

### 1.1.3 “Flesh and the Mirror”

Carter is deliberately using point-of-view in this narrative<sup>43</sup> in a movement between the perspectives of *she* and *I*. She moves in more closely to intimately examine the individual’s search for the self or home. In “Flesh and the Mirror”, Carter unveils the complex process of becoming aware of the construct that is ourselves. Though this notion is adequately expressed in Carter’s manipulation of the sense of being on a stage and of mirror imagery, she inextricably interweaves a subtle use of the outward constructs of point-of-view in order to further underscore the artificial distance already obvious in these two images.

It is fascinating to observe the movement of the narrative from the outside to the inside, from *she* to *I*, analysing every step as it is made. It is a conscious experiencing in the past tense. This could perhaps also be called a move from impersonal to personal discourse. Though Susan Ehrlich, in her discussion of this discourse focuses on the specific use of the third-person pronoun for third-person point-of-view, thus indicating impersonal discourse, and the use of the first-person pronoun for first-person point-of-view, thus indicating personal discourse, this idea, can be used to characterise the distance between the *she/I* inherent in the single narrative persona of Carter’s story.<sup>44</sup>

Most authors show the sense of doubling demonstrated in this pronominal shift through two distinct characters in the narrative. Even if these two distinct characters are lodged in the same person, they are given two names – two identities. Carter’s narrative protagonist does not create a separate persona, but creates a distance between an “I” defined by the actions and thoughts, to what she defines as the *she* who carries out these actions.

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<sup>43</sup>This is a revised version of a paper I read at a conference in Krakow, Poland. Kristina Koch. “I/She, She/I: Narrative Persona in Angela Carter’s Short Fiction,” *Tradition and Postmodernity: English and American Studies and the Challenge of the Future*, ed. Teresa Bela and Zygmunt Mazur. (Kraków: Universitas, 1999) 263-272.

<sup>44</sup>Susan Ehrlich, *Point of View: A Linguistic Analysis of Literary Style* (London: Routledge, 1990) 6. Monika Fludernik also states that this type of pronominal shift can reflect the “protagonist’s attempt at understanding himself [...]” While she is making this statement in the context of her discussion of Beckett’s *Company*, I believe that this can also be said of Carter’s narrative. Fludernik, ‘Natural’ Narratology 240.

The narrator arrives back in Japan after three months to find that her lover is not there to meet her. Wallowing in the role of the self-pitying victim, she allows herself to be picked up by another man and retires with him to a room suited perfectly to such an illicit encounter, complete with a mirror hung from the ceiling. Continuing her search for her errant lover the morning following a night of situationally appropriate sex, the reflection of which haunts her, she finds him only to retreat with him to another room, once again appropriate, this time because of its harsh austerity. The narratee is continually confronted with an ongoing analysis of the *tableau vivant*, to use one of Carter's favourite terms. This story continues the image of this living picture already emphasised in "A Smile of Winter". The end sweeps up the shards by reflecting that Japan had, after this experience, become home, precipitating the need to play a role the narrator had continually played throughout. And, as I will show more later, reflects a certain acceptance of the roles and scenes of others. At home one does not need artifice.

In the very first lines of the story, the reader is immediately confronted with the various artifices of the narrative persona. Beginning with a marvellously classic, "It was midnight – [...]" (68), almost as luscious a titbit for short fiction as 'once upon a time' is for the fairy tale, the narrator sets the scene.<sup>45</sup> This opening calls attention to the theatrical quality of the narrative and its narrator protagonist. This is emphasised by the duality inherent in this narrator protagonist, the *I* of the teller and the *she* of the actor.

"I chose my times and set my scenes with the precision of the born artiste" (68). In this line, Carter confronts her reader with a constructed reality. In the first portion of this narrative, the scenario that will serve as the basis, the graspable surface level for the whole, is quickly introduced. The protagonist has returned to Japan after a three month absence and is not met at the pier by her lover, though he had promised to be there. The theme of disappointed love is not new, but here Carter examines the appeal this particular type of pain has. Fascinated by desires of all kinds, expressible and inexpressible, Carter is going one step further by examining

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<sup>45</sup>This type of opening, Stanzel claims is only possible in a fictional text. Cf. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 218.

the unconscious or conscious prerequisites we provide ourselves with which make our experiences that which we so crave. The narrator suggests an awareness of this in her story's protagonist: "First, I was angry; but the poignancy of my own situation overcame me and then I was sad. To return to the one you love and find him absent! My heart used to jump like Pavlov's dogs at the prospect of such a treat; I positively salivated at the suggestion of unpleasure" (68). The narrator undermines her own story's protagonist, her experiencing 'I', with her insights and interpretations of the present already foreshadowing the inevitable awareness which must follow such a close self-examination.

She begins her own characterisation at a point long before this piece's action, when she was an "intolerable adolescent [...]" (68). Though not presented chronologically, the story gives the reader an insight into the development of the protagonist's character. As an adolescent, she developed the habit of creating herself as a *tableau vivant* of loneliness, a still-life: "I [...] learned to sit with my coat-collar turned up in a lonely way, so that people would talk to me" (68). This attribute seems to be the one constant in her life demonstrating also a consistency in her actions and mannerisms, but the perspective on this, seen retrospectively through the first-person narration, is changed.

She has become conscious of her own constructs, putting this particular one off as merely a habit: "And I can't drop the habit even now, though, now, it's only a habit, and, I realise, a predatory habit" (68). Almost serving as a frame for the narrative, this idiosyncrasy is touched upon again at the end. Carter chooses to use the same words as at the beginning of the story while adding, "they're only habits and give no clue at all to my character, whatever that is" (74). The conscious acknowledgement of the act and all of its ramifications has altered its significance. What the text makes clear is the progression of development from an adolescent's first uncertain steps in the creation of the self, in the manipulation of reality, to an adult's whole-hearted embracing of this self-created scene to, lastly, a mature realisation and acceptance of this manipulation, the experiencing of experience as experience.

Continuing to set her stage, Carter's narrator more closely defines the setting as the

pleasure quarters of Tokyo. Drawing a parallel to Mardi Gras, a festival which is an integral part of Western culture, inextricably linked to the Catholic church and thus foreign to Tokyo, it is, nevertheless, an apt comparison. The pleasure quarters are decorated with “artificial cherry blossom [...]” (68) and its alleys are covered by a “false ceiling of umbrellas [...]” (68), indicating a constructed reality, a false frivolity similar to the hysterical extravagance of Mardi Gras, a drama being enacted. The irony of choosing to set this piece of fiction in a red-light district, whether in Europe, in Japan, or anywhere for that matter, also cannot be overlooked. The act of purchased sex is the ultimate expression of constructed reality and distance to the self which is clear to the narrator protagonist.<sup>46</sup>

She compares the inhabitants of these pleasure quarters with the “mirror images of the dwellers on dry land” (68) depicted by medieval philosophers. This is reminiscent of another story in this same Carter collection, entitled “Reflections.” Here she examines the consequences of being confronted with the mirror image, the other side, dichotomy. In “Flesh and the Mirror”, though, she is using the mirror to demonstrate the narrator’s concept of her own omnipotence in being able to define that which is around her as she wishes. The place becomes irrelevant as she can only perceive the inhabitants as the same everywhere. They must conform to her stage no matter who they are. This, of course, is doomed to failure as long as she is unable to accept that the stages are by necessity radically different, as are the players:

And as I moved through these expressionist perspectives in my black dress as though I was the creator of all and of myself, too, in a black dress, in love, crying, walking through the city in the *third person singular*, my own heroine, as though the world stretched out from my eye like spokes from a sensitised hub that galvanised all to life when I looked at it. (68, emphasis mine)

Here, for the first time in the narrative, the narrator refers to herself in the third-person singular. As she herself puts it, she is her own heroine, playing the leading

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<sup>46</sup>Carter’s journalistic essay, “Lovely Linda”, is an interesting discussion of a modern view on pornography, prostitution and distance to the self. Cf. *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings*, ed. Jenny Uglow (London: Vintage, 1998) 54-6.

role in a production of her own creation. Later in the narrative she goes as far as to admit that she had been, figuratively, cutting her characters and settings to fit her view of things. This, of course, is coloured by “what I was able to recognise already, from past experience [...]” (72). The here and now were irrelevant. Having voiced the self-critique of herself at the time of the action as “never [having] experienced experience as experience” (69) it is clear that the narrator was setting her stage, taking her role as heroine and snipping and cutting her leading man to suit that which she knew. Not being native to Japan, though, that which she knew could, of course, never possibly fit right with what she was.

Carter is demonstrating how Japan refuses to subjugate itself to the desires of the individual, in this case the individual foreigner, although Japan could have been almost anywhere. The narrator was attracted to this particular country in order to “find a climate with enough anguish and hysteria in it to satisfy me [...]” (68). Carter’s narrator is merely looking for a different, perhaps more dramatic stage on which to act out her production. “The stranger, the foreigner, thinks he is control; but he has been precipitated into somebody else’s dream” (69). The system that the narrative protagonist requires does not exist. She has defined this place according to herself, while never realising that it exists for itself. She is foreign and it is home, to use Carter’s terms, not as she sees it – that Japan is foreign. Not being satisfied with only attempting to confine the city to her stage, the narrator also continues to confine herself in the role she has shaped. “But all the time I was pulling the strings of my own puppet; it was this puppet who was moving about on the other side of the glass” (72). This distance she has created for herself, the script of which she tries to be the writer, producer and lead, slips from her grasp.

While searching for her errant lover in the pleasure quarters of Tokyo at midnight, she allows her heroine to be picked up by another man. The problem with this scene, placed in the middle of Carter’s narrative, is that it shouldn’t have happened. It was not part of the script. The heroine was supposed to continue crying and looking pitiful while looking for her love. “None of the lyrical eroticism of this sweet, sad, moon night of summer rain had been within my expectations; [...]. My imagination



had been pre-empted" (70). The heroine finds herself on a stage that is entirely appropriate, but not her own. The hotel room contains all prerequisites for an illicit rendezvous, even to the mirror on the ceiling. It is this mirror which is to be the door which will show her the way off stage. She sees herself, for once, in a pose she did not write and finds herself unable to deny the reality of the situation. The more frightful reality, though, was, that this experience was good and caused her no suffering, which she, like one of Pavlov's dogs, so craved. She desperately flees from it:

as if the arbitrary carnival of the streets had gratuitously offered me this young man to find out if I *could* act out of character and then projected our intersection upon the mirror, as an objective lesson in the nature of things. Therefore I dressed rapidly and ran away as soon as it was light outside[...]. (71)

In this scene, Carter again plays with the pronouns *I/she*. She touches on an interesting stereotype most often associated with women, i.e., the obsession of women with mirrors. This perhaps stems from an over-emphasis placed by women, or society, on their appearance. Lorna Sage uses this notion to interpret this story as Carter's attempting to come to terms with her own anorexia.<sup>47</sup> Though this is understandable in view of these critical statements about mirrors and women, I find that this interpretation is too limiting. Anorexia is only one possible manifestation of a rather brutal means of not only defining oneself, but also of attempting to define the actions of others. Carter writes, "women and mirrors are in complicity with one another to evade the action I/she performs that she/I cannot watch, the action with which I break out of the mirror, with which I assume my appearance" (70). The mirror is not perceived as an objective source of reflection but allows itself to present the subjective image of the observer. The narrative protagonist does not see her image, but, before she even looks, the image which she knows is there, created to play a role and into which she then breathes life.

Robert Rogers writes, "narcissism paradoxically involves a relationship, a relationship of self to self in which one's self is regarded as though it were another person."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Sage, *Angela Carter* 28.

<sup>48</sup>Robert Rogers, *A Psychoanalytic Study of The Double in Literature* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1970) 18.

Though Carter's emphasis in this story is not on the narcissistic, on the love for a reflection, it does deal with the distance in the individual, in this case the distance expressed between the *I* and the *she*. It is made clear in the narrative that the narrative persona is able, as she states, to eye "the most marvellous adventures with the bored eye of the agent with the cigar watching another audition" (69). In the very next line, though, the narrator is forced to admit that this particular mirror "refused to conspire with me" (70).

The narrator flees once again into her role of forlorn heroine searching for her absent love. Upon finding him, she finds that the entire script has slipped out of her hands. Nevertheless attempting to continue the play, she once again enters a hotel room, this time with the 'right' lover. This room, lovingly described by Carter, is the mirror image of the former. While the former was opulent, fitting to the nature of the erotic encounter, the latter is a stark and filthy room as befits the condition of the affair played out there. Yet the narrator and her lover play the piece to its end. In an interesting little added scene, the narrator screams as someone attempts to enter the room where she and her lover are sleeping. Her lover, imagining that she has gone crazy and is going to murder him, "trapped me [the narrator] in a strangle hold [...]" (74). At this point, when the narrative is almost at its end, Carter makes clear that the narrator is not alone on her stage. She comments about this occurrence; "we were both old enough to have known better" (74). He, as well as she, is playing a part in a self-constructed reality.

At the end, Carter comes full circle back to the image of loneliness she picked up on at the beginning. The narrator is back in the present and is in full realisation of the penchant of human beings to write scripts for themselves which have nothing to do with reality: "they're only habits and give no clue at all to my character [...]" (74).

Though Carter is correct, on the one hand, that small predatory habits people act out in order to satisfy conscious or unconscious desires do not say much about their character, on the other hand, though, the very fact of a habit, of whatever nature, does seem to constitute a characteristic of that particular individual. Carter herself

is conscious of this disparity in her last sentence. “The most difficult performance in the world is acting naturally, isn’t it? Everything else is artful” (74).

In this narrative, Angela Carter plots one woman’s development away from a self-constructed reality to experiencing experience as experience. She uses point-of-view to clarify the disparity inherent in the presentation of experience as experience, attempting to bridge the gap between the selves by a subtle interspersion in the text of the third-person point-of-view. Wrapping the reader in a sense of security by establishing a distance between herself – I – of the past and herself – I – of the present, the narrator manages to project the image of an omniscient persona in control of the events being related. Closer examination, though, shows that it is Carter’s intention to undermine this artificial distance. This suggestion of self-examination, of self realisation, points to an awareness of the subterfuge the human animal is capable of in order to appease certain needs, hopefully ending in the recognition of experience as an autonomous entity, a scene of which you are a conscious part but do not define.

## 1.2 “Reflections”

“Reflections” is the eighth story in the collection *Fireworks*. It is one of two purposefully fictional autodiegetic narratives. In the case of this narrative, while the merits of this choice of point-of-view are recognisable, choosing to have it narrated in the third-person with an authorial type of narrator may have been at least as successful. “Reflections” is in many respects one of the most interesting narratives in the collection *Fireworks*, and at the same time, as Marina Warner writes, “one of Carter’s cloudier tales.”<sup>49</sup>

As mirrors have played a great role in the narratives thus far, it seems only appropriate that Carter would devote an entire short story to the dichotomies of mirroring. It is interesting to note, though, that despite the interesting possibilities of interpretation which present themselves in this narrative in the direction of feminist and gender

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<sup>49</sup>Marina Warner, “Angela Carter: Bottle Blonde, Double Drag,” *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994) 252.

discourse, "Reflections" has all but been ignored in critical analysis. This is perhaps also due, in part, to the fact that this is one of the most difficult of Carter's stories.

This story already anticipates the plot of *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), which has received much critical attention in this direction, particularly in the figure of Tiresias. Its tone is also reminiscent of the darkness found in *Shadow Dance* (1966) and *Love* (1971).<sup>50</sup> Laura Mulvey quickly comments in her article, "Cinema magic and the Old Monsters: Angela Carter's Cinema", on the author's preoccupation with dualism which is expressed in this particular narrative.<sup>51</sup> Mulvey's statement is appropriate, yet, despite all the many dichotomies presented in the narrative, Carter does not seem to be able to reconcile for the reader the choices she has made as to the mood and the characters. The narrative is overly convoluted and it does not entirely follow that the overall feeling is so angry and threatening. This story is not entirely successful, neither with a view towards feminist discourse nor narratologically.

There is no development in the character of the autodiegetic narrator in the course of the narrative. Yet when taking a look back through the narratives in this collection and Carter's fiction in general, this lack of development itself could be said to contain the quintessence of the meaning of the narrative. "Reflections", in contrast to the other autodiegetic narratives in this collection, reduces the shifts between the experiencing and the narrating 'I' to a minimum. Some of the comments offered by the narrating 'I' should be considered authorial commentary rather than attributed to the narrator of the story. Therefore, the narrating 'I' retreats into the background to a greater degree than in other of Carter's narratives. The distance remains indiscernible, making the characterisation of this persona more difficult. The relatively sparse expressions of conjecture voiced in the narrative, for example, "I thought" (82), "as if" (82), serve only to emphasise certain points, not, as in the previous narratives, to undermine the viewpoint of the experiencing 'I'. The spatial/temporal distance is impossible to discern, as there are no hints in the text as to time or place of the narrating act. Stanzel places this type of narration near the borderline between first- and

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<sup>50</sup>Cf. Lorna Sage, introduction, *Flesh and the Mirror* 10.

<sup>51</sup>Laura Mulvey, "Cinema Magic and the Old Monsters: Angela Carter's Cinema," *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994)233.

third-person narration (authorial/personal). This move away from the dichotomous narrator to a stronger emphasis on the experiencing 'I' points to the fact that:

Der Akzent liegt auf dem Geschehen "in actu", auf dem Erlebnis im momentanen Jetzt und Hier, durch welches auch der Wissens- und Wahrnehmungshorizont des erlebten Ich abgegrenzt wird. Parallel dazu verschiebt sich der Schwerpunkt der Motivation der Handlung von Einsicht, Wille, Überlegung zu unbewußtem oder nur halbbewußtem Reagieren, im Extremfall zum bloßen neurophysiologischen Reflex.<sup>52</sup>

It is through her choice of this approach that Carter is able to demonstrate that, despite being confronted with the antithesis, the narrator is unable to come to synthesis, better yet, he, in his arrogance, destroys the possibility of this by his destruction of Tiresias. Carter purposefully manipulates the boundaries of this type of narration, reducing a clear distancing or a sense of reflection in the narrator and thus reducing the assessment of her character in order to make the impossibility of synthesis of understanding graspable. Marina Warner writes, "the iconoclasm of the protagonist when he desecrates and destroys the hermaphroditic idol does not win the author's wholehearted applause [...]."<sup>53</sup> I agree with Warner's unease about the ending of the narrative, as the scene can be seen as rather ambiguous. The reader expects a type of epiphany perhaps even reflected in 'present' time comments by the narrating 'I', as already shown in the previous narratives. Only very few such interpretative comments can be found in the text, yet, when they are inserted, they are missing a tone which indicates a newly-won insight by the narrator.

If this can be defined as Carter's intention then her choice of autodiegetic narration though can be seen as appropriate for her purpose. While a more typical heterodiegetic-extradiegetic point-of-view would have perhaps made the narrative more mainstream and easier to understand, it would also have most likely made the 'message' too conclusive and therefore un-Carter-like. Yet there are discrepancies which remain in the text which are dissatisfying. Writing a male first-person narrator does not manage to move past the stereotypical. This pseudo male perspective is not

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<sup>52</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 269.

<sup>53</sup>Warner 252.

new in her writing as *Shadow Dance*, *Several Perceptions*, and *Love* have a male focaliser and *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* has a male autodiegetic narrator. Yet the adoption of a male narrator, while being a logical choice according to the subject matter, is not portrayed convincingly throughout. Many hints in the text point toward an unlikeable misogynistic character aiming toward an, uncharacteristic for Carter, straightforward feminist criticism of this figure. Yet experience with her writing has proven that such a reading must be distrusted. The negative characterisation of Tiresias and Anna would seem to undermine this, yet these two figures do not belong to the recognisable world of the narrator but are “mythic and monstrous beings.”(93) Thus, it could be claimed that this narrator is simply unreliable and everything he states should be called into question. This conclusion is not entirely satisfying either as the text does not clearly support this.

The main characteristic of autodiegetic narrative is the fact that it is told after the fact. One of the greatest critical challenges is subsequently to evaluate the distance between the ‘I’ who narrates and the ‘I’ who, in the past, experiences the action. In most texts this is relatively straightforward. Taking the action of the story “Reflections” into account, though, this determination of distance is not as straightforward. The narrator has gone through the mirror and has come back again. As he indicated in the last lines of the narrative, this narrator has experienced synthesis in some form and rejects it. Marina Warner picks up on the difficulties as well. “Even though his act rejects the deity’s wholeness as a kind of tyranny, and stands for the energy of sexual difference (I think)[sic] and for the shaping of identity achieved by resistance, there is irony and sorrow in the last paragraph, too [...]”<sup>54</sup> This shows that even Warner is having difficulty stating anything really conclusive about this narrative.

I do not agree with Warner’s interpretation of the scene. Carter has not chosen to portray the narrator in the slightly more positive light which Warner suggests with her interpretation of the end. In order to interpret the end of the narrative in such a fashion, one would need to discount much of what is presented in the story as a whole. The narrator is never portrayed in a convincingly positive manner, and a

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<sup>54</sup>Warner 252.

sense of unease about his motivations pervades. While the hostility of the figures of Tiresias and Anna is undisputed, attempting a positive reading of the violence found in all the characters at the end of the narrative is difficult. Warner's interpretation, while making sense in the general context of the themes addressed in this ending, is nevertheless not entirely satisfying within the confines of this particular story. Unfortunately, Warner's comments are restricted to the few I have quoted here and she does not offer any further interpretation of the story which could clarify her position somewhat.

The difficulty lies in attempting to interpret the effects this experience has had on the narrator, an aspect made difficult through Carter's narratological choices. The narrator describes himself as ingenuous at the beginning of the narrative, yet, already there, the text is littered with foreshadowing; the pricklings of fear he claims to have felt and his sobbing due to the weight of the shell he stumbles over. As the text progresses, the language also becomes increasingly complex and convoluted. The language of the simple English wood is left behind for the language acrobatics of Tiresias' house and the mirror world. The minute perceptions of this narrator are at odds with the person of the experiencing 'I', and the complexities continually suggest the author's strong hand guiding the narrative. The narrative takes on a strong feeling of artificiality, though it remains difficult to pinpoint the reason for this. Is the narrating 'I' deliberately creating his own persona in order to lead the narratee towards a more sympathetic reading of his character?

While the artificiality of such narration is a given, the narrator here seems to be doing the opposite of what the autodiegetic narrator has been doing in the three previous stories. Instead of distancing himself from the experiencing 'I', he is deliberately depicting this persona in a more positive light, which therefore has the logical consequence of throwing a more harsh light on Tiresias and Anna. Marina Warner picks up on this in her statement on the tyranny of Tiresias quoted above, yet the narrative is never truly able to make clear exactly the nature of the tyranny. The energy of sexual difference Warner cites seems a bit far fetched in the narrative, as the characterisations never move beyond simple, though seemingly reversed, stock portraits of

the female as strong and Amazon-like, and the male as intellectual and sophisticated. Mine is a different, though similarly reticent interpretation of the narrative. Already in Carter's choice of a male focaliser she has chosen to create an uncharacteristically clear criticism of the patriarchy. While the majority of her narratives refuse to focus on merely this type of criticism but go further to also include an inherent criticism of women and feminist constructs within this patriarchal system, this narrative utilises a much more black and white picture of these issues. It is also unable to move beyond them. The narrator's destructiveness at the end of the story is as unredeemed as the butch rapist Anna's is. I also disagree with Warner that the point of the story is that the destruction of synthesis should be seen in a positive light.

The first-person narrator introduces himself, and at the same time characterises himself, with a very flowery poetic description of the setting he encounters on a stroll through the English wood. In contrast to many of Angela Carter's other short stories, especially to her less fictionalised autobiographical narratives, "Reflections" does not open *in medias res*. The opening line is reminiscent of a traditional emic opening such as 'Once upon a time'.<sup>55</sup> The narrator introduces himself in the very first word by the use of the personal pronoun 'I', yet the first two paragraphs form a clear introduction to the setting, and simultaneously provide an opposition for what is to follow in the later narrative. Here the reader is introduced to the narrator who characterises himself through his choice of language and style, as a poet. The choice to open the narrative in this fashion clashes sharply with the tone of the latter part of the story. It must, therefore, be assumed that the narrator is deliberately portraying himself in this manner in order to manipulate the manner in which the scenes with Tiresias and Anna are interpreted.

The description in the opening paragraphs could rival the style of the best of the romantic poets: the clouds are skimming, the sunshine is shower-tarnished, the sky a lucid blue, the weather tremulous, the blackbird coloratura and singing a flawed chain of audible pearl (81). Lorna Sage writes that this narrative is an "inside out pastoral".<sup>56</sup> The narrator does not simply go for a walk, he walks in poetry. The

<sup>55</sup>Cf. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 175.

<sup>56</sup>Sage, introduction, *Flesh and the Mirror* 10. Sage's assessment, here, is apt in that a pastoral



ideals of the romantic poets, a return to nature, an emphasis on the feelings of the individual, are contrasted sharply by the characterisation of the narrator persona which can be inferred from the text. This seemingly romantic aesthetic is quickly disrupted. In the midst of the poetic description the 'I' describes himself as "slash[ing] the taller grasses with my stick [...]" (81). He is not at one with nature, but dominant over it, which is further recognisable in the image of the small woodland creatures fleeing before him. Unwittingly, the narrator has added another, darker dimension to his characterisation.

This is taken a step further when he finally gains dominance over the shell he finds in the wood, and his first thought is to "take it to the little museum in the nearby town where they would inspect it and test it and tell me what it might be and how it would have arrived where I found it" (82). Here the romantic poet clashes with the Victorian Darwinist.

A type of menacing foreshadowing is not only consciously provided by the words of the narrator, placing menace outside of himself, into the wood: "The year was swinging on the numinous hinges to the solstice but I was ingenuous and sensed no imminence in the magic silence of the rustling wood" (81), but is also unconsciously placing the menace within himself in his unconsciously dominant behaviour toward the very nature he is praising in such poetic terms. Thus everything can be explained, and if it can't be, then one can undertake to find a logical explanation, thus everything is under control, and the logical conclusion is dominance. With the above line, Carter ends her uncharacteristically short introduction and opens the door into the main narrative. In these two short paragraphs, though, she has managed not only to give the reader an impression of the setting, which is England-like: "last night's rain [...] had washed and refreshed the entire wood, had dowered it with the poignant transparency, the unique, inconsolable quality of rainy countries, as if all was glimpsed through tears" (81).

This description is comfortingly familiar in its similarity to any random walk. It

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is defined as "an idealization of shepherd life, and, by so being, creates an image of a peaceful and uncorrupted existence; a kind of prelapsarian world." "Pastoral", *Dictionary of Literary Terms* 644. It becomes clear in Carter's narrative that she is turning this on its head.

recalls images of people of leisure, or people taking their leisure by strolling through the countryside on a beautiful day. The swinging stick is also not an image foreign to this scenario. Yet the reader should not take this image at face value. The image of the strolling person swinging a stick through the tall grass, calls up images of white explorers in exotic, foreign places, images of the machete-swinging conqueror forcing his way through the jungle.<sup>57</sup> This interpretation seems far-fetched in light of the idyllic descriptions of the countryside in a place that is in no way foreign in its flora and fauna, but Carter's choice of "slashed" cannot be ignored and makes such an early interpretation plausible. Carter is playing with the type of figure typical of a period dominated by English expansionism and world power. This narrator is easily defined by his language and actions. He sees the world in the terms of poetry, while exerting his power over this world by forcing his way through it.

Instead of being interrupted, the narrator incorporates the sound of a girl's singing into his poetic musings:

Her voice performed a trajectory of sound far more ornate than that of the blackbird, who ceased at once to sing when he heard it for he could not compete with the richly crimson sinuosity of a voice that pierced the senses of the listeners like an arrow in a dream. (81)

Moving in this poetic vein, the reader is able to form an image of the girl. She takes on the guise of a mythic muse, an object which serves to inspire the poet. The narrator is dazzled by her song, especially so because he does not understand its meaning. Carter includes a line from the girl's song in the text: "Under the leaves, [...] and the leaves of life [...]" (81). Only after experiencing the antithesis of the mirror do these words take on meaning.

In the next second, though, the narrator stumbles and falls, breaking the spell. Until now, dominant over his surroundings, the narrator is suddenly angered: "I forgot that luring music. Cursing my obstacle, I searched among the pale, earth-stained rootlets to find it and my fingers closed on, of all things, a shell" (81). The suppressed

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<sup>57</sup>This theme is explored in greater depth in the narrative "Master".

violence Carter seems to be hinting at from the first lines surfaces here again. Instead of cursing his own inattention, the narrator turns his anger on the object that has tripped him. Yet in the next lines, Carter has her narrator's anger dissipate into curiosity. The narrator is determined to possess this shell. Though it angers him at first and then fills him with wonder, it also scares him. He is confronted, for the first time, with the physical manifestation of the antithesis, and is no longer able to fit everything into his sphere of understanding. The slight anger at being tripped dissipates once the cause has been discovered, once rational order has been reestablished. Everything can be explained by reason. Everything belongs to an order and a hierarchy of being must exist. In this sense, the narrator's surprise at the weight of the shell is understandable: "It glimmered through the grass like a cone of trapped moonlight although it was so very cold and so heavy it seemed to me it might contain all the distilled heaviness of gravity itself within it. I grew very much afraid of the shell; I think I sobbed" (82).

The natural order of things has been reversed in more than one sense. Not only does something that is known to weigh a little weigh a lot, but the whorls are also reversed. The narrator's intent is "to carry it through the wood for I thought I would take it to the little museum in the nearby town where they would inspect it and test it and tell me what it might be and how it would have arrived where I found it" (82). This further underscores the narrator's system of beliefs, which includes that there must be a logical explanation for everything. The expression of conjecture, 'I thought', is simply another foreshadowing of the fact that things will not go on as he expected; his reality will be disrupted.

The narrator does not get the opportunity, though, to have his shell examined. The owner of the beautiful voice comes to collect what is hers. With Anna's entrance, the narrator's world suffers its ultimate shock. Her appearance is in every way in sharp contrast to her sweet singing voice. The muse or siren which the narrator imagined is in reality more of a Valkyrie, an image fitting to the image of the burning of Valhalla in the *Götterdämmerung* alluded to when the narrator is in the mirror world. The very femaleness of her voice is negated by her hard and uncharitable appearance.

The narrator's description of her hair, "[it] hung about her shoulders in a calculated disorder that was not wild" (83), immediately calls up John Milton's description, of Eve in the garden as Adam first saw her. The Biblical Eve's wanton ringlets also stand for a wanton heart in Milton. Her description is the visual manifestation of the inevitable outcome of her story. Though Carter's description conjures up this image, it must be noted that she includes the word *calculated* and describes the disorder as not being wild. This may be an Eve, but one lacking innocence, a calculating Eve. A wildness would also denote passion or a lack of control. Anna, though, is calculating. The narrator nevertheless attempts to characterise her according to what he knows. If she is not the poetic figure fitting to the voice, she must be the opposite, something hostile yet still almost mythical. He compares her eyes to those that "justice would have if she were not blind" (83).

He begins the next paragraph with the words; "Why I do not know, but every impulse told me to conceal my shell [...]" (83). With this he voices conjecture about the actions of his experiencing self. Here, again, this choice does not serve to call his own past views into question, but again foreshadows that the experiencing 'I' knows that there is something seriously wrong with this situation. This seems a bit unconvincing. Carter's motivation for her choice of tone and mood for this narrative is not discernible. The foreshadowing and hints of fear already present in the protagonist at this point are a bit overdone. The only other possible explanation for this is that Carter wishes to characterise her narrator through this obviously leading description.

Once the narrator is taken to Tiresias' house the real plot begins. The allusions at the beginning of the narrative become clearer. Yet Carter does not oversimplify her point. The shell has proven, as was recognised immediately by the narrator, to be a mirror image of what we recognise as a shell. Even the dog, later, on the other side, is white and is a bitch, yet, Anna and Tiresias have not really changed. Though Tiresias has changed, this alteration is one in sense rather than fact:

Nevertheless, the quality of the difference made it seem that this altered yet similar face was the combination of the reflection of the female side of the face and the masculine side of the face that *did not appear* in the

face I had seen beyond the mirror; the effect was as of the reflection of a reflection [...]. (90)

While Tiresias speaks of opposites, mirror images, the changes in the protagonists are not merely black and white. Anna, who can go both ways, remains as she was. Perhaps the only difference is that, on the one side she has the potential for violence, symbolised by her gun, and on the other she uses this potential. She rapes the narrator. This seems rather shocking in light of the fact that Anna is female and the narrator, we suppose, is male.<sup>58</sup> Nor has his sex changed in the step through the mirror. Carter makes the changes in her human protagonists more subtle. Instead of changing their sex, she changes the power relationships. When Anna rapes the protagonist, she is still a woman. The vagina, with its connotations, has become a thing of violence. The penis, which the narrator mistakenly takes for a weapon in the other world, “but do all the men in the mirror world have guns between their thighs?” (88), ceases to be the instrument of rape. “The gun and the phallus are similar in their connection with life – that is, one gives it; and the other takes it away, so that both, in essence, are similar in that the negation freshly states the affirmed proposition” (88). In other words, an opposition serves to confirm. With this Carter confirms the inevitability, as well as the necessity, of dichotomy. At the same time, she seems to be arguing for a more complex interpretation of what dichotomies are.

The protagonist frees himself from Anna’s clutches by killing her. He makes his way back through the mirrored world to Tiresias’ house. In the violent scene which follows, the narrator goes back through the mirror and is confronted by the being:

‘The umbilical cord is cut,’ she said. ‘The thread is broken. Did you not realise who I was? That I was the synthesis in person? For I could go any way the world goes and so I was knitting the thesis and the antithesis together, this world and that world. Over the leaves and under the leaves. Cohesion gone. Ah!’ (95)

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<sup>58</sup>Carter will deal with sex-changes in greater detail in her novel *The Passion of New Eve*. This novel “dramatizes the ways biology can be manipulated to destabilize essentialist definitions of gender.” Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994) 354.

This ambiguous statement does not affect the narrator. “But I was arrogant; I was undefeated. Had I not killed her? Proud as a man, I once again advanced to meet my image in the mirror. Full of self-confidence, I held out my hands to embrace my self, my antiself, my self non-self, my assassin, my death, the world’s death” (95). The narrator attempts to recoup his destroyed self-image through the murder of his rapist. There seems to be some type of judgement inherent in the narration of these lines, yet, when examining them objectively, there is nothing which points at criticism of the experiencing ‘I’ by the narrating ‘I’. For him the arrogance was an integral part of himself, “... Proud as a man ...!”(95) It is the narratee, when coming across these terms, who would add the needed criticism. It is not inherent in the sentences. The narrator has chosen terminology which carries overtly negative connotations, yet Carter is adding a covert authorial comment here. The choice of wording does not fit to either the experiencing ‘I’ or to the narrating ‘I’ as characterised by the narrative.

This narrative is one of Carter’s most difficult. It, while being interesting narratologically speaking, is not as convincing as it could be. Its choice of male focaliser ends up being problematic, as does the portrayal of Tiresias and Anna. *The Passion of New Eve*, which picks up on the figure of Tiresias and further explores the interesting consequences of creating this narrative with a male focaliser, is much more successful. In the novel, Carter leaves behind an attempt to deal with a tangible mirror world and, instead, has the male protagonist go through a sex change forced on him.

### 1.3 “Elegy for a Freelance”

It is appropriate that Angela Carter chooses to end her first collection of short fiction with a narrative entitled “Elegy for a Freelance”. It tells of an apocalypse, an ending not only of an individual’s life, but also documents the end of a way of life. In this narrative Carter brings together, in a futuristic vision of revolution, civil war and chaos, all of the contradictory definitions that are set up to explain human actions and reactions. It predates, by over ten years, Margaret Atwood’s dark dystopian novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1986), which is told in an epistolary style, in this case

addressed to an anonymous future listener. Though the other narratives in *Fireworks* have retained some sense of the exotic and foreign, Carter, similarly to Atwood, creates in this story a narrative of a woman in a fictional world that is all too real. Returning for the fifth time to autodiegetic narration, subverted through the distinct inclusion of a *you* addressee, she is able to show a character caught up in a self-created maze of definitions: “the addressee may coincide with the *you* protagonist in a relationship comparable to that between narrating and experiencing selves in ‘ordinary’ homodiegetic narration.”<sup>59</sup>

While the narrator is obviously addressing the persona X in her *you* address, the nevertheless overtly autodiegetic nature of the story is strengthened by the inclusion of the *you* addressee. It offers a different, almost stronger form of the experiencing/narrating dichotomy inherent in autodiegetic narration.<sup>60</sup> The narrator is able to speak not only to X in her direct address, but, by association, herself. She is able, as narrating ‘I’ in a type of confessional mode, to examine her own past actions, those of the experiencing ‘I’, through a criticism of X’s, or perhaps addressing more closely the uneasy question of the motivation for this narration, she is able to remove herself from a level of culpability through the deliberate choices she makes in the characterisation of the events the experiencing ‘I’ and the *you* addressee experience.

This story is an elegy for the man, X, who fell victim to the ideals he, himself, could not live up to and also, in the same vein, an elegy for the loss of innocence. In literature, the elegy deals with themes such as death, war and love in verse form.<sup>61</sup> Carter reworks this form for prose fiction, yet retains the original themes and intent. It is therefore fitting, in light of Carter’s evocation of the poetic intertext, that she chooses to construct this narrative as an example of second-person narration. Monika Fludernik writes that one of the many occurrences of second-person fiction can be “the narrator writing to a dead or imagined addressee whose story is evoked [...]”<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup>Fludernik, “Second Person Fiction” 223.

<sup>60</sup>Fludernik argues that the possibilities opened up by second person fiction disrupt the “traditional dichotomous structures which the standard narratological models have proposed, especially the distinction between homo- and heterodiegetic narrative (Genette) or that of the identity or non-identity of the realms of existence between narrator and characters (Stanzel).” Fludernik, ‘*Natural*’ *Narratology* 226.

<sup>61</sup>“Elegy,” *Dictionary of Literary Terms* 253.

<sup>62</sup>Fludernik, ‘*Natural*’ *Narratology* 226.

Combining the term elegy in the title with this deliberate choice of address, Carter is once again manipulating form to enhance the meaning in her narrative.

The narrator tells the story of her love affair with the leader of a revolutionary cell. Beyond giving some information about herself and the surroundings in order to provide a frame of reference, she concentrates on one major event in this relationship. The cell has decided to assassinate a politician. After drawing lots, the actual act of killing falls to the *you* addressee, X. As a type of dry-run or self-test, he decides on his own to kill the landlord of their building. The other members of the cell, including the narrator, cannot condone this rogue act, as it goes against an unwritten moral code which serves to justify their very existence as a revolutionary cell. The speaker tells of the difficult decision the members must make as to the fate of X. They decide upon summarily executing him for his 'crime'.

At the end of the narrative, the already shaky tenets used to define the purpose of the group to which the narrator and X belong, dissolve. Some members want to turn themselves in to the police, some want to flee to the mountains, yet, before any action can be taken, the outside world infringes on their small constructed reality. The bigger revolution, "history"(107), begins, relegating them to insignificance. By choosing to combine two distinctive types of narration, autodiegetic and second-person, Carter has been able to achieve a subtlety of criticism in her narrative which would otherwise not have been possible.

This combination seems to suggest a level of unreliability in the narration, underscored by the present tense comments by an authorial commissar figure who obviously exerts a strong influence on the narrator. Yet what remains interesting in the narrative is the juxtaposition of the figural narrator's telling of the story with statements she quotes, often placed in parenthesis, from the ambiguous figure of the commissar already introduced in the first paragraph. Interestingly, the directly quoted speech tags are in the present tense, 'he says' serving to place the commissar and his statements into the present experience of the figural narrator in contrast to the narrated events taking place and narrated in the past tense. The interspersion of these quasi-present time statements underscores the character's development, the experiencing



'I' versus the narrating 'I'. At the beginning of her narrative she characterises herself as someone looking for an adventure, as she has chosen to live on the fourth floor despite being terrified of heights. She repeats this three times as if emphasising for herself how brave she was to have taken the room. It mutates to a symbol of her breaking out of her bourgeois world.

The question remains, though, for whom this emphasis is made. It can be assumed that the commissar who is quoted throughout the narrative is the actual audience, the real narratee; she feels the need to prove her adequacy to him. At the end of the narrative, she returns to this image a fourth time in a statement which defines what this room symbolises for her: "Instinct and will, again; I was poised on the windowledge of a fourth floor of a building I had never suspected existed and I did not know which was will and which was instinct that told me to jump, to run" (107). As this is found in the penultimate paragraph of the text, it can be seen as a type of conclusion the narrator draws from the story, a type of lesson for herself. Her experiences, her decision to leave her Bourgeois life, to join a terrorist cell, to execute X for his inability to live up to the ideals of anarchy, are all served up in this one statement, instinct versus will.

Yet the reader must question all that she says. While many statements seem brutally honest, the choice to open the narrative with a statement by the anonymous figure of the commissar, and the insertion of directly-quoted statements this figure makes should cause the reader to question the narrator's motives in telling this story.

The character of the narrator is perhaps the most challenging. She seems at times a slightly unconvincing persona in her obvious self-conscious analysis of the situation and of her own behaviour. Carter, through this character, though, is creating a portrait of a person caught up in a hurricane of emotion. The narrator never mentions her own name, and it is only through subtle references imbedded in the narrative that the reader learns a bit about who she is. The majority of information is gained through her telling of her dead lover, X's, story and her part in it. Monika Fludernik argues that while telling someone else's story and addressing them while doing so is "a patently absurd situation under normal circumstances [...]," nevertheless, the teller's

motivation in “addressing an absent or dead person [...]” opens up the possibility for a further characterisation of the narrator.<sup>63</sup> This person can be said to be indulging in a “rhetorical urge to relive events (and thus relieve herself of them), to mentally resurrect the co-experiences in the addressee function.”<sup>64</sup> That Carter has chosen to do this is clear in the narrative.

The narrator opens by speaking to the dead X as if sitting by his (as we will find out later non-existent) grave and telling him what has happened since he died. Yet instead of mirroring the form of the elegy which mourns and extols the virtues of a dead person, the narrator uses the format as a forum for her own type of confession: “I remember you as clearly as if you’d died yesterday, though I don’t remember you often – usually I’m far too busy” (96). The emphasis here is on the I and not on the you. This confessional or even diary-like style is in itself unremarkable. What is interesting is that Carter repeatedly changes the direction of the focus from a direct address toward X to a more conventional narrative focused toward a general narratee. The narrator moves back and forth in the narrative between these audiences.

Everything narrated is coloured by the statement at the end of the first paragraph: “Everything is changed now, and we are not the same” (96). This statement is interesting for two reasons. Firstly it introduces one of the three *we* groups found in the text.<sup>65</sup> In this case, it is a *we* imbedded in the temporal space of the narrating ‘I’, distinct from the *we* groups alluded to in the space of the narrative. In the narrative, the teller character refers to the *we* of herself and her lover ‘X’, the *our* and *we* of the tenants of her house and the *we* referring to the ‘cell’ to which she belongs. While this narrative is not a collective narrative, per se, and the narrator is not a collective narrative agent as such, the teller character’s insistence on utilising the collective *we* underscores the dystopian apocalyptic theme of the story. Her allusions to the Third Reich, Leninism and Marxism, all of which are totalitarian systems which function under a *we* mentality, draws parallels to her own present situation and to that in her narrative.

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<sup>63</sup>Fludernik, “Second Person Fiction” 221.

<sup>64</sup>Fludernik, “Second Person Fiction” 221.

<sup>65</sup>Monika Fludernik writes that second-person narratives “frequently utilize an implicit if not explicit we (I + you) [...]” Fludernik, “Second Person Fiction” 222.

Interestingly, the commissar's statements are all made in the ambiguous *we/they* dichotomy, yet, the narrator's inconsistency in her use not only of the second-person address of X but also of the *we*, and her constant reversion back to the 'I', emphasises the pitfalls of ideology when confronted with a romantic sensibility. The commissar states, "The bourgeoisie turned politics into an aspect of romanticism. [...] it was only an art form, how could it threaten them" (100). That the narrator is unable to escape the idealism of romanticism, and that it is inextricably bound to any type of revolution, is shown in her sacrifice of X. He is unable to uphold the ideals the 'cell' claims to believe in.

When he murders the old man as a type of practice run for the assassination of a cabinet member because he needs to know if he can do it, the narrator does not hesitate for a moment and begins the events that will lead to X's 'trial' and 'execution'. While she herself admits that she could never actually kill someone, "I would have shot anybody you told me to but only if they did not get hurt" (99), she feels no compunction in executing X when the time comes. The killing of someone 'innocent', as opposed to someone who has been defined as deserving, is a betrayal of ideals. Interestingly, once X has murdered the old man, he is purposefully excluded from the collective pronouns. The *we* and *us* stand in opposition to his individuality.

Yet it should also be noted that following this passage quoted above, the narrator continues;

I felt I needed to understand nothing beyond my own sensations. I felt, as primitives do, that ceremonials such as the ones we made could revivify dead earth. Your kisses along my arms were like tracer bullets. I am lost. I flow. Your flesh defines me. I become your creation. I am your fleshly reflection. (99)

She spins off into a very emotional and sensual recollection which is abruptly disrupted by a comment by the commissar. "(Libido and false consciousness characterised sexual relations during the last crisis of Capital, [...])" (99). The inclusion of this comment in parentheses more than hints at an ongoing sub-text, another conversation that the implied reader is not privy to except when the narrator chooses to stop her

own narrative with its emotionless ideological discourse. It also serves to highlight, in the alternation of point-of-view, the subtle feeling that there is another narratee beyond X and the implied reader. The fact that the narrative opens with the teller figure mentioning that she has asked the unidentified but authoritarian figure of the commissar whether or not she had acted correctly by executing X, already there sets up the tone of submission to this ambiguous narratee.

In the portions where the narrator speaks to the more general narratee, she often examines her own emotions and motivations in a distinctly confessional tone: "I went into his world when I fell in love with him and felt only a sense of privilege in its isolation" (97). This, almost at the outset, calls the narrator's motives into question. Carter is undoubtedly a feminist writer, yet what is often overlooked is what I see as a prime example of her critical stance toward her own sex in statements such as this one. The narrator, suspicious in this cell of rebels because of her bourgeois status, joins the cause not because of some high ideal but for love.

The narrator at once sees herself not only self-consciously as a product of that which this Leninist philosophy she quotes was fighting against, but also as a fighter against that which she embodies: "I was the innocent slave of bourgeois aesthetics, that always sees an elegiac charm in decay" (98). She, therefore, naturally accepts the misgivings the others have about her as she'd "been a rich girl" (103). She is less a terrorist than a mirror reflecting the image of one. The narrator can be compared to "sister-boy" (104), the transvestite. Like him, the narrator has taken on the appearance of something which she is not. She describes her life as a "triumph of will over instinct" (98), denoting a self-conscious quality in what she is doing. She is giving up herself to become a puppet.

Yet in the end she destroys X. When he begins to show weakness, the spell he has over her is broken: "But then I found you'd somewhere encountered an obstacle to indifference for now you were crying, though, when I asked why you were crying, you hit me" (101). X had been practising indifference all along. With this, Carter makes clear that not only the narrator is wearing a type of mask, but that X is also. Yet his mask is unable to protect him from what he feels is his calling. The narrator fell in

love with an image, a symbol, and not a real man. When he no longer represents the figure she desired, he no longer truly exists. After she participates in his execution and sinks into a feeling of despair, it is not sadness for the man that they have killed that she feels, but she claims that it is for the loss of an ideal.

The setting of the narrative is concentrated in the microcosmic world of the square, especially in the one particular apartment house in which the narrator is living. She, often indirectly through the second-person address, provides her ambiguous general narratee with a loving description of the other residents, especially the old landlord. He becomes simultaneously the symbols for resistance and resilience and also comes to represent the antithesis of what the group of revolutionaries think they believe. He comes, therefore, to serve as the object of X's fear and hate, making his murder inevitable.

It is difficult to place the time of this narrative, which is Carter's intention. Certain historical events and facts are mentioned that create the impression of a familiar picture in this fictional time. Yet instead of intending these hints in the text to pin down the time, Carter is offering intertexts for the reader to understand the ideological context of the narrative; she adds these theories only to undermine them through the immature narration of the 'I' persona: "He'd spent the Blitz in his house; it was his foxhole" (96). Carter thus characterises the figure of the landlord. This bit of information serves two distinct purposes. On the one hand, the reader is told that the action is taking place during the Second World War. This assumption would have at least partially made sense in that the setting is London during a war-like crisis.

It is well known that Carter experienced the post-war years outside of London with her grandmother, who was a strong personality and had a great effect on her.<sup>66</sup> It would therefore lie close at hand that Carter would deal with post-war and war images in her literature. Yet with the above quote she dismisses World War II if only as a specific time-frame. On the other hand, as the landlord is also still living, Carter creates a recent-history scenario which serves to diminish the distance between the narratee and the actual story.

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<sup>66</sup>Sage, *Angela Carter* 5. Angela Carter, "The Mother Lode", *Shaking a Leg* 3.

Carter also makes numerous references to the Bolshevik revolution. In the first reference, she calls up the image of the Tsars in Russia: "It hardly seemed possible the city could survive the summer. The sky opened like the clockwork Easter eggs the Tsars gave one another" (97). In referring to the Tsars and the famous Faberge eggs that serve as an example of their decadent lifestyle, Carter awakens the images of the time before the revolution which stand in stark contrast to the present depicted in the narrative. In a second example, the narrator herself makes a direct reference to Lenin: "I do not believe Lenin was right when he said there was no place for orgy in the revolution, even if I had read Lenin" (99). This statement is not only interesting in that it removes the timeframe of this narrative from the context of the actual revolution in Russia, but that it also contains an interesting contradiction. The narrator is at once quoting Lenin and denying having first-hand knowledge of his works.<sup>67</sup> Although this does not, by its nature, have to be a contradiction in the age of mass media or at least radio which is mentioned repeatedly in the story, it is, nevertheless, a contradiction of knowing.<sup>68</sup>

In the entire narrative, as well as in the collection *Fireworks* as a whole, Carter has been stressing the dangerous nature of half truths or, better yet, incomplete knowledge. In this brutal context of civil war and revolution, this theory of the damning effects that half knowledge has is all the more vital. In her statement, the narrator claims a partial knowledge, at least of the theories of Lenin. Yet she only picks and chooses, and is therefore not able to define completely for herself what her purpose is in this fight, much less truly define what it is about.

If one only reads this narrative superficially, it could be initially interpreted that Carter, in having her characters try to execute X, are in fact preventing the arbitrary killing that often results from the type of fanaticism fostered by the regimes to which she calls attention. It is too simple to say, though, that this group of people with letters for names are a type of noble revolutionary cell. Yet looking more closely, Carter never allows the characterisation of the members, or the narrator, much less

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<sup>67</sup>I am aware, here, of the discrepancy possible between my American English definition of 'read' as literally the act of reading i.e. a book and the British English possibility of reading meaning also to study as in a subject at the university.

<sup>68</sup>It is also an obvious stab at mass media and its part in defining truth.

their actions, to solidify, or to become strong enough to present such a coherent picture. The protagonists are looking for justice in a world where this term or ideal cannot possibly survive.

Within the numerous references to events and ideologies which form the intertextual basis for the story, the narrator expends a bit of effort in describing the landlord who, despite the fact that he is only a secondary character, personifies the impetus which causes the climax of the narrative. She begins his description in the vein of the communist ethos which she will repeatedly echo throughout the course of the narrative: "But our landlord – it was legal to own private property, to rent it out, in those days, refused to sell his house to the speculators who wanted to pull the entire terrace down" (96). He is a remnant of an earlier, decadent, perhaps capitalist era, while also, in his own small way, setting himself up against it. Nevertheless, he is also a product of war. The narrator describes his house as his "foxhole" (96). It is the place where he – as a type of soldier – was able to seek a type of refuge.

It should not be forgotten, though, that a foxhole is not only a refuge, as the term denotes, a fox's den or home, but is also used as a position out of which to attack. This aspect lends a menacing note to the characterisation of the house. It becomes clear shortly after, though, that it is not the old man who attacks from this house but the young "boys who lived in the basement [and] filled milk bottles with petrol in their back room and made explosives" (96). This also lends a bunker-like air to the building, another accrument of war. It is the figure X, who used the top floor of the building as a type of hunting high-stand from which to mime his sniper existence: "He sat with his rifle above the square at the window of my room" (97). Yet returning to the old man, this building, also in light of the other occupants, only offered him "a safety that, although it was fictive, he believed in completely" (96).

When continuing to observe the narrator's characterisation of this man and his subsequent murder, it is interesting to observe parallels to Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843). Carter not only emulates aspects of Poe's narrator's murder of 'the old man', but, in this story, she is also picking up on gothic aspects

which fit nicely into this modern apocalyptic narrative.<sup>69</sup>

A perpetual twilight dominated that house, with its characteristic odours of stale cooking, phantom bacon, lavatories and the cats who pissed in the hall. The bulbs on the stairways were always blown. It was an old, dark house; it was a cave. (101)

Though this is not a castle or mansion in the true spirit of the gothic tradition, Carter nevertheless takes advantage of the mood inspired by this mode to lend a mysterious, malevolent air to the story. Similarly to the old man in “The Tell-Tale Heart”, Carter’s landlord character is almost blind. While Poe’s killer decides to murder the old man in his ravings, because of the one blind, staring milky eye which disgusted him and drove him mad, Carter’s landlord is killed as a type of test; nevertheless, the reader is intended to keep Poe’s narrator’s madness in mind as a sub-text to the plot of the entire story. X, afraid that he will lose his nerve during the assassination they had planned, decides to practice on the landlord.

’I wasn’t sure, I wasn’t sure of myself. I kept thinking, what if I blow it? If I blow the whole thing, hadn’t been able to pull the trigger, and just stood there in the doorway staring vacantly at him. [...] ’What good did the landlord do to anyone? Sitting in his room, sucking in his rents. Nobody loves him. He’s significant to nobody. He’s hardly alive at all, he can’t talk, hardly, he’s almost blind, squatting like a toad on all that money. (103)

Just like Poe’s narrator, X works himself into a frenzied state in which the murder of the innocent man becomes a necessity. The murder scene itself is filled with desperate justifications. Carter’s landlord is also awakened before his murderer can strike and begs for mercy. While X, in contrast to Poe’s narrator, is not insane, per-se, Carter

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<sup>69</sup>While this narrative cannot be defined as gothic according to the proper definition that these narratives are “tales of mystery and horror, contain[ing] strong elements of the supernatural, [...] wild and desolate landscapes, dark forests, ruined abbeys, feudal halls and medieval castles, [...] a stupefying atmosphere of doom and gloom; heroes and heroines in the direst of imaginable straits [...] and a proper complement of spooky effects and clanking spectres [...],” nevertheless, Carter makes use of the Poe intertext to add this dimension to the tone of her narrative by association. “Gothic,” *Dictionary of Literary Terms* 356.



is nevertheless describing a world characterised by a type of general madness. The landlord becomes the innocent victim of this madness.

It is also the very fact of his innocence, leaving Poe's tale behind, which makes his murder, even in the context of this story, a crime. Within the histrionic nature of this system, the murder of an innocent, and perhaps even more so the fact that the murderer has allowed himself to show fear and doubts, makes the act a crime in a moral sense. Even this system of madness has its rules. The assassination of a politician has menacing overtones, as does the burning of a police station, yet a residual fear of harming the innocent remains in the narrator. X is a confusing and contradictory character, actually fitting perfectly into this theme. Carter sets him up as a contrast to the narrator and the other rag-tag characters. Within this disturbing scenario there is a gradation of madness. This in itself contains a typical Carter criticism. There is a method to the madness. The reader tends to sympathise with the remaining characters as they seem to uphold the rules to which they bind themselves.

Yet when examining the very nature of this narrative, the narrator's response to her lover's actions and the surrounding situation, as well as Carter's choice of title, it should become clear that Carter is, once again, blurring clear definitions. The title itself, "Elegy for a freelance", suggests a certain feeling of sadness. According to the traditional definition of an Elegy, it is "an elaborately formal lyric poem lamenting the death of a friend or public figure, or reflecting seriously on a solemn subject."<sup>70</sup> This, also seen in the context of the narrator's focus of her speech toward the dead X, and her words, "I am glad you died before the barricades went up" (105), suggest a true sense of loss. It is important, though to look at the last quotation in a slightly larger context. The narrator continues by saying, "we served our time and took our punishment upon them but I would not have liked to have you beside me with a machine-gun because you were your own hero, always your own hero, and would not have taken orders easily" (105).

Coming through this sense of sadness and loss is a more differentiated definition of

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<sup>70</sup>"Elegy", *Dictionary of Literary Terms* 66.

the nature of the narrator's feelings. X had betrayed the cause by placing his own importance at its centre. In casting light on the fine stratification existent within this madness, part of Carter's criticism is also focused on the narrator and the other cell members. A world unconsciously trapped within its own definitions has no sympathy with a figure who sets himself apart. X is a freelance among freelancers: "That was the time of the freelance assassins; our cell was self-sufficient and took no orders nor cognisance of any other cell in the cancerous growth of the deathwardly inclining city" (101).

The construction of the very term out of the word free is a contradiction in the context of Carter's subject matter. Obviously, X is not free to choose his actions; he has trapped himself within a definition of his own making. The description of his actions demonstrate this: "What if I can't kill when I want to kill and am in the right to kill? What if I were paralysed? What if I'd spent so long looking at people through the sights of the rifle and holding back from shooting that I could never shoot? Fear I'd be weak shook me" (103). The utterly contradictory character of his statement comes close to the point Carter is attempting to make. X has defined himself as someone who can, wants and has the right to kill. He becomes aware, shortly before he is to carry out this destiny for the first time, that things are not as clear cut as he believes them to be. In his despair over his own self-doubts, he convinces himself of the necessity of killing the old man in order to test himself before his real trial under fire.

Lastly, Carter does not specify whether or not X is tried and executed for the murder itself or for the fact that this murder constituted self-doubt or constituted a lack of conviction for the cause: "We had intended to be such philosophic assassins! But what were your existential credentials when you murdered the landlord? Was it the dress rehearsal for an assassination or the audition of an assassin?" (102). X had broken with the philosophy which gave meaning to this scenario bordering on madness: "Our complicity with him was over once he had acted only for himself and by himself and now we could stand apart from him and, in judging him, judge ourselves" (105).<sup>71</sup> Though the other characters attempt to justify their execution

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<sup>71</sup>Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology* 226.

of X, they are perhaps only semi-consciously experiencing the disintegration of their group. A, who's girlfriend has just had a baby, wants to leave for the Welsh mountains in order to lead a cleaner and more peaceful life. C and the narrator did "not know what to do, now, nor what to think. We felt nothing but a lapse of feeling, a dulled heaviness, a despair" (107).

B, on the other hand, wants them all to turn themselves in to the police and admit to their deed. In his skewed view of reality, he is completely convinced that what they have done is right. It is interesting to note the double nature of B's desire. On the one hand, he belongs to a group which makes bombs, while on the other hand it seems he accepts a certain authority from the police. When examining this more closely, however, the reader can observe a martyr mentality in B's actions: "He wanted us to go to the police, make a clean breast of all and take our punishment, since we had done nothing of which we ourselves were ashamed" (107). B takes on the character of a saint who, convinced of doing right, is willing to suffer the punishment of the oppressor to strengthen this vision.

At the end of the narrative, the full scale civil war begins. What X could not carry out as an individual will be taken care of by the mass which remains. "All the time we had been plotting, the generals had been plotting and we had known nothing. Nothing!" (107). What has seemed like a small cosmos, containing all there is to know, is really a small part of an entire world. The description of the old landlord echoes this idea: "His room was his world, his house the unknown universe he knew of but never ventured into. Everything else was unknowable" (96). At the end, this little cell which had thought itself so significant, is swallowed by the mass.

Carter ends this narrative with the enigmatic words: "History began" (107). She often makes her endings rather ambiguous and difficult to interpret. "Elegy for a Freelance" is no exception. She is suggesting that the reader must define for him/herself what history means. It is a means by which we define ourselves and our actions, often a self-fulfilling prophecy. One great hope is that mankind will one day learn from history and change the future. In this case history is a large scale version of what is constantly occurring on a small scale.

The choice of autodiegetic narration is suitable for this story. In light of the apocalyptic theme where constructs are being continually re-defined according to whom has power, Carter is able to create a narrator who embodies the struggle to find identity. In having her tell her own story, the author is able to subtly show the problematic nature of ideology, the gaps where the individual will fill in her own interpretation. This is emphasised by the inclusion of the ambiguous we of the commissar and of the larger revolution which must be seen to be the motivation for the manner in which the narrative is told and for what is included.

## 1.4 “Our Lady of the Massacre”

“Our Lady of the Massacre” is the third narrative in the collection *Black Venus*. It is also one of only two purely autodiegetic stories in this collection.<sup>72</sup> This story is told in the tradition of Daniel Defoe’s novel, *Moll Flanders*, and mimics its picaresque style. Carter obviously had a certain regard for Daniel Defoe, as this is the second story in which she re-writes the text or sub-text of one of his novels.<sup>73</sup> Lorna Sage describes the story as “a first-person adventure Defoe forgot to write up – a Moll Flanders among the Indians.”<sup>74</sup> A second possible source could be *Polly*, the sequel to John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728).<sup>75</sup> Angela Carter picks up on the criticism of society contained in Defoe’s and Gay’s writing and re-writes it from a 20<sup>th</sup> century point-of-view.

When one takes a close look at this particular narrative in the context of all the narratives in the collection, the question of Carter’s intention must be raised. Each of the stories takes an existing ‘plot’ and re-examines and widens it to offer new

<sup>72</sup>“The Kitchen Child” (292-9) is the other.

<sup>73</sup>“Master” (75-80) is the first of these.

<sup>74</sup>Sage, *Angela Carter* 45.

<sup>75</sup>Polly was suppressed until 1777 due to its harsh political satire. Carter writes in her 1977 article, “That Arizona Home” that, “It’s a little known literary fact that Polly Peachum, bigamous wife of Captain Macheath, finally pledged herself to an American Indian after she had followed Macheath to Virginia, whence he had been transported. All this is in *Polly*, Gay’s sequel to *The Beggar’s Opera*. Gay’s Indians are positive paragons of good sense and morality, never losing a chance to score off Whitey” (cf. *Shaking a Leg* 278).

perspectives. In the case of this particular narrative, Daniel Defoe's original story already goes far in attempting to portray Moll Flanders fairly while Gay's *Polly* is revolutionary in her choice of an Indian as husband. Carter does choose to change some aspects of the original plots and to condense the material to fit into the short story format. She nevertheless does not truly add anything dramatically new. Defoe's text is criticised for its obvious authorial intrusion, yet, Carter's re-writing seems to avoid this and takes upon itself to make clear judgmental remarks about society's ills in the narrator's own voice. It is obvious that Carter does not feel restrained by the same type of constraints that Defoe had to deal with.

Franz Stanzel writes about Defoe's novel:

So erwecken z.B. zahlreiche Kommentare der moralisch gewandelten Moll Flanders zur Geschichte ihres früheren Lebens als Diebin, Dirne und Bigamistin den Eindruck, als hätte Defoe hier das erlebende Ich der Moll Flanders zusammen mit den Reflexionen eines fremden auktorialen Ich in das Joch einer einzigen Person gespannt.<sup>76</sup>

Defoe was forced to intensify the sense of distancing by endowing the narrating 'I' with an authorial voice. As Stanzel goes on to state that "die Geschichte des quasi-autobiographischen Ich-Romans ist die Geschichte der immer überzeugenderen psychologischen Integration von erlebendem und erzählendem Ich"<sup>77</sup>, it could be argued that Carter has perhaps unconsciously incorporated this development into her narrative as there is no overt authorial voice discernible.

Sal, the narrating 'I', claims for herself at the end of the narrative that she has been changed irrevocably by the Indians. She finds herself unable to adapt herself to being back in her Western context and unable to slip back into her own definitions. She has experienced experience as experience and it has added to who she is. The narrative opens with a present tense comment by the narrating 'I' as to her own identity. In this she distinctly distances herself from the experiencing 'I'. Yet I believe that this is only a device intended to lead the narratee to believe that she rejects the self that

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<sup>76</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 272.

<sup>77</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 272.

she was. Her experiences among the Indians have changed her to the extent that she does not feel the need to apologise for her previous life. This opening mirrors that of Defoe's novel, yet, as Moll Flanders did not experience a radically different society and its more liberal ideologies as did Sal, her motivations for hiding her true name are different. Moll is afraid of implicating others in her story if her true identity were known and she wishes to distance herself from her former life for moral reasons.<sup>78</sup> Sal, on the other hand, no longer feels defined by her former life as her experiences have negated the definitions it applied to her.

The story-line is simple. Beginning in much the same fashion as *Moll Flanders*, "Our Lady of the Massacre" begins with Sal being orphaned, by the plague this time, and coming to live with an old woman for whom she does the sewing. This woman is a Catholic and is interested in astrology. She prophesies a glorious future for Sal, yet already tinged with an illicit quality, as both Catholicism and astrology are looked down upon and punishable. Yet far from glorious, after the old woman's death Sal becomes a prostitute. Too greedy, she also begins to steal and upon being caught is transported to the American colonies as an indentured servant. When the overseer of the plantation she works on tries to rape her, she cuts off his ears and flees with the help of a black slave.

In the forest, she meets up with a tribe of Indians who adopts her. The story takes an almost ironic 'bourgeois' turn when Sal marries one of the Indian warriors and gives birth to a son. The 'civilised' world intrudes, though, in the form of a pocket watch which Sal gives to her husband, and soon, after her tribe is massacred by the white man as is already alluded to in the title. Sal and her son are then taken in by a minister and his wife, where she is once again thrust into the white Eurocentric world that had always harshly judged her as a thief and a whore, and has now added to this list the mother of a half-breed boy. They try to re-assimilate her into this 'better' life by marrying her off to an appropriate man while the minister's wife is willing to keep the little boy. The narrative ends with Sal refusing to go along with this and accepting that her existence is filled with tears.

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<sup>78</sup>Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, ed. and intro. G.A. Starr (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971) 7.

Carter does offer a clear criticism of religious ideology. It could even be posited that these Christian aspects are the crux of this story. Not only is Sal constantly conscious of her Christian upbringing and the myth foretold for her by her first ‘mother’, but on a certain level she is aware of the disparities between the faith taught her and the world that supposedly lives this faith. Carter is not arguing for the somewhat idyllically portrayed system of morality espoused by the Indians with which Sal comes to live. This can be blatantly seen in her honest portrayal of these people. Yet by removing Sal from her own context, allows her to see herself in a manner which parallels the autodiegetic structure of the narrative. She is able to see herself from a distance, from a different point-of-view, and re-evaluate who she is.

With her choice of a name as title of the narrative, Carter immediately draws the reader into a pseudo-religious context. This must be seen, though, together with the important theme of naming which Carter scatters throughout this narrative. This is also touched upon, if more indirectly, in “Black Venus”, in that, historically seen, the protagonist also often used different names (237). Depending on the situation and the point in time in Sal’s life, her name changes to suit. While Carter does not go into detail on this point for Jeanne Duval, the parallel characterisations of whom seem to suggest a chameleon-like nature born out of necessity. Just as Jeanne Duval is that which the current man wishes, Sal is given by society, or chooses, a name to fit her current situation.

She begins her narrative by describing the enigma of her names:

My name is neither here nor there since I used several in the Old World that I *may* not speak of *now*; then there is my, as it were, **wilderness** name, that *now* I *never* speak of; and, *now*, what I call myself in **this** place, therefore my name is no clue as to my person nor my life as to my nature (249, emphasis in bold Carter, emphasis in italics mine).

This statement is interesting for several reasons. On the one hand, it gives a short rendition of her history of which she is obviously conscious, and on the other hand,

it provides the reader with an interesting context from which to view the narrative that follows. The overt use of the words *may*, *now* and *never* should be paid close attention to. Though this point should almost be too obvious to merit a closer look, it is, nevertheless, imperative to the reading of this narrative that the audience is aware of the context in which it is told. The tale is told in a slightly ambiguous temporal 'now', defined by the bitter tone of the text's last paragraphs. Sal, or Mary as she names herself at the end, has come almost full-circle from her beginnings. Her 'telling' of her story shows an interesting repetition of events only changed slightly by the culture or circumstances in which she currently finds herself. She *may* not speak *now* of her past in England, and she *never* speaks *now* of her life with the Indians. There is a difference which must be noted in her emphasis on these two experiences. The *may* denotes the authoritarian character of not only her life in England but also of her English life in the colonies. The tone in her choice of words for her Indian experience demonstrates a freedom of will.

When moving beyond this to take a look at the end of the above quotation in the context of the beginning, it becomes clear that the narrator does not completely identify with any of the worlds in which she has existed. She can be none of the people with whom she has come into contact. She seems to be a 'thinking' Jeanne Duval, who reflects her situation and sees the discrepancies instead of only feeling a vague unease. Each experience has altered Sal to the extent that she carries around remnants of each but does not embody any one completely. She is now neither identified nor defined by her name, nor can the reader draw any concrete conclusions about her from the facts about her life she provides. She is giving her Moll Flanders-like character a voice other than Daniel Defoe's which addressed the expectations of his particular audience.

Sal directly addresses her narratee and thereby defines it. Upon meeting the Indians, Sal states;

So I goes with her to the Indian town and in this way, no other, was I 'taken' by 'em although the Minister would have it otherwise, that they took me with violence, against my will, haling me by the hair, and if he wishes to believe it, then let 'im. (252)



At the end of the narrative, Sal once again makes mention of the Minister, speaking as the narrating 'I' in these instances. The narratee she addresses is one that is sympathetic toward her plight. Toward the middle of the narrative, Sal directly addresses this narratee again: "My young son we named what would be, in English, *Little Shooting Star*, and you may laugh at it, but it is a name fine men have carried" (257). This statement does not emphasise the religious disgust the later character of the Minister has at this name, nor does this comment exclude the narratee from a certain sense of understanding toward her life. The audience addressed belongs neither to the English society from which she stems (the workhouse, prostitution milieu) nor from the Indian society by which she is taken up, but one to whom she appeals and perhaps from which she expects understanding.

The last portion of Sal's first statement at the opening of the story is difficult to interpret. If her life does not give any clues as to her nature, then what, ultimately, would the purpose of her narrative be? This could also be seen as a type of disclaimer on Carter's part. With this statement she, as the author, calls attention to the fact that this narrative is yet another writing of someone's life, another intrusion of, this time, a self-conscious authorial 'I'. This type of autobiographical portrayal, especially in light of its fictive nature, cannot help but be utterly subjective. With this, then, one could argue that Carter saves herself from the criticism to which I called attention about merely adding another layer of subjective interpretation to this already much maligned character. She is, self-consciously, leaving the possibility of an unwritten narrative open to her protagonist.

The protagonist narrator begins the narrative of her history with her birth and childhood. Far from merely mirroring Defoe's plot, Carter also calls up associations to Charles Dickens' classic novel, *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839). In respect to naming, this novel, similarly to Carter's short narrative and Defoe's novel, makes the point that the naming was done by chance. Moll's friends knew her by this name, though, it was not her own; Oliver was given his by the chance that the letter 'O' was the next in line, and Carter's protagonist is often referred to as 'Sal', a name as anonymous as the 'Joe' often used as the general informal address for a man. This process of

naming can also be said to be reminiscent of Robinson Crusoe's naming of his black companion Friday, more or less arbitrarily as it was the day of the week Robinson met him.

Like the characters of classical literature already alluded to, Sal begins her life in the workhouse, in other words, "put on the parish" (248). Though this period in her life is practically idyllic in comparison to the hardships which befall her later, it is, nevertheless, during this time that she is introduced to a system of beliefs which will affect not only how she approaches and sees her life, but also herself. She is given a fatalistic view of what is to come which she will be unable to completely shake off in her later years:

This old woman, [...] her father [...] left her a great telescope with which she used to view the heavens from her roof [...]. She often let me have a squint at the stars, too, for I was her only companion and she learned me my letters, as you can see, and would have taught me all she knew herself, had she not, as soon as I come to her, cast my *horoscope* for me [...]. (248)

The old lady twists certain historical facts to suit her purposes: "For, she says, that country are beyond the sea is named *Virginia*, after the virgin mother of God Almighty, and its rivers flow directly from Eden [...]" (249). It was, in fact, the later state of Maryland that became the refuge for exiled Catholics and was named for the virgin Mary. Virginia was so named in honour of Queen Elizabeth I. During Elizabethan times, all unmarried women were politely assumed to be virgins. The old woman creates her own mythical reality in order to live her religion. The new world offers a remote place suited perfectly to the manifestation of dreams and fantasies. Sal is to become the new mother of God: "That the stars, whom she had consulted on behalf of her dear child, as she pleased to call me, assured her that I would take a long voyage over the Ocean to the *New World* and there bear a blessed babe whose father's fathers never sailed in Noah's Ark" (248).

The irony lies in the fact that this prophecy comes to pass, but in ways which the old woman could never have fathomed. It is in this context that the protagonist

receives her first name, which echoes the ironic name she gives herself at the end of the narrative: “the stars foretold I should grow up to be nowt less than Our Lady of the Red Men” (249). All of these proud dreams, which Sal does not share, are shattered when the old woman dies. With this, Sal is forced to enter the much less heroic life of a prostitute. She does this, though, with a self-consciousness found throughout the narrative: “Now, had I been content with honest whoring, no doubt I would be dressed in silk riding my coach in Cheapside still and never eat the bitter bread of exile” (249).

Sal must once again fight to survive in a system where she is nothing. The old woman, in her creation of a myth for this girl, had attempted to find for her a role which carried positive connotations in a world where women were either objects of sin or of adoration. Just as the old woman feared to be accused of witchcraft for her knowledge of the stars, Sal would have to be pure Mary or suffer the lot of an unredeemed Mary Magdalene. In this society the ideal role was not even a remote possibility, whatever the old woman may have prophesied. After lopping off the ears of her would-be rapist, Sal is forced to flee into the wilderness to escape the hangman’s noose. She is helped in this by another character, the second in this narrative who is set apart from the old and new world population of conquerors and masters: “The gardener being a good-natured kind of Negro man and a slave, hisself, and hisself tickled once too often by the overseer’s whip, cannot forbear to laugh [...]” (250). Carter has created two sets of people, one in collusion with those in power, and one not.<sup>79</sup> By having the slave help Sal, Carter has placed the latter firmly in the category of those who are not in power. She, herself, is a type of slave, not only in her status as an indentured servant, but also to the inescapable realities for her as a woman in this world. It is a necessity for Sal to escape this construct in order to alter her view of herself.

Once she has escaped, she reverts to a type of self-sufficiency. She begins to believe that she can survive on her own, apart from a world in which she must revert to

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<sup>79</sup>Ironically, at the end of the narrative, this slave gardener is mentioned again as the propagator of the myth that the Indians killed the overseer and kidnapped Sal. It seems only proper that Carter would choose to add a bit about myth making here. In this case myths are not the tool of the powerful but of the powerless. The slave gardener took advantage of the situation with Sal and murdered the overseer as revenge for past injustices. “I think to myself, how the gardener must have settled a score on his own account, good luck to him [...]” (261).

prostitution, thievery and violence to survive:

my nostrils were too full of the stink of humanity to relish a quick return to the world in some bordello in *Florida*. But I thought that I should travel on a little more, for safety's sake, into the deep wilderness, so that no hunting party might find me and return me to the noose. Of which I had a very powerful fear and, I may tell you, more dread of the *white man*, which I knew, than of the *red man*, who was at that time unknown to me. (251)

Her narrative has turned the tables on set thought patterns. Instead of fearing the wild, she fears civilisation as she has known it.

When she meets the Indians for the first time, the narrative takes on an idyllic, too-good-to-be-true quality. The descriptions of the 'Indian' morality here are vital to the story. Sal enters a truly 'new' world in their culture. She introduces her first meeting with the character whom she will herself call her Indian mother by comparing the situation with one with which she is familiar in England: "I never think twice about it but step across to pick up the spilled herbs for her as if I was back in Cheapside and run to help some fruit-seller that overturns her basket of apples" (252). This is only one example of what will be able to be recognisable as symptomatic of Sal's experience with this tribe. Carter includes numerous examples of the fact that the narrator protagonist is unable to completely leave behind her former experiences. At this point it is interesting to note that that for which Carter harshly criticised the character of Jeanne Duval in "Black Venus", does not seem to be problematic in this narrative.

While it is important to keep in mind that this narrative is autodiegetic, thus told with a certain narrative distance between the experiencing 'I' and the narrating 'I', the narrator nonetheless seems to be aware of her experiences. While the first-person narrator of "Flesh in the Mirror" complains of herself that "it was as if I never experienced experience *as* experience" (69) and the narrator criticises Jeanne Duval, in "Black Venus" for the fact that "she never experienced her experience *as* experience [...]" (231), Sal seems to be conscious of her experience as experience. This once

again makes the effects of autodiegetic narration clear, as the distance between the experiencing and narrating 'I' mirrors Carter's emphasis on experiencing experience as experience. It is important to keep in mind, though, that Sal argues that her life does not illustrate her nature. One could read this in a similar vein to the claim by the narrator that Jeanne Duval's experience "never added to the sum of her knowledge; rather, subtracted from it" (231).

Sal's narrative demonstrates, though, that this hypothesis does not hold true for her. This is especially clear in her description of her life with the Indians. She repeatedly confronts her Indian mother with the definition of herself according to English standards. The system of values here is so dramatically different that Sal finally decides to remain with these people despite originally having considered setting forth again toward her original destination of Florida. She also comes to realise, in living the myth presented to her as a child by her first 'mother', that this myth cannot continue to exist in the face of reality. Sal does not see these people as the lost tribe of Israel or something holy or pure.

While being happy or contented about their free acceptance of her, she nevertheless acknowledges the shortcomings of this system. Much of the characterisation of the Indian tribe can be found in Angela Carter's article, "That Arizona Home", which was published two years prior to "Our Lady of the Massacre".<sup>80</sup> In it she quotes Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family*(year) and utilises much of this to formulate the Indian tribe in the narrative:

'No soldiers, no gendarmes or police, no nobles, kings, regents, prefects, or judges, no prisons, or lawsuits – and everything takes its orderly course. There cannot be any poor or needy – the communal household and the gens know their responsibilities towards the old, the sick and those disabled in war. All are equal and free – the women included.'<sup>81</sup>

Lest one believe that Carter agrees with this opinion, she writes, "The red man must often have been surprised to find himself used as a moral example, a kind of super-ego, for Whitey."<sup>82</sup> Thus, for Sal, one hierarchy has been replaced by another, on

<sup>80</sup>Carter, "That Arizona Home", *Shaking A Leg* 277.

<sup>81</sup>Carter, "That Arizona Home" 277.

<sup>82</sup>Carter, "That Arizona Home" 278.

the surface less threatening than the one from which she stems: “And if I have one quarrel with my tribe, it is that the men will have nothing to do with this *agriculture*, although it is heavy work, but go fishing in the creek or chase deer or engage in dances and such silly performances and they say will make the corn grow.” (254)

Yet the manner in which the Indian mother explains the women’s manner of circumventing this, even for them accepted disadvantage, shows another dramatic difference in the two cultures. Sal is very much against sharing her new husband with other wives, though more hands would lighten the work load and insists on marrying him according to her own tradition. Her Indian mother explains their tradition in a similar vein to the Indian philosophy of sharing. Sal is unable, though this philosophy has redefined her, as she states later as “a good woman...” (261), to distance herself to this extreme from her Western Christian roots. The irony in this lies in the fact that, while upholding what she considers to be the tenets of her world, she is nevertheless trespassing upon them in the very fact of her living with, marrying and bearing the child of a ‘savage’.

Her idyllic life is soon at an end. Upon giving her Indian husband a pocket watch reminiscent of the one that was at the root of her transportation to the colonies, disaster descends on her Indian tribe:

But his gold watch I wound up and give my husband in remembrance of the one I robbed the alderman of. [...]. Just then it rang the hours of twelve... and he screeches [sic] out... and my husband, poor, superstitious savage that he was... said the watch was ‘bad medicine’ and boded ill. So he went off and got drunk with the rest. [...]. just before sun-up next day the soldiers came on horseback. (258-9)

Carter demonstrates in this entire episode in Sal’s life the inevitable clash of two foreign cultures. In this case, as historically proven, the winner is once again the white man. It is in this last portion that the seemingly idyllic quality of the narrative thus far is undermined. The reader sees a protagonist who has learned to survive. Sal, in a subtle manner, once again takes up the outward attributes of what is expected of her in her old world: “Taking my cue from his, I fall to my knees, for I see that

repentance is the fashion in these parts and the more of it I show, the better it will be for me" (260).

At the end it seems that the narrating 'I' discovers her strength, as she refuses to marry the man 'they' choose for her and she will not give her child to the minister's wife. The narrator often demonstrates a sense of humour and self-irony when characterising/narrating her past life. The strength she has gained by the end of the narrative, the growth in the character expected from this type of narration is demonstrated in the tolerance she shows towards herself and her own story. Irrevocably changed, she faces the consequences of a refusal to re-integrate herself into her parent society:

So I scrubbed the Minister's floor, cooked the dinner, washed the clothes and for all the Minister swears they've come to build the *City of God* in the *New World*, I was the same skivvy as I'd been in Lancashire and no openings for a whore in the *Community of the Saints*, either if I could have found in my heart the least desire to take up my old trade again. But that I could not; the Indians had damned me for a good woman once and for all. (261)<sup>83</sup>

Through this choice of point-of-view, Carter is able to create a strong female character. Sal does not feel the need to apologise for her life. She has learned acceptance by stepping out of her own context for a while, though the Indian context, as I have argued, is not meant as an ideal, it removes Sal far enough from that which has defined her that she is able to re-evaluate herself and recognise within herself where her own limits are (bigamy). She is not an entirely positive character, yet these negative traits are not what defines her as she chooses to define herself.

It is this changed persona who colours the entire narrative. She has been affected by the positive teachings of the Indians to the extent that the narrative is in no way judgmental. While she does make comments as to what she has done wrong in the past, the tone remains at the most wistful. This causes a great reduction in distance as the narrating 'I' filters all the action through this lens. While the information given may not be altered, the tone is consistently positive.

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<sup>83</sup>Carter's irony here is biting in her reference to Augustine.

Though Defoe's novel could be said to present Moll Flanders in a somewhat fairer light in which his predecessors or contemporaries would have described such a character, nevertheless, he still must have Moll repent and begin a new and better life at the end. For Carter's Sal, on the other hand, at the end there are only tears "by the waters of Babylon" (261). It would be very unlike Carter to give her narrative such a Defoe-like moralistic and happy ending.

While this ending, in its sadness, would seem to contradict what I have been arguing, that Sal is not judgmental toward her experiencing self, the sadness is not meant to suggest regret but resignation. This emphasis is crucial to the criticism inherent in Carter's choice of portrayal. By choosing to lessen the distance between the narrating and experiencing figures, by virtually eliminating the criticism, Carter is able to create a more subtly expressed juxtaposition of how Sal defines herself and how she is defined by others.



## Chapter 2

# Experimenting With the Narrative 'We'

In this chapter,<sup>1</sup> I will discuss the specific phenomenon of the first-person plural narrator, the *we* instead of 'I' narrator, or a type of, as Uri Margolin terms them, "collective narrative agents"<sup>2</sup>, which occur in two of Angela Carter's short stories: "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter" in *Fireworks* and "Lizzie's Tiger" in *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders*.

Monika Fludernik titled her section dealing with the *we* narrator, "'Odd' pronouns [...]", in her book titled *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* published in 1996. Wayne Booth also mentions the use of the pronoun *we*, along with the more typical 'I' in his discussion of dramatised narrators, citing an example from Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, yet he goes into no detail as to the possible consequences.<sup>3</sup> Franz K. Stanzel also mentions Flaubert's novel in the context of his discussion of Thackeray's novel, *Vanity Fair* (1848), mentioning the widespread use of collective pronouns in 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This chapter is a revised version of a paper I read at the *Tale, Novella, Short Story: Currents in Short Fiction* Conference in Salzburg, 1-4 November 2001. "Here we are high in the uplands': Experimentation with the Narrative 'We' in Angela Carter's Short Fiction". *Tale, Novella, Short Story: Currents in Short Fiction*, Ed. Wolfgang Görtschacher and Holger Klein (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2004) 217-28.

<sup>2</sup>Uri Margolin, "Telling in the Plural: From Grammar to Ideology," *Poetics Today*, 21:3 (Fall 2000) 591-618.

<sup>3</sup>Booth, "Distance and Point of View" 122.

Century novels. He, similarly to Wayne Booth, does not ascribe a further significance to this phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

The most comprehensive studies of the first-person plural narrator to date have been done by Uri Margolin in his essays entitled, "Telling our story: on we literary narratives"(1996), already introduced in Fludernik's *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*, and "Telling in the Plural: From Grammar to Ideology"(2000). While these two articles mark the first true steps toward a study of this type of narration, they nevertheless still do not deal effectively with the phenomenon of the homodiegetic extradiegetic narrator or, as defined by Stanzel, the external perspective.<sup>5</sup> Margolin, in his 1996 essay, goes into great detail on *we* narrators who are for the most part in some way anchored in the narrative itself, and in his 2000 essay, he thoroughly discusses collective narratives (CN) and collective narrative agents (CNA), yet only really dealing with subject of the narrating agent who stands wholly outside of the narrative itself on a surface level. He writes in his 1996 essay:

There are some 'we' narratives in which the collectivity in question acts primarily as witness, observer or mediating instance of the narrated system rather than as its main agent. Several of [...] [these] stories [...] fall into the first, homodiegetic category, where the group is sometimes unspecified as to number and only vaguely characterised as a group [...] observing actions, both verbal and physical, in which they play no part at all, or at most a marginal one.<sup>6</sup>

While this demonstrates that Margolin is aware of the extradiegetic narrator, he seems to find no examples in literature which would come close to characterising Angela Carter's manipulation of this figure.

Uri Margolin, in his 1996 essay on *we* literary narratives, asks the question of "why

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 260.

<sup>5</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 150. While Stanzel does argue that „Außenperspektive herrscht vor, wenn der Standpunkt, von dem aus die erzählte Welt wahrgenommen oder dargestellt wird, außerhalb der Hauptfigur oder an der Peripherie des Geschehens liegt“, he is discussing this in the context of first-person singular narrators.

<sup>6</sup>Uri Margolin, "Telling Our Story: On 'We' Literary Narratives", *Language and Literature*, 5(2), (1996) 121-3.

are literary 'we' narratives so rare [...]."<sup>7</sup> Monika Fludernik, in her 1996 *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*, published shortly before Margolin's essay, states that full length *we* novels are a rare exception, citing only one example, but also states that there are a number of narratives which alternate between the singular and plural pronouns.<sup>8</sup> Margolin also emphasises that non-literary *we* texts are quite common, and points out that such literary texts do also exist. The collective narrative agent is often not foregrounded, yet there are still "a good number of narratives, from short stories to novels, whose main protagonist is a collectivity of some kind [...]."<sup>9</sup>

Earlier texts of narratological theory do not deal with this issue, as they do not feel the need to make the theoretical distinctions that Margolin is outlining in his study. This seems to lead to the conclusion that the use of the first-person plural pronoun is confined to such a small sphere that it has not yet merited extensive study. The crux of the issue between older narratological examinations and Margolin's study is that he is looking for pure collective narratives. Narratology prior to this was not and did not necessarily see a problem in pronoun alternation, thus widening the scope of the *we* narrative. This will be shown more clearly later in passages quoted from Stanzel.

The problem with this type of narration is that, as Fludernik argues, "In most cases the *we* text represents an extended first-person narrative [...]."<sup>10</sup> Stanzel also equates the use of the *we*, especially in the chapter headings of earlier novels, with a rather unremarkable authorial narrative situation<sup>11</sup>, thus third-person narration. The *we* narrator has been subsumed into the discussion of first or third-person narrators. If Stanzel's discussion of this phenomenon is taken into account and placed in opposition to Margolin's claim that *we* literary narratives are rare, it can be argued that the occurrence of this pronoun is not at all rare, but that Margolin has narrowed the category to the point that it becomes difficult to find appropriate texts. Yet a closer

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<sup>7</sup>Margolin, "Telling Our Story" 132. Margolin's essay constitutes the first attempt that I know of to theorise this narratological phenomenon as a separate theoretical entity. Monika Fludernik also cites his essay as the first to deal with the subject in her study *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (397 n6.).

<sup>8</sup>Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology* 224.

<sup>9</sup>Margolin, "Telling Our Story" 593.

<sup>10</sup>Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology* 224.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 208.

look must be taken at how Margolin defines such narratives and to what degree the occurrence of the first-person plural pronoun defines such a text as a *we* narrative.

When going back to Monika Fludernik's claim that entire *we* narratives are a rarity, one could posit that the use of first-person plural narration is, to a higher degree, deliberate and its intention is to serve as a marker for meaning in the text is stronger than in more traditional and straightforward modes of narration. For the most part, it is not utilised as a continuous perspective. Uri Margolin writes; "They [...] include passages in the 'I', 'you', or 'he or she' mode."<sup>12</sup> The sporadic use of the pronoun easily leads the narratives in question to be defined as relatively straightforward first- or third-person texts, overlooking the fact that the text could also be defined as a collective narrative or as having a collective narrating agent.

In order to be able to demonstrate this, though, it is necessary to summarise the narratological material dealing with this phenomenon. What is particularly true about the pioneer texts on narratology is the fact that the use of the *we* is not overtly discussed in any real detail, but what one could, especially after Uri Margolin's 1996 and 2000 essays, define its characteristics as having to be filtered out from larger categories. In his discussion of the authorial first-person narrative situation, Franz K. Stanzel writes about the occurrence of the inclusive *our*, implying a *we* collective:

Eine solche vorübergehende, meist auch nicht weiter ausgeführte Lokalisierung des Standortes des auktorialen Erzählers in der Welt der Charaktere ist eine im 19. Jahrhundert weit verbreitete Erzählkonvention, sie findet sich bei Dickens, George Eliot, Trollope, Jean Paul, Wilhelm Raabe, aber auch bei Flaubert [...].<sup>13</sup>

The temporary nature of this phenomenon in the text suggests its negligibility, yet it can be inferred from Stanzel that the occurrence of such an authorial narrator within the fictional world of the characters constitutes an effective means of controlling the reader's sympathy.<sup>14</sup> This raises questions of narrator reliability and calls the entire

<sup>12</sup>Margolin, "Telling Our Story" 115.

<sup>13</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 259-60.

<sup>14</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 173.

story into question. I will demonstrate that this is important to the understanding of "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter" in particular. Stanzel leaves the boundaries between authorial narration and first-person narration open.<sup>15</sup> Fludernik underscores Stanzel's point about the manipulative quality of such a narrator or narration in that she also points out that the *we* is often found in portions of the text which serve the purpose of orientation or present comments by the narrator.<sup>16</sup>

Aspects of this *we* narrator can also be found in Stanzel's discussion of the peripheral first-person narrator. Accordingly, this persona is an eyewitness to events, an observer who stands at the periphery and in no way participates in the action.<sup>17</sup> In a point which will later be pivotal in my analysis of Carter's *we* narratives, Stanzel continues, that

Die wichtigste Funktion des peripheren Ich-Erzählers ist die Mediatisierung des Erzählten, d.h. das Gattungsspezifikum Mittelbarkeit [...] wird hier durch die Erzählsituation besonders nachdrücklich thematisiert: nicht wie die Hauptfigur und ihre Welt an sich sind, sondern wie sie von einem aus einiger Entfernung schauenden, fühlenden, bewertenden Erzähler wahrgenommen werden [...].<sup>18</sup>

This *we* narrator must therefore be examined as to his subjective nature.

Carter's three collections of short fiction have seven stories in which one can find some use of *we* by the narrator. In only two of these narratives, though, does this *we* constitute some type of collective narrative agent according to Margolin's definition. He defines this collective narrative agent as "a group of two or more individuals represented as a singular higher order entity or agent, a collective individual so to speak, with global properties or actions."<sup>19</sup> "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter" and "Lizzie's Tiger" are two good examples. The first utilises the older tradition, echoing the use of the pronoun as found in non-literary narratives and as has been defined by theorists such as Stanzel. The manufactured scientific distanced view

<sup>15</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 259.

<sup>16</sup>Fludernik, 'Natural' *Narratology* 224.

<sup>17</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 263.

<sup>18</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 263.

<sup>19</sup>Margolin, "Telling in the Plural" 592.

fulfils a specific purpose. The *we* narrator and group may claim to be present at certain events of the story, yet the identity of the group is left ambiguous enough to leave open the possibility that the narratee is being addressed as well by a narrator standing outside of the story. The manipulation of this point-of-view serves more to focus the reader's view on the character's and the place described than to focus on the group's quasi-experience there.

In "Lizzie's Tiger", Carter returns to a more traditional or mainstream use of the collective narrative agent. In this case, it is a narrator and a group who are part of the world of the story. The use of the *we* is reminiscent of William Faulkner's short story, "A Rose for Emily" (1931). In "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter", the focus lies on an anthropological view of a people caught in a self-destructive cycle of stagnation represented by an incest theme. The subtle message in the text is only able to unfold completely upon the recognition of Carter's manipulation of the assumed distance created by the collective narrative agent.

One should keep in mind, though, the following statement made by Margolin: (?)

But collective observation statements of the 'we saw' or 'we noticed' variety are once again a hybrid of the 'we' sayers' own immediate sense experiences and of the presumed experiences ascribed to the co-focalisers by the speaker on the basis of their public actions and statements. After all, one can no more directly know what and how much someone else sees or hears than one can know what they think or feel.<sup>20</sup>

As the public actions and statements of the co-focalisers are completely missing from Carter's narrative, thought, the motives of the *we* sayers must be questioned. This raises the issue of unreliability, which forces the reader to re-evaluate all that is described and commented in the story. The homodiegetic extradiegetic narrator is an extremely subjective persona who presumes to speak for everyone. Once this becomes clear to the actual narratee of the story, he/she must call into question all that is being narrated.

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<sup>20</sup>Margolin, "Telling Our Story" 121-2.

## 2.1 “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter”

The opening of “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter” immediately presents the reader with three interesting narratological items. The story begins, “Here, we are high in the uplands” (35). The sentence starts with a deictic adverbial, followed by a comma, which opens up various possibilities for emphasis and thus interpretation of where the *here* is. This is then followed by the first-person plural pronoun *we*, denoting an ambiguous collective narrative agent. Thirdly, the verb which follows is in the present tense which will remain consistent throughout the narrative. Monika Fludernik states that the use of this tense can cause the narrative to take on the quality of ongoing commentary.<sup>21</sup> This seems fitting for “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter”, as the narrative consists almost exclusively of commentary and contains no direct discourse. This is also interesting in light of the quality of the narrative being ‘presented’ in some fashion which is implied by the adverbial. This ‘odd’ tense, finally, does not disrupt the flow of the story and is barely noticeable. Käte Hamburger, one of the pioneers in the discussion of the present tense in fiction, terms this use of the present tense as the epic preterite.<sup>22</sup> For Hamburger, this tense is a distinctive marker for the fictionality of the respective narrative: “Rather than signifying real time, rather than labelling the situations and events reported as past, it designates them as fictive [...]”<sup>23</sup> It becomes clear that Carter makes deliberate use of this to further convolute the text. The *we* narrator gives the illusion of truth, while the tense firmly defines it as fiction.

The use of deictic adverbials further underscores Hamburger’s theories. She argues that they “designate [...] situations and events as fictive and as ‘occurring’ in the characters’ fictive and ‘time-less’ present.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, its use “helps to locate

<sup>21</sup>Fludernik, ‘*Natural*’ *Narratology* 252.

<sup>22</sup>Käte Hamburger, *Die Logik der Dichtung* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1968) 59-71. Hamburger’s theories are not uncontested. Monika Fludernik also addresses this issue. She states that “only for texts which have no *narrator’s present* tense which is being contrasted with the *characters’ past* can one posit an epic preterite [...]” (*‘Natural’ Narratology* 252). As this is the case in this narrative, I posit that Hamburger’s theories are fitting.

<sup>23</sup>Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* 26. For convenience sake I refer to Prince’s definition which cites Hamburger as a source.

<sup>24</sup>Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* 18.

what is reported relative to the addresser [...].”<sup>25</sup> In the case of “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter”, the *here* denotes the village of the story in contrast to the narrator’s *here*, where the production of the narrative is taking place. As the *here* is never defined more closely, the setting of the actual narration can only be assumed from the context.

The inclusion of the adverbial, though, can also be seen to further emphasise the fictionality of the world which exists *here*, only within the confines of the printed narrative, which, at the same time, also defines a different audience, the implied reader. I will deal with the importance of this later when I discuss the claim by the critic Robbie Goh that Carter postulates an orientalist view in this story.

Depending especially on the type of emphasis placed in the sentence on the *here*, and taking into consideration that it is followed by a comma, thus emphasising it to a higher degree, the first impression that comes to mind is of a darkened lecture-hall, where a type of anthropologist figure is showing the slides of his group’s latest research trip. The *we* immediately following suggests an inclusive group of first-hand observers belonging to the speaker’s sphere. At this point in the narrative, it is still impossible to infer the speaker’s nature from the information given. As the story progresses, though, a more academic portrait develops. This is not supported by specific details, but more by an overall impression of an educated narrator which can be assumed by the intertexts referred to and the general language register.

The first use of the first-person plural pronoun could also be interpreted as including the narratee who exists in the realm of the text defined by the opposition of the deictic adverbial. This could be a second level of narratee, an audience, not by necessity excluded from the shared experience as defined by Fludernik, but suggested more by the audience implied in the slide-show image than by a direct first-hand viewing of the village in the story or the audience of the printed narrative. The following text does not continue in this vein, only including the group physically present in the *here* of the village referred to in the CNA. The next two paragraphs are littered with CNA markers in the statements “lured us into the village square [...]”, “our feet crunched

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<sup>25</sup>Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* 18.



upon dryly whispering sawdust [...]” and “accident and disharmony combined to invite us” (35). It must be noted here that the present tense narration is broken by the inclusion of the past tense of ‘lured’. It would seem odd that the narrator would choose to interrupt the present tense instead of simply using the present progressive ‘lures’. Yet the interspersion of the past tense here further underscores the placement of the CNA at the physical location of the village being described. In contrast to the fictionality stressed by the present tense, the past tense implies a factuality which strengthens the position of the *we*.

Only in the seventh paragraph is a *we* included which specifically does not refer to the narrow CNA group, but to a group including all layers of narratee: “Laid out in such an unnerving fashion, these portions of his meat in no way fulfil the expectations *we* derive from our common knowledge of faces” (39, emphasis mine). Uri Margolin picks up on this when he writes, “some members of the reference group who do not participate in the current speech production may be present in the communicative field as listeners/addressees, while still others may be absent from it altogether.”<sup>26</sup> While this narratee may not strictly fit into Fludernik’s suggested constraints, the narratee nevertheless fulfils his own purpose of defining himself as an audience sharing in the narrator’s set of beliefs. Thus, not only is the narrator defined, but the perimeters for the narratee are simultaneously set as well.

Margolin defines one of his four types of first-person plural narrators as

a single member of the class [who] utters all tokens of ‘we’ in a given stretch of discourse to refer to the whole class. The most common example is the speaker who provides non-group members with an account of what befell his or her group or what they did, such as the convenor or chairman who signs a ‘we did’ report.<sup>27</sup>

Fludernik states that narratives which utilise the *we* can often be “narratives of expeditions or travelogues [...]”.<sup>28</sup> Stanzel defines his peripheral first-person narrator as located “an der Peripherie des erzählten Geschehens, seine Rolle ist die des Beobachters, Zeugen, Biographen, Chronisten [...]”.<sup>29</sup> While all three seem to assume

<sup>26</sup>Margolin, “Telling Our Story” 119.

<sup>27</sup>Margolin, “Telling Our Story” 118.

<sup>28</sup>Fludernik, ‘Natural’ *Narratology* 225.

<sup>29</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 258-9.

a type of participation in the action of the narrative by the narrator, Stanzel concedes that this narrator is not the hero who stands at the centre of the narrative.<sup>30</sup> I believe that Carter purposefully creates a true peripheral narrator who is in no way involved in the action described. The narrator is deliberately distanced from the people and action described which paradoxically serves to achieve the opposite effect which seems to be Carter's intent

While, on the surface, Carter's story is a description of a village filled with grotesque beings and a plot about a beautiful girl, Gretchen, who is raped by her executioner father on the very block on which he chopped off his son's head for committing the same crime of incest, the reader is challenged to look beyond the anthropologist's seemingly simple gothic and grotesque descriptions and really examine what is being shown. Once the comfortable distance is removed by the inclusive *we*, that which is utterly foreign and repulsive can no longer be easily dismissed as such.

Before I go on to specifics in the text, I would like quickly to illustrate the various shifts in narrative perspective found throughout the story. On page two of the text, when the focus shifts suddenly to the play of the "Awful [...] Spectacle of a Decapitation" (37), the "barbaric requiem [...]" (37) intoned by a "choir of stunted virgins" (36-7), the narrator shifts to heterodiegetic narration. The subtle movement away from a first-person description of the scene and persons present at this scene upon which the narrating group has chanced, becomes the type of narration more commonly found in the short story. There is a climax; "the axe falls. The flesh severs. The head rolls" (36) and a denouement; "Gretchen no longer sleeps soundly" (37). Immediately following, the focus shifts again and returns to the original narrator in a continuation of the description now focussing on the villagers and the village and, in an echo of the first line, "High among the mountains, how wet and cold it is!" (37), to an indirect address of the narratee. Oddly, with this statement, the narrator closes the gap between the experience and the narration of the experience by implying that he is present in the village at the time of narration. In the very last two paragraphs of the text, the focus shifts for the last time, back to a third-person narrative mode, finally to return to Gretchen.

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<sup>30</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 201.

The move between narrative foci can be seen as a physical manifestation of the circular quality of the text. Interestingly, though, Carter does not choose to complete the circle at the end of the story back to the original narrator. Yet as the meaning for the audience lies in the anthropological examination of these 'foreign' people and their endless repetition of an unchanging cycle, the lack of closure at the end at least leaves a glimmer of hope.

The sense of continuity within this place is already hinted at in the first complete paragraph.

Our feet crunched upon dryly whispering shifting sawdust freshly scattered over impacted surfaces of years of sawdust clotted, here and there, with blood shed so long ago it has with age, acquired the colour and texture of rust [...] sad, ominous stains, a threat, a menace, memorials of pain. (35)

The description suggests a long-standing tradition in this village which, since the observers have stumbled onto an ongoing execution scene, is invested with a sense of continuity. This is further underscored by the narrator's description of the 'scene' as a "tableau vivant [...] suffused with the sepia tints of an old photograph [...]" (35). Interestingly, Stanzel draws parallels between this tableau-effect and present tense narration: "Häufig erzeugt [das] Präsens eine Art Tableau-Effekt: das Erinnertere wird wie ein Bild in einiger Entfernung, d.h. gut überschaubar und für die ruhige, distanzierte Betrachtung fixiert, vorgestellt."<sup>31</sup> The narration makes the descriptions palatable for the narratee and reader. The suggestion of 'looking at a picture' implied in the first line is emphasised, creating a comfortable distance from which to view that which appears to be utterly something else.

The narrator's choice of words, in the text quoted above, already foreshadows the actual story then narrated in the third-person. There is the impression that a stage is being set, a tableau vivant with an executioner who strikes an "offensively heroic pose" (35). Almost as if describing the characters in the play, the narrator goes into a lengthy description of the figure of the executioner:

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<sup>31</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 135-6.

Through the years, the close fitting substance of the mask has become so entirely assimilated to the actual structure of his face that the face itself now seems to possess a parti-coloured appearance, as if by nature dual; and this face no longer pertains to that which is human as if, when he first put on the mask, he blotted out his own, original face and so defaced himself for ever. Because the hood of office renders the executioner an object. He has become an object who punishes. (36)

He is no longer a man but the Executioner, the embodiment of a signifier. He has, as a symbol of power, become self-perpetuating and has risen above the law. There is no one to punish him, he is *the* executioner. Robbie Goh suggests that "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter" could be "read as a caricature of the modern police state [...]" in which the executioner "violates [the] edict [forbidding incest] with impunity"<sup>32</sup>, but only because he does not take off his mask. In a statement reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray* (1890/91), the narrator states; "yet the executioner dare not take off the mask in case, in a random looking glass [...], he surprised his own authentic face. For then he would die of fright" (36). Paul Magrs equates the executioner's position of power with that of a puppet master, a figure also found elsewhere in Carter's fiction. "The Executioner, the Asiatic Professor ["The Loves of Lady Purple"], Zero [*The Passion of New Eve*], Uncle Philip [*The Magic Toyshop*] [...] all of them are supremely dangerous puppet masters who inflict their un-self-regarding viciousness on, usually, the women around them."<sup>33</sup> I disagree with Magrs in one respect though, while part of the focus in "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter" is undoubtedly on the situation of Gretchen, she acts as a physical representative of one group, in this case women, among many groups represented by the mass of the villagers and the beheaded son, as the objects of abuse of those holding power in a totalitarian state. Carter's focus in this narrative is not only on gender issues.

It is necessary to digress here for a moment and deal with the consequences of Carter's choice of the name Gretchen for the Executioner's daughter. Even at first glance the name is jarring in the oriental highland setting which has been painstakingly

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<sup>32</sup>Goh 76.

<sup>33</sup>Paul Magrs, "Boys keep swinging: Angela Carter and The Subject of Men," *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter* (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997) 188.

established. Added to this, she is the only character in the narrative given a proper name. All others are defined by their status or station. The intertext of Goethe's *Faust* (1808) is the most obvious reference. When examining the text, numerous parallels can be charted. Carter chooses to repeat the brother/sister dichotomy of Margarethe and Valentin. She also creates a type of Faust/Mephistopheles character in the Executioner. It is at this point, though, that the narrative seems to leave the intertext of Goethe's *Faust* and makes use of older versions of this well known theme. Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* (1604) is a darker version of this story. "[Faust] emerged as a definite poetic character: the magician and necromancer who sold his soul to the Devil became the symbol of an all-consuming greed for power and a ruthless superhuman desire to be the 'great emperor of the world.'" <sup>34</sup> At the end of Marlowe's version, Dr Faustus is found by his friends, torn apart and his soul is taken to hell. This is in direct opposition of Goethe's *Faust* which emphasises the potential for redemption as it is with redemption that both the first and second parts of the dramatic poem are concluded. <sup>35</sup>

Carter's Executioner cannot be defined as a figure who is struggling towards something better. Her Gretchen is also incapable of any type of redemption which is made clear at the end of the narrative in her inability to understand her dreams. She may be the only beautiful thing in the world of Carter's narrative, untouched by 'Satan', yet this cannot be construed in a positive light as in Goethe's *Faust* where Margarethe is the engine of redemption. Carter's Gretchen is balked by the inability to find an expression for the potential within her.

Carter's purpose in choosing the *Faust* intertext lies not in re-writing a modern-day Faust but in creating an anti-Faust, a rejection of all change and an embracing of stagnant power structures resulting in an unbreakable cycle of decay. Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* picks up on this irredeemable quality, yet is making his point on a moral, religious level. <sup>36</sup> Carter is criticizing power structures and the death of language.

<sup>34</sup>Victor Lange, Introduction, *Faust: A Tragedy*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (New York: The Modern Library, 1967) vi.

<sup>35</sup>Interestingly, Christopher Marlowe does not include the character of Margarethe or Gretchen at all. Helen is present but her character has nowhere near the presence of her counterpart in Goethe's version.

<sup>36</sup>Lange vi.

To complete the picture of intertextual reference in this narrative, it is also important to mention Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The villagers in Carter's narrative are described as follows: "They would, if they could, act out entire Wagnerian cycles of operatic evil ..." (39) With this reference, Carter adds a further dimension to her text. Gretchen's brother is decapitated at the beginning of the narrative for committing incest with his sister. This is an element missing entirely from the *Faust* intertext. It is though, one of the driving elements in Wagner's *Ring*. Wotan must kill his own son for committing incest with his twin Siglinde. Carter picks up on the *Ring's* theme of disintegration into chaos because the power structures are abused. Only when order is restored could chaos be avoided. Yet, neither Wotan's sacrifice of his son, nor the Executioner's decapitation of his, can restore more than a transient or semblance of an ordered world. In Carter's narrative, the hopelessness represented in Gretchen's inability to act as a redeemer makes the chaos and disintegration evoked by the Wagnerian intertext an inevitability.

At this point, the narrative focus shifts again and the actual execution is played out. Here, the only two 'normal' characters are presented. Gretchen is the executioner's beautiful daughter, "on whose cheeks the only roses in these highlands grow" (37) The second character is the unnamed son, also "thin, pale and graceful" (36). As already suggested, this executioner's action is the continuation of a never-ending cycle. The son introduced here calls up images of coming of age, of change and thus represents a direct challenge to the undisputed power of his father: "After the day his decapitated head rolled in the bloody sawdust, her brother rode a bicycle interminably through her dreams [...]" (37). Carter also uses the image of the bicycle as a symbol of modernity and the advent of technological advancement in the story "Lady of the House of Love" in her collection *The Bloody Chamber*. This bicycle represents a movement away from an older stagnant world often hampered by outdated definitions and legend, myth and superstition.<sup>37</sup>

Yet frustratingly, the bicycle in "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter" only appears after the brother has been decapitated. The stagnant hierarchical structures have

<sup>37</sup>Robert Rawdon Wilson, "SLIP PAGE: Angela Carter, In/Out/In the Post-Modern Nexus," *Past The Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) 118.

made change impossible. The decapitation of the son was an imperative in maintaining the status quo, yet another sibling, Gretchen, remains. It would be easy to assume that she also represents potential, thus raising the question as to why she does not share her brother's fate. The text makes clear, though, that she is not a possible threat to the hierarchy or to the status quo: "The executioner insists his breakfast omelette be prepared [by Gretchen] only from those eggs precisely on the point of blossoming into chicks and prompt at eight, consumes with relish a yellow, feathered omelette subtly spiked with claw" (37). The obvious allusions to Gretchen's thwarted reproduction makes clear why she is no threat to her father. The whole point of the crime of incest is that it is a degeneration, not a progression. The executioner negates Gretchen's ability to procreate and, as she is for him also merely something 'upon' which the crime of incest is committed, thus an object, her potential threat is negated.

To round off this theme of circularity or stagnation, it is important to mention the rest of the players in the 'tableau vivant' of the story: the villagers along with their king. The villagers are described as an outward and inward manifestation of decay caused by stagnation:

The men in particular are monstrously hirsute about both head and body, [...] the womenfolk are built for durability rather than delight. [...] their tormented flesh betrayed eternally by the poverty of their imaginations [...] They are inexorably baulked by ignorance, for ever *in potentia*. (39)

Just as Gretchen's potential can never be realised, here it is the same. Similar to the villagers, the king in this country also exists in *potentia*. A king is usually the ultimate representative of power, standing at the top of the hierarchy. The figure of this king, though, is a mute man who never moves and hangs by one ankle from the ceiling of a stone hut. He is the King, and since a king is defined as the ultimate earthly power, regardless of his true state, he remains the King.

While the portions of the narrative dealing with the villagers are fascinating in their grotesqueness, they also constitute a grave dilemma in this story. Robbie Goh claims that with this characterisation, Carter has fallen into an orientalist trap. The figures

of Gretchen, her brother and the Executioner are all overtly Western. The figure of the King is left ambiguous, yet it can be inferred from the distribution of power relationships that he is also Western. The description of the villagers, though, is plainly making use of the oriental 'other' as negative opposition:

an imperialist code is written into the story, providing a logic of reading which separates East and West. [...] the villagers are orientalized [and] can only form the static, dehumanized backdrop to this symbolization of the contemporary crisis [paradoxes of power] in the West.<sup>38</sup>

I do not argue that Goh's assessment of the characterisation here is correct. While he does offer astute interpretations of the paradoxes which Carter wishes to examine and criticise, he fails to recognise another level of criticism her manipulation of the *we* opens.

It is also important, here, to keep Carter's use of the *Faust* intertext in mind. In the second portion of *Faust* the protagonist meets the figure of Helen in the highlands. This has been widely discussed as a meeting of the East in the person of Helen and the Middle Ages in Faust.<sup>39</sup> Carter picks up on this and turns it on its head, as I mentioned previously, as a negative image, "... the sepia tints of an old photograph ..." (35). The author distorts the images of the East in the personas of the villagers as she also distorts the images of the European Faust. By doing this she goes beyond Goh's criticism, though on the surface doing exactly what he criticizes her for, to criticize idealized or stereotypical images handed down in literature. Helen and what she represents is neither ideal nor decrepit, two vastly different ways of seeing the East, and neither is Europe the font of all reason and order. By adding the inclusive *we*, Carter strengthens her criticism of eurocentricity.

Carter chooses to end the story with another reminder of the hopelessness of the situation. As was already quoted above in the context of the villagers, Gretchen, the only real hope left, is baulked by ignorance. And at the end, Gretchen's brother

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<sup>38</sup>Goh 77-8.

<sup>39</sup>Michael Neumann, *Das Ewig-Weibliche in Goethes 'Faust'* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1985) 275.



“wheeled and circled through her troubled dreams until the cock crowed and out she went for eggs” (40). The narrator chooses to end the story in the past tense.

On the surface the meaning of the narrative would not be significantly changed by the substitution of a purely 'I' narrating persona or, as the narrative in truth never really loses the feel of third-person narration, to have left out the homodiegetic narration completely, I nevertheless argue that it is specifically the addition of the group narrator, neatly paralleling the group images of East and West, which removes Carter from the realm of Goh's criticism. He himself seems to be falling into the trap of equating the narrator with the author. Carter has deliberately chosen to place the narration in a group which must be defined as prejudiced and flawed. The dichotomies present in the text are so obvious that they must point toward a flawed narrator.

## 2.2 “Lizzie’s Tiger”

“Lizzie’s Tiger” is the second of Angela Carter’s two short stories dealing with the famous Lizzie Borden who supposedly killed her parents with an axe in 1892. While at first seeming odd that Carter would choose to deal with this subject in two short narratives, something she, in this form, does nowhere else in her three collections, her motivation becomes clear when Susannah Clapp writes, in the introduction to *The Curious Room* (1997), a volume of Carter’s collected dramatic works, that the author had hoped to develop the material into a novel length narrative.<sup>40</sup>

It is interesting that Carter uses the *we* in both this story and its counterpart, “The Fall River Axe Murders”. Taking the nature of the plot line into consideration, a communal *we* is appropriate, as the person and story of Lizzie Borden has become public property. Through her use of the communal *we*, Carter is giving a phenomenon physical expression in her narrative. While “Fall River Axe Murders” confines its use of the *we* to a more general address of the narratee or the implied reader, “Lizzie’s

<sup>40</sup>Susannah Clapp, introduction, *Angela Carter: The Curious Room*, ed. Mark Bell (London: Vintage, 1997) X.

Tiger” goes a step further to include, in portions, a communal narrator imbedded in the narrative world.

One of the aspects of the actual Borden murder case which stands out in sharp relief is the power and manipulative quality of public opinion. David Kent, a leading Lizzie Borden scholar, in a case book he published in the attempt, if not to find the truth about who murdered Andrew and Abby Borden, at least to provide a comprehensive collection of the material surrounding the case, writes, “popular conception is guided by the ancient doggerel that says Lizzie Borden [...] took an axe to [her parents], but just as every shred of evidence indicates this to be true, those same shreds prove she did not; could not.”<sup>41</sup> Carter is picking up on the problematic nature of this in Lizzie Borden’s case and working it into her narrative. For this purpose, Carter is in the process of creating a narrator figure who could serve as an appropriate vehicle, a narrator who is able to represent the voices surrounding Lizzie and at the same time silence these voices.

What becomes clear upon reading both of Carter’s narratives is that she seems to buy into all of the popular myths propagated about Lizzie; her looks, her nature and her relationship to her parents. This raises crucial questions as to why Carter chooses to take this path when re-writing the story of this much maligned woman instead of attempting a different tack. When looking at “The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe”, in *Black Venus*, it can be seen that she chooses the same option of utilising ‘common myth’ about a real-life character. In Poe’s case, she picks up on the well known ‘myth’ of his alcoholism.

Carter, far from falling into the trap of subscribing to public opinion and utilising sensationalist qualities simply to provide her narratives with extra zest, requires of her readers a close look at how she is manipulating narrative structure to her own advantage. While “Lizzie’s Tiger” appears to be a straightforward heterodiegetic narrative, the interspersions of homodiegetic markers radically alters the interpretational possibilities. The narrative can no longer be defined as heterodiegetic, though it retains a distinct level of omniscience and the persona of the homodiegetic narrator,

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<sup>41</sup> *The Lizzie Borden Sourcebook*, ed. David Kent (Boston: Branden Publishing Company, 1992) i.

who sometimes utilises the communal *we*, remains ambiguous. It becomes clear that Carter is picking up on the issue of popular opinion surrounding, especially, the figure of Lizzie Borden. By utilising the narratological possibilities open to her, the author subtly brings in society's damning voice, which found Lizzie guilty when no court could, and provides a more sympathetic voice which breaks down the myths surrounding this woman. In making this voice of criticism and the voice of the collective society, one, Carter is able to offer the clearest criticism.

The choice of such narration by Carter is fitting. The narrative sets up, from the first pages and in the last lines, a distinct opposition between Lizzie and her family and the other residents, inhabitants of her neighbourhood and area. They live "on Ferry, in the worst part of town, among the dark-skinned Portuguese fresh off the boat [...]" (321). Hints in the text allow the reader to assume that the narrator belongs to this dark skinned or 'foreign' horde as he<sup>42</sup> lives on Ferry as well and is part of the plural crowd at the fair where he states that "she was a stranger among these strangers [...] nowhere at all was anyone who looked like she did [...]" (324).

Yet while the text defines the teller thus, this is not in fitting with the obvious omniscience demonstrated by this narrator. He is able to look into Lizzie's mind and make statements such as; "she was taken a little beyond herself and felt her head spinning, a vertigo, a sense of profound strangeness overcoming her" (324). This is information to which only an authorial type of narrator could be privy and which causes a problem with the portions of the text where the narrator is obviously imbedded in the textual world and then subsequently pulls himself back to an authorial position.

"Lizzie's Tiger" does not easily lend itself to being defined as having a collective narrative agent. On the one hand, there are clear statements made by the narrator, placing him firmly within the world of the narrative as part of an undefined collective of townspeople or his own family. On the other hand, the text demonstrates a high degree of omniscience on the part of this narrator. Carter blurs and disregards the

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<sup>42</sup>I am ignoring Lanzer's rule here of using the author's gender as the gender of an undefined narrator. The narrator does not come across as female and as Carter is known for positing a male point of view in her narratives, I believe that defining this particular narrator as male is defensible. Cf. <<http://www.welchco.com/02/14/01/60/02/04/1001B.HTM>>

definitions and boundaries of first and third-person narration. What is expected and allowed in authorial narration is found in the homodiegetic narrator persona and vice versa. Authorial comments are made by the physical 'I' narrator and not by the distanced third-person narrator. On the one hand, it establishes a community that 'knows' Lizzie, which exists in her physical and temporal space. On the other hand, the communal pronoun implies the narratee and the implied audience and thus offers a criticism of the assumption of 'knowing' someone. While Franz Stanzel does not see a particular narratological problem in this<sup>43</sup>, Carter, once again imbeds meaning in this seeming inconsistency.

The story opens *in medias res* with an initially ambiguous narrator, introducing an episode in Lizzie's life. Who Lizzie is and why her story is being told does not become clear until the last line when, in direct speech, her identity is revealed. What can be assumed from the tone and choice of wording in this opening is that the Borden family is known to the narrator in such a fashion that he feels comfortable speaking about them as *they* and *their*. Interestingly, the pronouns refer to Lizzie and her nine year older sister Emma and not Andrew Borden as implied by "in their father's house [...]" (321). This seems to point to the fact that the narrator, in some fashion identifies himself more closely with the girls, Emma and Lizzie, than with their father or, by comparison, his generation. The tone and emphasis of the narrative underscores this. This emphasis seems to suggest that the narrator commiserates with the Borden girls, as details given in the story characterise Andrew Borden as a cold man. Thus, from the outset the reader is presented with a narrator who is obviously sympathetic towards Lizzie and her sister. Through later hints in the text the narrator can be defined as a resident of Ferry Street, most likely an immigrant, definitely of the poorer class and thus part of the great mass who has, as the end of the story states, had someone buried by Andrew Borden, not a necessarily pleasant relationship, and/or owe him money. There has been nothing in the text thus far, though, to suggest that the narrator is anything other than a straightforward heterodiegetic teller. The tone and the subtle suggestion of familiarity with the setting and characters of the narrative suggest, even at this early point in the text, the importance of this narrator.

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<sup>43</sup>Cf. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 259-60.

What is also made clear in this beginning is that the narrator is speaking to a knowing narratee. The speaker does not feel the need to identify the Bordens specifically, only relying on the name Lizzie and the street they lived on to supply the context. The inclusion of "everyone knows" (321) addressing this narratee further, underscores a knowing group. This group, though, is not necessarily made up of Fall River residents, as one can assume the narrator is. They are familiar with the person of Lizzie Borden and the facts surrounding the gruesome murders, but here, the narrator, who is in the know, is providing 'the real story'.

The narrator, in the next paragraphs, returns to a more neutral narration, only to make again two very intimate statements that only an omniscient perspective would allow. Lizzie "did not show affection easily, except to the head of the house, and then only when she wanted something. She knew where the power was and, intuitively feminine in spite of her gruff appearance, she knew how to court it" (322). Apart from the omniscience these statements require on the narrator's part, these comments also seem stereotypical.

While up to now the narration has been consistently heterodiegetic, about one-third of the way into the narrative the narrator inserts the pronoun *our*: "A dumpy, red-striped, regular cat of the small, domestic variety greeted Lizzie with a raucous mew from atop a gatepost as she stumped determinedly along Ferry Street; *our* cat, Ginger [...]" (323, italics mine). While the tone of the narrative thus far has often implied the narrator's familiarity, even affiliation with the town of Fall River, the inclusion of the possessive *our* referring to a cat imbedded in the world of the narrative makes this even clearer. The reader can assume from the narrator's choice that he was also a Ferry Street resident. The *our* is an inclusionary reference to the narrator's family. The inclusion of the pronoun at this point, on the one hand, provides a motivation for the telling of the story but, on the other hand, also raises important questions about the omniscient voice which has proceeded and which will follow.

In the last third of the narrative, the narrator, for the first time, includes a collective *we*. While the *our* in the first pages implies a family group, here the group is more general. "All we could see was, it knelt" (328). The choice of wording and

tense makes clear that the group implied by the pronoun is present at the action described, thus imbedded in the textual world. What makes the inclusion of the *we* here particularly interesting is the narrator's acknowledgement of the discrepancy in the narrative between a collective narrating agent and the authorial perspective which dominates:

It seemed to Lizzie that they exchanged this cool regard for an endless time, the tiger and herself.

Then something strange happened. The svelte beast fell to its knees. It was as if it had been subdued by the presence of this child, as if this little child of all the children in the world, might lead to towards a peaceable kingdom where it need not eat meat. But only 'as if'. *All we could see was, it knelt.* A crackle of shock ran through the tent; the tiger was acting out of character.

Its mind remained, however, a law unto itself. *We did not know what it was thinking. How could we?* (328, italics mine)

In the first line of the quoted passage, the narrator is still demonstrating omniscience by stating what Lizzie thinks, while the next paragraph, in contrast, is filled with conjectures marked by the inclusion of 'as if'. The narrator steps back from the all-knowing stance and takes up the position of spectator present at the meeting of Lizzie and the tiger. As the entire narrative thus far has picked up on well-known facts about Lizzie, or better yet, well-known assumptions about her, it is necessary here for Carter to have her narrator step back from the inevitability of his interpretation to a more acceptably unsure one. Though the last line obviously refers to the tiger and that it is impossible to know what it was thinking, the narrator here is also speaking about the impossibility of knowing Lizzie's mind. Ending with 'How could we?' rounds up the passage. Everything told or believed about Lizzie Borden is inevitably seen in the context of her parent's murders. Even though the character is not identified at this point in this narrative, readers should have the context of "The Fall River Axe Murders" in their heads. Startlingly, if one examines the casebooks and newspaper clippings surrounding the Borden murders, it can be easily seen that Carter is picking up on the tone of the rhetoric used. Lizzie was found guilty by the

mob before she ever stood trial. Every physical feature, every utterance, every past or current action was interpreted by the public and the press. The general communal *we* has assumed too much and the narratee and implied reader must recognise this.

After this acknowledgement, the narrative does not return to the level of omniscience it had assumed in the beginning. The narrator includes more tentative language to denote an assumption on his part or that he is unsure. Yet in these last passages, nor is omniscience necessary. Lizzie has experienced an epiphany. The magical bond of love, "I cannot tell you how much she loved the tiger [...]" (328), between Lizzie and the tiger is emphasised, allowing the reader to draw parallels between the Tiger's situation, and Lizzie's. Lizzie must slip out of her identity to find the tiger in herself. The Puritan repression of her home refuses her the carnival, not only in the physical sense, but also in the meta-physical.<sup>44</sup> It is only when she immerses herself in the carnival, in the crowds of non-WASPs<sup>45</sup> and animals of the fair, that she can find her own power. It seems only fitting that, in "The Fall River Axe Murders", the slaughter of Lizzie's pigeons, drawing a parallel back to the animals in "Lizzie's Tiger", serves as the catalyst for her murdering Andrew and Abby Borden.

In this passage the narrator speaks to his cat again, yet at the same time is also speaking about Lizzie. She leads a normal life, no one could see beneath the surface yet, "who would have thought you seethed with such resentment" (330). Lizzie and her sister are like domestic cats. They are bound to the home and to their master. The only difference is that the cat can go where it pleases. This point is made by having the cat appear when Lizzie breaks out of her domestic prison. The juxtaposition of the animal with the child becomes clearer later in Lizzie's meeting with the tiger. The narrator's above-quoted comment assumes the connection between the domestic and the wild variety. It is not Ginger Cuddles who seethes with resentment, but Lizzie. Interestingly, the love that Lizzie feels for the tiger is that of a kindred spirit, which is set in opposition to the love Andrew Borden feels for his daughter: "He answered

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Gina Wisker, "Revenge of the Living Doll: Angela Carter's Horror Writing," *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter*, ed. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London: Longman, 1997) 123-4. Wisker discusses carnival and Puritan repression in the context of "The Fall River Axe Murders".

<sup>45</sup>'White Anglo-Saxon Protestants'

her with words of unusual harshness, for he truly loved this last daughter, whose obduracy recalled his own" (322). This love is like the relationship of fear between the tamer and the tiger. It is based on power. The trainer says of his tigers, "I have established a hierarchy of FEAR, and among my cats you might well say I am TOP DOG [...]" (330). Likewise, the narrator describes Lizzie as knowing "where the power was and, intuitively feminine in spite of her gruff appearance, she knew how to court it" (321).

With the statement "the world bounded into the ring" (329), the spell between Lizzie and the tiger is broken. By having the figure of the tamer be the same man who sexually molested Lizzie earlier in the narrative, Carter draws further parallels between Lizzie and the tiger. The tamer humiliates the cat, asserting his dominance. Guido Almansi writes that once Lizzie has met the tiger she is doomed.<sup>46</sup> Like the tiger, Lizzie is caged in a repressive society, in a family prison. She may try to break out but this is only possible for her through her father's death. Yet even upon her father's death, she is not free, as the society she lives in holds her captive just as tightly. Yet in meeting the tiger, Lizzie meets a potential that sleeps within her. The tiger, the narrative is clear on this point, will never be able to break out of its prison. It may want more than anything to kill the tamer who tortures it, but it will always be dominated by the human intellect. Lizzie, on the other hand, has the advantage of "a rational man's knowledge of the power of fear" (330). After the tamer's narrow escape from the tiger, Lizzie's face "was now mottled all over with a curious reddish-purple, with the heat of the tent, with passion, with the sudden access of enlightenment" (331). Even at only four years of age, Lizzie has understood the power dynamics at work here.

In the last lines, Lizzie is defined as "the most famous daughter in Fall River" (331). Her identity has been uncovered and her short period of freedom has come to an end. For her the freedom of anonymity, an anonymity suggested by the ambiguous figure of the *we* narrator, is not possible. This is the curse of belonging to the privileged class, though the money that goes along with this will only come to her family later.

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<sup>46</sup>Guido Almansi, "In the Alchemist's Cave: Radio Plays," *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago Press, 1994) 220.



This will become all the more poignant in her adult life, when her privileged status will damn her to live a life under the stigma of once having been accused of her parents' murder. The fact that she was found innocent, sadly, is not able to allow her to sink back into a relative anonymity.

While the use of the *we* in this narrative can be considered relatively mainstream, it does differ from the usage demonstrated in a multitude of 19th Century texts in that it does not merely situate the narrator in the world to guide the sympathy of the reader but takes on a determined purpose to connect the *we* existent on the story plane, the authorial narrator and the narratee in order to offer a criticism which would otherwise not be as possible. Carter, through this, manages to convey the fictionality of her text. She addresses the issue of appropriating, claiming to know a person, and simultaneously debunks it. Therefore the *we* takes on a purpose in Carter's texts which it does not and cannot have in earlier occurrences.

## Chapter 3

### Alternating Perspectives

This chapter will take a close look at the short stories, “Black Venus”, “The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe” and “Overture and Incidental Music for A Midsummer Night’s Dream”. The choice to examine these three very different narratives together arises from their varying manipulations of shifting perspectives. Each demonstrates this in a unique fashion. In “Black Venus” the reader will encounter a seemingly heterodiegetic narration which shifts its focalisation on numerous occasions, from the narrator herself who exists as an ‘I’ in the text, to Jeanne Duval and finally to Charles Baudelaire. These shifts will undermine any attempt at stabilising the narrative, at claiming that it represents a single true account. “Black Venus” is also given a longer introduction than the other narratives as so much more criticism on this story exists that it merits a short overview of topics relevant to my interpretation. “The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe” takes a similar approach in that it also moves from the focalisation of the narrator, to Poe.

In both narratives, Carter pulls together bits of non-fictional accounts and mixes them with a re-visionary history in order to offer a speculative look beyond this. “Overture and Incidental Music for A Midsummer Night’s Dream” breaks out of this mould and addresses Shakespeare’s play. It also offers a behind the scenes look, a re-vision of well-known figures. In this case Carter chooses a more blatant switch than only focalisation by including a move from homodiegetic to heterodiegetic narration.

While the homodiegetic portion of the narrative belongs to the golden Her, whom Carter models on the changeling boy in Shakespeare's play, and succeeds in giving a voice, the shift in point-of-view serves less an overtly critical purpose than as a physical manifestation of the comic discordance found within the narrative. Carter mixes form and function.

### 3.1 “Black Venus”

Jill Matus' essay, “Blonde, Black and Hottentot Venus: Context and Critique in Angela Carter's “Black Venus”,<sup>1</sup> addresses the issue of point-of-view in “Black Venus”. While her focus is on Carter's manipulation of the Venus image in the figure of Jeanne Duval, Charles Baudelaire's mistress, she nevertheless calls attention to Carter's use of the narrator to add meaning to this story:

Does Carter's story claim to be a substituting or superseding version, presenting a new and improved Jeanne Duval? The concerns raised in this question are perhaps allayed by the narrator's awareness of the problem, for the narrative voice continually dissolves the illusions it creates and disputes its own authority [...] to tell the real story about this woman.<sup>2</sup>

The last portion of this statement suggests that Carter is telling, or, better yet, letting Jeanne Duval's story be told. Susanne Schmid also claims that “Carter challenges Baudelaire's representation of Jeanne Duval by describing their relationship from the woman's point of view [...]”<sup>3</sup> Through her narrator, Carter chooses to *privilege* Jeanne Duval's point-of-view, although a close reading shows that Charles Baudelaire's ‘side of the story’ is also given expression, setting it alongside obvious allusions to Baudelaire's poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal*. This is an example of a fine distinction which needs to be made in point-of-view. Not only does the narrator, to

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<sup>1</sup>Jill Matus, “Blonde, Black and Hottentot Venus: Context and Critique in Angela Carter's ‘Black Venus’,” *Studies in Short Fiction*, V. 28, no. 4 (1991) 467-476.

<sup>2</sup>Matus, “Blonde, Black and Hottentot Venus” 467.

<sup>3</sup>Susanne Schmid, “Black Venus’ – Jeanne Duval and Charles Baudelaire Revisited by Angela Carter”, *ESSE*, 2/97 <[http://webdoc.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/artic97/schmid/2\\_97.html](http://webdoc.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/artic97/schmid/2_97.html)>.

continue with the example of “Black Venus”, have an opinion, but also alternately expresses two additional points of view in the opinions and thoughts of Baudelaire and Jeanne Duval. Seymour Chatman writes, “The perspective and the expression need not be lodged in the same person.”

Thus the crucial difference between “point of view” and narrative voice: point of view is the physical place or ideological situation or practical life-orientation to which narrative events stand in relation. Voice, on the contrary, refers to the speech or other overt means through which events and existents are communicated to the audience.<sup>4</sup>

Here, of course, the critic is confronted with the concept of voice which has, in recent years, received a great deal of attention in feminist criticism. It is not, therefore, incorrect to claim that Carter is giving Jeanne Duval a voice in this text, but a privileging of one voice over another is not the same as exclusive presentation of one.

“Black Venus” allows the reader a glimpse into the life of Charles Baudelaire’s mistress Jeanne Duval. Simply with the choice of this subject, Carter has opened a Pandora’s Box of possibilities for examining woman. First there is Claire Hanson’s approach, which is to examine woman as other. In a fascinating switch, Carter has managed to turn the tables by reversing the roles of subject and object by taking up the story of this woman. Yet it is not her intention to re-write one existing story, per se, but in the more limited scope offered by a more ‘historical’ figure, to make her the subject of one story and not the object of literature, paintings, etc. “Jeanne is actually described in the first pages of the story as a ‘tabula rasa’.”<sup>5</sup> She is as the men write, paint and see her. By telling her story, Carter has added another dimension which could previously only be extrapolated from artistic renderings. She is as Baudelaire writes her. In Enid Starkie’s biography of Baudelaire, she repeatedly makes the point that not much is known about Jeanne Duval at all. No one is even sure what she really looked like.<sup>6</sup> The only information about her can be found in Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs*

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<sup>4</sup>Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1978; Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) 153.

<sup>5</sup>Clare Hanson, “Each other” 78.

<sup>6</sup>Starkie remarks that the only portrait of Duval that exists, painted by Manet, shows a far different woman than the one described by the people who knew her. Enid Starkie, *Baudelaire* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957) 86-87.

*du Mal*. This offers a portrait of Jeanne magnified and distorted through the lense of the poet. A point that Carter's narrator repeatedly picks up on when she has her Jeanne interrupt Baudelaire's poetic musings with often vehement negations. Starkie goes on to state that Baudelaire was, himself, quite an enigmatic figure and that his relationship with Jeanne was cause for much speculation.<sup>7</sup>

Another possibility of approaching Carter's story is by way of the question which is automatically attached in modern theory to the figure of Jeanne, the question of coloniser/colonised. Jill Matus and Susanne Schmid both deal with this question of colonisation, but do so in different approaches. Jill Matus goes into detail about the origins of the myth surrounding a black version of Venus. She claims that Carter is out to upset the notion of the exotic which serves to define Jeanne Duval. This is a trend which can be traced not only throughout history, but in Carter's writing as well, especially in the character of Fevvers,<sup>8</sup> a fact also noted by Aidan Day.<sup>9</sup> Yet it is exactly this question of colonialism which could easily become a trap for a writer like Carter, no matter how brilliant, who is firmly embedded in the white Anglo-Saxon tradition. Yet Matus states:

Though Jeanne has been, in effect, silenced by Baudelaire's words and eclipsed by his shadow, Carter does not presume to appropriate Jeanne's story by knowing her mind; rather she draws attention to other possible representations of her than those we already have by persistently imagining her as an ordinary down-to-earth woman concerned with her own immediate material conditions.<sup>10</sup>

Susanne Schmid, in her essay "Black Venus' – Jeanne Duval and Charles Baudelaire Revisited by Angela Carter," deals similarly with the issues of woman as other and exotic, yet goes a bit further to describe Carter's move to a "metapoetic level."<sup>11</sup> While Carter deliberately re-writes existing fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber*, in this story in particular she is not merely re-writing one story but a 'history' compiled

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<sup>7</sup>Starkie 87.

<sup>8</sup>Jill Matus, "Blonde, Black and Hottentot Venus" 467-476.

<sup>9</sup>Day, *Angela Carter* 178.

<sup>10</sup>Jill Matus, "Blonde, Black and Hottentot Venus" 473.

<sup>11</sup>Schmid, "Black Venus".

from various 'texts'. It is in this point that both Schmid, who is known for her work on Carter's re-writing, and Matus do not differentiate enough. Both claim that Carter is re-writing, but what I have made clear is that 'lumping' this story into the same category with her re-written fairy tales would be an injustice to both types of texts. What Carter is faced with in "Black Venus" is also a type of conglomeration of myth, history, etc. but in dealing with a 'real' woman in this story, as well as other 'real' characters such as Poe and Lizzie Borden in later narratives, she must deal with a whole set of different factors which differ radically from those factors inherent in fairy tales. The sense of re-writing comes from a close examination of Baudelaire's poetry. Carter, herself, lists numerous poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* at the end of the narrative, suggesting a type of further reading for those interested. In "Sed Non Satiata", which Carter presents in her own translation, she plays on the sense of smell, "... reeking of musk smeared on tobacco ..." (237) One page previously, the narrator has Jeanne complain about Baudelaire being too cheap to pay for hot water for her bath. (236) Carter distorts this moment from one poem and creates an alternate reading. From "Les Bijoux" she uses the images of "...Elle n'avait gardé que ses bijoux sonores, / Dont le riche attirail lui donnait l'air vainqueur / Qu'ont dans leurs jours heureux les esclaves des Mores."<sup>12</sup> and repeats them in "[h]e liked her to put on all her bangles and beads when she did her dance, she dressed up in the set of clanking jewellery he'd given her, paste, nothing she could sell or she'd have sold it." (233) Enid Starkie's biography of Baudelaire offers a different reading of this. "Once, when he was obliged to leave her, he described her as his only companion and sole joy, and declared that several times she had sold her furniture and jewels for him."<sup>13</sup>

These two examples, among many others, begin to demonstrate the nature of the intertexts that Carter manipulates for her narrative. It can easily be seen that Carter picks up on Baudelaire's often negative tone in respect to Jeanne Duval. This, though, is symptomatic of Baudelaire's problematic attitude toward women. "... although he never mentioned details, he gave [...] the impression that he was sexually promiscuous,

<sup>12</sup>Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Richard Howard, trans. (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982) 204.

<sup>13</sup>Starkie 86.

even while expressing in every line he wrote the profoundest contempt for women.”<sup>14</sup> It is often characteristic of Carter’s writing that she chooses to exploit or glorify the negative aspects of a character in order to set the scene for her criticism. Her writing purposefully evokes feelings of revulsion, disgust and a deceptive sense of distance to a character seemingly defined as utterly other but who becomes eerily familiar upon closer examination.

Perhaps one of the most important things to keep in mind when reading and analysing this narrative is that Carter is not attempting to portray Jeanne Duval, the protagonist, in a ‘better’ light than has perhaps been done. It is easy to fall into this trap, especially when discussing the author’s manipulation of point-of-view, and especially her use of perspective. She privileges Jeanne’s perspective in that she attempts to give her some kind of a voice, yet she is by no means handling her with kid-gloves. Privileging should not be confused with a positive voice. Jeanne Duval is not presented as a silent object as in Baudelaire’s poetry, the object of his love/hate tirades against women, but neither does she present herself as such in this narrative. The narrator takes on this duty for her by stating, “I will tell you what Jeanne was like” (231). Through the words of the narrator, Jeanne answers back against Baudelaire’s definition of her but it is easy to lose sight of the fact that it is the narrator who is choosing Jeanne’s answers and that it can never, by the very nature of the narrative, be Jeanne. In this, Carter picks up on the non-existence of a biography of Jeanne Duval. Enid Starkie makes the point that the only information which exists on any feelings or opinions that Jeanne Duval may have had is filtered through the person of Nadar, a close friend of Baudelaire. “With regard to Nadar’s assertion[s], it must be remembered that he was a coarse-grained man who respected nothing, and it is probable that it was he himself, though he says it was a friend, who desired Jeanne Duval as a lover, and, very possibly, he made her his mistress without Baudelaire’s knowledge.”<sup>15</sup> Starkie’s chapter on Baudelaire’s affair with Jeanne admits the biographical

<sup>14</sup>Starkie 90. Gerd Rohmann also makes the point in his article, “Der Dichter als Dandy: Vergleichende Betrachtungen zur Ästhetischen Theorie und zum Künstlerideal bei Edgar Allan Poe und Charles Baudelaire” that Baudelaire “schwankt zwischen Sensualismus und Madonnenkult ...” Gerd Rohmann. “Der Dichter als Dandy: Vergleichende Betrachtungen zur Ästhetischen Theorie und zum Künstlerideal bei Edgar Allan Poe und Charles Baudelaire”, *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* Band XXV (1975) 210.

<sup>15</sup>Starkie 92.

gaps and the resulting assumptions about his relationship with her. Interestingly, Starkie's account makes widespread use of Baudelaire's poetry to describe the relationship. This results in a biographical account which very much takes on the nature of a prose narrative, often echoing Carter's much later version. What is clear is that Carter is picking up on the widely acknowledged lack of or distortion of information or even mystery surrounding the person of Jeanne Duval.

This is underscored in her narrative by the insertion of authorial comment included in the questioning, "would she?" The narrator, for just a moment, distances herself from her statements and leaves a gap which allows for an alternative reading placing herself in line with the academic position concerning this figure. It is also interesting to note that the narrator refers to herself in the first-person here. While this, in itself, is perhaps not so remarkable, Carter deliberately creates this narrator as a tangible persona which is underscored by her use of the I. The more graspable this narrator is for the narratee, the more clearly the point can be made that this is the opinion, the interpretation of one person, thus inherently subjective and always to a certain extent flawed. It can, therefore, be argued that the choice of external focalisation interspersed with internal focalisation is suitable to this subject matter.<sup>16</sup>

The narrator is moving along the fine line of stereotypes in order to discern where Jeanne could be defined. This more than leaves open this story to the same type of criticism that Carter is directing towards Baudelaire and his ilk. Carter is colonising Jeanne for her purposes, be they feminist or otherwise, just as Jeanne's white lover is. Carefully read, though, the text reveals a kind of self-consciousness through the narrator which goes far in contradicting this claim. Jeanne is not turned into a feminist pseudo heroine who succeeds in breaking out of the mould she was forced into by her colonisers. In a plot line reminiscent of "The Loves of Lady Purple", Carter shows Jeanne's unwillingness to change her definition while nevertheless underscoring the fact that she is a construct effected by external influences and power constructs..

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<sup>16</sup>Internal focalisation is defined as "a type of FOCALIZATION whereby information is conveyed in terms of a character's (conceptual or perceptual) POINT OF VIEW or PERSPECTIVE." Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* 45.



The main difference between Carter's two short-stories seems to lie in that, in the one, Carter portrays an archetypal fictional character, and in this narrative she takes a historically 'real' woman and attempts to see where the story could lead after the historical facts stop. She is also moving over much more dangerous ground in dealing with a real figure. Instead of focusing on the person of Jeanne apart from Baudelaire, however, Carter creates glimpses of their life together, from what can be assumed through historical facts, and debunking them. The narrator never claims to attempt to give Jeanne a true identity, but uses her as a figure through whom the narrator can criticise Baudelaire and through him the privileging of the poetic gaze. There is a fine nuance of difference here which prevents the criticism of Jeanne's re-colonisation. The narrator is conscious of the traps inherent in this type of figure and steps around them. Baudelaire is, and remains, the decadent white coloniser, and Jeanne meshes with other like figures to once again represent an archetype as in "The Loves of Lady Purple". Only in this manner is the author able to criticise the misogynistic definitions surrounding this figure. Jeanne is a product of a misogynistic culture, and it would be fairy-tale like if she were able to break out of this mould. It would therefore represent a true colonisation of this figure if she were re-made into a product of feminist fancy.

Carter opens the narrative with an adjective rife characterisation of the season. It is appropriate that she chooses autumn:

Sad; so sad, those smoky-rose, smoky-mauve evenings of late autumn, sad enough to pierce the heart. The sun departs the sky in winding sheets of gaudy cloud; anguish enters the city, a sense of the bitterest regret, a nostalgia for things we never knew, anguish of the turn of the year, the time of impotent yearning, the inconsolable season. (231)

The narrator chooses to include the collective *we* in this opening passage, and if the reader takes this in context with a statement which follows a few lines later: "Although she does not know the meaning of the word, 'regret', the woman sighs, without any precise reason" (231), it can be seen that the narrator has set up herself, the narratee and, with hindsight, Baudelaire, in opposition to Jeanne. With this,

Carter defines the group who controls the definition of Jeanne. *We* regret but Jeanne does not know what this means. Though used to criticise misogynistic discourse, the term ‘other’ here seems appropriate to define Jeanne. The narrator is deliberately creating a distance between the *we* and Jeanne, in this case, to avoid an appropriation of this figure. We cannot really understand Jeanne and everything that is said about her must remain pure speculation.

The narrator’s choosing Autumn allows her to manipulate the descriptions of this season to set a mood for the story: “In America, they call it ‘the Fall’, bringing to mind the Fall of Man” (231). Here, she once again manipulates the images associated with Genesis. A favourite image of Carter’s, it enables her to set the stage appropriately for Jeanne, which she does at the end of this paragraph. Jeanne immediately becomes Eve, who “offered the choice between virtue and knowledge, will always choose knowledge, always the hard way” (231). Carter returns her protagonist to a semi-state of innocence, yet with the ever present potential for sin. Jeanne, similar to the villagers who peopled the narrative, “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter”, has a vague notion of sin but does not truly understand it. The description of the season hints at this. If used to characterise the protagonist, these statements define a persona full of potential, but also full of unrealised potential. The story will deal with this notion of potential in Jeanne, thus never clearly defining her, only offering potential versions of her story.

The emphasis placed on the term ‘regret’ is also worthy of note. Carter is deliberately blurring definitions here by bringing together this term and the context of the Fall. Regret denotes a clear self-consciousness of one’s actions. It also implies the potential for a better situation or at least for different possibilities. By describing the search for knowledge associated with the Fall in the terms of little boys robbing orchards, she is adding a touch of irony and lessening the original impact of the story and degrading this “fatal drama of the primal fruit theft [...]” (231) to a banal inevitability which loses its menacing meaning in this simplistic analogy; it becomes merely a child’s prank. With this, Carter is simultaneously speaking to her knowing readership, who is familiar with the connotations surrounding the figure of Eve and removing this Eve

from this context by altering how the reader sees the Biblical intertext. If the story no longer contains the assumed meaning, then perhaps another look has to be taken at the protagonist. This parallels what Carter is doing in her narrative as a whole. By taking the Baudelairean context and redefining them, she is forcing the reader to redefine the characters, especially Jeanne.

Jeanne is an Eve who does not know regret. Yet Jeanne sighs. As she does not yearn, though, for a different life, one could assume, when reading further, that she sighs out of boredom. The next paragraph implies that Jeanne's sigh reflects the mood the narrator presents: "On these evenings, you see everything as though your eyes are going to lapse to tears. She sighs" (231). Tears obscure or blur vision. They also blur definitions, giving everything a dream-like quality. Jeanne "was all at once transported here, as in a dream; and yet she is a *tabula rasa*, still" (231). Carter uses this blurred image to criticise Jeanne. She is living in a dream-like state, allowing herself to float without will. Yet keeping the next lines in mind, it becomes clear that this dream world is not of her own making. Jeanne is being defined according to Western terms, or, even better, according to Baudelaire's poetic style.

If the reader pays close attention to the poetic, or even over-written quality of the text thus far, it becomes clear that the narrator is miming a poetic voice. This will become even more dramatically visible later in the narrative and will become an issue the narrator directly addresses. The narrator criticises Jeanne for "never experiencing her experience as experience [...]" (231), yet her very experience is defined by the settings and surroundings in which she finds herself. This, when the narrator states that "She was like a piano in a country where [sic] everybody has had their hands cut off" (231), it becomes clear that Jeanne is unable to participate in the structures she is confronted with. She bit the apple of sin and moved suddenly from innocence to this, for her, foreign place. Here she is the exotic who can never fit in.

It is also important to take careful note of the narrator's direct address to the audience. What can, at first glance, be automatically taken at face value, actually proves to be a questioning or surmise on the part of the narrator: "Indeed, I think she never bothered to bite any apple at all. She wouldn't have known what knowledge was *for*,

would she?" (231). This question at the end of the statement can be interpreted in two fashions. On the one hand, it could denote a sense of uncertainty and, on the other hand, could be seen as ironic. Both possibilities give reason for pause. The reader should become aware of the fact that the narrator is speaking to the audience's prejudices or opinions. This demonstrates a clear collusion on the part of the narrator with Jeanne and her predicament, implying that the reader tends toward privileging Baudelaire's perspective.

It is, therefore, more than appropriate that the narrator moves directly on to a description of Baudelaire's perspective, represented in direct discourse. Up to this point Jeanne Duval has been given no voice at all. The narrator will repeatedly return to Baudelaire's perspective, through allusions to his poetry, throughout the narrative, interspersing it with Jeanne's and the narrator's own to offer an interesting contrast.<sup>17</sup>

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, like you did when you were little, baby. (231-2)

There are a few things immediately apparent in Baudelaire's portion of the narrative. First, he does not address Jeanne by her name. In this example he calls her baby, which is perhaps a recognisable term of endearment between lovers, but is both impersonal and condescending. It implies an inferior status, which is the connotation more appropriate to this context. Baudelaire continues later in the paragraph by calling Jeanne "my monkey, my pussy-cat, my pet [...]" (232).<sup>18</sup> Baby must also be kept in mind when Jeanne later calls Baudelaire Daddy. This opposing pair aptly mirrors this type of relationship. Returning to the second half of the statement above, Baudelaire wishes to take Jeanne back to where she belongs. The reader should pay

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<sup>17</sup>Interestingly, Starkie emphasises that the lack of information we possess about Jeanne is not only a result of the enigmatic quality of this figure who not many people knew but also because Baudelaire was not overly forthcoming with information. What information we possess is gleaned through his poetry and from letters to his mother and some conversations with Nadar and Banville. Almost no one has firsthand knowledge of Jeanne. (Starkie 86-89.)

<sup>18</sup>Compare to Baudelaire's poems "Le Chat" and "Le Parfum".

close attention to the wording of this statement and the description of the place which follows. The poet does not want to accompany Jeanne, he wishes to take her. Also, he is privy to the information as to where Jeanne belongs. He does not wish to take her where she wishes to go, but to his subjective picture of where she supposedly belongs.

In his following description of the setting, the reader gains a strong impression of the poet emerging in the lines. Instead of describing a real place, he has created a fantasy world.<sup>19</sup> His words also imply that only in this fantasy will he be able to love her “to death” (232). While not directly stated, the context of this statement implies that their relationship is based on fantasy, and only in a world of fantasy can it survive.<sup>20</sup> With these words and descriptions, the narrator critically defines Baudelaire. The style not only mimes the poetic but also the nature of the words that characterise a man who does not live in reality. This could serve to criticise or almost to excuse the poet. While the nature of the entire narrative tends to be critical toward the male protagonist, it would be much too simple to leave it at this. There is also a trend in the story which points to a certain acceptance of Baudelaire. This is not to say that his character is not criticised, but that the criticism is subtle and quietly present in his statements and actions.

At the end of this short exposition by the Poet, the narrator once again takes over. Baudelaire’s comments are all negated by the narrator’s description of Jeanne and Jeanne’s own reactions to the poet’s words, “Go, where? Not *there!*” (232) given in free direct discourse followed by a paragraph giving her perspective. While Jeanne is again described as an animal, this time it is a crow: “she looked more like an old crow with rusty feathers in a miserable huddle by the smoky fire [...]” (232). There is a difference, though, in the narrator’s stating that Jeanne looks like a crow and Baudelaire calling her his pet. The poet’s insistence on the possessive pronoun lessens Jeanne’s value for herself. She has no desire to go where he thinks that she belongs. Her characterisation of the island is dramatically different. As a native and

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<sup>19</sup>Compare to Baudelaire’s poems “A une malabaraise” and “Parfum exotique”.

<sup>20</sup>Starkie makes the point that Baudelaire could only have a physical relationship with women in his fantasy as it was widely claimed that he was incapable of a sexual relationship. Starkie 88, 89.

not a member of the privileged colonial class, she would not be party to the fantasy lifestyle he described. Her world is made of “fly blown towns. All there is to eat is green bananas and yams and a brochette of rubber goat to chew” (232). This example differentiates between the perspectives and demonstrates how vital this dual view is.

Once again the perspective shifts, yet this time more subtly. The only notable difference is a change in style. The narrator adopts a poetic tone: “Night comes in on feet of fur [...]” (232). Whereas Baudelaire’s stance on Jeanne’s homeland was presented first, now their present apartment is being characterised. It is described in the terms recalling Nadar’s hot air balloons. Neither is able to see the earth, only the sky. It is, therefore, appropriate that the windows of the house they are living in are frosted except for the topmost ones: “all the panes except the topmost ones [were] replaced with frosted glass so that the inmates could pursue an uninterrupted view of the sky [...]” (232). While the images of the sky and the hot-air balloon conjure up a sense of freedom, the narrator’s use of the term “inmates” seems to negate this. Baudelaire and Jeanne are prisoners of their own making. In this sense they are kindred spirits, though it must be kept in mind that the basis for motivation for each is different.

The narrator continues the description with an almost loving, though, slightly tongue-in-cheek, description of the furnishings in their cell. While the style of the paragraph does not make it immediately recognisable, it contains free direct discourse:

at the inspiration of a gust of wind such as now rattles the tiles above us, this handsome apartment with its Persian rugs, its walnut table off which the Borgias served poisons, its carved armchairs from whose bulbous legs grin and grimace the cinquecento faces, the crust of fake Tintoretto 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) [...]. (232)

To whom the narrator is referring with the *us* is unclear, yet she seems to be mimicking Baudelaire’s voice, to which she gives the second half of the paragraph:

at the invitation of the mysterious currents of the heavens, this well-appointed cabin will loose its moorings in the street below and take off,

depart, whisk across the dark vault of the night, tangling a stillborn, crescent moon in its ropes, nudging a star at lift-off, and will deposit us [...]. (232)

While the entire paragraph consists of free indirect speech, the narrator's aside, included in parentheses, would seem to argue against this type of reading. The second half of the paragraph, though, seems to represent Baudelaire's poetic musings. In this case, the *us* included in the text refers to Jeanne and Baudelaire. Thus Jeanne's tagged direct discourse which is abruptly forced into Baudelaire's musings makes sense.

She vehemently negates everything that has been stated in the last paragraphs with a resounding "No!" (233). By invoking the image of the "slavers' route back to the West Indies [...]" (233), Jeanne is able to show that these objects and places which Baudelaire has been so lovingly describing are for her, inverted: "The bloody parrot forest!" (233) is for him paradise, but for her a place where she and her people are slaves. The reversal of her journey to France is a repetition of the forced journey of the slaves to these islands. Even the "precious Bokhara!" (233) is an object belonging to his Western world and in the tone of her comment about it, worth more to him than she is.

What follows this is a more general statement by the narrator about both characters. Here it is claimed that both are dispossessed and without a native land. This is something which has been implied throughout the text thus far and must be differentiated here. The narrator points out that Baudelaire "cannot believe she is as dispossessed as he [...]" (233), though the nature of their homelessness is radically different. The poet is in his native country, while actually being dispossessed in the city of Paris, so his feeling of being dispossessed is a luxury. These feelings could be attributed to the fact that he is an artist. Jeanne's homelessness, however, has its roots in colonialism and slavery.

A few paragraphs later, the narrator once again intertwines her text with that of Jeanne this time: "but Daddy paid no attention to what song his siren sang, he

fixed his quick, bright, dark eyes upon her decorated skin ass if, sucker, authentically entranced" (233). In the next line, the word 'sucker' is repeated again in tagged direct speech. It is as if the narrator wishes to give her descriptions of what is going on in this room and Jeanne's feelings a legitimacy which is usually questioned in heterodiegetic narration.

After this initial switching back and forth between perspectives, the text begins to concentrate for the most part on Jeanne. It becomes an interesting mixture of authorial narration interspersed with segments which could be defined as free direct speech. Near the end of the first part of the narrative, Baudelaire is allowed back into the text for a moment through a short authorial comment and the inclusion of his poem, "Sed non satiata" It seems interesting to include Baudelaire again at precisely this point, as two short paragraphs later the first break in the narrative occurs. After this break, the narrative takes on the quality of an historical report about the known facts concerning Jeanne's life. Reintroducing Baudelaire to the text shortly beforehand with the 'real' text of one of his poems makes this transition less jarring.

In this next section, the authorial comment becomes even more present. Flowing directly from this historical interlude, the narrator attempts to find a history for Jeanne:

as if she were the Empress of all the Africas.

But she was the deposed Empress, royalty in exile, for, of the entire and heterogeneous wealth of all those countries, had she not been dispossessed? [...]

She had been deprived of history, she was the pure child of the colony.  
The colony – white, imperious – had fathered her. (238)

With these statements the narrator's choice to begin the story as she did, with the inclusion of both Jeanne's and Baudelaire's perspectives, becomes clear. With it, she demonstrates the mentality of the coloniser in Baudelaire and of the colonised in Jeanne. Yet the often unflattering characterisation of Jeanne in the text thus far



precludes a simple reading along these lines. The text refuses to paint Jeanne only as a victim, something Carter refuses in most all of her writing.

What follows, in short, separate sections, are various musings by the narrator on the effect of language on the colonised, in this case Jeanne. After this, she returns to the image of the first portion of the story, of Jeanne and Baudelaire as disconnected wanderers in a short section comparing the two to Penguins and Albatrosses. Interestingly, here the narrator once again makes use of free direct speech in which she speaks directly to Baudelaire. In some parts it is unclear if the voice does not directly belong to Jeanne. Carter is picking up on Jeanne's history as an actress when Jeanne defines herself as an albatross. Even Enid Starkie's biography makes the point that Jeanne has little sympathy with or understanding of Baudelaire's artistic side. "It is clear, from Nadar's account, that she considered [Baudelaire] a generous, kind-hearted lunatic [...] She did not understand his sensitivity, his shyness, his love of beauty and his longing for perfection ..."<sup>21</sup> Carter calls attention to this lack of understanding which is present on both sides of the relationship and even present in the *we* group of the narrator. "It was not surprising if sometimes [Jeanne] became bored, and thought her lover odd and unbalanced, it was no wonder that she often felt dissatisfied at being worshipped like an image in a shrine."<sup>22</sup> Thus Jeanne sees Baudelaire as a ridiculous figure akin to a Penguin and in her fantasy wishes herself into the role of the albatross.

if you go far south enough you reach again the realm of perpetual cold that begins and ends *our* experience of this earth, those ranges of ice mountains where the bull-roaring winds bay and bellow and no people are, only the stately penguin in his frock coat not unlike yours, Daddy, the estimable but, unlike you, uxorious penguin who balances the precious egg on his feet while his dear wife goes out and has a good a time as the Antarctic may afford.

If Daddy were like a penguin, how much more happy *we* should be; there isn't room for two albatrosses in *this* house.

flightless birds form the audience for the wonderful *aerielistes* who live in the heart of the storm – like the bourgeoisie, Daddy, sitting good and

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<sup>21</sup>Starkie 87-8.

<sup>22</sup>Starkie 89.

quiet with their eggs on their feet watching artists such as **we** dare death upon the high trapeze. (240, bold emphasis mine)

Exactly to whom the *we* and *our* refers remains ambiguous. This is one of the more problematic sections of the narrative, as the narrator is mixing her voice with Jeanne's. The previous clear separation at least allowed for the semblance of an independent Jeanne. Here, the narrator is calling attention to the deceptive nature of such an assumption. While she is giving voice to a different version of Jeanne than is known historically, she cannot but remain a creation of the narrator. The merging of the voices makes this all the clearer.

In the last portion of the text, the narrator once again begins by narrating Jeanne's 'true' history. She then juxtaposes this with a fictionalised account of how Jeanne's life could have ended. Carter does not choose to create a 'new' Jeanne here. Jeanne spends the rest of her long life living in luxury, bought from the sale of Baudelaire's unpublished manuscripts she had not used as ashtrays, as well as various other memorabilia. With this wealth she opens her own brothel with an ambiguous "brother" and lives happily ever after. Ironically, with the final lines of the text, the narrator cannot help but deliver a last stab at the patriarchy.

Until at last, in extreme old age, she succumbs to the ache in her bones and a cortège of grieving girls takes her to the churchyard, 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. (243-4)

This narrative demonstrates self-consciously the fictionality of any writing of a real or fictional character. As it is told in the homodiegetic narration, the narrator is able to vary the perspectives and achieve a much more well-rounded portrait of who Jeanne Duval *may* have been than if Carter had attempted to create this narrative as homodiegetic. Homodiegesis tends to give a flawed impression of reality, which "Black Venus" is at pains to avoid, and which the self-conscious third-person makes all the more graspable.

### 3.2 “The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe”

“The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe” is one of five heterodiegetic narratives in *Black Venus*.<sup>23</sup> It is, like the others, overtly authorial. The narrator chooses to focus the perspective on two characters in Poe’s life, the man himself and his mother who died when he was three years old. The narrative is divided into three recognisable sections, not including a short authorial introduction. The first section can be seen under the heading history or life. Here, the narrator begins by telling the story of Poe’s mother and her career as an actress. Intermingled with this is Poe’s experience of his impressionable first years. During this time, he more or less grows up in the theatre, where he must play second fiddle, along with his older brother Henry, to the personas their mother portrays on the stage. The mother is an ever-changing, transforming and thus insubstantial being. During this time Poe also experiences his sister’s birth first hand. All of these impressions come together to make up his picture of women.

This section ends with the mother’s death. Accordingly, the next portion of the text revolves around death, even going so far as to include a fictional will left behind by Poe’s mother. In this will, no possessions are left the children, but memories and impressions. Lorna Sage writes that the narrative deals with “the *real* role of the black Muse, the dead mother’s Gothic legacy [...]”<sup>24</sup> The narrator gives this legacy a physical manifestation in the form of the written will. In the third section, the narrative follows Poe’s life as an adult. The logical movement of the text thus far, from life to death, is continued here. Poe’s concentration on death and its images in his writing is manipulated here to paint a portrait of the fictional Poe of this particular narrative.

The choice of heterodiegetic narration for “The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe”, is fitting. Much of the material used to form the ‘history’ of this figure is highly speculative.

<sup>23</sup>I exclude “Overture and Incidental Music for A Midsummer Night’s Dream” from this as the point of view shifts from first- to third-person.

<sup>24</sup>Sage, *Angela Carter* 45. Interestingly, Linden Peach writes that the narrative “inserts into the literary biography of Poe an account of the significance of the black muse, his dead mother’s legacy.” Peach, *Angela Carter* 146. This is almost the exact wording Sage uses and it lies close at hand that Peach had her interpretation in mind as he cites her about “Overture and Incidental Music for A *Midsummer Night’s Dream*” in the next sentence.

Carter has chosen the most stereotypical ‘readings’ of the author’s life in order to form a coherent narrative. Clare Hanson writes that the narrative “explores the construction of the nineteenth-century American writer’s particular sensibility through an imaginative reconstruction of his childhood.”<sup>25</sup> Yet strategies employed by the subjective teller in this story point towards a criticism of such a cause and effect reading: Poe is obsessed with death because he watched his mother die. He marries a 13 year-old cousin because he is afraid of mature female sexuality. Writing this text in the first-person would add a legitimacy which Carter wishes to undermine. Hanson harshly criticises this narrative, as she judges it to be falling into the trap of upholding stereotypes, which I claim that the nature of the narration undermines. She writes,

So while [the narrative] looks like a promising candidate for a reading drawing on [...] ideas about performance, and focusing on the contestation of gender stereotypes, what actually happens within the story is a return of the repressed archetype of the maternal-feminine linked with death. And while the zone of abjection is present, signalled most strikingly by Poe’s desire for his corpse-like young wife, it forces no rearticulation of ‘what qualifies as bodies that matter’. On the contrary: at the end of the story the abject Poe, like his father before him, simply *dematerializes* [...].<sup>26</sup>

I maintain, though, that Hanson is focusing on something that is not at the core of the narrative. This is not a story primarily about patriarchal discourse. While it does deal with the problematic nature of how Poe sees his mother and Hanson’s statements that the “most startling aspect of this story, however, is the way in which the young, cross-dressing Mrs. Poe moves not towards freedom but towards a death which seems to be inextricably linked with her maternal function”<sup>27</sup> are true, Carter’s focus lies not in the deconstruction of these stereotypes from the female point-of-view, but from Poe’s, the male. Hanson claims that the story “moves toward stasis rather

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<sup>25</sup>Clare Hanson, “‘The red dawn breaking over Chapham’: Carter and the limits of artifice,” *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter*, ed. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London: Longman, 1997) 61.

<sup>26</sup>Hanson 62.

<sup>27</sup>Hanson 62.

than contestation [...].”<sup>28</sup> She uses this to criticise the narrative, yet, this is the very point that Carter is making.

The narrative relies on a narratee who will, on the surface, buy into this jargon of repression. Coupled with Poe’s ‘biography’ the narrator is then able to seem to present an inevitability, a static situation. It is, therefore, vital to examine closely the narrative strategy employed in order to not misinterpret this narrative. Carter is asking her readers to question their ‘readings’ of history, of historical figures as well known as Edgar Allan Poe. This is something she does repeatedly, not only in this collection, and this narrative, especially, deals with the problems arising from re-writing history. The author, through the fallibility of the narrator, can call attention to the distinction between event and facts.

In the opening lines of this narrative, the reader is confronted with a narrator who speaks directly to the audience: “Imagine Poe in the Republic!” (262). The narrator chooses to begin *in medias res* as the title figure is so well known that a lengthy general introduction would not be necessary. Carter hints at the breadth of Poe’s aesthetic code in this statement. “Der Dichter ... lehnt die Demokratie wegen ihrer negativen Folgen der gleichmacherischen Ausrichtung nach der Masse, des Materialismus und des platten Fortschrittsgeschreis mit Verbitterung ab.”<sup>29</sup> The author is picking up on the dissolutionment that went along with the Civil War in the United States, thus providing an appropriate historical and aesthetic setting for her narrative and setting the dark and serious tone. Choosing to begin in an implied *you* address with the word ‘imagine’, the reader is asked to suspend belief for a moment and allow the narrator to paint a portrait of Edgar Allan Poe. The sentence continues after the exclamation point as if this punctuation mark were not there to serve its usual function, but to mimic a vocal emphasis. The reader can imagine the narrator almost laughing, at the very least expressing extreme disbelief at the thought of Poe in the Puritan North. The choice of an *in medias res* beginning emphasises the feeling that one has entered into an ongoing conversation. The line continues, “when he possesses none of its virtues; no Spartan, he” (262). With this the narrator sets the stage for

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<sup>28</sup>Hanson 62.

<sup>29</sup>Rohmann “Der Dichter als Dandy” 202.

the bent of the narrative. She will concentrate on Poe's 'outsider' status. She writes, "Either you are a saint; or a stranger. He is a stranger, here, a gentleman up from Virginia somewhat down on his luck" (262).

Ironically, this collection was originally titled *Saints and Strangers*. Perhaps this title was too overt for Carter, so she chooses to utilise the more ambiguous "Black Venus" instead. The original title seems to address the theme of the collection more overtly. While the author is not presenting a fairy tale, as in *The Bloody Chamber*, she is nevertheless creating a mythical tale of Poe's life from historical facts. Therefore, the impression of a narrator as tale-teller is strong in this narrative. Historical facts and images are gleaned from Poe's life and works to blend together in a collage which, to a certain extent, attempts to draw conclusions about Poe's life from what he left behind. Ironically, the text manipulates this fact in the inclusion of Mrs. Elizabeth Poe's will to her son.

Carter's choice of 'cabinet' calls up pictures of Madame Tousseaud's wax cabinet in London. These figures give a semblance of life, yet are and remain only a representation of such. Similarly in this story, Carter creates a semblance of Poe and his life, but it is important to keep in mind that it can, lastly, always only be a representation. Legend and mystery, ever present in Poe's gothic writing, have come together and solidified in the minds of the reader to form just such a wax figure. The narrator states, "People think he is drunk. He *is* drunk" (262). This can be interpreted in two ways. The narrator may be claiming that Poe is an alcoholic, which is often underscored in the following text, but could also be claiming in the subtle inclusion of the first sentence that as 'people' believe Poe to be drunk he *is* therefore drunk. While this is only one pseudo-historical fact about him, it is nevertheless a debatable one. Edward H. Davidson writes, in his introduction to a collection of Poe's writings, that Poe's audience and critics have melded together his literary art and life into a biography which, for them, is fitting for an author of such works as he produced:

In that brief life-span of forty years he initiated enough half-truths and legends to grant later biographers and indiscreet analysts the apparent license to make the man into a repulsive myth. [...] [It is an] obvious

human failing to confuse life and literature- to assume, in other words, that what a man wrote he inevitably was in his own person. [...] [This] is virtually nonexistent in the case of Edgar Poe. Perhaps one might lay down the truism that Poe wrote what he did because it was as remote as possible from his own experience.<sup>30</sup>

Scott Peeples writes that it is largely due to the Rev. Rufus Wilmot Griswald that Poe is seen as such a controversial figure. Even during his life and shortly after his death, there was widespread disagreement about Poe's life, writing and nature. He was touted by many as a brilliant author and critic and, on the one hand, his "partisans produced scrap after scrap of evidence that he *did* have friends, that he was devoted to his wife and his mother-in-law, that he was more often sober than drunk, more often honorable than devious."<sup>31</sup> His critics, on the other hand, emphasized his dissolute character.<sup>32</sup> Whether or not Davidson's reading of Poe's life is the only one possible, the fact remains that the 'real' story is unknowable. She uses a conglomeration of information about Poe to construct a portrait of the man and she uses the constructs of point-of-view to emphasize the feeling that the story is not knowable. Carter is also picking up on a point that Poe touched on in his own writing. In the story, "The Man That Was Used Up," Poe writes a character who is a construct.<sup>33</sup>

She begins the narrative by setting the stage of pre-Civil War America: "Here it is always morning; stern, democratic light scrubs apparitions off the streets down which his dangerous feet must go" (262). The reader is immediately confronted with the defining characteristics of the Puritan work ethic, which served to define first the colonies and later the nation as a whole. A clear line is drawn through the middle of this country, a literary Mason Dixon line, dividing not the physical states, but a state of ideals. Poe is firmly ensconced in the decadence of the soon to be ending Southern idyll.

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<sup>30</sup>Edward H. Davidson, introduction, *Selected Writing of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. and intro. Edward H. Davidson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956) vii.

<sup>31</sup>Scott Peeples, *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe* (Rochester, Suffolk: Camden House, 2004) 2.

<sup>32</sup>Peeples 1-27. Peeples argues that Griswald may have even blackened Poe's reputation on purpose in order to make him more interesting. Griswald was given the job of compiling an authorized edition of Poe's works. Both Griswald and Poe's mother-in-law claim that this is what Poe wished. Peeples 4.

<sup>33</sup>Peeples 25. *Poe: Poetry, Tales, & Selected Essays*. Library of America College Editions. (New York: The Library of America College Edition, 1996.) 307-16.

The 'black star' of the South is mentioned here for the first time. The narrator utilises this symbol at least two more times in the text in the context of Poe. Here it is the star of melancholy, fitting in the literary tone of his works. It is mentioned again in the second half of the narrative as "the black stars of the slave states" (269). This is a colour negation alluding not only to the skin of the slaves, but also an opposite to the white of the stars in the nation's flag. The last mention of this image is in the last lines of the narrative, where Poe becomes engulfed by the black star: "Lights! more lights! he cried, like the hero of a Jacobean tragedy when the murdering begins, for the black star was engulfing him" (272). Only a place like the US-American South could foster such an artist. The melancholy gothic air of this place and this person could not survive the glaring light of the Republic. In light of her re-use of the star imagery throughout the narrative, the inclusion of the passage on the Republic begins to gain meaning. Poe's own characterisation is hinged to this dichotomy of light and dark, life and death.

This image is taken further in the narrator's inclusion of Poe's actress mother in the narrative.<sup>34</sup> Besides being a historical fact, this world of the theatre and its different costumes constitutes an unreal atmosphere where reality and semblance melt together. With the introduction of the mother and her life, many of the allusions made in the text to Poe's life and his rather skewed vision of women and death begin to make sense. Of course it would be incorrect to assume that these assumptions are true merely because Carter chooses to utilise them in her own fashion. She presents a possibility which fits into her scheme. Manipulating well known images, she manages to open a door between two worlds which could offer insight into Edgar Allan Poe's life and work.

At the beginning of the description of Poe's mother, the narrator continues to characterise the historical time. Here there is a move away from the generally defining Puritan ethic to the ethics of the audience. This is a theme Carter often manipulates in her fiction, as can be seen in this study thus far. She "made her first appearance on any stage in her ninth summer in a hiss-the-villain melodrama [...]" (262). This

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<sup>34</sup>This character can be found again, to a certain extent in Carter's final novel, *Wise Children*, in the figures of the Hazards and Chances.



offers a first stark contrast to the sombre atmosphere of the Republic. Going even further, the narrator throws in the Marquis de Sade for good measure. Though having published *The Sadeian Woman* in 1979, and the collection, *Black Venus* eight years later, as can be seen with many of her symbols and images, she uses and reuses them in varying contexts to examine different facets of their meaning. This is the first time, though, that Carter has specifically used the image of this famous man in her short fiction.

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 swarm of full-armed, mad-eyed homunculi. Everything is about to succumb to delirium. (262-3)

It is arguable whether or not the image of de Sade is appropriate here. It contains such a great number of connotations that Carter might be overplaying her hand. Of course he is fitting in the sense of death and sexuality, yet his works go in a much different direction than Poe's. If we remove de Sade from the context of Poe and argue that his inclusion in the narrative serves to characterise the time and not the actual protagonist, then it could be said that he represents the slow decline of static ethics, and that the reference to delirium pertains to the coming of the Civil War. A further possibility also emerges when seeing the Sadeian delirium in the context of the theatre: "So you say he overacts? Very well; he overacts. There is a past history of histrionics in his family" (262). The narrator is bringing together the artificiality, the hysterical quality of the theatre with the sexual hysterics of de Sade. As Poe was well loved in France beginning in the 1850s when his writing was translated into French by the poet Charles Baudelaire, the reference to de Sade can also be seen as a comment by the narrator as to the hesitant reception of Poe's work in his home country, this country of the Puritan work ethic where there was bright light which banished all darkness in contrast to de Sade's France.

The narrator continues by characterising Poe's mother as a very versatile and skilled actress. An interesting emphasis is placed on her ability to look young. Later in this

narrative, emphasis is placed on the youth of Poe's wife, Virginia Clemm, and through this it is inferred that Poe had a penchant for young beauty, pure and untouched, as is seen especially in his poetry. This also touches, again, on the lingering image of de Sade and his sexual perversions. Poe's mother can play children of both sexes and "she could do you Ophelia, too!" (263). At the same time, she also became a mother. This, though, is mentioned in such a way that it fits in with the other roles she plays. There is no border between reality and the stage:

She ran back to the green room and undid the top buttons of her waistcoat to let out a sore, milky breast to pacify little Edgar who, wakened by the hoots and catcalls that had greeted her too voluptuous imitation of a boy, likewise howled and screamed. (263)

Her audiences and children are described in the same terms. She moves between the two, fulfilling their needs. There is an important difference to be noted in the description of the hoots and catcalls and the howls and screams, though. While they are similar, their difference lies in more than the person making these sounds. The one audience is a knowing one. They are conscious of their desires and are able to identify them. The baby, Edgar, on the other hand, reacts for different reasons. He is unable to differentiate between the impressions. This, coupled with the alcohol given to him by his parents to keep him quiet seem to have formed the world for this fictional Poe. It is convenient for the narrator to place the evil spirit of alcohol in Edgar's crib: "The red-eyed Angel of Intemperance hopped out of the bottle of ardent spirits and snuggled down into little Edgar's longclothes" (264). While this can be seen as a convenient manner in which to have the spectre of alcohol enter Poe's life, it also relies on historical fact. Knowledge of the dangers of alcohol, especially with children, is a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon.

It is with this image of the alcohol that Poe's father is introduced and with which he also exits a few paragraphs later at the birth of his last child. Similarly to his almost non-existence in the story, he is also almost non-existent in Poe's life: "their father began to grow insubstantial. He unbecame" (264). Poe's life becomes like the theatre, like a tragedy where everyone dies. First his father fades away and then his

mother slowly dies. It is in this death that she is unable to maintain the illusion that has made up her life. She now only plays one role: “Her mirror, the actress’s friend, the magic mirror in which she sees whom she has become, no longer acknowledged any but a death’s head” (265).

What follows the mother’s death in the text is a type of last will and testament. Instead of being a list of possessions she leaves her children, it is an abbreviated list of her life and the incomplete and often skewed or horrific memories she has left Edgar.

The subsequent narrative serves to underscore the images presented in the first half. Mrs. Elizabeth Poe’s will is presented in the form of a list with headings. This will is filled with authorial comment which, while the text is setting up a cause/effect scenario which defines Poe’s life, the indecisiveness expressed by the narrator simultaneously undermines this.

*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. (266)

The choice of the *would* is not as clearly defining as the simple past tense of the verb *did*.

*Item: transformation.* This is a more ambivalent relic. Something like this... Edgar would lie in prop-baskets on heaps of artificial finery and watch her [...]. (266)

By choosing to add the statement ‘This is a more ambivalent relic. Something like this’, the narrator makes an overt statement to the narratee that that which follows is a fictional supposition, a created scenario a further level removed from the already fictional text.

*Item:* that women possess within them a cry, a thing that needs to be extracted... but this is only the dimmest of memories and will reassert itself in vague shapes of unmentionable dread only at the prospect of carnal connection. (266)

In this item, the narrator becomes even vaguer in the statement that all that the child Poe has experienced pertaining to the physical sexuality of women will retreat so far back into his consciousness as to manifest themselves in vague fears. While the narrative “Peter and the Wolf” has been examined towards its Freudian critique, I have thus far discovered no such concrete analysis of this story. This item about Poe’s mother and her effect on his sexuality especially lends itself to this correlation. Yet through the subtle inclusion of uncertainty, the narrator pulls the rug out from underneath the Freudians who would too easily place all of Poe’s problems at the feet of a massive Oedipus complex.

*Item:* the awareness of mortality. (266)

In this particular item, the narrator, uncharacteristically, avoids direct or indirect comment. The question of Poe’s ‘obsession’ with death is of a much more neutral nature. This portion, as well as the next ‘item’, are added for reasons of completeness.

*Item:* a face, the perfect face of a tragic actor, his face, white skin stretched tight over fine, white bones in a final state of wonderfully lucid emaciation. (266)

In the same vein, this next to last item also contains no overt authorial intervention. It is, nevertheless, followed by a two-paragraph exposition on little Edgar’s mother’s second death, subjectively seen through the eyes of this little boy for whom mother was a myriad of personas, in the burning down of the theatre in which she had last performed. With this, the narrator succeeds in re-entering the fictionality of her narration.

NATURE OF THE THEATRICAL ILLUSION; everything you see is false. (267)

In the final point, a type of coda to the rest, the narrator expounds on the reasons why all of the impressions listed above could cause the reaction they did: “Consider the theatrical illusion with special reference to this impressionable child, who was exposed to it at an age when there is no reason for anything to be real” (267). The direct address is reminiscent of the opening ‘Imagine’. It asks the narratee to leave behind every other consideration for a moment and to allow the narrator to lead him in her own particular direction. In the next sentence, she once again expresses a sense of conjecture in “he must often have toddled” (267).

Interestingly, the subsequent paragraph, which describes Poe’s experience as a baby on this stage he is discovering, is written in the present tense, further underscoring the discourse’s fictionality.<sup>35</sup> Further, the narrator begins to speak directly to an ambiguous *you*: “Artificial shadows fall in all the wrong places. Nothing is what it seems. *You* knock against a gilded throne [...] *you* kick it sideways [...]” (267). It is unclear at this point whether the narrator is speaking to the narratee addressed directly in other instances in the narrative or if she has chosen to speak directly to Poe: “it turns out to be made of papier mâché, it is as light as air – a child, you yourself, could pick it up and carry it off with you [...]” (267).

This ambiguity is deliberate here in assuming an immediacy with the protagonist’s child-self, while the choice of tense undermines the very possibility of immediacy by deliberately causing a sense of distancing in underscoring its fictional nature. As this passage continues, it becomes clear that the *you* address has shifted through a gentle transition which caused speculation as to the *who* being addressed, to a clear address of the child Poe. In an offset sentence, the narrator leaves this speculative tone and once again returns, forcefully, to her core assumption of cause and effect in Poe’s life. “On his brow her rouged lips left the mark of Cain.” (268)

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<sup>35</sup>Cf. Fludernik, ‘*Natural*’ *Narratology* 224.

In the remaining narrative, the narrator utilises the images outlined in the will to explain Poe's adult life. The choice of his bride is linked to his fear of sexuality and to the child-like persona his mother often portrayed on stage: "He was not put out by the tender years of this young girl whom he soon married; was she not just Juliet's age, just thirteen summers?" (269). The narrator chooses to make the implied speaker of 'was she not' purposefully vague, as this leaves open to the reader to choose whether this is uttered by the narrator or is an instance of free direct discourse attributed to Poe. In her death, Virginia merges with Poe's mother. In his death, Poe merges with his father: "He was starting to dissolve!" (272).

Through the choice of heterodiegetic narration, Carter is able to create a narrative which addresses multiple aspects of Edgar Allan Poe's life while avoiding the attempt at creating a true story. She is also able to chart an interesting progression through her manipulation of narratological constructs demonstrating once again the subtle use she makes of these possibilities; form underscores meaning.

### 3.3 "Overture and Incidental Music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*"

"Overture and Incidental Music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" begins with the first narrator, the Golden Herm, speaking directly to an unidentified audience. This is the second narrative in the collection *Black Venus* in which the author deliberately chooses to utilise autodiegetic narration. Yet on the third page of the narrative, the perspective changes abruptly to heterodiegetic narration. The narrator subsequently shifts focus numerous times from Puck to Titania to the Golden Boy to Oberon and to a self-conscious expository narration while always retaining the heterodiegetic point-of-view.

In an "irreverent salute to the national Name"<sup>36</sup>, the narrative goes behind the scenes of Shakespeare's play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c1594). Lorna Sage writes,

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<sup>36</sup>Sage, *Angela Carter* 45.

“Shakespeare’s play is subjected to a cunning transformation by means of a sort of pre-script. We are behind the plot, before the curtain rises, eavesdropping on the suppressed subtext, which is all about the large libidos of the fairies.”<sup>37</sup> While both Carter’s text and the Shakespearean intertext are obviously fictional and move in the realm of the fantastic, Sage writes that Carter’s matter of fact treatment of the fantastic material has the effect of “*naturaliz[ing]* the reader in this landscape [...]”<sup>38</sup> The just as fantastic re-writing of the characters and setting takes on the guise of reality by being juxtaposed with the Shakespeare play. While the narrative does contain, in a certain form, the formal aspects of a piece of short fiction, it does lack a traditional plot. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to examine especially both the point-of-view and the narrative personas to gain some type of insight on the purpose.

Carter’s story begins with narration from the changeling boy who, in the play, serves as the catalyst for Oberon and Titania’s falling-out which gives rise to the comedic reversals in the piece. In Carter’s narrative, though, the changeling boy calls him/herself the Golden Herm. After approximately two and one-half pages of narration from this figure, the heterodiegetic narrator takes over and offers an approximately two page treatise on the essence of the English wood. Subsequently, the focus shifts to Puck, the trickster figure in the play intertext.

After a bit more than a page, the focus shifts again to the Golden Herm. Following only five short paragraphs, some only one line, the narrator begins to tell again, as in the first section on Puck, of this figure’s attempts at getting his hands on the Golden Herm. Barely a page later, the focus again shifts, this time to Titania. In a rare smooth transition, the focus again shifts almost two pages later, to Oberon. Following this is an approximately one-page section, in which all of the four major figures are dealt with together. This is followed once again by a short section focusing on Oberon, then one on Puck. The final section returns to Titania and Oberon and then “The curtain rises” (283) to usher in the ‘real’ world of the play.

Upon reading this list of reversals and shifts, the question of the success of this narrative strategy must be posed. Why would Carter choose to approach this behind

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<sup>37</sup>Sage, *Angela Carter* 45.

<sup>38</sup>Sage, *Angela Carter* 45.

the scenes look at Shakespeare's play in this manner? The intertext itself suggests this type of approach in that it also shifts scenes and characters, as well as offering often confusing reversals. Secondly, as suggested by the title of the narrative, "Overture and Incidental Music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*", the narrative is a type of preliminary for the real thing. The term overture can be defined in two different ways. Firstly, it refers to music which serves as an introduction to a longer piece of music.<sup>39</sup> In short, an introduction as in essay writing. Linden Peach also argues that "An 'overture' is normally an introduction, which reverses the chronological relationship between the two texts, and does not have to have a close relationship in style to the main piece of music."<sup>40</sup> It can also mean "an approach made (to someone) in order to offer something [...]."<sup>41</sup>

While the title suggests the musical connotation, nevertheless, the narrative can also be seen as 'offering' a behind-the-scenes look at the real thing, encapsulating both definitions. The term incidental music refers to "music that is played in the background during a film, broadcast or play to help the people who are watching or listening to feel emotions that suit what is happening in the performance."<sup>42</sup> This type of underscoring is not seen uncritically.<sup>43</sup> Placing Carter's narrative into this critical debate, it is clear that she is deliberately colouring the reader's experience of the play intertext. Seymour Chatman argues that the "two different kinds of communications, textual [in this case Shakespeare's original] and non-textual, [here Carter's story] may perform *at each other's service* [...]."<sup>44</sup>

The two texts, in this case form a symbiosis necessary for the Carter narrative. While in reality, the Shakespeare play does not need Carter's behind-the-scenes look at the characters to be understood, the story level<sup>45</sup> of the Carter narrative assumes this,

<sup>39</sup>"Overture," *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, 1999 ed.

<sup>40</sup>Peach 146.

<sup>41</sup>"Overture," *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, 1999 ed.

<sup>42</sup>"Incidental music," *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, 1999 ed.

<sup>43</sup>Seymour Chatman writes, "In classical Western music, for example, penultimate dominant chords generally call for resolving tonics, and to that extent they control listeners' expectations." Chatman, *Coming To Terms* 8.

<sup>44</sup>Chatman, *Coming To Terms* 8.

<sup>45</sup>Prince defines this as, "The CONTENT plane of NARRATIVE as opposed to its EXPRESSION plane or DISCOURSE; the 'what' of a narrative as opposed to its 'how' [...]." Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* 91.



creating a fictional symbiosis. This goes without saying. What remains interesting in all of this, though, is the discordant nature of the text. Picking up on subtle hints in the text and keeping the definition of the terms in the title in mind, the narrative takes on the quality of an orchestra ‘warming up’ prior to a performance. This warming up consists of discordant sounds, beginnings and abrupt screeches. Also, when one considers incidental music in film and television, it also changes abruptly to suit the scene. It is comprised of bits and pieces which change and repeat according to the needs of the visual narrative.

Carter’s narrative becomes the physical manifestation of this discordance. She expresses this through changes in point-of-view and perspective, in smooth transitions and abrupt screeches. The ‘notes’ end up being a perversion of the music. In the same vein, Carter perverts the play’s idyllic subject matter and creates a self-centred and conceited Herm, a voyeuristic, exhibitionistic and thwarted Puck, a voluptuous and wilting Titania and a thundering Oberon. All of them are caught in the damp and dank rainy climate of the English wood.

The ‘changeling boy’ of Shakespeare’s play is the only figure allotted a real voice in this narrative, in sharp contrast to the original, where he is the only figure who is truly silent. Carter, here, chooses to give him a voice, and what a voice it is. He speaks directly to an audience, which is defined by the prior knowledge the narrative assumes of its readers.<sup>46</sup> A readership completely unaware of Shakespeare’s play’s intertext would be hopelessly lost. While perhaps being able to grasp some of the stabs the text makes at literary discourse, or at fantasy versus reality, the reader would, nonetheless, be excluded from the richness of the narrative. Though Shakespeare’s play is among his best known, Carter, which is characteristic of this collection, chooses to begin the narrative with a minor character, who nevertheless serves as the motivation for the action on the fairy level of the play.

It is typical for Carter that she would turn this changeling boy into something sexually singular (no pun intended), the choice in this case is fitting. Marina Warner writes of Carter, “the figure of the female impersonator mirrors the hermaphrodite, and this

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<sup>46</sup>I will subsequently refer to this figure using the masculine pronoun *he* to simplify reading.

figure of alchemy, wisdom and magic also holds a very potent place in Angela Carter's imagination [...]."<sup>47</sup> Picking up on the descriptive 'changeling', by definition a baby who secretly replaces another baby<sup>48</sup> or in legend a fairy baby who replaces a human baby<sup>49</sup>, in a short story filled with sexual tension and innuendo, defining this figure in her own narrative as a hermaphrodite, extending the definitions a bit to define someone who can 'change back and forth', is not too far-fetched.

The Herm's speech quickly defines him as narcissistic: "And I am called the Golden Herm for I am gold all over; [...] wee, tiny, playful cherubs filled their cheeks and lungs and blew, blew the papery sheets of beaten gold all over my infant limbs [...]. See me shine!" (274). The narrator can immediately be identified not only by the information he/she gives in the text but also by the tone which is highly sarcastic. He follows the above quotation with a reversal outlining the contempt he has for England and its weather:

And here I stand, under the dripping trees, in the long, rank, soaking grass among draggletail dog-daisies and the branched candelabras of the buttercups from whom the gusty rain has knocked off all the petals, leaving their warty green heads bald. [...]. Boring. In the underpinnings of the trees, all soggy and floral as William Morris wallpaper [...] I, in order to retain my equilibrium and psychic balance, meditate in the yogic posture know as The Tree, that is, on one leg. (274-5)

In the approximately two and one-half pages of discourse Carter allows this character, it becomes obvious that what is being dealt with here is an unreliable narrator. The use of language implies a knowing persona in the respect that the Golden Herm is, or seems to be, master over an academic discourse.

The text begins with the statement, "Call me the Golden Herm" (273). This should immediately cause a sense of scepticism in the reader. This figure does not claim that this is his/her name, but only that this is what he/she wishes an unidentified audience to call him/her. Even in the Shakespeare play he is never named. While

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<sup>47</sup>Warner 251.

<sup>48</sup>"Changeling," *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, 1999 ed.

<sup>49</sup>E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Folkways* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957) 289.

he does go on to painstakingly qualify this name, it, nevertheless, also fits well to the nature of the Herm's discourse. It is neutral as to implied gender, it includes the descriptive adjective, golden, which also reflects the figure's estimation of himself. The shortening of the hermaphrodite to Herm demonstrates a flippancy and casual tone demonstrated throughout his short text.

This figure's command of terminology rivals that of any stereotypical academic. The Golden Herm is debunking as much myth as possible in the short space allotted. Filled with anti-colonialist, ethnic and feminist terminology and criticism, this portion speaks radically against the fantastic nature of the Shakespearean intertext. One must also keep in mind that all first-person narratives, by the very nature of the utterly subjective quality of this type of point-of-view, must be questioned.

Describing the place and circumstances of his birth, the Golden Herm states:

My mother bore me in the Southern wild but, 'she being mortal, of that boy did die,'<sup>50</sup> as my Aunt Titania says, though 'boy' in the circumstances is pushing it, a bit, she's censoring me, there, she's rendering me unambiguous in order to get the casting director out of a tight spot. (273)

The use of the term censoring in this context for his 'Auntie' Titania's transgression of calling him boy instead of being more specific or PC, serves to define the nature of the Herm. While he is mute in Shakespeare's play, in Carter's behind-the-scenes look he has a big mouth and is full of himself. While it can be argued that this and subsequent remarks dealing with types of repression are valid, the tone of the Herm's narration suggests a parody of the overuse of these theories and philosophies. By claiming censorship and at the same time stating that perhaps Titania's motive is to help the casting director, as it would prove to be very difficult to find a hermaphrodite to play the role, weakens the philosophical premise.

Nor is the sweet South in the least wild, oh, dear, no! It is the lovely land where the lemon trees grow, multiplied far beyond the utmost reaches of

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<sup>50</sup>William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) II.i. 138.

your stultified Europocentric imaginations. Child of the sun am I, and of the breezes, juicy as mangoes, that mythopoeically caress the Coast of Coramandel far away on the porphyry and lapis lazuli Indian shore where everything is bright and precise as lacquer. (273)

The Herm is splitting hairs, on the one hand, taking offence at the descriptive wild, yet continues in the most colourful terms himself to describe the country of his origin. Instead of escaping the language constructs he criticises, he energetically embraces them. He continues in his tirade to include Titania, the fairies, and Oberon, as well as a general discussion of the inadequacy of England in comparison to his far-away home. Titania is still lovely, but also fat with enormous breasts. While Shakespeare's play also endows her with a certain sexuality, the Herm drags this into the realm of the ridiculous by calling her "Auntie Tit-tit-tit-ania (for her tits are the things you notice first, size of barrage balloons) [...]" (273). At the end of this paragraph, the Herm expresses himself in an ironic aside, "(oh, yes, indeed!)" (273), which serves the purpose of adding an all the more realistic dimension to this figure. Finishing the paragraph with a deictic *here* furthers the illusion of reality. Linden Peach writes, "Carter presents a fantasy which appears to give us a realist interpretation of a fantasy"<sup>51</sup>, underscored by the above mentioned narrative devices.

When finishing with Titania, the Herm also destroys the fantasy of fairies. Instead of ephemeral beings, they are cold and wet: "the bushes shudder in the reverberations of dozens and dozens of teeny tiny sneezes, for no place on their weeny anatomies to store a handkerchief and all the fairies have got shocking colds [...]" (273-4). The comic aspect of this image cannot be denied, yet it is also clear that an entirely different picture of fairies is being presented, a more human one. Nor is Oberon left alone. In this case, though, the picture that the Herm presents is not so very different from the one with which the reader is familiar. The Herm presents Oberon as causing the rain when he masturbates.

In a final complicated discussion of patriarchy and colonialism, "'Boy' again, see; which isn't the half of it. Misinformation. The patriarchal version. [...]. Are these

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<sup>51</sup>Peach 147.

blonde English fairies the agents of proto-colonialism [sic]?” (274), the Herm once again attempts to diminish the distancing caused by the juxtaposition of the Shakespeare fantasy and the pseudo reality of the behind-the-scenes Carter creates by finishing this discussion with, “To all this, in order to preserve my complicated integrity, I present a facade of passive opposition. I am here. I am” (274). The inclusion of the deictic *here*, again as earlier, assumes a ‘reality’ of the spatial sphere of the narrative. This is even further underscored by the added visual perspective implied by the Herm’s statement about his double sexual organs. “Take a look. I’m not shy. Impressive, huh?” (274).

The Golden Herm’s narration is ended explosively with a resounding, “Atishoo” (275), a discordance reflecting the title. There is subsequently a complete break in the text, along with a radical shift in point-of-view, which takes place in an offset sentence, like the introduction of an new instrument that begins with a single clear note.

The Herm is made up of the stuff of fantasy. While taking this aspect to one extreme in the first portion of the narrative through the first-person narration of the Herm, in the second, specific universally recognisable images, are examined in more detail. The narrator in this section begins by examining the ‘wood’, which is such an integral part of the Shakespearean play. Calling attention to the fact that Shakespeare chose to set his romances or fantasies outside of England, the narrator attempts to bring the notion of the wood back home to England, at the same time offering a tongue in cheek critique of her country.

This wood is, of course, nowhere near Athens; the script is a positive maze of false leads. The wood is really located somewhere in the English midlands, possibly near Bletchley, where the great decoding machine was sited. Correction: this wood *was* located in the English midlands until oak, ash and thorn were chopped down to make room for a motorway a few years ago. (275)

The first line of the above quotation by the authorial narrator can be taken more than one way. The wood can be seen as a metaphor for the text of the narrative, not clean and romantic but soiled and ruined, where the fairies have colds and the gods

are paedophiles. The false leads referred to can be attributed either to the original Shakespearean intertext or to Carter's narrative. The quoted description removes the wood from the realm of fantasy and places it firmly in reality.

Continuing, the narrative goes on to define the definitive wood. Not satisfied with the English definition, the forest as integral part of the fairy tale landscape is brought into the discussion. At this point it becomes interesting to note what the narrator is accomplishing with this strategy. By beginning the text with the first-person narration of the Herm and bringing in the ever typical Carter sexual overtones, mingled with and, perhaps, placing them on the same level as literary discourse and subsequently switching to an external, thus deceptively more objective narrator, who manages to relegate the English wood to the realm of the harmless. Carter has managed to remove her typical sexual shock treatment from the character of the menacing forest, as in for example "The Company of Wolves" to Shakespeare's light-hearted wood.

The very perils of the wood, so many audio-visual aids to a pleasurable titillation of mild fear; the swift rattle of an ascending pheasant, velvet thud of an owl, red glide of the fox – these may all 'give you a fright', but, here, neither hobgoblin nor foul fiend can daunt your spirit because the English lobs and hobs reflect nothing more than a secular faith in the absence of harm in nature, part of the credit sheet of a temperate climate. (Here that, Herm? No tigers burn bright, here; no scaly pythons, no armoured scorpions.) Since the last English wolf was killed, there is nothing savage among the trees to terrify you. (276)

In the inserted aside included in parentheses, the narrator directly addresses the Herm. This refers to the Herm's comments on the pastel, which implies colourless or boring quality of England as compared to the hot colours of his exotic home. The English, and herein lies the authorial narrator's criticism, have systematically excised any hint of the wild out of their country and culture.

While seeming to begin in the same vein of discourse language as the Herm, this narrator discourages a rational and academic analysis of the fantastic, while on the surface eradicating the mythology surrounding the archetypal English forest. The physical representation of our fantasy may have been systematically destroyed or may never have existed, yet the immaterial, the fantasy, exists nevertheless.

Just as your shadow can grow big and then shrink to almost nothing, and then swell up, again, so can these shadows, these insubstantial bubbles of the earth, these 'beings' to whom the verb, 'to be', may not be properly applied, since, in our sense, they are not. [...]. Their existences are necessarily moot – do you believe in fairies? [...] such half-being, [...] is not conducive to any kind of visual consistency among them. So they may take what shapes they please. (278-9)

This is a self-conscious reference by a narrator who, for a moment steps out of the role of yarn-spinner and acknowledges the fictionality and purpose of her text. By definition, fantasy is undefined and can thus be created and re-created at will. The narrator makes another similar nod to the writing process a bit earlier when she writes, “my very paper would blush, [...] should I write down upon it some of the things Puck gets up to [...]” (277).

The second narrator leads the reader through this philosophical discourse to then end at the beginning of a play. The final part of the narrative is once again heralded in by a sneeze, “Atishoo!” (283).

Carter's narrative has ended as abruptly as it has begun. Through her numerous shifts in focalisation and point-of-view, she has, much like in “The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe”, deliberately manipulated narratological constructs to create a visual impression of her theme, in this case of discordance.

# Chapter 4

## Third Person

In this last chapter, I will take a close look at three narratives collected in *Fireworks*, “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest”, “Master” and “The Loves of Lady Purple”. When seen together with the other stories in the collection, these three could be said to make use of more mainstream narratological constructs avoiding the acrobatics seen in some of the other texts. While much of the emphasis in previous chapters has been on narratological acrobatics, this chapter will chart Carter’s use of more mainstream constructs which nevertheless provide space for subtle interpretations.

“Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest” is a demonstration of how heterodiegetic narration manipulates the expectations of the reader to come to a shocking ending. Yet as all is only suggested, these expectations and the resulting conclusions must be questioned. “Master”, in a subtle use of the collective pronoun *we*, creates a sense of inclusion and exclusion which will become the key to survival in the hostile jungle. “The Loves of Lady Purple” makes distinct use of perspective in order to undermine the images it presents.

### 4.1 “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest”

“Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest” is the fifth story in Carter’s collection *Fireworks*. It is also the first purely heterodiegetic narrative. With this, Carter returns to



the ‘typical’ style of short fiction, which is known for its dependence on third-person narration as it is an effective means of supplying information critical to the text, yet supplying it in the direct manner necessitated by the lack of space. It continues the narrative style introduced in “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter” of a great deal of description<sup>1</sup> coupled with an often nearly marginalised imbedded narrative proper. It is the story of Madeline and Emile Dubois, who, when they are 13 years old, decide to try and ‘penetrate to the heart of the forest’ to find a mythical tree. This journey only takes up half of the entire narrative, the remaining portion being taken up by descriptions of the setting, characterisations of the native inhabitants, and the twin’s father, as well as, a sketchy description of the children’s early lives before this journey.

Narratologically seen, this is one of the relatively few more ‘normal’ narratives in Carter’s oeuvre. It contains no pronominal acrobatics, and only a few select cases of obvious authorial comment, which are not pivotal to the interpretation of the story. The narrative is also told in the past tense. In the case of this short story, Carter chooses to let the intertexts and a subtle use of irony serve as the vehicle for meaning. The figure of the narrator remains uncharacteristically reticent. It becomes necessary to examine closely the language used in the short story in order to be able to discern the motivation and identity of this teller. The language register is high, and the intertexts introduced suggest a well read narrator persona. The omniscience that is demonstrated and the evaluative and ironic qualities of the narrative could not be expressed in the first-person. „Steht der Erzähler existentiell außerhalb der Welt der Charaktere, dann handelt es sich nach der herkömmlichen Terminologie um eine Er-Erzählung”,<sup>2</sup> which could also be extended to claim the more specific authorial narrative situation.

While I do not claim that “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest” is one of Carter’s less skilful narratives, it does lack a subtlety of expression achieved in, for example,

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<sup>1</sup>David Lodge writes, “The purest form of telling is authorial summary, in which the conciseness and abstraction of the narrator’s language effaces the particularity and individuality of the characters and their actions. [...] The summary narrative method seems to suit our modern taste for irony, pace and pithiness.” David Lodge, “Showing and Telling,” *The Art of Fiction* (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 122, 126.

<sup>2</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 71.

“Flesh and the Mirror” and “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter”. This is also one of the reasons that it has been practically ignored critically. The narrative ends up interpreting for the narratee the significance of certain moments or actions. She relies heavily on exposition (telling) at the cost of a well-developed plot that speaks for itself (showing/mimesis). Stanzel refers to this in his comparison of teller-characters and reflector characters.<sup>3</sup>

Die berichtende Erzählung einer Erzählfigur (“telling”) [tendiert] zur begrifflichen Zusammenschau des konkreten Vorgangs im raffenden Bericht und im erklärenden oder wertenden Kommentar.<sup>4</sup>

Benjamin Harshav picks up on this, too, and also argues that such strategies rely heavily on reader response.<sup>5</sup> In order to lighten my initial criticism of this text, I argue that Angela Carter is utilising this emphasis on reader response for her own purposes. The unease caused by the inclusion of the *Candide* intertext and the hint of incest at the end of the story add a dimension to the narrative that can only be achieved by the reaction of the narratee. She is juxtaposing the universal truth of the incest taboo with the paradise-like setting of the story. For those readers unable to pick up on the nagging feeling of “there must be something wrong here”, the *Candide* story is added.

It is impossible to ignore the religious overtones in “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest.” Though most critics gloss over this aspect of her writing in favour of feminist or post-modern aspects, her manipulation of religious themes is fascinating. Though not as overt in most of her novels, Carter does delve into this subject as well, or chooses to utilise these images in her longer narratives. Her allusions to the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve in, especially, *The Passion of New Eve*<sup>6</sup>, *The Magic*

<sup>3</sup>Telling and showing (mimesis) are the two fundamental types of distance regulating narrative information. “Telling is a MODE characterized by more narratorial mediation and a less detailed rendering of situations and events than SHOWING [...]” Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* 96.

<sup>4</sup>Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 204.

<sup>5</sup>Benjamin Harshav. “Theory of the Literary Text and the Structure of Non-Narrative Fiction: In the First Episode of *War and Peace*,” *Poetics Today*, 9(3), (1988) 636.

<sup>6</sup>Marie Lathers’ article, “Fin-de siecle Eves in Villiers de L’Isle-Adam and Angela Carter,” discusses the Eve persona in Carter’s novel *The Passion of New Eve*. Marie Lathers, “Fin-de siecle Eves in Villiers de L’Isle-Adam and Angela Carter.” *Literature and the Bible*. ed. David Bevan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993) 7-27.

*Toyshop* and *Heroes and Villains*, are clear.<sup>7</sup> Lorna Sage writes about *The Magic Toyshop*, “The vertiginous uncertainty of [the *Heroes and Villains*] ending, with girl and boy on the brink of an unknowable future, is the dominant feeling throughout the narrative.”<sup>8</sup> It is a shame that Sage chose to ignore that “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest”, published seven years prior to these two novels, also follows the story of a boy and a girl with a similar uncertain future.

The story opens with a detailed description of the idyllic setting of the narrative in a lush hidden valley ‘somewhere’. In this type of utopia or Eden live former slaves who have embraced this place as a refuge which offers them the possibility of living a simple life. Lindsey Tucker states that this “Edenic space’ is one of Carter’s favourite motifs.”<sup>9</sup> The inhabitants have no desires, no needs that are not met in the narrow confines of their valley. Into this idyll comes the figure of Dubois, a failed intellectual who wants to escape from the world.<sup>10</sup> After deciding that he has found his final destination in this valley with its Creole inhabitants, he packs his belongings and his twin babies and comes to the valley to live. The children are raised with an odd mixture of their father’s scientific knowledge and the sweet innocence of the natives. This mixture is emphasised in the narrative and leads to the journey alluded to in the title. Madeline and Emile, the twins, their curiosity sparked by a native legend telling of an evil tree in the centre of the forest, decide to go in search of this tree. The name Madeline is an obvious reference to Edgar Allan Poe’s character of the same name in “The Fall of the House of Usher” which also includes an incestuous

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<sup>7</sup> *The Passion of New Eve* is about Evelyn, a British man who comes to the United States and is captured by a radical feminist group and turned into a woman, Eve. In the case of this narrative, Carter chose to place the figures of Adam and Eve in the same person (*The Passion of New Eve* (1977; London: Virago, 1982)). In *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie and Finn, after the cataclysm at the end of the novel, come together in the garden. “Nothing is left but us.’ At night, in the garden, they faced each other in a wild surmise.” (*The Magic Toyshop* (1967; London: Virago, 1981) 200) *Heroes and Villains* is set up similarly to “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest” in that it deals with someone from the outside world, in this case Marianne, a Professor’s daughter, entering into the world of the exotic jungle, the world of the Barbarians. This novel also utilises religious allusions. (*Heroes and Villains*, (1969; New York: Penguin Books, 1993))

<sup>8</sup>Sage, *Angela Carter* 18.

<sup>9</sup>Lindsey Tucker, *Critical Essays on Angela Carter* 5. Though I would not go as far as Tucker to state that this is one of Carter’s favourite motifs, she does utilise it in some fashion in the stories, “Master”, “Reflections”, and “Our Lady of the Massacre”. In these cases, similarly, yet more quickly than in “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest” it is revealed that this is a deceptive Eden which is relatively quickly shown to be hostile.

<sup>10</sup>It is interesting that this is a narrative that was conceived at a time when Carter, herself, had just ‘run away’ from her former life and moved to Japan.

brother-sister relationship. Emile is a play on the protagonist of Rousseau's novel *Emil* (1762). Both characters and Carter's choice of names suggest the themes of incest and education apart from society. The narrative closes with a final scene where they discover it. Whether or not it is the embodiment of evil as in the legend or not is left ambiguous. The story ends with the twins kissing each other.

In the first lines, a lush description of a land locked region where "the inhabitants believed the name, Ocean, that of a man in another country, and would have taken an oar, had they ever seen one, to be a winnowing fan" (58), is given. The image of remoteness conjured by a distance from waterways which, itself evokes images of sea trade and travel, a thriving exchange, serves to characterise this text's inhabitants. This sense of distance, though, is deceptive, as it is in all of Carter's writing. The narrator lulls the reader into a sense of security, of innocence, which effects this narrative's reception. This distance is broken for the first time at the end of the first paragraph with the almost negligible inclusion of the deictic *now*: "All they did *now* was to cultivate their gardens" (59, emphasis mine). While the spatial distance is upheld, the temporal distance induced by the non-existent, or at best vague, time reference is undermined.

Through the use of the temporal adverbial, if we use Käte Hamburger's arguments for the epic preterite, the narrator is establishing the world of the ex-slaves as fictional. While a *now/then* juxtaposition is created, it seems that its purpose is, in effect, to create an Eden-like fictional space compared to the 'non-fictional' space introduced by the figure of Dubois who enters from the 'real' world. The temporal adverbial is only used in one further instance, two sentences later in "Now, the groves that skirted those forests of pine in the central valley formed for them all of the world they wished to know and nothing in their self-contained quietude concerned them but the satisfaction of simple pleasures" (58). The ex-slaves have created their own fictional world, their own utopia, and banned the unknown, or that which they did not wish to know, to the distant reaches of the heart of the forest.

Not a single exploring spirit had ever been curious enough to search to its source the great river that watered their plots, or to penetrate to the

heart of the forest itself. They had grown far too contented in their lost fastness to care for anything but the joys of idleness. (58)

Picking up the voice of a type of anthropological or sociological figure, the narrator spends the first part of the story describing the ‘history’ of the inhabitants of this remote valley. It becomes immediately clear that Carter is manipulating motifs from Genesis and Exodus in the Bible. They “arrive[d] in a region that offered them in plentiful fulfilment all their dreams of a promised land” (58). The reader is able quickly and easily to define the inhabitants according to this scheme. This is rounded off by the introduction of a perverted version of the tree found in Genesis:

Almost as if to justify to themselves their lack of a desire to explore, they finally seeded by word of mouth a mythic and malign tree within the forest, a tree the image of the Upas Tree<sup>11</sup> of Java whose very shadow was murderous, a tree that exuded a virulent sweat of poison from its moist bark and whose fruits could have nourished with death an entire tribe. And the presence of this tree categorically forbade exploration [...]. (58)

It becomes clear in this passage that Carter is playing with, and perverting, the legends surrounding the tree of life in the garden of Eden. One must also pay attention, though, to the authorial comment at the beginning of this quote. With the inclusion of ‘almost as if’, the narrator sends a signal to the reader that this motivation for the generation of a tree legend is open to speculation.

This story is a prime example of Carter’s earlier writing in that it is obvious in its search for meaning. Her symbols and metaphors, such as the ones used in the above quote, are more obvious in their simplicity and directness than in later collections. One could almost claim that she is overwriting when confronted with the wealth of images, all pointing, it seems, in the same direction. The narrative mimes a journey

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<sup>11</sup>The Upas tree is a real plant. *Antiaris toxicaria* of the mulberry family *Moraceae*, with a poisonous latex used for arrows, and traditionally reputed to kill all who fell asleep under it. <<http://www.tescali.co.uk/reference/dictionaries/animalsplants/data/m0014466.html>>.

in almost every aspect. The title itself, with its use of penetrating, repeated in the second paragraph in a different tense – penetrate – already suggests a continuing process which does not find its end.<sup>12</sup> The contrasting use of penetrate in the second paragraph stands in opposition to the tense in the title, as it is used in the context of describing the inhabitants of this Eden-like spot. “Not a single exploring spirit had ever been curious enough to search to its source the great rivers that watered their plots, or to penetrate to the heart of the forest itself” (58). Carter’s deliberate choice of the infinitive with the inhabitants, in contrast to the present progressive which points at the actual focus of the story, the twin’s journey, already serves to draw a line between the staid and already developed characters, even including Dubois himself and the still forming and developing youthful characters of the twins.

This concept of journey is dominant throughout the text in its reference to a number of various types of development. This differentiation at the very beginning not only draws a clear line between the ex-slaves, Dubois and the twins, but also the narratee and the twins. The narrator of this story is, quite early on, aligned with the characters of the ex-slaves and Dubois in a ‘knowing’ stance, as is the audience. It is easy to recognise the similarity of the scientific stance of the descriptions by the narrator persona and their correlation to Dubois’ character. This is coupled with the many religious images recognisable from the Book of Genesis and Exodus in the Bible, which serve to strengthen the idea of a gap between knowing and unknowing as even Dubois states: “Here we have all become *homo silvester*, men of the woods,’ he would say. ‘And that is superior to the precocious and destructive species, *homo sapiens* – knowing man”’ (61).

Carter is attempting to create a recognisable narrator persona, a type of anthropologist with whom the narratee can easily identify. Though in Dubois one can easily recognise a botanist and on the surface the narrator is rather easily seen as being a type of anthropologist, therefore someone who knows and studies ‘foreign’ cultures, Carter’s choice of comments made by Dubois and the narrator do tend to point to a

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<sup>12</sup>In Stanzel’s discussion of synoptic chapter headings, he categorises this type of title under *leitmotif*, thus excluding it from a further interpretation according to tense. (Cf. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* 58.)

plain authorial purpose. Some of the subtleties open to an author using this type of narrator seem to be lost in Carter's overwriting, found in her early collection. She at first seems to be criticising the naive scientific approach Dubois embodies, yet chooses a role for her narrator persona which can quickly degenerate into a similar trap. Carter's subtle use of imagery prevents this from happening, though. Acknowledging the usefulness, as well as the limits of science, Carter's point in this narrative does not restrict itself to a criticism of learned society, but is attempting to find a way of describing that a definition, by its very nature, is limited and always incomplete. By offering her audience recognisable characteristics, she is able to hint at the flaws contained within the accepted and recognisable system. Her narrator is not a part of the narrative, yet unfailingly a part of the system. Though obviously omniscient within the framework of the story, this narrator is not privy to the understanding of the subtleties his/her own interpretation bring to light.

This garden of Eden's inhabitants are characterised as a simple people, dark skinned, friendly and wholesome in an almost cliché-like manner. The narrator describes them as "in every respect like *Candide*" (58). This is at once a clear, as well as a deceptive characterisation. On the surface Carter seems to be suggesting, a people who are kind, naive and accepting that this is the best of all possible worlds. Yet Voltaire's *Candide, ou L'Optimisme* (1759) is "... der Hohn auf die beste aller Welten, mit dem Ende:??»?? Wir müssen unseren Garten bestellen ??«??, also einer Hinwendung von müßigen Spekulationen zur Arbeit im Garten des Lebens, im Garten der Menschheit, um dort Unkraut auszurotten, um zu okulieren und die Baumbrüchte zu verbessern."<sup>13</sup> Similarly to *Candide*, the descendants of the ex-slaves have found their "promised land" (58) only by undergoing severe hardships. They are now reaping their just rewards and are in all ways satisfied as they have restricted themselves to tending their gardens.

They warn the children not to go in search of the tree and they themselves show no desire to undertake the journey. Carter sets these ex-slaves up in opposition to Emil and Madeline. Ernst Bloch writes about *Candide*'s statement, "Il faut cultiver

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<sup>13</sup>Ernst Bloch, *Neuzeitliche Philosophie I: Von Descartes bis Rousseau* Tuth Römer and Burghart Schmid, Ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985) 260.

notre jardin.”<sup>14</sup> “Das heiSSt: bleiben wir hier, überlassen wir die metaphysischen Weltgegenden sich selbst, wir können sie nicht sehen, und wir können sie nicht mit reiner Vernunft erkennen.”<sup>15</sup> Carter asks her reader to suspend logic and imagine that these people have truly regained a pre-lapsarian consciousness. What is a bit problematic at this point is the distancing involved between the original ex-slaves, who arrived an indeterminate time ago, and their descendants, who are living in the valley when Dubois arrives. It becomes difficult to discern whether or not Carter intends to define these people as a negative example. There is also clear criticism inherent in the characterisation of Dubois, yet the ambivalence of the native’s portrayal leaves Carter open to the type of criticism voiced by critics such as Robbie Goh, who accuses Carter of having an “ideological blind spot [...]”<sup>16</sup>

While she is often alert to gender codes, to their artifice and arbitrary power, she is much less aware of the imperialist codes which place the West in the centre of her consciousness and efface all other regions and cultures into an indistinct and irrealist mass.<sup>17</sup>

While I would not go as far as Goh, the portrayal of the natives nevertheless remains problematic in its ambivalence.

This forces the reader to take an even closer look at Dubois, who, when taking the whole *Candide* allusion into consideration, comes away looking similar to Voltaire’s Dr. Pangloss; the root of Candide’s naive view of the world. Though it would be going too far to draw such concrete parallels between the two scenarios, Carter’s and Voltaire’s, the reader is nevertheless forced to examine the nature of Carter’s intention. Dubois does enter more or less ‘after the fact’, yet nevertheless somehow completes the image suggested by the connotations evoked by the comparison to *Candide*. As can also be questioned in and about *Candide*, it can be questioned here whether or not the ex-slaves and Dubois are truly innocent and/or naive. In a close examination of Carter’s story, she makes clear, through a subtle use of details, that

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<sup>14</sup>Voltaire

<sup>15</sup>Bloch 239-40.

<sup>16</sup>Goh 70.

<sup>17</sup>Goh 70.



no one, unless completely isolated, can remain innocent, and that a development, or a journey of discovery, will always take place which inevitably destroys innocence as we define it. Lindsey Tucker writes, “the French botanist [...] who retreats into his pre-lapsarian world to become *homo silvester* [...] cannot prevent his two incestuous children from venturing out of Eden and assuring their fall into the condition of *homo sapiens*.”<sup>18</sup>

It seems, though, that Carter is making a distinction between the different types of knowing already touched upon in Dubois’ statement about *homo silvester* and *homo sapiens*. She is differentiating between what could be defined as education and what could be seen as biological inevitability. This is a very dangerous statement, in that it can be taken to extremes and used as a weapon against women in particular. Carter is steering toward the gap left by Dubois’ incomplete education of his children and the inability of the inhabitants to properly explain to the two children, trained to be curious by their father’s books and most likely his mode of living and, on the other hand, totally ignorant of social structures which have formed not only their father but also the descendants of the ex-slaves, why they should not try and find the mythical tree at the heart of the forest. It is inevitable that rules thrown into a system which heretofore had none will naturally cause curiosity. Dubois and the ex-slaves, like Candide, could only come to the conclusion to cultivate their own gardens after ‘experience’ had shown them that this was the best path.

The inhabitants have upheld certain social structures and beliefs. That which they brought with them to this place has been adapted and changed to fit the new situation. “With the years they fashioned an arboreal argot of their own to which a French grammar would have proved a very fallible guide” (58). This, though, is not only true for their grammar. What is more important for Carter and the story are the beliefs, superstitions, and bits of religion that invariably accompany any organised society.

And they had also packed up in their ragged bandannas a little, dark, voodoo folklore. But such bloodstained ghosts could not survive in sunshine and fresh air and emigrated from the village in a body, to live only

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<sup>18</sup>Tucker 5.

the ambiguous life of horned rumours in the woods, becoming at last no more than shapes with indefinable outlines who lurked, perhaps, in the green deeps, until, at last, one of the shadows modulated imperceptibly into the actual shape of a tree. (58)

As Carter makes clear in the narrative, such superstitions, while perhaps not really believed by those who create and foster them, “even though they all knew, in their hearts, that such a tree did not exist” (59), develop a life of their own; they are carried from place to place like luggage. They are or become the basis for a set of beliefs which form the basis of all rules and taboos in a society. Susann Schmid writes in her study, *Jungfrau und Monster: Frauenmythen im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*:

In der postmodernen Literatur wird der intensive Bezug zu Mythen aufrechterhalten [...] Neu ist das kritische Hinterfragen von Konzepten und Rollen, die in Mythen präsentiert werden. Ihr Absolutheitsanspruch wird als Fiktion enttarnt [...] Das Spiel mit ihren inhärenten Widersprüchen mündet in eine jouissance des Umschreibens zu frauenfreundlicheren Gegenentwürfen, die ihrerseits auch wieder als Mythen gelesen werden können.<sup>19</sup>

While Schmid’s study deals in part with Angela Carter’s writing, she does not deal directly with “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest”. Nevertheless, it can be seen in this story that Carter is manipulating universal myths to open them to new possibilities of interpretation.<sup>20</sup> While Schmid’s claim that many re-writings end up being more sympathetic to women, I argue that in this particular story, as in much of her fiction, Carter nevertheless challenges a simple woman-friendly re-interpretation. While the reader is asked to re-think the story of the Fall, Madeline is not re-written as the positive heroine of the story. Carter creates a three-dimensional character with all her positive characteristics and all of her failings.

Dubois can be examined in a similar manner. Though he differs radically from the inhabitants of this valley in appearance, background and education, he nevertheless is a further representation of a social structure. He is an educated man who obviously

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<sup>19</sup>Schmid 15-16.

<sup>20</sup>She will examine this more fully in her collection *The Bloody Chamber*.

has the means to organise his life at will. “He had visited most of the out-of-the way parts of the world to peer through the thick lenses of his round spectacles at every kind of plant. He gave his name to an orchid in Dahomey, to a lily in Indo-China and to a dark-eyed Portuguese girl [...]” (59). Though it is obvious that he is unable really to fit into the social construct, “his reticence had cheated him of the fruits of his scholarship [...]” (59-60), he is nevertheless unable to leave behind all that connected him to the outside world, be they material or immaterial things. He wishes to find a place where he could be alone and rear his children “in a place where ambition, self-seeking and guile were strangers [...]” (60). Thus, though he left the world he could not leave it behind. He brought with him his children, a few momentous and, above all, his books. Much like the ex-slaves, he brought with him things that would always connect him with the outside world.

Here, then, is the crux of the situation: He removes himself from his responsibilities and his world, yet brings with him the very tools which form the world from which he wished to escape. For him or even for the inhabitants this has no consequences. They have experienced life and the world and have made knowledgeable decisions about what they want or do not want. The crux of the problem is the children. It is in these children that Carter makes clear the line between two different kinds of knowledge and how incomplete definitions are worse than no definitions at all. Dubois has come into this garden, ready-made, and has placed his children in it to run free. Keeping in mind all of the references to the garden of Eden and other Biblical allusions, Dubois takes over the role of the god figure in this narrative.

Already set apart by his background and education, if not also by the fact that he is the only one in this story of whom one could say that his choice to come here was deliberate, he becomes one with the valley and thus seems a part of it: “As his children grew older, he seemed to them more an emanation of their surroundings than an actual father [...]” (60). If one chooses to draw a parallel to the Biblical garden of Eden, the situations do seem similar. A benevolent father figure places his two children into a fantastic and beautiful garden. He then lets them, more or less, do as they please. Dubois does no more than not interfere with the lives of his children.

He has provided all of his books and a place for them to live, and beyond this they are of no concern to him.

This lack of immediacy in both stories seems to be the crux of the problem. In both cases, essential pieces of knowledge are being kept from the Adam and Eve figures. They are only provided with partial information and expected to find their own way. In the case of Carter's story, the villagers provide the information about the tree: "Besides, when they spoke of the heart of the forest to their other friends, a veil of darkness came over the woodlanders' eyes and, half-laughing, half-whispering, they could hint at the wicked tree that grew there [..]" (62). To Madeline and Emil, this type of reasoning was incomplete. Half-trained by their father's books but untrained in every other respect, they felt "a faint contempt, for their world, though beautiful, seemed to them, in a sense, incomplete – as though it lacked the knowledge of some mystery they might find, might they not? In the forest, on their own" (62).

If Carter had limited the conflict in this story to the disparities caused by an incomplete education and lack of socialisation, the narrative would be rather simple. Yet what would a Carter story be without sex or sexuality? In this narrative she brings in the theme of incest as she also does in "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter". It is in connection with this vague hint at an incestuous encounter between Emil and Madeline that all of the allusions in the narration become important. This story deals with a number of journeys, present and past. Dubois and the villagers have more or less come to the end of their journeys, but that of the children is merely beginning.

Carter paints an idyllic picture of Madeline's and Emile's childhood. They are curious, healthy and wonderful children. She also emphasises that they are identical in appearance: "They resembled one another so closely each could have used the other as a mirror and almost seemed to be different aspects of the same person for all their gestures, turns of phrase and manner of speech were exactly similar" (61). It is not until about the half-way point in the story that the reader is even informed that the twins are a boy and girl. This is of vital importance in light of the development later in the narrative. Another aspect of this early description is a second short mention made of a mother figure. It is made clear from the outset that Dubois' wife was fated

to live only a short life. She dies giving birth to the twins, leaving them motherless. In addition, as Dubois is nearing middle age, the prospects of a new wife and stepmother are slim. No real mention of an ersatz mother is made, yet at one point the narrator states, “The green would took them for its own and they were fitting children of their foster mother, for they were strong, lithe and supple, browned by the sun to the very colour of the villagers whose liquid *patois* they spoke” (61).

What is important though, as I already hinted at before, is the difference between traditions or book knowledge and simple biological development. It is not by chance that Emile and Madeline – whose name is also reminiscent of Mary Magdalene in the Bible – choose to make their journey to the middle of the forest in August of their thirteenth year. Thirteen is not simply a number fraught with connotations, mostly negative, but it is also often associated with human puberty. Up to this age, the twins are described as being exactly alike. Though never really having been dissatisfied in their lives, the twins begin to feel the need to explore further: “for reasons beyond their comprehension, this intimacy had been subtly invaded by tensions which exacerbated their nerves yet exerted on them both an intoxicating glamour” (62).

Without really knowing what has happened or without anything really even occurring, Madeline and Emile feel that they have outgrown their village: “The settlements were just as their father had seen them first, pre-lapsarian villages where any Fall was inconceivable; his children, bred in those quiet places, saw them with that faint, warm claustrophobia which the word, ‘home,’ signifies” (63). The reader is taken on a trip with Madeline and Emile toward adulthood and sexual awareness.

Early in the journey, Madeline stops to pick a water-lily and is bitten by it. Her reaction is dramatically different towards this situation than her brother’s. Madeline bleeds for the first time, alluding to her first menstrual cycle. If one decides on this interpretation of the situation, her secretiveness and hurt feelings can be rather easily understood. Furthermore, this water-lily proves to have fangs. It is a beautiful white flower with a deadly purpose. The female genital is often described as a flower, as

well as being negatively criticised as being emasculating and having teeth.<sup>21</sup> Carter is conjuring up conflicting images of female sexuality, thereby decidedly colouring the reader's picture of Madeline.<sup>22</sup>

When Emile is eager to tell their father about the flower, Madeline is adamant in her refusal. "No," she said. "We must not talk of the things we find in the heart of the forest. They are all secrets. If they were not secrets, we would have heard of them before" (64). With this statement, Madeline brings to light the discrepancies in their education: "Though they knew he never listened when they spoke to him, never before had they consciously concealed anything from him" (64). These are things their father never talked about, thus immediately suspect. Nothing was ever hidden from them, so when confronted with something so startlingly new in themselves, they are filled with a sense of unease. They were taught everything, allowed to do everything but no one ever talked about what exactly was at the heart of the forest. It was thus made a secret, and since its very mention was tinged with fear, it becomes inevitable that everything the two experience there, whether in the physical manifestation of the forest or in themselves, will already be loaded with connotations.

What must be closely paid attention to, though, is the authorial comment contained in the next line. The narrator states, "Her words fell with a strange weight, as heavy as her own gravity, *as if she might have* received some mysterious communication from the perfidious mouth that wounded her" (64, emphasis mine). What the reader tends to concentrate on, though, is Emile's feeling of separation from his sister expressed in the next lines because of her new found femininity.

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<sup>21</sup>Carter utilises this image of carnivorous flower/vagina in her story "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" when describing the birth of Poe's sister: "and something bloody as a fresh-pulled tooth twitched between the midwife's pincers" (264) and "he rearranges the macabre candelabra so that the light [...] will fall between her legs [...]. 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" (271). She also uses it in *The Passion of New Eve*, where Zero's wives all have their front teeth removed so that they will not hurt him while performing oral sex: "But not one of those girls had any of their own front teeth left because Zero had sent them all to the dentist after Betty Louella once nicked his foreskin too painfully in her ecstasy whilst performing fellatio on his sacred member" (88).

<sup>22</sup>Paul Magrs, in his article, "Boys keep swinging: Angela Carter and the subject of men," claims that "Male subjectivity is succinct as the bland, impervious white lily which bites, as in the incest story 'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest' (1974). The lily stands for an entirely narcissistic male sexuality which can blinker itself as to its own nature and believe itself integral and complete, sufficient unto itself. (Magrs 191.) While this is an interesting reading of the piece, I believe that Magrs is concentrating too strongly on the male perspective and ignoring the wider possibilities.

Looking at her in a new puzzlement, he sensed the ultimate difference of a femininity he had never before known any need or desire to acknowledge and this difference might give her the key to some order of knowledge to which he might not yet aspire, himself, for all at once she seemed far older than he.(64)

If one pays close attention to the ‘as if she might have’ of the previous quote and acknowledges the conditionality expressed in this phrase, then Emile’s feelings could be groundless. The narrator is playing on the reader’s assumptions. It is easy to simply accept the logical causality of the events up to this point. Madeline has reached puberty and has thus become a mystery to her brother, yet the authorial comment leaves this open to speculation.

In this statement, Carter also touches upon the theme of knowledge. There is something the twins shared before but which they cannot share now. The mysteries of which both were contemptuous before have surfaced, and while Madeline now newly feels the need for privacy, the need to conceal, Emile has not yet reached this stage and is left confused. Looking at the fact that both are the same age and the acknowledged fact that girls reach puberty ahead of their male counterparts, this behaviour makes sense. Emile’s thoughts about Madeline’s feminine difference, narrated by the narrator persona, seem dramatic and dangerous.

On the surface, one could quickly fall into the trap of saying that Carter is repeating sexist jargon. It is vital, though, to look at the exact wording. Emile simply has finally figured out that Madeline is a girl and therefore different from him. These small physical discrepancies were previously irrelevant and now, with the advent of their sexuality, have moved to the centre of importance. The second half of his statement is worse, in that he seems to think, at first glance, that now there will always be a gulf of misunderstanding between himself and his sister. It is important, though, not to miss Carter’s use of the word yet: “To which he might not yet aspire [...]” (64). Since girls reach puberty earlier than boys, it is only a matter of time before Emile catches up with Madeline.

Madeline is being described in an increasingly negative manner. Carter writes, “‘Oh, no!’ said Madeline with a mysterious purposefulness that might have been rooted, had he known it, only in a new born wish to make him do as she wanted, against his own wishes” (65). This immediately calls up visions of spoiled, manipulative women, a stereotype which has survived for centuries. Yet once again, this passage must be examined carefully. It becomes obvious that the narrator is speculating. If the reader oversees the *might* in this passage, the meaning becomes threatening. With the inclusion of this word, it is, finally, the narrator who must be called into question and not Madeline. She does exude a new-found confidence or a sense of mystery, yet the descriptions of her motives are, when carefully read, pure speculation.

What follows is a lush and loving description of the various plants Emile and Madeline discover on their continued journey. Here, again, the narrator picks up on Madeline’s changedness. The speculative tone of the previous statements becomes clear-cut. No longer is Madeline’s attitude open to interpretation, “this time her triumph was unconcealed” (66).

The twins’ joy at finally reaching their destination and instead, of finding a venomous tree, finding a sweet-smelling tree with fruits reminiscent of the apple bitten into by Eve is great. This is a crucial scene in the story. Upon eating the fruit in the garden, Adam and Eve knew that they were naked. “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked [...]”<sup>23</sup> Emile and Madeline have been discovering their differences and their nakedness throughout this journey. The images of Adam and Eve coming into knowledge, the, as some term it, fortunate fall, mirror Emile and Madeline also leaving their state of half, of artificial innocence, and of discovering themselves. Neither their father nor his books could prepare them for the new onslaught of feelings that came along with the changes in their bodies. The narrator states:

Had they known how, they would have been proud, because their intimacy was so perfect it could have bred that sense of loneliness which is the source of pride and, as they read more and more of their father’s books,

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<sup>23</sup>Genesis 3:7, <<http://www.genesis.net.au/~bible/kjv/genesis/>>



their companionship deepened since they had nobody but one another with whom to discuss the discoveries they made in common.(61)

Looking ahead, this situation is reminiscent of Johnny and Annie-Belle in Carter's story, "John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore", from the collection *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* (1993). Also left alone without a mother, and having a father who was there but not a father to his children, Johnny and Annie-Belle seek solace with each other. In "Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest", there is no consummation, only a hint and a kiss. Taken at face value, the story is innocent and beautiful. It is about a paradise in which two children come of age and become aware of their sexuality. But with the multitude of Biblical images and allusions, there is instilled in the reader a sense that something is wrong. The reader brings to the story prejudices and social taboos which, inevitably, colour the manner in which the piece's outcome must be seen. Though the narrator leaves the reader dangling, the reader has inevitably already decided on an ending.

Like Adam, Emile "took the apple; ate; and, after that, they kissed" (67).

Through her choice of narration, Carter is able to manipulate the expectations of the different groups the text is addressing. This seems most demonstrated in her suggestion of incest. It is nowhere mentioned, yet the narrator's choices make it into an inevitability. The audience must recognise the leading quality of the narration and call its conclusions into question.

## 4.2 "Master"

"Master" is the seventh story in *Fireworks*, and the third that utilises the first-person plural pronoun *we*. It demonstrates the weakest instance of this use, and it would be safe to define this narrative as purely third-person authorial or heterodiegetic extradiegetic, as the narrator is not present on the story plane. What the first-person plural pronoun does do, however, is enable the reader to define the narrator a bit more closely. In "Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest", for example, there was

practically no concrete information to go on by way of defining the narrator apart from the choice of intertexts. In this case, with the inclusion of the *we*, the narrator can be defined as European and probably is British. Robbie Goh claims that “the story is careful to establish the English origins of [the Master’s] cruelty [...]”<sup>24</sup> This does lend itself to the immediate equation of the narrator persona with the author, and thus could be said to constitute a weakness in the narrative. Yet I believe that the motivation for including this particular pronoun is deliberate.

When he had sufficiently ravaged the cats of Africa, a country older by far than we are yet to whose innocence he had always felt superior, he decided to explore the nether regions of the New World [...]. (75)

With this small inclusion, the narrator manages to create a collective made up of the white hunter, the narrator and the narratee, effectively making everyone culpable for the white hunter’s commissions. The he of ‘to whose innocence he’, can almost be read as a *we*, since the transition between these pronouns is so seamless as to call for such a conclusion. The superiority felt by the protagonist is characteristic of a European mentality.

The narrative, is “a gothic revision both of the kind of benign imperialist history of which Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* is an early example, and a story of rapacious male power.”<sup>25</sup> It is a dystopia which tells of the archetypal figure of the English White Hunter, who travels the world, ever in search of the greater challenge, the ultimate kill. Master, as he names himself, ends up in South America at the ‘end’ of his search. Here he buys a native girl and goes into the jungle to hunt the jaguar.<sup>26</sup> Deep in the jungle, far from civilisation, he contracts malaria and begins to die. His existence becomes a frenzied orgy of drinking, raping and killing. The girl, whom he dubs Friday, suffers all of this and, due to her completely different cosmology, instead of being killed in this grotesque orgy of death, becomes one with the mythical system

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<sup>24</sup>Goh 74.

<sup>25</sup>Goh 74.

<sup>26</sup>Angela Carter, herself, writes that “there is a small tribute to Defoe, father of the bourgeois novel in England, inserted in the story [...]” (460). As the narrative does not re-write, nor follow Defoe’s plot, this tribute seems to be able to be found in the name of the girl whom Master calls Friday.

which, for her, governs the jungle. In the end, Master dies alone, and Friday has become the jaguar.

In contrast, especially to “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest”, this narrative does not begin with a detailed description of the setting. In fact, it begins abruptly, *in medias res*, doing without an introductory identification of the White Hunter. This seems an apt beginning in light of the fact that this figure does not require an individual identity; he is an archetype. By including the intertext, especially of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-20), Carter is not forced to ‘explain’ her character. In the inclusion of the *we* explained above, she also establishes a type of complicity of all Europeans with this figure, thus able to offer a wider criticism of power relationships. While Carter, in all but the Japan stories in this collection, usually devotes close to a third of the space in her narratives to a lush description of the setting, only in “Master” and in “The Loves of Lady Purple” does she truly specify the region. The close descriptions in the other texts allow the reader to surmise the location of the action, yet the ‘real’ location is so secondary to the actual plot that vague hints suffice.

Once again, as in “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest”, or at least as can be guessed from this narrative, Carter has returned to the South American continent. “He decided to explore the nether regions of the New World intending to kill the painted beast, the jaguar, [...]” (75). Her choice of using the favourite *nomen* for the destination of the early explorers, opens up a wealth of connotations which are worth examining in more detail. The first name associated with the term ‘New World’ is Columbus. A figure shrouded in historical controversy, he is lauded nevertheless as the discoverer of the New World. His main aim seems not to have been the discovery of entire new continents, but merely the search for a shorter or better trade route to India, hence the name of the inhabitants, Indians. Later settlers of the North American continent also picked up on this term ‘new world’ to denote the possibilities and hopes of finding a new life and freedom. In both cases, the opposition between an old and a new world cannot be ignored. One of the first questions that comes to mind is, new for whom? Loaded with both positive and negative assumptions, old

versus new, in any case calls up a valuation. The suggestion is that the new was just waiting to be discovered and defined, and especially exploited.

The white hunter, infinitely destructive in comparison to the benign indifference of a Dubois in “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest”, does not come seeking a refuge but comes to conquer. It is in the description of the ports-of-call on the journey he makes looking for animals to destroy that the opposition between Carter’s purposeful manipulation of old and new becomes even clearer. Early on, Carter defines England as her protagonist’s place of origin. As such, England thus becomes, for the protagonist, the beginning or the ‘centre’<sup>27</sup>. For him this is the Old World, which is unable to offer him that which will satisfy his desires.

With this fact, Carter seems to drive home the tendency of humans to regard themselves as the centre of the universe. Old and new are no longer defined in terms of time, but in terms of power. “He had sufficiently ravaged the cats of Africa, a country older by far than we are yet to whose innocence he had always felt superior, [...]” (75). Carter, here, includes her interesting use of the pronoun *we*. As in previous narratives, she once again includes the reader as a type of accomplice to this story. In contrast to the other stories, though, in this case she does not seem to allow for an artificial distance which offers the reader a sense of disconnection, thus, security in the text. By using the *we* in this sentence and abruptly returning to the ‘he’ in the same sentence, Carter destroys any sense of distance. She immediately defines her audience as European, and thus, by deduction, a type of accomplice to this type of behaviour. The influence on England of being a colonial power cannot be dismissed.

The image of the “white hunter” (75) Carter uses to characterise her protagonist is a universally acknowledged primarily British figure.<sup>28</sup> Yet Carter does not stop at defining the protagonist as a white hunter, but, through him, personifies the white hunter. Robbie Goh writes, “The unnamed Englishman in this story, who is only

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<sup>27</sup>Goh 74.

<sup>28</sup>Mary Shelley makes similar use of an equally stereotypical British figure, the English Explorer Walton, in her novel, *Frankenstein* (1818). *White Hunter, Black Heart*, a 1990 movie from a novel by Peter Viertel and Ernest Hemingway, “The Short Happy Life of Frances Macomber” (1938) explore this as well.

called ‘Master,’ is a racist, imperialist, phallogocentric rapist and butcher all at once.”<sup>29</sup> Carter has taken the archetype to the extreme. It goes from being a passtime or luxury to being a mode of living, of thinking. “The insatiable suns of Africa eroded the pupils of his eyes, bleached his hair and tanned his skin until he no longer looked the thing he had been but its systematic negative; he became the white hunter, victim of an exile which is the imitation of death, a willed bereavement” (75). Carter turns definitions on themselves, the signifier has become the signified. Life becomes death, violence becomes love: “He did not kill for money but for love” (75). She walks a very fine line here, in that it is easy to interpret her characterisation of the Master/White Hunter incorrectly.

It lies close at hand that Carter is suggesting that Master has become animal in that “little of him now pertained to the human [...]” (75). Yet especially in light of the end of the narrative, human is unable to become something it is not unless the system allows it. Friday belongs to such a system which allows her, within this system, to aspire to a jaguar existence.

In this story, Carter, for the first time, writes with a concrete literary intertext in mind; *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-20), by Daniel Defoe. As *Fireworks* is a collection marked by the author’s attempt to define the observer, whether narrator or narratee, it is with *Black Venus*, published almost ten years later, that she investigates much more deeply the possibilities of point-of-view which open themselves through the manipulation of intertexts. Her focus in “Master” is, nevertheless, different from that of the narratives in *Black Venus*. While it could be said that she is examining the Defoe scenario from a different perspective, similar to what she is doing in the stories in *Black Venus*, here she nevertheless feels a need to change the basic plot to the point that only a suggestion of the original remains. In *Black Venus*, she manages to stay within certain boundaries of the original ‘story’ and to work on perspective and point-of-view within these confines.

“Master” leaves no doubt that it has taken its inspiration from one of the most popular 18th Century English novels. What is interesting to examine in this context

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<sup>29</sup>Goh 74.

is the deliberate choices Carter makes that modify and alter the original to fit into her scheme. Carter begins in a much more blatant fashion than does Defoe. The reader is immediately confronted with the hierarchy universally acknowledged in this theme. The title, "Master", introduces the inevitable scenario of master and slave. Carter even goes as far as to identify the slave, in this narrative, as female, Robinson Crusoe's counterpart's name: "He told her her name would be Friday, which was the day he bought her; he taught her to say 'master' and then let her know that was to be his name" (77).

When looking at this aspect of naming, the point Carter is trying to make when she calls the Master a "systematic negative" (75) becomes clear. Even in this point the man is no longer seen as a man or a human but has become a signifier, a personification of the inhuman. In the same respect, though in this case even more interesting, the girl is named with a signifier which serves, in the thought system of the Master, to also denote her inhumanity. Friday, in Western thought, is a day of the week. The term is taken from the name of the Nordic goddess Freya, in old English, Frigg, the wife of Odin. Similarly to the term master, the name Friday then contains a number of connotations. Yet all of these connotations belong to Western thought or mythology, which Carter calls up in order to further define the girl, and, on the other hand, systematically negates her characterisation of the girl. By including the perspective of the girl in the narrative, something Carter intensifies and broadens in *Black Venus*, she is able to show the inadequacy of Western definitions for that which is being colonised.

Master's attempt at further dehumanising the girl he does not for a moment even consider in the same context of himself and his world, fails in the face of the girl's definition of herself. Master's definition of these people, loaded with the narrator's own commentary immediately places the 'natives' on a low rung on the hierarchical ladder:

They represented such a diversity of ethnic types that they were like a living museum of man organised on a principle of regression for, the further inland he went, the more primitive they became, as if to demonstrate that evolution could be inverted. (76)

This quote is loaded with Western Darwinian thought. This evolutionary concept, though violently rejected in the Victorian Age when it appeared, nevertheless provided a further methodology for defining that which seems primitive. In moving these peoples down the evolutionary ladder, Master is defining their inhumanity. Yet as the system these people use to define themselves does not know of or acknowledge a Darwin, they are not weighed down by a need for a hierarchy of being. Master, on the other hand, unable to find a recognisable order in this foreign place, escapes to the world of alcoholic dreams to make it bearable. “He did not recognise that they were men although they distilled demented alcohol in a still of their own devising and he drank it, in order to people the inside of his head with familiar frenzy among so much that was strange” (76). Master has left the system which made him and, confronted with a hierarchy not of his own making, attempts, in a microcosm, to construct his own meaning. In stark contrast to a Darwinian hierarchy, these people do not see themselves at the top of the pyramid: “The beliefs of her tribe had taught her to regard herself as a sentient abstraction, an intermediary between the ghosts and the fauna” (77). It is for this reason, the lack of an exclusionary hierarchy, that at the end of the story the girl survives. The Master’s world, defined by a system of dominance can, in the long run not survive in the face of the foreign.

The narrative suggests a type of inbred savagery which was always present in the Master: “He had first exercised a propensity for savagery in the acrid lavatories of a minor English public school [...]” (75). This type of behaviour, criticised in Western society, is, nevertheless, often dismissed as harmless and a part of the natural power struggles between children. Master is a bully who has never grown out of this type of behaviour. When he reaches adulthood, this behaviour takes on adult dimensions. Moving from childlike abuse of his classmates, he moves to a sexual brutality pointed towards whores, who expected nothing else anyway. Yet in his ever growing need for violence and domination, Master is forced to leave England for foreign shores.

When examined closely, this rather small point in the narrative, the description of the evolution of the protagonist, is of crucial importance. While Carter has made clear that a certain amount of brutality is accepted in Western society, in this case

specifically England, she has also made clear that in order to satisfy even more savage desires Master must leave the ordered Western world. Choosing England as her protagonist's home allows the author to make this point easily. England's colonialist past and its attitudes toward those colonised are a well known historical fact. The colonies, more primitive and therefore exploitable, served as a type of playground for the most eccentric desires of the cool English.

Carter here is also seeming to draw parallels between the suppressed brutality of the strict Japanese society, which often finds its outlet in their art and literature<sup>30</sup>, and the English Victorian society which also seems to have an outer veneer of coolness and lack of emotion. In any case, the Master must seek other locations in which to exercise his brutality. He goes to Africa, and even there begins to again differentiate. In England, he moved from little classmates to whores, both unable to protect themselves against his violence, yet inevitably unsatisfying in the very nature of their helplessness. In Africa, in a similar respect, Master moves from the harmless herbivores to seek a worthier opponent:

although he decimated herds of giraffe and gazelle as they grazed in the savannahs until they learned to snuff their annihilation upon the wind as he approached, and dispatched heraldically plated hippopotami as they lolled up to their armpits in ooze, his rifle's particular argument lay with the silken indifference of the great cats [...]. (75)

In these cats, Master begins to see himself, an indifference and lack of fear towards death. It is only, when he arrives in the new world, that he has finally divorced himself so thoroughly from the familiar that he is inevitably doomed. He has "arrived in the middle of a metaphor for desolation, the place where time runs back on itself, the moist, abandoned cleft of the world whose fructifying river is herself a savage woman, the Amazon" (75-6). In this place he has met his match. This part of the world, though long since colonised, which Carter aptly expresses in the person of the priest

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<sup>30</sup>Angela Carter writes about Japanese comics, "Indeed, from their contents, they would appear to be directed either at the crazed sex maniac or the dedicated surrealist. [...]. [They are] pictorial lexicons of the most ferocious imagery of desire, violence and terror [...]. However, it is respectably suited Mr Average who buys them to flick through on his way home to peaceful tea, evening television and continuous, undisrupted, absolute propriety" ("Once More into the Mangle", *Shaking a Leg* 244).



at the end of the road, “he left the jeep behind at a forgotten township where a green track ended and an ancient whisky priest sat all day in the ruins of a forsaken church brewing fire-water from wild bananas and keening the stations of the cross” (78), is able, nevertheless, through its inaccessibility, to retain a sense of autonomy.

Master, having learned to deal with fear, and the foreign in the language of brutality, is incapable of modifying his language to adapt to this place: “He could not reconcile himself to the rain forest, which oppressed and devastated him. He began to shake with malaria” (78). This world, which he is desperately trying to conquer, is conquering him. In contrast to him, the girl Friday, coming from a system of thought that is inclusionary rather than exclusionary, is easily able to add Master to her scheme of things:

she looked at her purchaser’s fever-shaking, skeletal person with scarcely curiosity, for he was to her no more yet no less surprising than any other gaunt manifestation of the forest. If she did not perceive him as a man, either, that was because her cosmogony admitted no essential difference between herself and the beasts and the spirits, it was so sophisticated. (77)

Master has lost his meaning in this world, which has stood for power and dominance, and is here completely different. It is interesting to note the very last portion of the above quotation, the narrator’s statement that this system is so sophisticated that essential differences are negated. Carter inverts the universal assumption that these people must be more primitive, as their society is not as developed as Master’s. She hints at this fact when she describes the girl’s father as walking “a little way into the twentieth century [...]” (77) in the rubber sandals he has made from the spare tyre he took in payment for his daughter. If progress is measured in rubber sandals and the propensity for violence, the text suggests, then the reader must truly reconsider the values which define it. Robbie Goh argues that

Carter’s universalism diffuses her critique and contradicts its apparent revisionism. Master’s rapacious violence becomes a fact of a general phallocentrism rather than the specifically imperialist history the tale initially suggests. His inhuman sexual cruelties practised on the girl are, after all,

enabled by the girl's father, who barter her to the Englishman for a jeep's spare tire.<sup>31</sup>

While some of his critique may be justified, he is not considering that the narrative would have become a bit of pastiche if she had characterised the girl's family as victims or that a gap would have been left if they had not been mentioned. Goh also states that she "refuses to be gulled by 'so much sentimentality about primitives' [...]."<sup>32</sup> While he calls this a "deeply patronising view of 'native' shamanism, passivity, and ghostly abstraction,"<sup>33</sup> I argue that, the inclusion of the bit about the father, as patriarchal as it may be, is more realistic than a portrayal of an ideal society of Indians unsullied by Western thought. This type of idealisation would constitute a much more patronising view.

One also needs to keep in mind the later statement in the text, "the girl's father made sandals from the rubber tyre to shoe his family's feet and they walked a little way into the twentieth century in them, but not far" (77). With this, Carter is implying that the Indians are figuratively walking toward Western thought. She has gone to pains throughout the narrative to point out the utter difference of the Indian culture to that of the white hunter. The feminist critique Goh is making is modern and Western. The implied *we* of the text sees the criticism the passage implies. Yet *we* are once again imposing our nouns on the text. Carter also avoids Goh's criticism of universality by not making the primary point of criticism one of the patriarchy, per se. She begins on a more universal level, already implied by the inclusion of the *we* near the beginning of the text.

Friday does not experience difficulty finding a way to reconcile that which she knows with the stranger before her and in whose power she finds herself. As he names her, she also names him. Early on, when he kills her tribe's sacred animal, the jaguar, she realises that Master must be death personified: "He taught her to eat the meat he roasted over his camp fire and, at first, she did not like it much but dutifully

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<sup>31</sup>Goh 74.

<sup>32</sup>Goh 75.

<sup>33</sup>Goh 75.

consumed it as though he were ordering her to partake of a sacrament for, when she saw how casually he killed the jaguar, she soon realised he was death itself” (77). Once again the names make signifier out of the signified. Whereas Master had to leave his home to fully embody his desires, Friday’s world has a possibility for him. Carter creates a rich mythology surrounding the figure of the girl, which offers her not only an avenue of escape but also a venue in which she can defend herself.

Master is slowly killing himself in his lust for death, but, as Friday’s system of beliefs allows her to populate a positive spirit world with the animals she kills, she is able to incorporate herself literally into her people’s mythology. Thus, in opposition to Master, who dies, Friday transforms. While this could be interpreted as a type of magic realist twist in the narrative,<sup>34</sup> this is not entirely Carter’s intention. The girl’s gradual transformation does not contain the crux of the meaning but the juxtaposition of the two entirely different belief systems the two protagonists embody. Friday’s belief frees her and Master’s kills him.

### 4.3 “The Loves of Lady Purple”

“The Loves of Lady Purple”<sup>35</sup> is the third narrative in *Fireworks*. It is a heterodiegetic narrative with two occurrences of the first-person plural pronoun *we* and one use of *us*. Much like “Master”, this narrative can safely be defined as purely third-person. The inclusion of the *we* again involves the narratee through a direct address by the teller. It creates an interactive story-telling situation which Ana Gabriela Macedo alludes to in her essay about this story when she writes, “the writing of Angela Carter

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<sup>34</sup>While Robbie Goh states that “Master” is written in a “magic realist style” (74), at the beginning of his article he criticises such a generic use of the term Magic Realism: “[It] is often extended to refer to literatures with similar narrative strategies, but which have very different socio-political contexts and motivations [...] the distinctive qualities of magic realism tend to be confused with the philosophies and agendas of her self-conscious literary styles and movements” (66-67). It seems almost ironic that he would criticise the overuse and undifferentiated use of this term as a type of colonisation but himself uses it for Carter’s fiction.

<sup>35</sup>This section is a thoroughly revised version of a paper I read at the *Tale, Novella, Short Story: Currents in Short Fiction* Conference in Salzburg, 1-4 November 2001. “Here we are high in the uplands’: Experimentation with the Narrative ‘We’ in Angela Carter’s Short Fiction”. *Tale, Novella, Short Story: Currents in Short Fiction*, Ed. Wolfgang Görtschacher and Holger Klein (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2004) 217-28.

possesses that same quality that gives life to the ‘art of storytelling’ as “the ability to exchange experiences.”<sup>36</sup>

The narrative takes place in a travelling carnival run by the figure of the Asiatic Professor. The main attraction of this carnival is the life-sized puppet, Lady Purple. She performs nightly in a play about her own life, entitled “The Notorious Amours of Lady Purple the Shameless Oriental Venus”. The story claims that Lady Purple was a notorious courtesan who was so depraved that she mutated into a marionette. At the end of the frame narrative, the puppet re-awakens and, like a vampire, sucks the blood from her master and heads off to the next brothel.

The narrator of this story directly defines the *we* referred to in the text.

The puppeteer speculates in a no-man’s limbo between the real and that which, although *we* know very well it is not, nevertheless seems to be real. He is the intermediary between *us*, his audience, the living, and they, the dolls, the undead, who cannot live at all and yet who mimic the living in every detail since, though they cannot speak or weep, still they project those signals of signification *we* instantly recognise as language. (41, emphasis mine)

With this, the narrator, as well as the narratee, become the audience. The professor’s stage becomes synonymous with the text’s stage. In both, the observer and reader are the audience. Through this fascinating manipulation of the term audience, Carter succeeds in creating a distance for the reader between the actual actions in the story and what is going on on the stage. This is intensified further by the introduction of a play within the play of the narrative.<sup>37</sup> Carter creates multiple levels of narrative which provide a cinematic distancing or a deceptive sense of security for the final audience consisting of the reader.

The intimate tone of the narrator here suggests at once an insider’s knowledge of the topic, and at the same time an acute awareness of the audience. It is interesting to

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<sup>36</sup>Anna Gabriela Macedo, “Angela Carter’s Disquieting Poetics: An Ec-centricity Ex-centrically Assumed,” *Daughters of Restlessness: Women’s Literature at the End of the Millennium* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1998) 81.

<sup>37</sup>Macedo also refers to this as a first and second degree narrative (Macedo 86).

compare this piece of fiction with Carter's journalistic essay, "Lovely Linda". In her essay, Carter deals with a similar notion of distancing provided by the camera lens.

In the service of the god, she has taken the repertoire of sexual display from the commerce and intimacy of the brothel and allowed her performance to be frozen upon celluloid, condemned to a sequence of endless repetitions. In doing so, she has removed any element of tactile immediacy from her exposition of the potentialities of the body [...].<sup>38</sup>

The figure of Linda Lovelace is similar to the figure of Lady Purple, in that they are both players in sexual pornographic productions. On the other hand, Carter also seems to be creating her narrator as a type of journalist, as the author is in the essay, reporting on a dying art, that of carnival theatre. This comparison is made even more plausible by the fact that, while this narrative is not overtly Japanese, Robbie Goh calls attention to the many instances when themes contained in this story can be also found in Carter's journalism concerning Japan.<sup>39</sup> If we accept that Carter is utilising the journalistic mode in this narrative, it leaves the door wide open for a type of authorial voice not as overtly possible with other characterisations. It is, therefore, not too surprising that "The Loves of Lady Purple" is full of overt authorial interpretation.

The narrative begins, appropriately, with a description of the symbols on which the whole narrative depends. It will become clearer in the course of the narrative that Carter is pointing toward a form of the death of language, or, better yet, our dependence on symbols and metaphors to define things which has, to a certain extent, made language superfluous. On the other hand, her very use of this silent language of symbols brings it out of the darkness and into the daylight, where it can be examined and debunked for what it is. She begins with a description of the stage and actors of her 'play': "Inside the pink-striped booth of the Asiatic Professor only the marvellous existed and there was no such thing as daylight" (41). This one sentence contains the quintessence of Carter's message.

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<sup>38</sup>Angela Carter, "Lovely Linda", *Shaking a Leg* 54.

<sup>39</sup>Goh 80.

The setting, a blatantly colourful booth, calls up the first connotations of a fantasy world, in which only one specific set of ideas can exist, i.e. those created by its owner. A further aspect of this which cannot be ignored is the realistic and non-fantastic notion of the commercial. Not only does the Asiatic professor create a fictional, mythical world, but he creates this world for an audience. This audience and its desires cannot be ignored. It broadens Carter's scope not only to lay the creation of this fantasy at the feet of one figure, but to spread the responsibility further to the audience. With this, the fundamental importance of recognising both the immediate and the distanced audience, as already suggested by the telling words of the narrative persona, becomes vital.

There is a symbiotic relationship of creator and audience. Neither exists without the other. In an image which once again calls up the tree in "Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest", the first line states that the fantasy world that is brought to life in this booth can only exist shrouded in darkness. Similarly to the manner in which the mysterious tree can only exist in the uncharted reaches of the forest, the marvellous is also not able to survive exploration and daylight which makes it visible and tangible for examination. Carter takes this image even further by immediately characterising the protagonist of this carnival as "the Asiatic Professor" (41). This oriental image<sup>40</sup> is carried through the entire story, and with this Carter once again calls attention to her experiences of Japan while writing the narratives in this collection. The use of the adjective Asiatic, coupled with later allusions to the foreign and the use of the term 'other', she achieves a colourful characterisation of this protagonist with a dearth of words.

With one simple word, the audience makes immediate associations with a person who is other and, therefore, in the carnevalesque context, harmless in the realm of fantasy. "The puppeteer speculates in a no-man's-land between the real and that which, although we know very well it is not, nevertheless seems to be real" (41). The carnival, through its actors, presents the audience with images and distortions

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<sup>40</sup>It is fascinating that the critic Robbie Goh, who thoroughly criticises a number of narratives in *Fireworks* for their orientalist view, would almost completely ignore this in "The Loves of Lady Purple", apart from mentioning the mirrors in her hair in the context of a discussion of mirrors in the collection (Cf. Goh 81).

of what is known. It lives from signs and symbols, and is only dependent on the rudiments of a specialised language to make the whole work: “The huckster’s raucous invitations are made in a language beyond language, or, perhaps, in that ur-language of grunt and bark which lies behind all language” (42). Paul Magrs writes that the Professor “articulates [Lady Purple’s] being as a language.”<sup>41</sup>

Not only does he communicate through her, but she is the embodiment of his communication. “She fills the silences of the men who manipulate her limbs, while she is virtually voiceless.”<sup>42</sup> It is, therefore, appropriate that the professor himself speaks only in “an incomprehensible rattle of staccato ks and ts [...] so he did not speak at all in the ordinary course of things [...]” (42).<sup>43</sup> He has become a symbol, a signifier whose every expression is invested into the animation of the puppet. Ana Macedo argues that “The Professor’s “eloquence” is [...] obviously paradigmatic of the narrator’s own eloquence, and his rhetoric finds an echo in the rhetoric excesses of that other *metteur en scène*, the narrator herself.”<sup>44</sup> Yet this point remains vague. If she means to argue that the rhetorical excesses of the narrator, typical for Carter’s narrators in general, are the written, or even verbal manifestations of the Professor’s silent art, then her arguments would make sense. Unfortunately, she does not go into more detail.

Even his companions, a deaf boy and a dumb girl, serve to strengthen this image of a microcosm where language is secondary and not essential to communicate. The character of the puppet, Lady Purple, is the ultimate expression of this. It appears as if the whole small world of the travelling side-show has mutated into a play itself.

And this means of communication, so delicately distanced from humanity, was particularly apt for the Professor, who had rather the air of a visitant from another world where the mode of being was conducted in nuances rather than affirmatives. (42)

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<sup>41</sup>Magrs 188.

<sup>42</sup>Wisker 129.

<sup>43</sup>A similar statement can be found in Carter’s journalistic piece, “Tokyo Pastoral” (*Shaking a Leg* 231).

<sup>44</sup>Macedo 86.

This type of description can easily lull the reader into a false sense of security. The narrator seems to be artfully creating a comfortable distance for the reader from the characters in the story. It is, therefore, easy to miss the more concrete aspects of especially the professor's characterisation, which point toward an easier interpretation. While the description of the carnival and the professor give the impression that the professor is a type of emanation of his surroundings, the reader should not forget that even the fantastic world of the carnival and its plays has a creator. It is interesting to note that Carter's re-use of Dubois' description in "Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest", here for the Asiatic Professor. Though Carter describes his "benign indifference [...]" (42) as pointed towards "everything except the simulacra of the living he himself created" (42), and that of Dubois as "towards by far the greater part of mankind – towards all those who were not beautiful, gentle and, by nature, kind" (61), the simple repetition of this phrase denotes a comparison which cannot be ignored.

Dubois, in his self-chosen Garden of Eden, becomes a part of his surroundings and presides like a satisfied god figure who is content to let that which surrounds him, as well as that which he has created, namely his children, simply be. He has given what he thought was necessary, and now lets his creation to come to its own terms. In a similar vein, the Asiatic Professor is also a creator. The acknowledgement of this fact is vital to the understanding of the text. The professor has, like God, created his microcosmic world and its inhabitants. In another similarity to Dubois, the professor is also 'Father' to a son and daughter who are, one could say, also a type of mirror image of each other, a negative mirror image more clearly seen in the narrative "Reflections".

Yet while the professor is not the real father to these children, and they are subsequently not at the centre of the narrative, he is Lady Purple's father. Carter's re-use of this image, which served a hierarchical purpose in "Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest", also more than serves to represent a male centred meaning in this text. By placing the professor in a god-like connotation, Carter calls up a universally acknowledged hierarchical form. In this world, the professor is the creator and caretaker of



a status quo that, by the very fact of the 'legend' of Lady Purple and the repetitive quality of this carnival life, is stagnant and unchanging.

Whatever its location, a fair maintains its invariable, self-consistent atmosphere. hieratic as knights in chess, the painted horses on the roundabouts describe perpetual circles as immutable as those of the planets and as immune to the drab world of here and now whose inmates come to gape at such extraordinariness, such freedom from actuality [...]. (42)

Carter adds to the carnival atmosphere of mystery and the marvellous, far older traditions of myth. She deliberately sets the stage for this narrative in Transsylvania. This setting is so infused with legend and mystery that it almost succeeds in making Lady Purple's (re-)awakening at the end of the narrative plausible. The readers, already having the images of vampires in their minds are not shocked by Lady Purple's metamorphosis into one. Yet with all of these mythical and fantastic allusions, it is easy to lose sight of Carter's purpose. Lady Purple is the sole possession of the professor; he guards her jealously - he is her creator. Without him she does not move and would not exist: "He revealed his passions through a medium other than himself [...]" (43). Reading closely, it becomes clear that all that Lady Purple is, is a reflection of the desires of man.

Carter, not surprisingly, chooses to give Lady Purple the appearance of a geisha. This is also appropriate for the professor, as the geisha is a living example of a stylised woman and stylised sexuality. Carter writes in "A Souvenir of Japan" that Japan is such a proper place that one would never guess that a samurai is a murderer and a geisha is a whore (33). Though I argue against her simplistic reduction of the multifaceted career of the geisha to that of a whore, on the whole she hits the nail on the head. One aspect which stands out about geishas is their artificiality.

This fits perfectly into the narrative, as Lady Purple is a marionette. There is nothing natural about her; it has all been distilled out: "Her actions were not so much an imitation as a distillation and intensification of those of a born woman and so she could become the quintessence of eroticism, for no woman born would have dared to be so blatantly seductive" (43). Herein lies the crux of the narrative. No woman

could be like Lady purple. Yet to the professor, Lady Purple is woman. She is the embodiment of his fantasies.

She could have acted as the model for the most beautiful of women, the image of that woman whom only a man's memory and imagination can devise, for the lamp light fell too mildly to sustain her air of arrogance and so gently it made her long nails look as harmless as ten fallen petals. (49)

The professor has created her, and her story, to fit a universal image of woman that is at the same time wholly and completely repulsive while embodying secret sexual fetishes.

Lady Purple has the exterior of a geisha; her appearance consists of a painted on smile and a chalk white face. When one sees photographs of the traditionally made up Japanese geisha, what is most startling is the mask-like face. The skin of the face, neck and shoulders is painted a stark white. Interestingly, this paint caused permanent damage to the women's skin after years of use, similarly to the habit of European women to use arsenic or lead in face powder and paint, which slowly poisoned them or at least caused partial paralysis of the facial muscles. The geisha's face is also expressionless and bland. Their mouths are painted after current fashion in bright colours, which never cover the entire outline of their lips. Carter makes a concession with Lady Purple's permanent smile, as a geisha usually is not pictured smiling.

In every respect Lady Purple is not conceived for normal tasks with her long, decorative nails which could be said actually to be a handicap. In some cultures, long nails symbolise a life of privilege and luxury. Crowning this puppet is a "monumental chevelure [...]" (43). This again is a typical characteristic of the geisha. Their elaborate hairdos are not only a mark of beauty, but also a form of torture for the wearer. The geisha is prevented from sleeping in a relaxed position for fear of ruining their elaborate style. Carter's deliberate characterisation of Lady Purple, on the surface, helps to define her as a 'real' figure. Yet this puppet stands for a certain patriarchal view of women. Carter overwrites this in order to make her point, yet a vague sense of unease accompanies any simple dismissal of this puppet.

The professor not only creates the physical puppet, he also creates the story of her life. Not sparing any detail, he begins with her childhood and paints a self-fulfilling prophesy.<sup>45</sup> Again, utilising a symbol used in “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest”, Carter writes: “They lavished upon her all the attentions which love and money could devise and yet they reared a flower which, although perfumed, was carnivorous” (45). The reader will recall the white water lily which bit Madeline’s finger. This symbol of female purity in Carter’s hands gains a menacing sexuality. Though shown kindness, Lady Purple is incorrigibly evil. The Professor manages to paint a damning portrait, which obviously appeals to his audience. It is easy, though, to lose sight of the fact that everything about her is created by this one person. She is a symbol of womanhood which, created by him, cannot exist outside of the Professor’s world. By drinking his blood, she may have regained life, but at the price that the life she has is once again given by the man who created her as a symbol. Thus, at the end of the narrative, after drinking her creator’s blood, she unerringly walks back into the ‘life’ of a prostitute, echoing, in some fashion, the hopelessness suggested by Gretchen’s repetitive act of collecting eggs at the end of “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter”.

It is easy to lose sight of the fact that everything about her is created by one person. We must keep in mind that the inevitability of Lady Purple’s life lies solely in the professor’s hands. When, at the end of the narrative, she unerringly walks back into the ‘life’ created for her by the professor, the reader is left questioning why she does this when there must have been other options available to her. Yet the course of the narrative makes clear that there can be only one outcome. In a world where women are defined according to the desires of others, in this case of the professor, they become unable to define themselves. Just as the professor claims that Lady Purple hardened into the inanimate puppet, women are unable to break out of a patriarchal role created for them. In this case, the narrator has informed the narratee from the very beginning that what the professor will claim to be true, *we* should all know is not true. While on the surface speaking about fiction or myth and fantasy, the narrator is actually addressing the issue of definition. We may recognise the fiction

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<sup>45</sup>A similar theme occurs in the film, *Ai No Corrida*, discussed in Carter’s article, “Japanese Erotica” (*Shaking a Leg* 354-7).

on the stage, but since the play is an imitation of life, do we recognise the fictions there?

# Chapter 5

## Summary

In this study I have attempted to demonstrate how narratological constructs can be fruitfully applied to close readings of texts. The short fiction of Angela Carter has been particularly useful in this endeavour as her style of writing lends itself well to such an approach. Walter Kendrick commented that she could not write a plot to save her life<sup>1</sup> and it becomes interesting to examine how she creates meaning in her narratives. In lieu of an often recognisable story, the reader is confronted with strong narrators who consciously guide the texts. This study has demonstrated how important a close look at this narrator becomes in light of this.

The examination of the Japan Trilogy showed the pitfalls of ignoring the consequences of the doubling inherent in the narrating/experiencing dichotomy. Carter creates a flawed narrator who, across three narratives, finally reaches an understanding of herself and her surroundings. Ignoring the centrality such a narrating figure has to the interpretation of the story can easily lead to a misreading of Carter's intent. While the stories do demonstrate some weaknesses and are not always entirely satisfying, they do demonstrate some of the depth of possibility contained in the choice of point-of-view.

The three narratives in the second portion of this first chapter each utilise a very different approach to autodiegetic narration. "Reflections" shows the limits of this

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<sup>1</sup>Kendrick 79.

choice in a narrative that remains difficult to interpret. In this case, Carter's choice of point-of-view can be questioned, yet, by invoking these questions, this choice of autodiegetic narration opens up further possibilities of interpretation. The author is testing the limits of elements needed to construct a narrative. Not only is the point-of-view one which Carter deemed suitable, the construct of experiencing and narrating 'I' mirror the theories which serve to underscore the dichotomies which are central to the narrative, the thesis and the anti-thesis. The impossibility of the logical conclusion of synthesis is expressed in the narrator's rejection of his mirror image, his other self. "Elegy for a Freelance", through its combination of autodiegetic and second-person narration is able to achieve a subtle examination of the effects of ideology on identity. Here the narrator takes advantage of this type of narration to distance herself from a self who did not fit into an ideology she must espouse now.

By adding the second-person reference to her lover, she is able to intensify this by shifting a certain emphasis to the role his actions played. This is a subtle use of the constructs of point-of-view in order to achieve a shift in emphasis which creates meaning in itself. "Our Lady of the Massacre" is a much more straightforward narrative both in its choice of subject and its choice of narration. The examination showed that while in "Reflections" the lack of distance between the experiencing and narrating 'I' could be seen as emphasising a lack of or negative development, in this narrative, a similar lack of distance is used to define a positive development. Sal has learned to see herself in a different light. Instead of moving away from her experiencing 'self' as a rejection of that self's choices, she is able to subtly express an acceptance of this self.

The second chapter demonstrated the possibilities contained in the use of a collective narrating agent. This is still a relatively undeveloped field and especially "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter" was able to give an example of such a narrator which has not been emphasised in criticism. In both narratives, Carter utilises this construct to create multiple levels of narratee and various groups on the story plane whose collective nature represents a type of tyranny. The subtlety of this lies in the deliberately slippery nature of this construct. The reader can never be sure exactly

which collective is truly being addressed, thus the reader often has a sense of being in collusion with this collective.

The third chapter examined the possibilities of shifting perspectives in three narratives. By destabilising point-of-view in these stories, Carter is able to achieve a sense of possibility instead of a graspable portrait of her characters. She frees Jeanne Duval and Edgar Allan Poe from the confines of 'myth' and allows space for alternative reading. In "Overture and Incidental Music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" this approach has a more artistic purpose in that it serves as an intensification of the theme of the piece, a comic discordance.

The final chapter closely examined three heterodiegetic narratives. While these can be considered more normal applications of point-of-view, nevertheless, Carter's choices once again can be defined as appropriate according to her subject matter.

This study has demonstrated the possibilities on linking point-of-view and other narratological constructs to the meaning of narratives. It has become clear that this is fruitful ground for examination. It has also been shown that Angela Carter's oeuvre does not only consist of her novels and fairy-tale re-writings. She produced three collections of short-fiction which demonstrate such a wide range of possibilities that the lack of attention paid them is difficult to explain. Despite their often obvious repetition of themes and startling lack of plots, her short fiction charts possibilities in writing which need to be examined.

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