Postmodern Pathologies: Living with Disbelief  
in  
The Fictions of Angela Carter

All interest in disease and death is only another expression of interest in life.  
--Thomas Mann

by

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ABSTRACT
Postmodern Pathologies: Living with Disbelief in the Fictions of Angela Carter
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This study of the narrative techniques employed in Angela Carter's novels, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Nights at the Circus*, demonstrates that for Carter, at least, the postmodern project and the feminist one share concerns regarding the formation of subjectivities, the roles of narrative, and the possibilities for a politics of positioning in a postmodern climate of disbelief in master-narratives.

The Introduction defines and examines the concepts that are central to locating my subject. A brief synopsis of postmodernism is provided, as well as a more extensive discussion of one particularly problematic master-narrative, the Oedipal paradigm. Drawing on the theories of Freud, Teresa de Lauretis, Hélène Cixous, and others, I demonstrate that Oedipal textuality is complicitous with a certain sexuality, one that privileges the male as the active agent of culture and desire, and can be associated with narrative sadism.

Part I shows that, in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, Carter forestalls the death required by narrative. Through repetition, parody, allegory and semantic play, Carter manages to perpetuate disbelief in the Oedipal paradigm through a postmodern strategy of installing that very paradigm. Part II provides a reading of Carter's *Nights at the Circus* that offers alternatives to received traditions of narrative. The metaphors of the confidence trick and of comic contagion provide means of
speculating on alternatives to a narrative that is intrinsically sadistic. The possibility of revisioning Oedipal textuality is further explored through the figure of Cassandra, who is inherently doubled in that she represents both the traditional silencing of Woman, because she is unheard (an Oedipal dynamic), at the same time as she prefigures the power of the seeress (a Cassandrian dynamic). The ultimate purpose of this study is to demonstrate that Carter's texts offer us strategies for living with the disbelief in metanarratives that characterizes the postmodern age. These strategies suggest possibilities, if not for derailing the Oedipal textual dynamic, then, for providing it with an altogether different mission.
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INTRODUCTION

Diagnosing the Dis-ease: Living with Disbelief

"One can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

--Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*

This is a work that addresses (is addressed to?) a name, a title--Angela Carter. Angela, of course, evokes for us the name of "angel" which Alan Bass tells us, in his "Glossary" to Derrida’s *The Post Card*, is derived from the Greek *angelos* meaning messenger (xv). Carter, then, is an angel and a messenger—a messenger who serves a function, much like that of her own creation, the angel-messenger in *Nights at the Circus*. Fevvers, who heralds "the New Century" (*Nights* 281). It is my hope, here, to illuminate the message of the messenger. In this work, I will explore the significance of titles, entitling (naming), entitlement, for contemporary continental theory has taught us that "naming a symptom does not deal with it" (Fleiger 5). As Hélène Cixous has shown, the idea of the name and the entitlement inscribed in any naming necessarily lead us to

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1See Derrida’s “Sending: On Representation” and the conclusion of this introduction.
question the notions of origin and ownership--what names belong to whom--and my text will partake of her insights. Thus, my text will address the meaning of the name, the significance of the title and the politics of entitlement. Mine will be a text rife with borrowings (some might prefer the term intertexts) and citations--as namings of the other, because, as Cixous observes,

[to fly/steal is woman's gesture, to steal into language to make it fly. We have all learned flight/theft, the art with many techniques, for all the centuries we have only had access to having by stealing/flying; we have lived in a flight/theft. stealing/flying, finding the close, concealed ways-through of desire. It's not just luck if the word "voler" volleys between the "vol" of theft and the "vol" of flight. pleasuring in each and routing the sense police. It is not just luck: woman partakes of bird and burglar, just as the burglar partakes of woman and bird: hesheits pass, hesheits fly by, hesheits pleasure in scrambling spatial order, disorienting it, moving furniture, things, and values around, breaking in, emptying structures, turning the selfsame, the proper upside down. ("Sorties" 96)

Significantly, Cixous' words are strikingly applicable to the protagonist in Carter's Nights at the Circus, who is born "[t]o fly/steal . . . into language" and thus turns "the proper upside down." Similarly, my borrowing of names and language is consistent with Carter's endorsement of such 'theft' in "Notes from the Front Line," when she writes: "[r]eading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (69).
Both these names, Cixous and Carter, will figure prominently in the ensuing pages. Other names and borrowings will include a sampling of the following: Freud who borrowed the name from Sophocles; Brooks who borrowed the name from Freud; Winnett who borrowed from Brooks; Mulvey who borrowed from Sade; de Lauretis who borrowed from Mulvey and myself who borrowed from them all. The politics of citation and of ownership are, therefore, also under investigation. And because this is a work about naming/entitling/entitlement, I will borrow from dictionaries, I will borrow from theory, and I will borrow from fiction— all in an effort to demonstrate that boundaries, even those inscribed in a naming, a definition, are not impregnable and the name is not contained, but rather it suffers from contagion and dis-ease. We should approach the name with incredulity.

One naming under consideration here is the very name of narrative. In the following pages I intend to explore narrative desire. One influential film critic has given "narrative" a provocative and polemical naming: the name of sadism. "Sadism," contends Laura Mulvey, "demands a story; depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end" (22). Mulvey's provocative definition of sadism, which sounds uncannily like the common definition of narrative, has prompted Teresa de Lauretis to conclude that the Oedipus\(^2\) "is in fact paradigmatic of all narratives" (Alice

\footnotetext{2}{The translators provide a very helpful note for the readers of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, one which I think might help my reader as well, as I am employing the term "Oedipus" in like fashion: "[a]s will be seen below, the term Oedipus has many widely varying connotations . . . . It refers, for instance, not only to the Greek myth of Oedipus and the Oedipus complex as defined by classical psychoanalysis, but also to Oedipal mechanisms, processes, and structures" (3n).}
that is, narrative desire has always been constructed as resolutely male and Oedipal in structure. Narrative, then, "depends on making something happen," "forcing a change"; it represents an overcoming or an enlightenment (generally at the expense of an/other) and inscribes its own teleological requirement for closure. Narrative--one means by which we make sense of and articulate our reality--appears to be already encoded with Oedipal and perhaps sadistic logic. I might have wished to amend de Lauretis' assertion slightly to state that all traditional narrative is Oedipal, but I will leave this possible difference aside for the time being in order to examine three narratives of narrative--metanarratives, if you will--in light of de Lauretis's statement.

In a provocative article entitled "Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure," Susan Winnett, citing Peter Brooks, is able to exemplify the naturalization of male sexuality as a 'universal' structure of desire in narrative. The "male orgasm," writes Winnett,

is preceded by a visible "awakening, an arousal, the birth of appetency, ambition, desire or intention." The male organ registers the intensity of this stimulation, rising to the occasion of its provocation, becoming at once the means of pleasure and culture's sign of power. This energy, "aroused into expectancy," takes its course toward "significant discharge" and shrinks into a state of quiescence (or satisfaction) that, minutes before, would have been a sign of impotence. (505-6)

Winnett, in this depiction of male desire, is drawing from Peter Brooks' "Freud's Masterplot," in the volume entitled Reading for the Plot; however, the cited material is primarily intended to describe narrative desire rather than male sexual response. Thus,
with trenchant irony, Winnett makes her point that both male desire and narrative desire are similarly constructed; they are, in effect, indistinguishable in these representations. In his text, Brooks addresses Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and does indeed conclude that Freud's model of (male/Oedipal) desire is paradigmatic of all narrative. Freud's "plotting of the life trajectory" and "the dynamics of beginnings, middles, and ends in traditional narrative" support "Brooks' articulation of what are ultimately the Oedipal dynamics that structure and determine traditional fictional narratives," argues Winnett (506). Thus, sexuality--specifically Freudian, Oedipal, male sexuality--is constructed as the 'master' trope for narrative drive in Brooks, following from Freud.

Others, besides Peter Brooks, have trod in the steps of the great 'master-plotter' Freud; witness Robert Scholes' description of narrative in "The Orgastic Pattern of Fiction":

> [t]he archetype of all fiction is the sexual act. In saying this I do not mean merely to remind the reader of the connection between all art and the erotic in human nature. Nor do I intend simply to suggest an analogy between fiction and sex. For what connects fiction--and music--with sex is the fundamental orgastic rhythm of tumescence and detumescence, of tension and resolution, of intensification to the point of climax and consummation . . . . When we look at fiction with respect to its form alone, we see a pattern of events designed to move toward climax and resolution, balanced by a counter-pattern of events designed to delay this very climax and resolution. (*Fabulation and Metafiction* 26)

Winnett comments: "[f]rom the way that both Brooks and Scholes implicate the scenario of male pleasure in the processes that determine narrative sequence as well as the
narrative's aesthetic, erotic, and ethical yield, it would seem that the pleasure of the text depends on the reader's erotic investment" (Winnett 511), and that erotic investment is constructed as male. Roland Barthes also makes explicit the connection between language, narrative and the Oedipal dynamic: “it may be significant,” he writes in “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives,” “that it is at the same moment (around the age of three) that the little human ‘invents’ at once sentence, narrative and the Oedipus” (*Image, Music, Text* 124). Elsewhere, he further refines our understanding of the Oedipal structure as a function of reading as well as of narrativizing--as a textual erotics: "[t]he pleasure of the text is . . . . an Oedipal pleasure (to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end), if it is true that every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father--which would explain the solidarity of narrative forms, of family structures, and of prohibitions of nudity" (Barthes, *Pleasure* 10).

Interestingly enough, Barthes' description of Oedipal narrative--to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end, to unveil the truth--aligns it irrevocably with the project of modernity. "[M]odernity," writes Gianni Vattimo,

is in fact dominated by the idea that the history of thought is a progressive ‘enlightenment’ which develops through an ever more complete appropriation and reappropriation of its own ‘foundations’. These are often also understood to be ‘origins’, so that the theoretical and practical revolutions of Western history are presented and legitimated for the most part as ‘recoveries’, rebirths, or returns. The idea of ‘overcoming’, which is so important in all modern philosophy,
understands the course of thought as being a progressive development in which
the new is identified with value through the mediation of the recovery and
appropriation of the foundation-origin. (2)

The intersection of the Oedipal trajectory with the project of modernity will, I hope,
become clearer as we progress in the examination of the Oedipal logic, which de Lauretis
describes as “the inner necessity or drive of the drama—its ‘sense of an ending’
inseparable from the memory of loss and the recapturing of time” (Alice 125). For the
time being, however, it is important that the metanarratives cited above—Brooks',
Scholes', Barthes', and, by inference, Freud's—all partake of, as well as delineate, an
Oedipal structuration and a post-enlightenment, or 'modernist', salvation ideology that,
necessarily, exclude the female experience of desire and that would see such female
experience as the object rather than the subject of arousal. Hence, "it seems clear that a
narratology based on the oedipal model would have to be profoundly and vulnerably male
in its assumptions about what constitutes pleasure and, more insidiously, what this
pleasure looks like" (Winnett 506); notably, "even Freud was troubled by his theory's
inadequate explanation of female experience," claims Winnett (506). The Oedipal
passage is, after all, problematic for the female child—a fact which caused Freud to
lament that nature “has been less kind to women” (de Lauretis, Alice 132). Such
assumptions regarding the nature of both the production and reception of narratives
would effectively erase—kill as it were—the object or obstacle in the path of their own
insistently modern Oedipal ideologies of narrative reception and representation.
Consequently, it is in the interrogation and critique of these ideologies that ‘Feminisms’ and ‘Postmodernisms’ meet. According to Craig Owens:

[i]t is precisely at the legislative frontier of what can be represented and what cannot be that the postmodernist operation is being staged—not in order to transcend representation, but in order to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others. Among those prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women. Excluded from representation by its very structure [emphasis added], they return within it as a figure for—a representation of—the unrepresentable (Nature, Truth, the Sublime, etc.). This prohibition bears primarily on women as the subject, and rarely as the object of representation, for there is certainly no shortage of images of women. Yet in being represented by, women have been rendered as absence within the dominant culture . . . (59)

It is at this "legislative frontier" that I locate my subject, the narratives of Angela Carter.

In order to comprehend fully the significance of the pervasive and insidious power of representation as it is outlined by Owens and others, as well as the ideological implications of such a "structure" of representation, it may be useful to examine briefly what I intend by some of the more problematic terms that will surface throughout my analysis of Carter's narrative techniques: ideology and, more specifically, the ideological assumptions inscribed in Freudian psychoanalysis, as well as the rather slippery designation postmodern.
According to T. J. Clark in *The Painting of Modern Life* ideology may be defined as "orders of knowing." Further,

[t]he sign of an ideology is a kind of inertness in discourse: a fixed pattern of imagery and belief, a syntax that seems obligatory, a set of permitted modes of seeing and saying; each with its own structures of closure and disclosure, its own horizons, its way of providing certain perceptions and rendering others unthinkable, aberrant, or extreme. And these things are done . . . as it were surreptitiously. Which is to say that ideologies, like any forms of knowledge, are constructs; they are meanings produced in a special and partial social practice. (8)

I particularly like Clark's description because it draws our attention to the 'grammar' of ideology--its narrative structure. Clark argues, correctly I believe, that "ideologies naturalize representation . . . they present constructed and disputable meanings as if they were hardly meanings at all, but rather forms inherent in the world-out-there, which the observer is privileged to intuit directly" (8). This, of course, is what narrative of the Oedipal or sadistic persuasion has always done, by presenting "constructed and disputable meanings" as if they were truth. Thus, Clark neatly draws our attention to the most immediately obvious connection between narrative and ideology.

The Freudian discourse is one which partakes fully of the modern Western master-narrative of progress and enlightenment; it has proved to be a powerful and pervasive

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1A more standard and in-depth study of ideology is Terry Eagleton's *Ideology: An Introduction*. I choose to use Clark simply because, in a few short lines, he makes explicit the relationship between ideology, language and narrative.
ideology that has inevitably conditioned and determined the ideologies of desire. In fact, Jerry Aline Fleiger remarks that "[i]ndeed, Freud's oedipal scenario of subjectivity might be considered one of the master-narratives of our century" (18). As Shoshana Felman writes, "Freud did make history" ("What Does A Woman Want?" 69) and in a big way. Whether or not psychoanalysis remains a popular form of dealing with psychological trauma, culturally, Freud is our legacy. And, we must deal with our inheritance. As Roland Barthes writes: "(The monument of psychoanalysis must be traversed--not bypassed--like the fine thoroughfares of a very large city, across which we can play, dream, etc.: a fiction)" (Pleasure 58). Lennard Davis, on the other hand, argues that "psychoanalysis can help us in understanding not the content of literary works or even the psychological history of individual authors, but the process of cognition and the ways in which literary structures operate on the conscious and unconscious mind" (14)--structures such as the Oedipal structure. However, "such work must always be done in the context of the historical moment," he cautions (14). Davis's caution here is noteworthy because it may be possible to view this particular historical moment as one that might be able to

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"Significantly one of the most impressive and impressing voices in modern history has been Freud's and his notions, opinions and convictions have come down to us in the humanities as a strange, often unchallenged legacy. The permeation of psychoanalytic ideological assumptions into popular discourses is evident when a contemporary and populist magazine with a wide general readership can assume that this readership is conversant with such ideology. To accentuate the manner in which Freud's master-narrative has permeated culture--popular-culture--I quote Time Magazine, November 29, 1993. In an article entitled "The Assault on Freud," Paul Gray writes: 

[t]o a remarkable degree, Freud's ideas, conjectures, pronouncements have seeped well beyond the circle of his professional followers into the public mind and discourse. People who have never read a word of his work... Nonetheless 'know' of things that can be traced, sometimes circuitously, back to Freud: penis envy; castration anxiety; phallic symbols; the ego, id and superego; repressed memories; Oedipal itches; sexual sublimation. This rich panoply of metaphors for the mental life has become, across wide swaths of the globe, something very close to common knowledge (47)."
challenge the pervasive Oedipal logic or, at least, rewrite it. It might be possible, now, to respond to Laura Mulvey's plea for "a new language of desire" (16) and to construct, in de Lauretis' words, "the terms of reference of another measure of desire and the conditions of visibility for a different social subject" (*Alice* 155). After all, in *Freud and the Culture of Psychoanalysis*, Steven Marcus demonstrates, according to Davis, "that even the unconscious--often seen as universal and unchanging--has a history and is part of material change" (Davis 13).

However, the study of ideology cannot claim freedom from ideology. My study, which in Part I will concentrate on Oedipal ideology and its application to narrative, is, like any such study,

not a neutral one because by unmasking and demystifying it places itself in an adversarial role to ideology. It is therefore by definition a *critique* of ideology.

As a critique, it seeks to change the status quo and therefore change the way we think. (Davis 27).

After all, "[n]othing human is exempt from the unconscious" (Davis 33). Ideology, then, could be said to construct our reality; thus, a critique of ideology acknowledges by its very nature the possibility of ideological shifts and the possibility of thinking differently--of establishing another 'reality'--but such a critique will inevitably install another ideology. This is the postmodern paradox: the postmodern installs in order to subvert (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 3). However, as we shall see, the postmodern does not make claim to truth value; rather, it offers only provisional and partial truths--alternative sites from which to speak.
It is in the examination of ideological assumptions, specifically those assumptions that arise from narrative representation, that Carter's texts approach the postmodern, the second of my problematic terms. Any definition of postmodernism is problematic—a statement which has been made again and again. For its detractors, this lack of definitive boundaries de-legitimizes postmodernism. What we call postmodernism, however, is problematic precisely because, as an assortment of ideological positions (which of course it is), it attempts to incorporate, maintain and support differences rather than reduce, erase or deny them. The multiple significations of postmodernism, then, are in fact symptomatic of the postmodern interrogation of universalizing, totalizing discourses. Nonetheless, the very description—that postmodernism attempts to incorporate differences—amounts to something of a definition and, thereby, implies a kind of 'definitiveness', or closure, which seems to contradict the openendedness I have just claimed for the postmodern. Thus it is clear that we are always and necessarily in very uncertain, contradictory and 'murky' territory when discussing the "definitive postmodernism." Perhaps some preliminary discussion of the most prominent theories of postmodernism will, at the very least, orient the reader.

To me, the least interesting of the theories of postmodernism is the periodizing concept, for no firm chronology presents itself and there is little consensus. If we seek consensus we will be very disappointed; of course, as Linda Hutcheon has pointed out, the concept of consensus, itself, is under question in poststructuralist theories—the theories which most inform postmodern practices (Politics 7). For Lyotard, "consensus is only a particular state of discussion, not its end" (Postmodern Condition 65). The
periodizing concept does at least acknowledge that the "post" of postmodernism indicates a chronological development after modernism, but, as Hutcheon argues, the postmodern "incorporates" the modern within its very name (*Poetics* 3). However, it is clear, from the considerable degree of debate in the field, that this chronology is problematic. Ihab Hassan, who, of all the theorists of postmodernism, most wants to delineate a periodizing definition, himself has published work acknowledging that postmodernism is more of a "spirit" than a chronology: "[t]he postmodern spirit lies coiled within the great corpus of modernism . . . . It is not really a matter of chronology: Sade, Jarry, Breton, Kafka acknowledge that spirit" (Hassan, *Dismemberment* 139). Thus, it becomes clear that the limits of this "period" are controversial. The most concise and generally agreed upon version of postmodernism as a periodizing concept is reiterated in the recent publication *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*, by Hans Bertens. Bertens provides a general overview of the major ideas informing our present understanding of postmodernism. His most salient point is that postmodernism has been with us now for at least three decades; hence, the acceptable meanings of the term have undergone considerable change. This, in itself, is one explanation for the lack of consensus.

Bertens begins with an analysis of the influential contribution made by Ihab Hassan in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He identifies Hassan as one of the very first theorists of postmodernism and one of the most insistent in his attempt to wrestle "with problems of periodization, that is, with distinguishing convincingly between modernism and postmodernism" (Bertens 42). Hassan’s "POSTmodernISM: a Paracritical Bibliography," published in 1971, appears to have been instrumental in establishing
attitudes and approaches toward postmodernism throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Bertens 38). In this volume, Hassan attempts to distinguish between an older modernism and a new, post-World War II, literature of silence that

strives for silence by accepting chance and improvisation: its principle becomes indeterminacy. By refusing order, order imposed or discovered, this kind of literature refuses purpose. Its forms are therefore non-telic; its world is the eternal present. ("POSTmodernISM" 78)

The problem for Hassan appears to be distinguishing between an anti-representational modernist "literature of silence" and the postmodernist variant. Unfortunately, the territory remains murky.

At this juncture, Hassan is still trying to define literary postmodernism (Bertens 42). Cultural postmodernism, or "postmodernity", which might be characterized in a tradition of avant-gardism as a "revolt against the liberal humanism of the high bourgeoisie" (Bertens 43) develops later in his thinking, when he identifies the postmodern episteme as "the age of 'indeterminance'" ("Culture, Indeterminancy, and Immancence" 91). By "indeterminance" Hassan means to identify the conflation of what he identifies as the two predominant characteristics of postmodernism: "immanence" and "indeterminacy.

By immanence he intends the "capacity of mind to generalize itself in the world, to act upon both self and world, and so to become more and more, im-mediately [sic], its own environment" ("Desire and Dissent" 10). Thus, he generalizes the earlier insight that "the postmodern endeavour in literature acknowledges that words have severed themselves
from things, that language can now only refer to language" (*Paracriticisms* 90). The second characteristic, "indeterminacy," is compounded of subtendencies that the following words evoke: heterodoxy, pluralism, eclecticism, randomness, revolt, deformation. The latter alone subsumes a dozen current terms of unmaking: decreation, disintegration, deconstruction, decenterment, displacement, difference, discontinuity, disjunction, disappearance, decomposition, de-definition, demystification, de-totalization, delegitimation. ("Desire and Dissent" 9)

This concept of "unmaking" has proved rather important to our understanding of postmodernism and will thus influence my reading of Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. Since I cannot conclude comfortably with a periodizing definition, perhaps it is possible to concur with Linda Hutcheon who writes:

> [t]he political, social, and intellectual experience of the 1960s helped make it possible for postmodernism to be seen as what Kristeva calls "writing-as-experience-of-limits" (1980a, 137): limits of language, of subjectivity, of sexual identity, and we might also add: of systematization and uniformization. This interrogating (and even pushing) of limits has contributed to the "crisis in legitimation" that Lyotard and Habermas see (differently) as part of the postmodern condition. It has certainly meant a rethinking and putting into question of the bases of our western modes of thinking that we usually label, perhaps rather too generally, as liberal humanism. (*Poetics* 8)
It is this other version of postmodernism, that which seeks to delineate it as an impulse, or condition—what Hassan calls the "postmodern turn"—rather than the periodizing concept, which appeals most to what I see as the project of many contemporary writers amongst whom I number Angela Carter.

Whatever the chronology of postmodernism, it is, most assuredly, a phenomenon of the present age. According to Jean François Lyotard, the term postmodern designates this nuclear Now—this time of "incredulity towards metanarratives" (*Postmodern* xxiv). In particular, Lyotard questions the hegemony of the rationalist doctrines, or metanarratives, which represent history as the story of continual progress—an enlightenment, as it were. He defines as modern "any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse . . . an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth" (*Postmodern* xxiii). According to Albrecht Wellmer, "for Lyotard, subject, representation, meaning, sign, and truth are links in a chain which must be broken as a whole: 'The subject is a product of the representation machine, it disappears with it'" (qtd. in Bertens 135). Thus Lyotard stages a postmodern challenge to metanarratives because, as Owens says, "no one narrative can possibly account for all aspects of human experience" ("The Discourse of Others" 64). For another preeminent postmodern philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, "the precession of simulacra" (*Simulations*) maps, and, in so doing, engenders the territory of the present. The Marxist theorist, Fredric Jameson, in his attempt to offer a periodizing account of postmodernism as a "cultural dominant" (*Postmodernism* 4) rather than as a style or impulse, outlines
postmodernism’s “offensive features--from obscurity and sexually explicit material to psychological squalor and overt expressions of social and political defiance” (Postmodernism 4). In the same text, he proffers his infamous critique of postmodernism's play of surfaces, ahistoricity and “waning of affect” (10). These attitudes contribute greatly to what Robert Rawdon Wilson calls "the fairly stark colours" (113) with which postmodernism, as a periodizing concept, is generally mapped. However, I would argue, that despite the claims of ahistoricism, the postmodern era has actually been witness to a trend, in literary texts and other cultural products, towards reevaluating traditional history. In response to Jameson’s assertion that postmodernism discounts the past, Linda Hutcheon has written that it is, in fact, "contradictory, resolutely historical and inescapably political" (Poetics 4), as it endeavours to incorporate the past inexorably within its present. What seems to have developed, in her view, is not a fundamentally ahistorical approach to ideology and culture, but rather a new position vis-à-vis the discourse and narratives of historiography, as well as other traditionally hegemonic discourses: a position typified by questions of doubt and challenges to received truths, as this past is no longer a “golden age to be recuperated” (Portoghesi. 26). In short, a position has developed, which Zygmunt Bauman calls “ambivalence” (10), but which I will call disbelief. This disbelief is most evident in the relationship of postmodern art to history which is always a relation of "critical reworking" (Hutcheon 4), rather than the nostalgic return which is said to typify modernist strategies of narrativizing history, as can be seen in Lyotard’s statement that “modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unpresentable to be put
forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure” (Postmodern 81). The postmodern, on the contrary,

would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms. the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations. not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. (81).

One aspect of the postmodern revaluation of representation, historical and otherwise. has been the active interest in heretofore silenced versions of historical events--the re-*presentation* of traditionally unrepresented and suppressed voices: Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje, Daphne Marlatt, Susan Daitch, Susan Swan, Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie, Christa Wolf and Angela Carter are a few of the writers who bear witness to this trend in the literary arts both in Canada and elsewhere. This revisiting of the past has resulted in a revaluation of the discourses of historiography (memory/remembrance). modernity (progress) and, ultimately, truth (representation)--as we can see, most trenchantly, in the work of Michel Foucault who is yet another extremely influential postmodern theorist. For my purposes, Donald Bouchard is able to summarize succinctly and effectively the contribution Foucault has made to our understanding of history, representation and truth. In his “Introduction” to Foucault’s *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, Bouchard writes:
Foucault locates another form of history: not the slow progress of consciousness or the steady forging of new tools which will finally reveal our identity, but a transgressive history; not the order of things, but the surface disorder of things to the degree that they are spoken. (17).

Foucault’s method of archeological/genealogical inquiry into the discourses of representation, history, language, sexuality and ‘everyday’ life, has, in Bouchard’s phrase, “shown the something other which was said” (17); in Foucault’s own terms, his method “begins with the outside of our own language (langage)” (Archaeology 131). Thus, Foucault produces "transgressive texts" which are intended as “diagnosis" (Archaeology 131); but "diagnosis, by definition, implies recuperation: the particular recuperation of another tradition and of other voices which have remained silent for so long, ‘naturalized’ as they were through the language of reason" (Bouchard 18). For Foucault,

the diagnosis does not establish the fact of our identity by the play of distinctions. It establishes that we are difference, that our reason is the difference of discourses, our history the difference of times, our selves the difference of masks. That difference, far from being the forgotten and recovered origin, is this dispersion that we are and make. (Archaeology 131)

Foucault’s method, then, is one of "genealogical recovery" (Bouchard 18. emphasis added). Sally Robinson explains the significance of Foucault's method to postmodern theories of narrative desire:
[w]hat is important in this work on power and knowledge is the idea that power relations are *mobile*, and that they take historically specific paths based on current notions of "truth," "normality," and their opposites. These paths, the trajectories of desire as they constitute knowledge and power, are always to some extent contradictory and unstable. (15)

I would like to take a moment to examine the postmodern in light of the metaphors employed by Bouchard to summarize the Foucauldian archaeological/genealogical method. We see the recurrent motifs of transgression (of boundaries), diagnosis, recuperation and recovery, but it is not a recovery that seeks to “restore what has been thought, wished, aimed at, experienced, desired” (*Archaeology* 139); rather, according to Foucault, it is “nothing more than a rewriting” (140). This telling use of language allows me to associate Foucault’s discourse with the particularly provocative rhetoric of postmodernism as it is articulated by Hutcheon. "Postmodernism," she writes, is usually accompanied by a grand flourish of negativized rhetoric: we hear of discontinuity, disruption, dislocation, decentring, indeterminacy, and antitotalization. What all of these words literally do (precisely by their disavowing prefixes--*dis, de, in, anti*) is incorporate that which they aim to contest—as does . . . the term *post modernism* itself. (*Poetics* 3).

Significantly, Hutcheon’s list of "disavowing prefixes" and the Foucauldian language of *recovery, resistance, representation, recuperation, rewriting* (terminology which implies repetition--"re"--and perhaps even parody, somewhat analogous to Hutcheon’s sense of the complicitous nature of postmodernism) seem to intertwine readily for me in the
complex language of postmodernism and to signal the emergence of two terms of 
singular relevance to the discourses of and on the postmodern (complete with their own 
disavowing prefixes): disease and disbelief.

Interestingly enough, Fredric Jameson has identified postmodernism as disease, as
"an alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing 
with time and history" ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 117, emphasis added).
"For Jameson," says Craig Owens, "the loss of narrative is equivalent to the loss of our 
ability to locate ourselves historically; hence, his diagnosis of postmodernism as
'schizophrenic', meaning that it is characterized by a collapsed sense of temporality"
(Owens 65, emphasis added). Jameson derives his notion of schizophrenia from the work 
of Jacques Lacan who considers schizophrenia "essentially as a language disorder"
(Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 118). Lacan, according to Jameson, 
inscribes "a linguistic version of the Oedipus complex in which the Oedipal rivalry is 
described in terms not of the biological individual who is the rival for the mother's 
attention, but rather of what he calls the Name-of-the Father, paternal authority now 
considered as linguistic function" ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 118). Jean 
Baudrillard (Simulations) and Deleuze and Guattari (Anti-Oedipus) are yet other theorists 
of the postmodern who have 'diagnosed' postmodernism as a disease, as schizophrenia.
but their views of schizophrenia do not necessarily partake of a negative rhetoric.
Nevertheless, both its supporters and detractors tend to diagnose postmodernism in a 
similar manner, as Craig Owens explains:
[d]ecentered. allegorical, schizophrenic . . .—however we choose to diagnose its symptoms. postmodernism is usually treated. by its protagonists and antagonists alike. as a crisis of cultural authority. specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions. (“The Discourse of Others” 57)

Lyotard also serves as pathologist to the postmodern. According to Owens. “Lyotard diagnoses the postmodern condition as one in which the grand récits of modernity—the dialectic of Spirit. the emancipation of the worker. the accumulation of wealth. the classless society—have all lost credibility” (“The Discourse of Others” 64). Further. in The Postmodern Condition. Lyotard asserts:

[w]e no longer have recourse to the grand narratives . . . we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern scientific discourses . . . . In addition. the principle of consensus as a criterion of validation seems to be inadequate. (60)

It is important. however. to note other possibilities in our sense of the term `disease`.

We can take disease to mean not only a pathological symptom. but to include in its signification the sense of dis-ease—that is. ease denied or deferred. which is also to say. without comfortable or easy consolations. Dis-ease. schizophrenia. these are functions of disbelief and are useful metaphors for diagnosing the current cultural phenomenon. postmodernism. Though historically such terminology carries with it a sense of failure (Sontag. Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors). I would like to argue that the present moment offers us an opportunity to open up the investigation of this terminology to think differently about the dis-ease of disbelief.
Having briefly outlined what is meant by my use of the term postmodernism--its equation in my mind with dis-ease and disbelief--I would like to move on to the interrogation of a specific dis-ease, a specific problem of credulity: narrative desire and its Oedipal representation. While Angela Carter's critique of the ideology of pornographic representation in \textit{The Sadeian Woman} does not dispute the influence of Freudian theory on contemporary discourse, she does draw attention to the problematic status of the Oedipal dynamic as master-narrative; she also, thereby, suggests the possibility of thinking otherwise:

[t]he whippings. the beatings. the gougings. the stabbings of erotic violence reawaken the memory of the social fiction of the female wound. the bleeding scar left by her castration, which is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus. to which it is related in the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture. Female castration is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men's attitude towards women and our attitude to ourselves. that transforms women from human beings into wounded creatures who were born to bleed. \textit{(Sadeian Woman 23)}

Along with Carter, I would like to interrogate the ramifications of such ideological assumptions particularly as they pertain to narrative because, despite the fact that this Oedipal logic is but a "social fiction"--an ideological premise--it. nonetheless, remains pervasive in modernist Western discourses. As Hélène Cixous explains:

[always the same metaphor: we follow it. it carries us, beneath all its figures, wherever discourse is organized. If we read or speak, the same thread or double
braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection . . . . Through dual, hierarchical oppositions. Superior/Inferior. Myths, legends, books. Philosophical systems. Everywhere (where) ordering intervenes, where a law organizes what is thinkable by oppositions (dual, irreconcilable; or sublatable, dialectical). And all these pairs of oppositions are couples. Does that mean something? Is the fact that Logocentrism subjects thought--all concepts, codes and values--to a binary system, related to "the" couple, man/woman? ("Sorties" 63-4)

In order to answer Cixous' (albeit rhetorical) query as to whether the binary, Oedipal logic of modern Western discourses finally reduces to "the hidden male/female opposition with its inevitable positive/negative evaluation" (Moi. Sexual/Textual 105), we must further examine the hidden binarism of this logic.

Teresa de Lauretis' work helps to reveal what Cynthia Chase calls "the complicity of Oedipal sexuality with a certain textuality" (176). De Lauretis' work, drawing on the theories of Victor Propp, reminds us that the Oedipus story emerged with patriarchy: "the complex Oedipus plot appears to be located during the period of transition and merging of two social orders whose difficult conflictual coexistence is inscribed in the many variants of the widely disseminated myth" (de Lauretis, Alice 116). The role of the princess, so central to previous myths of matriarchal succession, had to be attenuated; thus, the figure of the Sphinx emerges who is "a condensation of the princess with the serpent" (de Lauretis, Alice 115). As de Lauretis points out, no one asks what becomes of the Sphinx, the last remnant of a matriarchal system, within the myth in which she is
inscribed; in the Oedipal structure she serves merely as an obstacle to patriarchy and the grand myth of patriarchy disposes of her summarily, if quietly. But the answer to her riddle--an answer which marks Oedipus' entry into culture (and history's entry into patriarchy)--is (what else?) "man."

The story of femininity. Freud's question [what does woman want?], and the riddle of the Sphinx all have a single answer, one and the same meaning, one term of reference and address: man, Oedipus, the human male person. And so her [the female's] story, like any other story, is a question of his desire; as is the teleology that Freud imputes to Nature, that primordial "obstacle" of civilized man. (de Lauretis, Alice 133)

Thus, de Lauretis quite provocatively associates the riddle of the Sphinx, so significant to Oedipus and patriarchy, with a more recent riddle of perhaps even greater significance to us today, the riddle of femininity as it is articulated by Freud. "What does woman want?" he asks. Significantly, both 'riddles' deny the female, as Shoshana Felman points out: the questions are directed by men to men; furthermore, the correct response to both is 'man' ("Rereading" 21). Freud's statement originates in his article entitled "Femininity" from New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis: "[t]hroughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity . . . . Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem--those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply--you are yourselves the problem" (146). Thus, it is apparent that 'women' and 'femininity' are the problems--the obstacles to a totalizing theory of human sexuality.
Women are the question and also the quest in the Oedipal trajectory; for, as Freud states, it is men who pose the question of femininity, not women. To women, as objects of the discourses of psychoanalysis, of myth, and, ultimately, of narrative, the question does "not apply." Felman's analysis of Freud's text is telling in this respect:

[a] question, Freud thus implies, is always a question of desire; it springs out of a desire which is also the desire for a question. Women, however, are considered merely as the objects of desire and as the objects of the question. To the extent that women 'are the question', they cannot enunciate the question; they cannot be the speaking subjects of the knowledge or the science which the question seeks.

("Rereading" 21)

This type of Oedipal logic, which constructs the female as the object rather than the subject of desire, is most clearly articulated by de Lauretis in her essay, "Desire in Narrative," where she outlines the "text-generating mechanism" (116) that semiotician Jurij Lotman has located at the origins of patriarchal culture (116). In an article entitled "The Origin of Plot in the Light of Typology," Lotman defines a simple chain of two narrative functions in any plot-text which are endlessly repeatable: "entry into a closed space, and emergence from it" (168). Moreover,

inasmuch as closed space can be interpreted as "a cave," "the grave," "a house," "woman," (and, correspondingly, be allotted the features of darkness, warmth, dampness)... entry into it is interpreted on various levels as "death," "conception," "return home" and so on; moreover all these acts are thought of as mutually identical. (Lotman 168)
De Lauretis' reading of Lotman's account of the origin of cultural narratives explains the ideology that attends such notions:

[i]n this mythical-textual mechanics, then, the hero must be male, regardless of the gender of the text-image, because the obstacle, whatever its personification, is morphologically female and indeed, simply, the womb. The implication here is not inconsequential. For if the work of the mythical structuration is to establish distinctions, the primary distinction on which all others depend is not, say, life and death, but rather sexual difference. In other words, the picture of the world produced in mythical thought since the very beginning of culture would rest, first and foremost, on what we call biology. Opposite pairs such as inside/outside, the raw/the cooked, or life/death appear to be merely derivatives of the fundamental opposition between boundary and passage; and if passage may be in either direction, from inside to outside or vice versa, from life to death or vice versa, nonetheless all these terms are predicated on the single figure of the hero who crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space. (Alice 118-119)

The Oedipus myth, then, and its implied ideology uphold the binarism that reduces the female to object, obstacle, boundary that must be 'overcome' by the male, Oedipal hero. According to Hélène Cixous "[d]eath is always at work" ("Sorties" 64) in this kind of patriarchal binary thought. Toril Moi explains Cixous' meaning: "for one of the terms to acquire meaning, [Cixous] claims, it must destroy the other" (Sexual/Textual 105). The female disappears, just as she does in the Freudian question, which is directed at men and the answer to which is always 'man'. Yet another version of the (unanswered) riddle of
femininity is proffered by Hélène Cixous in "Sorties," when she asks, not "what do women want?" but, rather, "Where is she?" (63). In response to her own question, Cixous provides the following chart of oppositional forces that further explores the 'death' of the other/woman in representation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity/passivity</th>
<th>Sun/Moon</th>
<th>Culture/Nature</th>
<th>Day/Night</th>
<th>Father/Mother</th>
<th>Head/Heart</th>
<th>Intelligible/Palpable</th>
<th>Logos/Pathos.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress.</td>
<td>Matter, concave, ground--where steps are taken, holding-and dumping-ground.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Man  
Woman (63)

Cixous' stated project is to write with a difference: to eschew the linear, Oedipal logic of masculinist narrative (as she defines it) by producing an "hysterical" narrative. Such a narrative wanders/wonders through various competing sites of meaning. In her own manner, she seeks to locate outside of the Oedipal trajectory; for she insists that 
"[e]veryone knows that a place exists . . . . [t]hat is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where it writes itself, where it dreams, where it invents new worlds" ("Sorties" 72). This place of "exploration" is "what books are" (72). This project, then, for Cixous, is a return of "The Repressed" in culture; a return of the other. But her use of the indefinite pronoun, rather than the feminine, suggests that the repressed is ungendered in a social sense (although biological sex is inescapable, the socially constructed concept
of gender, she suggests, is discursive and, possibly, changeable. Writing with a difference, the writing of "The Repressed." is Cixous' response to the ideology that informs patriarchal binarism. Since "the hidden male/female opposition with its inevitable positive/negative evaluation can always be traced as the underlying paradigm" (Moi, Sexual/Textual 105), victory is always associated with activity and is thus construed as male; defeat is associated with passivity and the female. "Under patriarchy, the male is always the victor" (105), writes Moi in Sexual/Textual Politics. However, we should note, here, that writing and narrativizing are active rather than passive activities. activities directed so as to produce change (change in the protagonist, change in the reader), to produce and reproduce meaning in culture. Cixous must therefore eschew writing in its traditional, linear, dialectical format in order to embrace a writing differently conceived: non-linear, non-progressive, non-modernist writing--an hysterical female, wandering. However, as appealing and utopian as her project may be, such a writing is a question/quest in itself. a desire to "invent new worlds." and it therefore, in its own way, partakes of an Oedipal logic.

Thus, we see that even Cixous' hysterical narrative is itself implicated in an Oedipal logic; perhaps, then, such a logic is inescapable and the "[d]eath at work" in this kind of thought is a permanent condition of modern Western culture. However, for de Lauretis, woman in representation is not even susceptible to death as she is already an object, inanimate and inhuman. She writes that the Oedipus--the paradigm of the hero, the mythical subject--
is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture.

the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not
susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space,
a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter. (Alice 119)

Denying the female the possibility of transformation also denies her the agency of
change. The binary system, then, with its inherent and insidious inscription of the
objectification of the female, appears to be firmly entrenched in modern Western
discourses; from graffiti to psychology, the male is represented as the actant-victor while
the female is receptor-loser. In this war of binary oppositions the female, as subject, is
obliterated. In "the stylization of graffiti," writes Carter,

the prick is always presented erect, in an alert attitude of enquiry or curiosity or
affirmation; it points upwards, it asserts. The hole is open, an inert space, like a
mouth waiting to be filled. From this elementary iconography may be derived the
whole metaphysics of sexual differences --man aspires; woman has no other
function but to exist, waiting. The male is positive, an exclamation mark.

Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing,
that only becomes something when the male principle fills it with meaning.

(Sadeian Woman 4, emphasis added)

Such universalizing of experience is true of all mythologizing of gendered subjectivity,
but, as Carter argues, "graffiti lets [sic] it be seen to be true. It is the most explicit version
of the idea of different sexual essences of men and women, because it is the crudest. In
the face of this symbolism, my pretensions to any kind of social existence go for nothing" (Sadeian Woman 4).

Moreover, this legitimation of male authority is indelibly inscribed in the discourse of psychoanalysis which informs both our sense of subjectivity and our social relations in its assertion of "the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration, which is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, to which it is related the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture" (Carter, Sadeian Woman 23). In all of these accounts, one perceives that the female inhabits some imaginary zone--she is constantly denied by discourse--she is either absent or an enabling position; that is, she is smothered, snuffed by narrative itself. Perhaps, then, de Lauretis' statement, with which I opened this chapter, is, in fact, correct without exception: the Oedipus story is "paradigmatic of all narratives" and, hence narrative rests "on a specific assumption about sexual difference" (Alice 113). Thus, we begin to understand that the obliteration of the female appears to be required by narrative. This narrative, then--which, Carter contends, reduces us all, male and female, to a "charade" (Sadeian Woman 8) of ourselves--is essentially sadistic. Thus we may begin, with the help of de Lauretis, Cixous and Carter, to make sense of Laura Mulvey's provocative and significant assertion that "[s]adism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end" (22). This proposition, "with its insidious suggestion of reversibility" and which "sounds like a common definition of narrative" (de Lauretis, Alice 103) also sounds like the Oedipal
structure. "Are we to infer that sadism is the causal agent, the deep structure, the generative force of narrative? or at least coextensive with it?" asks de Lauretis (Alice 103). To say that narrative is the production of sadism, the production of Oedipus, is also to say "that each reader--male or female--is constrained and defined within the two positions of sexual difference thus conceived: male-hero-human, on the side of the subject; female-obstacle-boundary-space, on the other" (de Lauretis, Alice 121).

Significantly, Carter introduces her "Polemical Preface" to The Sadeian Woman with a quotation from Michel Foucault's Madness and Civilization, which defines sadism as "one of the greatest conversions of Western imagination: unreason transformed into delirium of the heart, madness of desire, the insane dialogue of love and death in the limitless presumption of appetite" (Foucault 210; Carter 3); this sounds astonishingly like a thematic synopsis of Carter's novels, particularly of The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman. In The Sadeian Woman, Carter comments: "[s]adism, suggests Michel Foucault, is not a sexual perversion but a cultural fact; the consciousness of the 'limitless presumption of the appetite'" (32). Thus, if "the combined work of myth and narrative is the production of Oedipus" (de Lauretis, Alice 120)--of sadism--and if myth, as Carter insists, is "consolatory nonsense" (Sadeian Woman 6), then narrative's complicity with this consolation warrants close examination.

In the introduction to Expletives Deleted, published in 1990, Carter acknowledges the death at work in narrative; she writes,

the end of all stories, even if the writer forebears to mention it, is death, which is where our time stops short. Sheherezade [sic] knew this, which is why she kept
on spinning another story out of the bowels of the last one. never coming to a
point where she could say: 'This is the end.' Because it would have been. We
ever travel along the thread of narrative like high-wire artistes. That is our life. (2)
Fortunately, Angela Carter's texts survive her today to teach us how to live with the
inevitability of this death. Like Scheherezade. she insists on "spinning another story out
of the bowels of the last one." in an epidemic of narrative possibilities.

In the work of a German contemporary of Carter's, this threat of annihilation.
complete and total closure, is expressed as a regret of certain knowledges--a wish to
disbelieve, as it were. the modern (ie. post-Enlightenment) history of Western culture
with its metaphysics of insistent binarism. Christa Wolf writes:

[w]hen I observe myself. I catch myself daily. nightly in a continual inner
monologue which rarely ceases--can Europe. can we be saved? . . . [O]ur
subordination to the logic whose ultimate manifestation is the rocket has become
senseless. That is to say, we cannot be radical enough in our questioning; in the
face of the "situation." . . . shouldn't we think. suggest, and attempt that which "is
actually impossible?" (qtd. in Love, 187)

I would like to remind my reader of the citation, from Lewis Carroll, with which I
introduced this chapter. Interweaving these perspectives, we can see. I think, the
articulation in literature of the postmodern predicament: living with disbelief. In the
postmodern world where all master-narratives have " decayed and ceased to grip" (Wilson

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1In fact, Nights at the Circus literalizes the image of the highwire artiste in the figure of Fevvers
whose 'ascendency' is assured by her wings and whose symbolic function is to represent the "New
Woman" (281).
112), we live in a state of constant disbelief. At the same time, narrative persists: "narrative is . . . simply there, like life itself." wrote Barthes (Image-Music-Text 79). just as for Carter narrative "is our life" (Expletives 2). The narratives produced in postmodernity, however, differ significantly and necessarily from those of modernity, because they question, at the same time as they install, the hegemonic discourses of modernity—the master-narratives of modern culture.

The Postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself: that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. (Lyoard, Postmodern 81)

In literature this has resulted in an interrogation of the ideological assumptions in realist and modernist narratives. An investigation of the texts of Angela Carter shows the possibility of writing other-wise, of expressing the inexpressible, of producing narratives which deconstruct the master-narratives of modern culture. In so doing, her work enables an ontological and epistemological shift to a position based on contingency rather than identity.

Nonethess, identity is a theme I should address before going much further—at least one particular identity, that of my subject, Angela Carter. Carter has been described as "the most brilliant and exciting of women writers who is also frankly and intelligently committed to radical politics and analysis" (Jordan 26). I first encountered her work as a
graduate student and I immediately wanted to include her in a proposed study of 
reflexivity in narrative. However, once I began my analysis of *The Infernal Desire 
Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. I soon realized that in her work alone there was an 
abundance of material relevant to the study of narrative. Indeed, her work is receiving 
unprecedented and much-deserved attention in the United Kingdom. Tom Shippey in a 
recent review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 4, 1995, reports that 

[m]ore people in the United Kingdom already are writing theses on Angela Carter 

than on any other contemporary author, and (it is said) than on any author or area 

from anywhere in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. As for undergraduate 

courses, in some university English departments it's hard to find one where she 

hasn't been made into a "set book." Courses on Women's Studies, courses on 

Theory of Narrative, courses on Contemporary Literature, she's on all of them . . . 

Literature and Myth, Fantasy Literature, Realism and Post-Realism, she 

dominates the lot. (Shippey 20) 

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the syllabi in Canadian universities—although 

interest in her work is certainly increasing. 

One reason for Carter's growing appeal is the challenge and richness of her 

metaphorical and allegorical style—what Shippey calls her "not-quite-ease of 

interpretation" (20). However, it is the theoretical component of her work, in an era in 

which the study of the vast field of literary theory has so altered the field of literature 

studies, that I think compels the interest of those of us who study literature. Indeed, 

Carter's work explores and enacts many of the critical insights emerging from French
post-structuralist and postmodern theorists. And she has, in her profoundly insightful and comic way, produced fiction which is, in itself, theoretical in import. For Shippey, Carter is "the very doyenne of Postmodernism: it wouldn't make sense without her" (20). Elaine Jordan writes: "Angela Carter's fictions are a series of essays: attempts, trials, processes" (27); and, Jordan continues, "there is hardly a theoretical debate of the past twenty years that she does not subject to imaginative exploration" (34). Sally Robinson agrees with this assessment of Carter's theoretical sophistication: she describes Carter's novels as "fictive explorations of postmodernist theory" (16). "[T]he focus of her entire oeuvre," writes Joanna Gass, "from her first published novel, Shadow Dance (1965) to her last, Wise Children (1991), was the material world, its representations, and the effects of its representations upon the body, particularly, but not exclusively, woman's body" (7).

Carter herself claims that her writing is devoted to an "investigation of the social fictions that regulate our lives" ("Notes" 70).

In Part I of my study, entitled "Re-membering Desire: Oedipal Narrative," I will examine Carter's investigation, in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, of one such "social fiction": the Oedipus. Carter is identified by Patricia Waugh as one of the writers who

push their representations to the limits of the signifying order, attempting to reverse the development from the imaginary to the symbolic and to envision an alternative subjectivity formed out of the dissolution of the unequal boundaries of gender. Images of mirroring, reflection, rebirth and non-corporeal or non-material
forms of connection (telepathy, 'plugging in' to others' minds) express an impulse to re-enter and reformulate the mirror stage. (*Feminine Fictions* 169)

While Waugh's statement definitely applies to Carter's text, my reading of the significance of this desire for 're-entry', or what I will call penetration, and for reformulation, which I will call 're-membering', does not limit these 'impulses' to the desire to reformulate Lacan's mirror stage. The desire evoked in and by Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines*, is plural. Although Carter certainly presents desire as a constitutive factor in the formation of subjectivity, she also represents desire as constitutive of sexuality and textuality. As Brooks points out, desire "is a concept too broad, too fundamental, almost too banal to be defined. Yet perhaps it can be described: we can say something about the forms that it takes in narrative, how it represents itself, the dynamic it generates" (37). Carter's text, as we shall see, has a great deal to say about the forms desire takes in narrative.

*Infernal Desire Machines* is a dark and brooding text, partaking of the gothic, by which I mean it exhibits the features of the gothic as they are identified by David Punter: most of [Gothic's] manifestations are closely related to perceptions of the failure of accounts of the world and the mind predicated on the supremacy of subjectivity. The Gothic world is one in which health, strength and moral wellbeing will not serve to get one by; on the contrary, they will prevent one from seeing the real sources of power and control, and thus make one's demise the more fitting an object for irony. (*Literature of Terror* 400)
The gothic "demonstrates the potential of revolution by daring to speak the socially unspeakable; but the very act of speaking it is an ambiguous gesture" (Punter. Literature of Terror 417). By evoking the "ambiguous gesture" of the gothic, Carter situates her text in the psychic terrain of the unconscious and establishes both the protagonist and the reader as voyeurs (Day 67). In thematic terms, the protagonist, Desiderio, is situated in an unresolved Oedipal conflict. However, for the purposes of this study, it is the conflicts that arise from Oedipal narratives that hold greater interest than any Oedipal resolution or lack thereof. Indeed, Carter does inscribe the Oedipal trajectory, again and again and again: she attacks myth with myth. Through repetition, allegory and 'play' with language and representation—mythical and otherwise—Carter inevitably parodies and ironizes the very ideology she installs. For Lyotard, "[t]he narrative function is losing its functors. its great hero, its great dangers. its great voyages. its great goal" (Postmodern xxiv). The failure of the Oedipal trajectory to resolve with any assurances or transcendence leaves Carter's reader bereft of the usual consolation offered by mythical narratives from Homer to Joyce. As Jordan puts it, her novels "are questioning journeys to no final home. which remember but are not detained by nostalgia" (22). Her work is typically postmodernist in its complicity with that which it would critique and in its use of reflexive, intertextual and parodic strategies to subvert her own narrative. As she tells John Haffenden, in a very postmodern denial of totalizing truths: "there are no answers which are unequivocally correct" (qtd. in Haffenden 79). This does not mean, as I will show, that there are not possibilities for partial, contingent truths, like those conceived by Donna Haraway when she writes: "[t]he alternative to relativism is partial, locatable. critical knowledges
sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology" (191).

In Part II of my study I will look beyond the Oedipus to another figure of and for narrative representation: Cassandra. Carter's *Nights at the Circus* is one of the fantastic texts identified by Patricia Waugh wherein the "feminine subject is fragmented, dispersed, in an attempt to rupture or deconstruct the 'fixed' ego formed doubly in alienation" (*Feminine Fictions* 169). I shall argue that, in her verbosity, fragmentation and wandering, the protagonist, Fewvers, evokes the very image of Cassandra. Whether she is 'fact' or 'fiction' is a problem Jack Walser, the reader, and even Fewvers, herself, are led to contemplate. The young journalist, Walser, who records her life story, finds her narrative unbelievable. The question remains, how does the reader interpret the disbelief evoked by her story; moreover, how does Fewvers deal with the disbelief she provokes? Indeed, I will demonstrate that the narrative is an hysterical (in the dual sense of that term) and Cassandrian production that teaches us how to live with disbelief.

Interestingly enough, while the Oedipus, as we know it, is a recuperation—it is Freud's version of Sophocles' play—the version of Cassandra I would like to address, in order to construct an alternative version of narrativity, is also a recuperation of a Greek dramatic precedent—Christa Wolf's rewriting of Aeschylus' *Orestia*. Christa Wolf's revisitation of Troy in *Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays* and her reinvestment of the protagonist, Cassandra, with a voice—is a particularly trenchant and symbolic gesture in the postmodern context of disbelief. Cassandra provides an apt metaphor for the recuperation of silenced voices because she is the prototype in Western mythology of that
loss of voice, especially in so far as that voice is gendered female. While the Oedipal structuration represents the paradigm of modern narratives, the Cassandra structure represents the muted, unheard (uncomprehended) narrative. Wolf discovers, in her rewriting of the *Orestia*, that writing--women's writing--can perhaps lift the curse of women's silencing (305); but writing is as problematic for women in the present state of patriarchy, as speaking was for Cassandra in Troy. In "Conditions of a Narrative: Cassandra," Wolf asks:

how can we write under the glowing sun of reason; in this rigorously cultivated, arrogant, and deciphered landscape, robbed of our possessions, including our words, which could have the power to cast spells? This, too, is a question which can only be approached by asking further questions . . . . What is Cassandra's message today, when of course she is mocked, unheard, described as abnormal, exposed, consigned to death? (305)

Cassandra's message, it would appear, is the continued importance of narrative despite the landscape of disbelief. For Wolf, as we can see by the title of her fiction/essay with its deliberate colon, "Conditions of a Narrative: Cassandra," Cassandra is much more than a thematic investment; she is nothing less than a structural condition of the narrative. In the German title of Wolf's text, "Cassandra" is presented as one of the "pre-conditions"--*Voraussetzungen*--of narrative. Before narrative can commence, there is, necessarily, Cassandra. And Cassandra is the prototype of enduring disbelief--that is, she endures and learns to accommodate persistent disbelief. Disbelief, then, is a precondition of narrative.
Part II of my study, which addresses Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, is entitled, "Living With Disbelief: Re-covering Narratives." This title is a deliberate citation of Laurie Layton Schapira's text, *The Cassandra Complex: Living With Disbelief* which, in turn, cites Christa Wolf's *Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays* which cites Aeschylus' *Orestia* which cites Homer who cites the language of the oral tradition, that is, language itself, which, as Barthes has taught us, is everything. My title, then, alludes to the figure of Cassandra as she is re-constructed in numerous and often contradictory instances. This reconstruction enables us to see Cassandra as the prototype for life as text, as versions rather than as truth. In her present day evocation, she is a collection of intertexts and it is such an intertextual narrative paradigm I would which to evoke. This project entails the exploration of a new model of narrative which does not exist as antithesis to the Oedipal narrative, but rather as an interrogation of Oedipal structures. In postmodern fashion, it incorporates that which it contests. In this project I have been preceded by Wolf and my experience has mirrored hers. Therefore, I present my process as what Wolf would call "a fabric" which, again stealing my language from her, I set before you:

I feel keenly the tension between the artistic forms within which we have agreed to abide and the living material, borne to me by my senses, my psychic apparatus, and my thought, which has resisted these forms. If I may formulate a poetological problem so soon let it be this: There is and there can be no poetics which prevents the living experience of countless perceiving subjects from being killed and buried in art objects. (142)
Wolf, thus, would wish to deny the 'deathly' mythical-textual mechanics of narrative (Oedipal), which stand as a constant challenge to women who are constituted as object in the Oedipal narrative and who are 'killed-off' in the Freudian "master-plot" (Brooks). Postmodernism, then, as "a paradigm case of the problem of boundaries and slipping categories: collapsing borders, fuzzy sets and unmappable zones" (Wilson 115) is hardly a threat for those who have been denied subject status by the hegemonic discourses—the master-narratives of Western culture. Nor, I might add, is disbelief a new experience for the so-called marginalized. In so far as both Carter and Wolf have first-hand experience of marginalization due to gender, they are well prepared to address the postmodern condition of disbelief; women may not have any great affection for, or persistent belief in, the master-narratives that would objectify and deny them. The evocation of Cassandra as a figure of disbelief, we shall see, enables women's engagement with narrative, as it allows for a far greater number of narrative possibilities than is contained in the Oedipal textual dynamics.

Nevertheless, Cassandra and Oedipus are not totally dissimilar. They both originate at the (mythical) historical moment that marks the emergence of patriarchy and the victory of Apollonian consciousness—rationality and reason personified; however. Cassandra is the silenced player—the prototype of the muted, unheard voices of history. Her opposition to Apollo does not determine her as irrational—she speaks truth—rather she is unbelievable (to those who hold the power of signification—in our culture, hegemonic patriarchy). The fault lies not merely in what she has to say, but rather in the skepticism of her audience; a failure of reception and a failure of the ear to hear the other of what
was said (Foucault). There are many versions of the myth of Cassandra, but the most common interpretation is that Apollo—the god of reason and rationality—desired Cassandra and therefore bestowed upon her the gift of prophecy as a bribe for her favours. Cassandra accepted his gift, but refused his advances. So Apollo, during an inspired moment, said he would be satisfied with just a kiss. When Cassandra granted him the kiss, he spat in her mouth, thereby insuring that though she spoke truth, no one would believe her. Significantly, Cassandra prophesied the Fall of Troy—often associated with the demise of a matriarchal society—but no one acted on her insight. However, the Cassandra represented in Wolf's text does not claim access to truth, only an access to another perspective. Perhaps, it is time to grant that perspective is always partial and truths are always contingent. It seems to me that Cassandra offers a compelling paradigm case, for she represents a silenced voice, but as she is represented in Wolf's text, she represents a silenced voice that seeks to comprehend her own complicity with history. Significantly, in Wolf's text, Cassandra is the ostensible author: she has found a voice with which to speak within a social environment (Troy, our present) that disbelieves her perspective. However, accepting this disbelief as empowerment, rather than skepticism and paralysis, means accepting disbelief as the representation of the partiality of any one perspective. And it is possible that the recuperation that gives voice to the historically silenced may still fall on deaf ears, but it is also possible that the postmodern moment, which I have characterized as one of disbelief, allows for these partial and contingent truths.
For the purposes of my work on Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, I would like to explore yet another vision of postmodernism. Robert Rawdon Wilson proposes what I find to be an extremely useful approach to the postmodern moment and one that shares considerable affinity with the perspectives expressed in Carter's hysterical Cassandrian narrative. Wilson suggests that we "confront it [postmodernism], that is, the diverse kinds of evidence that 'it' constellates as an educational challenge" (115):

post-modernism offers the opportunity to read both texts and culture with "parted eye" in which, as Hermia exclaims in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, everything "seems double". . . . It is an opportunity, and neither a catastrophe nor a punishment . . . since the possibilities for reflexivity, for self-consciously inscribing the problematic of one's own explorations, are always exciting . . . . And as a discursive nexus, it continues to open towards multiplex investigations.

(121)

I would like to respond to Wilson's directive to confront the postmodern as an educational challenge as I see this challenge unfolding in Christa Wolf's exclamation: "Shouldn't we think, suggest, and attempt that which 'is actually impossible'?" (Wolf, qtd. in Love 187). or, in the strategies Carter has devised, in her own words, "to cheat the inevitability of closure, to chase away the demons, to keep them away for good" (*Expletives* 3).

De Lauretis suggests one possible way "to cheat closure" and "to chase away the demons" when she writes:

[t]o assert that the social representation of gender affects its subjective construction and that, vice versa, the subjective representation of gender--or self-
representation--affects its social construction, leaves open a possibility of agency and self-determination at the subjective and even individual level of micropolitical and everyday practices. (Technologies 9)

It may just be possible to affect change despite our complicity with and our location within, the discourses that confine and define us. While it may be true that male/subject and female/object are the "only two positions offered by hegemonic discursive systems, it does not necessarily follow that others cannot be constructed or even wrenched from within those very systems" (18), writes Sally Robinson in her extremely engaging analysis of Carter's Infernal Desire Machines and Nights at the Circus--the texts under consideration here. One way of achieving this is to reevaluate voices from the past that have traditionally been silenced, but who have always 'thought differently' from the hegemonic discourse--their thinking in fact, assuring their exclusion from history, their silencing.

My analysis of these revaluations takes into account the literary as well as literal use of the equivocal term recuperation. Exploiting the double sense of the word "recuperation," I am led to inquire: from what are we recuperating? What illness or disease of history, metaphysics, or modernity has left us weak and doubtful? For we do suffer (if suffer is an appropriate term) from the disease of disbelief. And to recuperate is, for one, to return to life, but also it is to leave behind, to improve; thus, the term also invokes the ideology of progress. The Oedipal logic looms once again: 'leaving behind' and its association with progress are notions linked with the ideology of modernity as defined by Gianni Vattimo and cited earlier in my introduction. The fact that descriptions
of postmodernity can partake of the rhetoric of modernity attests to its inescapable complicity with the discourse it would critique. The critical approach of postmodernism's radical interrogation of notions of foundation and origin cannot avoid the contradictory and complicitous; however, what in modernism could be viewed as a nostalgic return in postmodernism becomes "a critical revisiting" (Hutcheon, Poetics 4). Postmodernism, writes Hutcheon, is distinguished by its incorporation of the past within its inexorably contemporary present. It has not "replaced liberal humanism, even if it has seriously challenged it" (Poetics 4). Postmodernism cannot help but partake of that which it purports to critique if it is going to remain true to its stated project of disrupting and deconstructing monolithic, hegemonic discourses; unless, of course, postmodernism claims to transcend and replace with something better those ideologies which precede it. but then it would partake only of the ideology of modernity, as Vattimo describes it. According to Brenda K. Marshall, it is essential that we recognize that in the postmodern moment "there is no 'outside' from which to 'objectively' name the present. The postmodern moment is an awareness of being-within, first, a language, and second, a particular historical, social, cultural framework" (3).

Throughout my introduction I have had cause to cite various writers, who in turn have been dis(un)covered citing other texts. My use of citation has a point. This is a study of re-visions--it can hardly be otherwise. For one, it is a doctoral thesis, but, more importantly, it is an attempt to re-vision--that is, to see differently--what has gone before. There are silenced voices here as elsewhere; to some degree, all voices arrive to us out of the past, out of other discourses and other texts. I make no effort to hide my reliance, but
I also acknowledge that my gesture, here, has a politics. For all texts--whether they acknowledge it or not--re-incarnate and recuperate what has gone before, repeat and reinforce ideological assumptions, and are indebted to many ‘unheard’ or silenced voices—many Cassandras. For the formal concerns of a dissertation, the debt must be acknowledged, but it should become clear that such an acknowledgement participates in, even colludes with, a notion that ideas belong to someone, and that our own ideas are—just that—our own. However, ownership of ideas—intellectual property rights if you will—must be questioned in any discourse that recuperates and reinterprets the past through intertextual and metafictional modes and that, in so doing, revisions the present. As Hassan says, “[d]erision and revision are versions of subversion” (“Postmodern Perspective” 505).

I have also taken the opportunity in this introduction to engage in word-play, puns and double-meanings. This is not, to my mind, a frivolous endeavour. Derrida, for one, has taught us the importance of a thorough interrogation of the significations of language: he, too, often has recourse to puns and other word-play. Neither is Angela Carter immune: she consistently plays with and on the multiple significations of language. This mode of double-meaning seems to me to partake of the ironical stance of the postmodern moment: to suggest the value of seeing with parted eye, the subversive value of double vision in our approach to representation and reality. This method is expansive—meaning multiplies continuously. However,

[t]his is not chaos, this is not anarchy, this is not entropy, although it may be chaotic, anarchic, entropic. There is sense here, but not safe sense. Sense made
here is limited, local, provisional, and always critical. Self-critical. That is sense within the postmodern moment. That is the postmodern. (Marshall 2)

That is also Carter's Cassandrian narrative. Granted, we cannot evoke a very 'clear' picture when afflicted with double vision, but we may be able to live with the multiple perspectives such vision offers us. Double vision represents a 're-mission' of the singular, unitary and monolithic versions of the self and reality in favour of partial truths, contingencies and possible worlds. "The postmodern moment resists totalizations, absolute Identity, absolute Truths. It does, however, believe in the use-value of identities and local and contingent truths" (Marshall 6). Perhaps, then, we can say that Carter's narratives, despite the postmodern interrogation of the notion of progress, are yet progressive in the sense that they offer us 'remission'—in the sense of re-mission, that is, of course, to send again (renvoi).6 to re-present differently, to provide with a different mission.

* See Derrida's "Sending: On Representation." translator's note: "in Derrida’s language, the ‘original envoi’ . . . can only be approached by means of a ‘renvoi’ or ‘sending-back’. But ‘renvoi’ brings its own complexities, since it is also the term used for ‘reference’ in the scholarly sense (to footnotes, to earlier works, etc.)" (294).
PART ONE

Re-membering Desire: Narrative Sadism

Chapter 1

Desire Between the Covers: Infernal Desire Machines

Angela Carter's The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hofman,¹ published in 1972 as the first installment in an intended trilogy (Jordan 31), is a richly evocative and highly imaginative work that engages, critically, with the multiple possibilities of narrative. Sally Robinson² views Infernal Desire Machines as

a postmodern parody of fictions of male subjectivity and desire. Carter parodies both liberal humanist and postmodernist epistemologies by constructing a textual world torn by a war between the forces of rationality and philosophical certainty, and the forces of desire and radical indeterminacy. The narrative unfolds in a

¹Subsequent references to The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (1972)—a title which Elaine Jordan calls "an outrageous imposition" (Jordan 31)—will be abbreviated as Infernal Desire Machines in an effort to facilitate reading. I should note at this juncture that Jordan prefers to designate Carter's text as Hoffman; my choice of the available options for abbreviating Carter's title inevitably reflects my own ideological positioning, a position that will become clear as I undertake an investigation of Carter's chosen title and its interaction with her text. My titular preference, Infernal Desire Machines, forces upon me the realization that my choice of titular abbreviation (naming) is as arbitrary as any other.

²Unfortunately, Robinson's work did not become available to me until after I had completed the five chapters which deal with Carter's Infernal Desire Machines. Her insights often parallel my own. Although I reached similar conclusions prior to reading her work, whenever the parallels are particularly striking I have sought to accredit the ideas to Robinson. Since mine is a work that, in part at least, questions the 'ownership' of ideas, there appears to be an interesting disciplinary exercise in the necessity, due to the conventions of the form, of indicating ownership of an idea by claiming that it originated where in fact it did not. Ironically, this enacts some of the very questions and problems of origins, citation and ownership that circulate in my work in a way that would be far more difficult to explain without such a cogent example.
textual world where all "reality" is mediated, indeed, *produced* by the articulation of desire. (22)

While the formation of subjectivity and desire are central to the work, it is the narrative structure and its ideological configuration that will most occupy my attention here. Structurally, *Infernal Desire Machines* is, ostensibly, an autobiography, and it is this element, as well as the quest motif, that most interest me in my study. Robinson discusses the significance of the quest motif in her volume entitled *Engendering the Subject*:

> [t]he quest plot that structures *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* is a contorted version of Oedipal narrative that Carter uses to foreground the ideological stakes in this kind of story. Because Desiderio's adventures represent a direct expression of his desire--both conscious and unconscious--the text serves as a commentary on the gendering of that desire as masculine. (115)

However, because the narrative forms of science fiction, fantasy, the gothic, and the picaresque are also elements of *Infernal Desire Machines*, the historical quest narrative it appears to be is contaminated by these as well. In fact, as I will show, genres, like everything else in Carter's text proliferate to epidemic proportions. I will argue, along with Robinson, that

> [t]he text engenders its readers as political by de-naturalizing the processes by which narrative constructs differences--sexual, racial, class, national--according to the twin logics of desire and domination. The text addresses a reader who must

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1 My reason for this particular choice of terms will become clear as I proceed in my argument.
negotiate between the Oedipal logic the text flaunts with a vengeance, and another logic that emerges from her/our engagement in that narrative. (22)

The text begins with an "Introduction" by the narrator Desiderio, who, as he commences his narration, is in his final years and feels his death approaching. He is writing his autobiography as an historical document, one which will ostensibly support the official version of the War against Reality in which he played a significant part. His narrative, he claims, will finally "coffin young Desiderio" (221). However, Desiderio has never really been certain about the part he played in history and this uncertainty permeates his account of the events of the war, and also problematizes the death he ascribes to his narrative.

Despite the public function of his document, Desiderio's history is, nonetheless, a personal one. He tells us that, years before the telling of his tale, he was enlisted by the Minister of Determination to seek out and destroy the 'diabolical' Doctor Hoffman. Hoffman, through the means of "eroto-energy" (208), which is an energy of the text akin to that which Barthes describes in *The Pleasure of the Text*, has altered reality in

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'Carter provides neither a specific locale nor time frame for the events in the novel, an omission which is telling in itself. One can search in vain, I have, for some indication of Desiderio's exact location in time and space, only to discover, that much as in the chapter "Nebulous Time," these elements of the text are a projection of the reader's desire. The only hint of the locale is when Desiderio refers, nostalgically, to "[his] own far American South" (155); he also describes his own tongue as the standard speech and refers to his English as "faulty" (176). These hints, while informative, remain vague. The time scheme can be approximated by counting the generations that have passed since the arrival, in Desiderio's country, of Hoffman's great-grandfather on the 18th of September 1867 (26). I have calculated the time frame to be the 1960s or 1970s. However, I must acknowledge that the compulsion to figure out these details in a work of fiction is obviously paradoxical and should, therefore, alert us to how deeply entrenched are our assumptions that language represents reality. The desire to know these details may well be fostered by our 'realist' expectations of the text, especially considering the 'historical' frame of the novel. One could, perhaps, claim that such omissions provide the text with a universality by allowing it to be 'all things to all people', but, to my mind, these omissions draw our attention to the limitations of realist representation and they are, thus, only further evidence of the non-universality of any given historical account.
Desiderio's city so that reality has become a reflection of the unconscious desires of the inhabitants, rather than a product of a 'reasoned' civilization. The nameless city, then, is "[u]nder [s]iege" (15). The war against reality waged by the Doctor amounts to a war of binary oppositions in which two competing versions of reality vie for ascendancy. What eventually becomes clear is that reality is precisely that: a version—nothing more or nothing less than a construct. Desiderio, at this point, is given a mission: to discover the location and reality-bending methods of the Doctor. However, Desiderio has already by this time met the intriguing Albertina, the Doctor's daughter, and his quest for the Doctor can never be entirely differentiated from his quest for the daughter. Desiderio's journey takes him through six elaborately gothic episodes that derive their ideas and iconography from the anthropology of myth, from Freud, Swift and De Sade, from Hollywood and fairy tale, and from Carter's own highly charged imaginative concern with bizarre or perverse sexuality, with animals and automata and situations of subjection. (Clark 154)

Desiderio begins his heroic and, as we shall see, Oedipal journey as an Inspector of Veracity in the episode entitled, "The Mansion of Midnight." In his function as Inspector of Veracity, he seeks to uncover the reason for the disappearance of the Mayor of a coastal city. However, in his other capacity as secret agent for the Minister of Determination, he is really seeking to discover the identity of a certain peep-show proprietor who was, we will eventually discover, a former teacher of the Doctor. Desiderio will, in fact, meet the peep-show proprietor and will view his samples, samples which represent the more gruesome side of unconscious desires in three-dimensional
detail and which are a major part of the means by which the Doctor restructures events (97) and alters the nature of reality. The Mayor's disappearance, however, remains a mystery. Much in this text that appears to be inexplicable will remain so. This is not a novel of the realist paradigm; that is, it is not a novel that would eventually and conveniently tie up loose ends. Rather, it is as if possibilities are left to the imagination.

During his stay in the coastal city, Desiderio, in effect, rapes the young daughter of the Mayor as she is essentially asleep when he makes love to her. When he is later discovered rescuing her lifeless body from the sea, he is accused of her murder and imprisoned. He escapes the terrible fate that awaits him at the hands of the Determination Police and is eventually rescued by the River People. We never learn, for certain, the cause of Mary Anne's death, or that of her father. Such 'loose ends' would, generally, be seen as an aesthetic flaw; however, in Carter's text they seem, rather, to represent to the reader the impossibility of knowing everything and the improbability of the 'realist' text which implicitly or explicitly presents reality as completely knowable. When Desiderio is rescued by the River People, who are native to the country, he is reconnected with his indigenous roots--Desiderio's mother, after all, is of Indian extraction. On the river, he discovers a simpler life-style outside of the conflicts that rage in the city. The River People remain untouched by the alterations to reality; their imperviousness to the Doctor's machinations, we shall see, is a result of their language, and therefore their ideology, which does not incorporate the concepts that would enable them to take part in the war of binaries. However, their culture, like all others we will encounter in *Infernal Desire Machines*, is permeated with myth. When they seek to destroy Desiderio in a
ritual sacrifice and consume him,5 he escapes and joins a travelling carnival. The River People's desire to consume Desiderio is not, finally, realized; nor is the reader's desire to consume Desiderio's narrative completely realized. Absolute closure is continually denied.

At this point in the narrative, Desiderio reconnects with the peep-show proprietor and, in fact, becomes his assistant. Here, he familiarizes himself with the ever-changing samples first encountered in "The Mansion of Midnight, and learns something of the Doctor's history and method of altering reality to reflect unconscious desires. These samples often depict events which will later occur in the text, although with differences: for instance, Desiderio views one of the samples, "PERPETUAL MOTION." (46) which depicts a man in the perpetual embrace of Albertina. He correctly guesses that he is fated to be the man. This sample prefigures his fate, but only if the Doctor and his daughter have their way. Desiderio is raped in this episode by the Acrobats of Desire. He escapes and attempts to console himself. and during this period a massive earthquake completely obliterates the travelling carnival-- yet another fantastic and unexplained event.

In the subsequent episode, "The Erotic Traveller." Desiderio is rescued by the Count and his syphilitic servant, Lafleur, who we eventually learn is Albertina in disguise. The Count lives only to realize his desires, no matter how extreme and grotesque. He is a consummate sadist. In fact, Jordan insists that "[t]he grotesque Count represents Sade and Nietzsche, dressed up as Dracula" (34). Desiderio accompanies the Count to a

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5The theme of cannibalism, the consumption of the human, recurs in Carter's text. As I will show, this theme is also a metaphor for the way in which narrative 'consumes' both the actant and the reader.
brothel wherein the objects of purchase, the women, are represented as a complex conflation of animal and machine who are totally confined by their construction in gender. Lorna Sage refers to these representations of "mechanical humans" as Carter's "most extraordinary images" ("Savage Sideshow" 272). "These androids." she writes. "somewhere between Bernini and the Bunny Club, aren't a bad emblem of the many worlds of Hoffman. There's more myth-breaking going on than myth-making, but the plot, which has reverted to the primitive form of the quest, keeps just ahead of the demolition, until the final cataclysm" ("Savage Sideshow" 263). Thus, Carter literalizes the female as object through these representations of the prostitutes. She also satirizes the gendered construction of the male. Both the Count and Desiderio are required to don a costume that covers them entirely, with the exception of their genitals. This is the male as phallus personified, and frankly, ridiculous. The Count, we learn, is running from his nemesis and eventually, after many adventures by land and sea, the Count is caught on the coast of Africa and consumed as comestible in a parodic enactment of Western misconceptions of African 'barbarism'. Albertina and Desiderio escape the Count's fate and wander deep into the forest and into, what Carter calls, "Nebulous Time."

The chapter entitled "Lost in Nebulous Time" represents the time of "concretized desires" (219). "Nebulous Time," "the womb of time" (189), also represents narrative time, as I will show. In this episode, Desiderio and Albertina are, if not imprisoned, at least, not free to leave the society of the Centaurs. The echoes of Gulliver's Travels contribute to our understanding of these creatures. Like Gulliver, Desiderio is very much seduced by the values upheld in this alternative culture. As with the culture of the River
People, in this society the myths that underlie and uphold 'reality' are exposed. The Centaurs cannot conceive of a being who is different: their "deep conviction the universe was a horse" made it "impossible for them to see any evidence that hinted things might be otherwise" (183). Hence, they seek to erase differences by forcing the "insignificant" humans to comply with Centaurian ideology and become more horse-like. This transformation is to occur through a barbaric and painful ritual, incorporated into their mythology, during which Albertina and Desiderio, while still conscious, will be 'centaurified' (rather than personified): shod with iron 'shoes', just like those applied to horses; tattooed; and, finally, trampled to death (190). They will, thus, be subsumed by the Centaurians' narrative. "The centaurs had all the virtues and defects of a heroic style" (180)--that is, of a heroic, Oedipal and sadistic style, as we shall see. Albertina and Desiderio are rescued, coincidentally and just in time, by the Doctor's helicopters. Closure and, ultimately, death are postponed. Albertina resumes her identity as "Generalissimo" (195) and her father's daughter. Desiderio, at this point, also resumes his identity as questing hero.

The final 'apocalyptic' chapter is entitled "The Castle." In the castle, Desiderio finally meets the Doctor and discovers that he is more like than unlike his adversary, the Minister. This realisation is significant, as we begin to understand Desiderio's non-committal and disaffected behaviour throughout his quest. Power is revealed, as it is in Foucault's work, as not intrinsic to an entity, but rather as a position one inhabits. Desiderio is very disturbed by the similarities he identifies between the two agents of power and by the fact that, for him, neither Doctor nor Minister seems to represent any
absolute truth, but only the will to power. He is also disturbed by the embalmed corpse of the Doctor's wife which keeps the Doctor company, as well as the paintings which line the walls and which represent a version of history much altered from the one he knows. When Desiderio discovers that his unending passion for Albertina is to be utilized by the Doctor in the production of the "eroto-energy" which affects the alterations in reality, he realizes that his identity will be lost forever if hesuccumbs to his desire. He kills both father and daughter and flees the burning castle. When many years later, he sits to write his memoirs, he still wonders if he made the right decision. His desire "to see Albertina again" (14) before he dies seems to consume him; this, more than his function as official hero, seems to spawn the writing of his autobiography. Of course, he can only see Albertina, now, in his textual representation of her. Or can he realize something more? The final words of the novel, "[u]nbidden, she comes" (221), leave the reader in perpetual doubt, in a state of disbelief. Yet another mystery is left unresolved for us. Robert Clark remarks that each chapter of Infernal Desire Machines "constitutes an elaborate parodic animation of its intertextual resources, but a parody that has no discernible point of departure or of arrival and seems always to verge on pastiche" (155). This, of course, echoes Jameson's complaint, discussed earlier, that postmodernism is a play of surfaces without depth. However, while I agree that there is not one "discernible point of departure or of arrival" in the sense that absolute origins and closure are problematized in

*Throughout my analysis, I will often have occasion to remark on Desiderio's ostensibly singular desire. I hope that this necessary repetition will not frustrate my reader. It seems to me that the desire to narrate and the desire to see Albertina again are interrelated in a number of important ways in a text that is so apparently concerned with what constitutes and objectifies both sexual and narrative desire.
Carter’s text, I would maintain that this absence is central to Carter’s analysis of narrative: this absence is the point. There is, however, the initiatory desire to narrate (on the part of Desiderio and Carter) and, therefore, to provide a structure and meaning to life as text. Carter’s point, though, is that the way stories are told, the structure of narratives, is central to the meaning we discern therein. This desire to narrate establishes textuality and language as the point of departure; and as I will show, this desire to narrate, first realized by the inscription of a title, a naming, is, in postmodern terms, not superficial; rather, it is a formidable aspect of narrative and the ‘reality’ it constructs, as Brenda Marshall makes clear when she writes:

[O]ne of the results of seeing the postmodern moment as an awareness of being-within a way of thinking is the recognition that such an awareness disallows the speaker (the subject) the comfort of absolutely naming the terms of that moment. Naming must occur from a position ‘outside’ of a moment, and it always indicates an attempt to control. (3)

Moreover, Carter’s refusal of absolute closure, of, in Clark’s terms, ”point[s] . . . of arrival,” suggests that all origins and endings are in language. Language and textuality, then, are my subject. Certainly, I agree with Clark that, if we seek an authoritative version, we will seek it in vain.

Infernal Desire Machines, then, "explores pornography, the Gothic, fairy tales, horror films, boys' imperial adventure stories, anthropological idylls according to Rousseau or Lévi-Strauss, and the fantasies of philosophy, the world as Will and Idea" (Jordan 34). I have provided this summary of the central events of the novel in order to remind my
reader of the episodic, almost labyrinthine, elements of the text. The lack of resolutions.
closure, which I have noted in passing, will be central to my argument. I wish to show
that Carter's techniques of deferring closure, multiplying representations, and allowing
mysteries to proliferate in an "epidemic of signification" to undermine her inscription of
the typical Oedipal plot. In the text, Carter inscribes the Oedipal trajectory with a
"vengeance" (de Lauretis 157) in each episode, yet finality, totality and closure are never.
finally, enacted. Carter thereby questions the Oedipal trajectory through its very
inscription, a complicitous move that establishes her text as postmodern in that it installs
that which it seeks to subvert (Hutcheon). As Robinson maintains:

narrative possibilities are not exhausted by the assignation of masculine and
feminine positions oppositionally conceived. While it might be true that these are
the only two positions offered by hegemonic discursive systems, it does not
necessarily follow that others cannot be constructed, or even wrenched from
within those very systems. (18)

Thus, it is clear that feminism also informs Carter's text. However, while some would
see postmodernism's lack of an agenda as in perpetual conflict with feminism's search for
agency, Carter manages, by means of this "epidemic of signification," to walk the fine
line. In this she resembles Desiderio, who can never, finally, reach a definitive

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7This terminology is borrowed from Paula Treichler and will be fully explicated later in my text.

8Linda Hutcheon, for one, remarks that the search for agency in feminist discourses is
problematised by postmodernist and poststructuralist deconstructions of the unified, autonomous self; yet
as she remarks in "Discourse, Power, Ideology: Humanism and Postmodernism, "it is [the] plurality of
feminisms that makes the postmodern valuing of 'difference' possible" (122).
conclusion. She also resembles another of her fictive creations, Ferver, the aerialiste in her 1984 novel *Nights at the Circus*. Carter has written that "[w]e travel along the thread of narrative like high-wire artistes. That is our life" (*Expletives* 2).

In the first section of this study, I have chosen to concentrate on the image first contained in Carter's title: *Infernal Desire Machines*. The fact that Carter begins her text on the title page, so to speak, and allows this title to permeate and multiply its representations in the body of the work, is significant. Much as the Doctor's samples anticipate and even proscribe events, the title prefigures the ending of the novel as well as the inscription of plots with their Oedipal trajectories. The title, I would argue, enacts its own Oedipal journey, overcoming obstacles and breaking down boundaries until it reaches its culmination in the multiple representations of desiring machines and in narrative closure. Plots are desire machines, too, and they are, in their sadistic, Oedipal logic, certainly "infernal." Along its path toward completion, the title penetrates the plotspace (morphologically female) and permeates the imagery. Thus, the title not only inscribes in its language the desiring machines, it actually enacts one. My study is a metaphorical journey much like Desiderio's and the ensuing argument acts, much like Carter's title, as a naming which confers meaning upon Carter's text and which re-members desire: the desire I wish to re-member is the desire to penetrate the text and to reach illumination--to consummate.

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*Carter never once repeats this image, in this exact language, in the body of her text; yet its powerful inscription in the title permeates the text on many levels, as I will show.*
Entitling, and naming in general, are persistent themes which draw attention to the effects of representation in Carter's text. Language, its power to represent and delimit reality, is always under question in Carter's narratives: if we do not know how to name our desires, "the desires do not exist" (207). What exists, then, it could be argued, exists only in language, and narrative is a particularly powerful use of language. "Language," writes Donna Haraway, "is not about description, but about commitment" (214). Hence, I begin and end my discussion with reference to Carter's commitment as it is initially inscribed in the language of her title. Finally, I wish, also, to demonstrate that the machine, prefigured in Carter's title, "is us" (Haraway 180). Besides Haraway's compelling delineation of the cyborg text, two important works on narrative desire will frame my discussion: Teresa de Lauretis' "Desire in Narrative" and Peter Brooks' "Narrative Desire." De Lauretis, as I have noted, outlines the Oedipal model of narrative and connects it with narrative sadism which inscribes the death of the female. "The Oedipus," de Lauretis argues, is "paradigmatic of narrative." Brooks' text also establishes a master-plot based on his reading of desire in Freudian texts. Brooks examines, in detail, the workings of narrative as a machine, specifically as a desiring machine. Informing the work of both of these writers are the texts of that great master-plotter, Freud. Bringing together the perspectives of de Lauretis and Brooks, my discussion will

concentrate on one particular machine, the plot machine. if you will, with its Oedipal textual mechanics. However, I will, periodically, have occasion to discuss other literal and metaphorical inscriptions of the machine in Carter's narrative. Since the Oedipal trajectory is a desire machine, the 'workings' of the many representations of desire machines in Carter's text are under question from the very commencement of the novel; indeed, as I have indicated, desire machines, specifically, "infernal desire machines," are evoked prior to the novel's beginning, on the cover, in the title.

My overall purpose, through this examination of Carter's narratives, is to demonstrate the possibilities of living with dis-ease and disbelief in the master-narratives of Western culture. The Oedipal narrative is just such a grand récit and is, therefore, under question in postmodern texts such as Carter's. Moreover, as discussed in the Introduction, the Oedipal trajectory is also of particular concern to feminists, as it is this traditional narrative structure that inscribes the death of the female: and, in its inscription of death, the Oedipal trajectory partakes of sadism as de Lauretis has shown. Infernal Desire Machines, we shall see, both inscribes and undermines the death required by the narrative machine and the Oedipal dynamic. It both installs and subverts narrative sadism. Thus, we may include Carter amongst those theorists identified by Jerry Aline Fleiger as having "posed a radical challenge to the centrism of our culture, by exploring the relation between writing and desire"(xi).
Chapter 2

Machinations of Desire: Those Infernal Plots

Michel Foucault's definition of sadism is cited by Angela Carter in The Sadeian Woman (3) and is further inscribed in her fictions, particularly in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman which is, undoubtedly, what Foucault describes as a narrative of "unreason transformed into delirium of the heart, madness of desire, the insane dialogue of love and death in the limitless presumption of appetite."1 In effect, Infernal Desire Machines inscribes this version of sadism and links it inexorably with narrative, much as de Lauretis and Mulvey do. Sally Robinson is one of the first to see Carter's narrative strategies as contesting the sadistic logic of Oedipal narrative as it is defined by de Lauretis and Mulvey. Robinson writes that de Lauretis, "for example, argues that all narrative is Oedipal, that it constructs sexual difference as the difference between male subjectivity and female objectification; and, further, that women should be 'suspicious' of narrative because it tends toward sadism" (17).

"Laura Mulvey," argues Robinson, sees classic Hollywood cinema as constructing "essential masculine and feminine positions for spectators, so that the woman spectator

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1Foucault continues: "Sadism appears at the very moment that unreason, confined for over a century and reduced to silence, reappears, no longer as image of the world, no longer as a figura, but as language and desire. And it is no accident that sadism, as an individual phenomenon bearing the name of a man, was born of confinement and, within confinement . . . . It is no accident, either, that all the fantastic literature of madness and horror, which is contemporary with Sade's oeuvre, takes place, preferentially, in the strongholds of confinement. And this whole sudden conversion of Western memory at the end of the eighteenth century, with its possibility of rediscovering—deformed and endowed with a new meaning—figures familiar at the end of the Middle Ages: was this conversion not authorized by the survival and the reawakening of the fantastic in the very places where unreason had been reduced to silence?" (Madness and Civilization 210). Foucault's thinking on sadism could be said to be put into representation, or figured, by Carter's evocation of the lovers confined in love pens producing "eroto-energy," that is, an energy of the text.
has only two choices: one, she can identify, like a transvestite, with the active male subject of the fiction; or, two, she can identity with the objectified woman in the fiction, a figure who, more often than not, flounders in passivity" (18). As discussed earlier, Teresa de Lauretis locates the link between sadism and narrative in the inscription of the Oedipal trajectory, but she concludes that, contrary to what we might expect.

[t]he most exciting work . . . in feminism today is not anti-narrative or anti-Oedipal; quite the opposite. It is narrative and Oedipal with a vengeance, for it seeks to stress the duplicity of that scenario and the specific contradiction of the female subject in it, the contradiction by which historical women must work with and against Oedipus. *(Alice* 157)

Angela Carter's texts provide examples of this "most exciting work"; in Carter the interrogation of the Oedipal trajectory through its inscription serves also to problematize subjectivity, identity and representation, in so far as these are functions of narrative.

Donna Haraway goes one step beyond de Lauretis' reinscription of the Oedipus "with a vengeance" and imagines/constructs something altogether different: the cyborg as text. "The cyborg," writes Haraway," is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (149). As such a negotiation between boundaries of life and death, nature and technology, science fiction and social reality, the cyborg text perhaps best describes Carter's problematizing of boundaries. Through a multiplex investigation of multiple sites of meaning and contradiction, Carter's text produces a complex proliferation of
narrative possibilities for subjectivity. What de Lauretis sees as "a vengeance" is in Carter's work an "epidemic of signification" (Treichler): a repetition of representations of sadistic Oedipal narratives that overcome obstacles, boundaries, and spaces--including the boundaries of the body, representation, the text, the page, and the author's authority--in their insistent logic of death.

Such an epidemic of signification--"the insane dialogue of love and death in the limitless assumption of appetite"--inevitably parodies the very thing which it installs and situates Carter's texts firmly amongst those we seem to have agreed to call postmodern.

Carter contends that "our flesh arrives to us out of history, like everything else does" (Sadeian Woman 9), including language; in Infernal Desire Machines she connects language and flesh, language and the body, language and sexuality through narrative and thus initiates a memory that re-members desire with a difference. Carter's notion of desire is foregrounded as a construction rather than as an innate, totalizing universal which installs normal and abnormal as qualities of desire. The desires, machines, and dreams in Carter's texts are all subject to re-memberment, and thus partake of Haraway's

[1] Emphasize the "and" construction of these double significations because the use of this conjunction will prove significant in Carter's texts. In Telling Tales, Katherine Cummings explains its most significant implications. In her introduction, Cummings claims that the same logic she herself applies to "seduction" had been applied by other women, such as Jane Gallop and Shoshana Felman, to the conjunction "and":

[a]s the mark of supplementarity in language, “and” undoes oppositions and destabilizes power relationships that have been established historically between subjects in order to effect their mutual coinvolvement or complicity. Thus, in Felman's essay ["To Open the Question"], the grammatical copula promotes a dynamic encounter between the two domains of psychoanalysis and literature, in consequence of which each finds “itself enlightened, informed, but also affected, displaced, by the other” ("To Open the Question," 9). Gallop replicates her predecessor's practice, but because her subject is seduction, she (more) explicitly erotizes "and" (8).

This is consistent, too, with what Linda Hutcheon identifies as the 'both/and' ideology of the postmodern that promotes the notion of 'difference/différance' rather than the 'otherness' which is inscribed in the 'either/or' hierarchical organization of binarism (The Politics of Postmodernism).
insight that "[w]e require regeneration, not rebirth" (181). Thus, *Infernal Desire*

*Machines* requires that we embrace what Haraway calls

the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts . . . . This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia . . . . It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships. (181)

First, it is important to note that the "machines" inscribed in Carter's title, are, after all, plural; they have, therefore, multiple significations and destinations. In this text, the explicit evocation of the ending (and, as we shall see, the plot) in the title announces the multiplication and interpenetration of discourses, the breakdown of boundaries, including those between cover and text,3 as well as the reflexivity of Carter's fiction.4 In its reflexivity, the title "represents" the text.5 I would like to look at a number of the received historical significations inscribed in Carter's title: *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. An "infernal machine." *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* tells us, is "an apparatus (usually disguised as some familiar and harmless object) contrived to produce an explosion for the criminal destruction of life or property; formerly, an

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3The cover is, after all, the image of textual containment.

4I employ the term reflexivity rather than the more common usage 'self-reflexivity' because, as Robert Siegle has demonstrated, the latter term assumes an integrity of the self and/or an authorial presence which is under question in both poststructuralist and postmodernist thought. Carter's implication in postmodern and feminist discourses situates her textual production amongst those that would question the integrity of the self and the author. Nevertheless, her text is definitely reflexive, in that the text reflects on its own textuality and diegesis. For various perspectives on reflexivity and metafiction see Robert Siegle, *The Politics of Reflexivity*; Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*; and Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction*.

5By "represent" I intend the multiple significations of the term 'representation' as they are uncovered in Derrida's article, "Sending: On Representation."
explosive apparatus used in military operations"; this, then, is one type of "machine" we see represented in the final chapter of Carter's text. The perpetual lovers--"familiar and harmless objects"--are Hoffman's major weapon in the War against Reality—they amount to the core of his "military operations." Eventually, according to Hoffman, the lovers will "resolve into two basic constituents—pure sex and pure energy. That is, fire and air. It is a grand explosion" (215). The lovers, then, explicitly evoke the image of "infernal machines," but, more specifically, they are hellish precisely because they are non-individuated automata; that is, because they are machines.

The lovers correspond, almost exactly, to other OED definitions of the word "machine" without the modifier as well. They serve as an "instrument employed to transmit force, or to modify its application"; moreover, they are the representation of "a combination of parts moving mechanically, as contrasted with a being having life, consciousness and will. Hence applied to a person who acts merely from habit or obedience to rule, without intelligence, or to one whose actions have the undeviating precision and uniformity of a 'machine'." In the unthinking, automata-like anonymity in perpetuity of their love-making, the lovers are, indeed, also infernal. Thus their designation as 'machine' marks them also as 'infernal'; one term predicates the other and hence, 'infernal' actually serves in one sense as a repetition of 'machine'. for

[t]he anonymity of the lovers, whom the act transforms from me and you into they, precludes the expression of ourselves.
So the act is taken away from us even as we perform it . . . . The man and woman, in their particularity, their being, are absent from these representations of themselves as male and female. (Carter, Sadeian Woman 8)

Male and female are caught in an endless repetition of representations. Thus, in Infernal Desire Machines Carter critiques, through a representation of her own articulation in The Sadeian Woman of the reductionary binarism of Western metaphysics, the proliferation of all representations, including those of myth and psychoanalysis, that would reduce all of humanity to gendered stereotypes. Carter identifies "myth with the rhetoric of oppression. Indeed, rhetoric occupies much of her attention, for rhetoric classifies, identifies, stultifies" (Gass 7). Significantly, for the lovers in Infernal Desire Machines, the eventual outcome of their activity is death; they are "petrified pilgrims, locked parallels. icons of perpetual motion, they [know] nothing but the progress of their static journey towards willed, mutual annihilation" (215). By inference, then, Carter appears to identify the kind of death that is at work in narrative representation.

Carter's most direct articulation of the critique of the mythologizing of gendered subjectivity and the binarism in modern Western culture (which according to Cixous and Clément, reduces ultimately to sexual opposition) is inscribed in The Sadeian Woman:

[a] whole range of images poeticises, kitschifies, departicularises intercourse, such as wind beating down corn, rain driving against bending trees, towers falling, all tributes to the freedom and strength of the roving, fecundating, irresistible male

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6 A death perhaps akin to that which Cixous identifies in The Newly Born Woman (La Jeune Née, 64); also see my Introduction.
principle and the heavy. downward. equally irresistible gravity of the receptive soil. The soil that is, good heavens. myself. It is a most self-enhancing notion: I have almost seduced myself with it . . . .

The moment [two sexual partners] succumb to this anonymity, they cease to be themselves, with their separate lives and desires: they cease to be the lovers who have met to assuage desire in a reciprocal pact of tenderness, and they engage at once in a spurious charade of maleness and femaleness. (8)

Carter further elaborates the conditions of representation: "[t]he lovers are lost to themselves in a privacy that does not transcend but deny [sic] reality . . . . It occurs in the mythic dream-time of religious ritual" (*Sadeian Woman* 8-9). In *Infernal Desire Machines*, Carter literalizes this mythologizing of the lovers in the final chapter, and the "mythic dream-time of religious ritual" is satirized throughout her text: the Doctor's and the Minister's slavish devotion to imagination and reason, respectively, represents something of a religious conviction, even fanaticism: the River People wish to sacrifice and consume Desiderio in a religious ritual which presents a rather wry look at the notion of holy communion. However, Carter's most sustained evocation of the mythic dream time of religious ritual is in the chapter entitled "Nebulous Time." "Nebulous Time" is, of course, narrative time wherein reality succumbs to desire; it represents the unconscious desire of the actants. Thus Carter makes the point that reality is a projection of the self's ideological assumptions about reality—a narrativization, in other words. She parodies this, at the same time making it clear that this is *always* the case.
Carter also represents this "spurious charade" in *Infernal Desire Machines* by portraying the lovers as machines which are in fact responsible, albeit unconsciously, for the war against reality. We lose, in such representations of ourselves as machines, any pretense of subjectivity; we are reduced to objects of our own gaze. The lovers, then, are at once the willing captives of Doctor Hoffman—"every single one of them volunteered" (215)—and the perverse captives of the cover and its titular inscription of "desire machines" that, in fact, heralds their demise. They are also, like us, captives of a history of representations that confine us all in our own "love pens" (213). Carter's pun surely indicates that the captivity is one directly associated with writing and representation, and writing as power of representation is one of the persistent themes under investigation in this novel. In Carter's texts, says Robert Clark,

the reader captures momentary and fugitive awareness of the social system that engenders him/her. This same process, however, is one by which the reader is *captured*, both in reading and in social life, for we now more and more inhabit a world composed of the various, multiple and discordant images the desire machine has prepared for us. (154)

Moreover, the lovers' willing subjection to one of these captivities suggests their consent to the others as well. We are responsible, then, through our consent, for the representations in which we are confined and constructed. The "war against reality" depicted in *Infernal Desire Machines* is nothing less than a metaphor for the human condition. As Elaine Jordan puts it: Hoffman's "war makes the world we live in" (32). Through the interpenetration of title and text, Carter suggests that the boundaries that
confine us are permeable and that, despite the received traditions implicit in language and representation, we are confined to this language and these representations through our own consent. She also seems to suggest that there are options outside received representations of sexual stereotypes which mystify and disempower. In this, she is aligned with Cixous who also perceives a place outside of the hegemonic system of representation. The lovers are the supreme feat of the Doctor's imagination—or lack of same, for is it not in fact something of a cliche that lovers can transcend the present and the quotidian and, in a metaphorical sense, exist outside time and space. Carter evokes just such a universalized, transcendent image of the lovers in perpetuity, for all time past, present and future, as if time barriers (history) can be erased, and as if the expression of love is not determined by historical and social contexts, but rather by some atavistic universal. She does so precisely in order to question such notions of universality and

7Interestingly, Cixous has written a punningly-entitled article on the tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann called "Les comtes de Hoffmann" in Prénoms de Personne [Nobody's First Names]. In Part II of my study, on Nights at the Circus, I will again have occasion to employ Cixous' arguments as they are put forth in The Newly Born Woman (La Jeune Née), so I will not elaborate on her views further at this point. My Introduction should provide my reader with a sufficient familiarity with Cixous' text for the purposes of this chapter alone. However, I would like to take this opportunity to remark on the frequently shared interests and even imagery of Cixous and Carter. Suffice it to say at this juncture, that their texts are similarly concerned with the construction of femininity and the overlap between theory and fiction; hence, it may be safe to say that their texts are, to some degree, produced by overlapping discursive concerns.

8Leonard Cohen's poem, "The Lovers," is a 'modernist' instance of a work which expresses such a universalizing of physical love, although these notions of the universality of love obviously extend much further back in history. In his poem, the lovers transcend their individuality, and lose a sense of both their 'place' and 'time'; they become one of innumerable participants in the 'universal' act of love. Such representations of a universalizing and mythologizing of experience are interrogated in postmodern texts such as Carter's. She identifies the universalizing of human experience as a "charade" (Sadeian Woman 12) and as a "confidence trick" (Nights 284). Carter's notion of the "confidence trick" will prove important in the section of my study which addresses Nights at the Circus. Baudrillard, on the other hand, has labelled such universalizing representations of representation as simulacra.

9Albertina and her father view the lovers much more idealistically than Desiderio does; she claims "these lover do not die....They have transcended mortality" (215). However, as I have already indicated,
truth. In other words, she installs this representation in order to interrogate it—a postmodern move that allows us to question, without the assurances offered by a paradigm of transcendence, transformation and solution, since here representation neither romanticizes nor legitimizes; rather it parodies. Carter thus demonstrates an insight articulated by Donna Haraway: "[t]he machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they" (180).

Carter also interrogates the validity of such universalizations in that "exercise in cultural history," *The Sadeian Woman*, when she writes that "[t]he notion of a universality of human experience is a confidence trick and the notion of a universality of female experience is a clever confidence trick" (12). In her "Introductory Note" to *The Sadeian Woman*, she describes her own text as another reading of Sade which is neither a critical study nor a historical analysis of Sade; it is, rather, a late-twentieth-century interpretation of some of the problems he raises about the culturally determined nature of women and of the relations between men and women that result from it—an opposition which is both cruelly divisive in our common struggle to understand the world, and also, in itself, a profound illumination of the nature of that struggle. (1)

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the Doctor explains that eventually "they resolve into two basic constituents—pure sex and pure energy. That is, fire and air."

That is, fire and air." (215). While this may be interpreted to intend a spiritual and 'transcendent existence', certainly resolving into one's constituents amounts to a corporeal death. Note also, that the first American edition, *The War of Dreams*, reads, "These lovers do not die. . . . [t]hey have transcended morality" (277).
In this text, Carter attempts to argue that pornography, which reinforces the status quo—the subjection of women and men to mythologized versions of gendered subjectivity—is concerned with representing sex as idealized pleasure without explicitly questioning what constitutes pleasure. The assumptions behind this type of "pastoral" (20) pornography will inevitably reduce male and female to crude representations of themselves, a process which "converts the sexed woman, living, breathing, troubling, into a desexed hole and the breathing, living, troubling man into nothing but a probe" (20). However, the pornographer who goes one step beyond the representation of sex as idyll or pastoral pleasure

has it in his power to become a terrorist of the imagination, a sexual guerilla whose purpose is to overturn our most basic notions of these [social] relations, to reinstitute sexuality as a primary mode of being rather than a specialized area of vacation from being and to show that everyday meetings in the marriage bed are parodies of their own pretensions, that the freest unions may contain the seeds of the worst exploitation. (Sadeian Woman 21-22).

And Sade, Carter argues, became such a terrorist of the imagination by rendering explicit the violence, misogyny, tyranny and martyized subservience inscribed in sexual and social relations. For Carter, despite the violence and hatred explicit in Sade's representations, his approach to "some kind of emblematic truth" (Sadeian Woman 22) makes him something of an ally to those who would wish to expose the ideological assumptions underlying representation, "whereas the lackey pornographer, like the
devious fellows who write love stories for women's magazines, that softest of all forms of pornography, can only do harm" (Sadeian Woman 22).

Carter's position on pornographic representation, whether or not we agree, can assist our understanding of her own inscription of sadistic Oedipal narrative (e.g. in her title and elsewhere), as well as her representations of erotic violence throughout Infernal Desire Machines. most particularly in the explicitly pornographic "samples" that, in many ways, prefigure and represent the social relations represented elsewhere in the novel. For instance, the images depicted in the first sample glimpsed by Desiderio, entitled "I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE," later materialize in the Doctor's garden--which turns out to be "the park framed by the female orifice in the first machine of all" (196). "The models," writes Desiderio, "indeed represent everything it was possible to believe by the means of direct simulation or a symbolism derived from Freud" (108). Carter seems to revel in exposing the mythologized gendered constructions, as well as their Freudian overtones, produced in our linguistic and visual representations. These are the images, she claims, which "departicularize intercourse" (Sadeian Woman 8) and all social relations. She inscribes both the positively and negatively valued manifestations of these gendered metaphors with such excess that their ideology is inevitably exposed. Take, for instance, the following description of the perilous female "chasm," encountered on the path leading to the Father's phallic castle:

[t]he chasm was some sixty feet wide and, from both its lips, sheer precipices fell to a depth of a thousand feet or more, so deep you could not see what lay at the bottom. Beyond the bridge was a little green grove about four acres in area,
surrounded on all sides by the crags in which the transmitters were lodged. It was a sweet, female kernel nestling in the core of the virile, thrusting rock. (196)

Here we see Freud's "dark continent." female passivity and male aspiration all parodied and thus, exposed. Nor does Carter back away from explicit representations of erotic violence or from the reinscription of sadistic, Oedipal textual mechanics. However, her representations are neither condemnations nor celebrations, but rather attempts to expose the true nature of social relations and of narratives that inscribe the Oedipal trajectory, because representations of "sexual relations between men and women always render explicit the nature of social relations in the society in which they take place and, if described explicitly, will form a critique of those relations" (Sadeian Woman 20). Thus, her repeated inscriptions of the Oedipal trajectory, with its own insidious inscription of death, neither reinforce nor condemn this narrative paradigm; rather, they render explicit its ideological assumptions regarding gendered subjectivity and the constitution of desire.

The Oedipal trajectory of Sadeian narrative is a paradigm in which "male means tyrannous and female means martyred, no matter what the official genders of the male and female beings are" (Sadeian Woman 24). Carter, therefore, determines her function as akin to Sade's: she is a terrorist of the imagination. Yet her tolerant view of the Marquis in no way mitigates the death inscribed in sadistic narrative. Rather, she represents this death to excess. Much as Sade's excesses terrorized, Carter's should fill us with disbelief, if not fear.

In the fourth chapter of Carter's study of Sade, entitled "The School of Love: The Education of a Female Oedipus," she attempts to define other, as yet unrepresented.
possibilities for gendered subjectivity. Carter's most salient point in this chapter is Sade's refusal to see reproduction and sexuality as interdependent and his subsequent refusal either to idealize or to despise the female as mother--a misogyny that, Carter maintains, does occur in Freud. Carter writes that "King Oedipus' transgressions were mother-incest and parricide; when he found out what he had done, he blinded himself. that is. underwent a symbolic castration" (117). In Sade's extremity and his attempt to 'naturalize' all and any desire, including sexual desire for the mother (incest), he approaches a world in which "the concept of taboo is meaningless and pornography itself would cease to exist" (Sadeian Woman 132). However, as he approaches this liberatory moment, he capitulates. Carter theorizes that "[i]nstead of constructing a machine for liberation" (132), his perversion. "an unnatural obsession with pain." finally overcomes his progression toward a "terrible freedom"; thus he falls at the feet of his mother and "the taboo against the mother has been violated only to be immediately and hideously restored. The obscenities and profanations never quite fulfill the subversion implicit in them" (Sadeian Woman 132). Significantly, though. Sade has glimpsed an alternative reality and he suggests to us "a type of Oedipal conflict in relation to the mother which is not restricted by gender" (Sadeian Woman 133). In fact, he anticipates woman's release from the tyranny of the body and in Sade's philosophy, according to Carter, castration no longer marks woman's deformity--rather it marks her conformity with sexual pleasure and desire. The ostensibly irreducible binary, male/female, that rests as foundation for all other binarism, is problematized in Sade and this is what Carter most admires: in a society freed of binary logic, gendered identity, "vice and virtue, that is, energy and
passivity, that is, evil and good, would then be states to which one could accede" (128). writes Carter in The Sadeian Woman.

"Another's desire, not the self's labour, is the origin of 'woman'." writes Donna Haraway (159). It is in light of this that we can best understand gendered identity as being constituted by the prolific machinations of (an/other's) desire in Infernal Desire Machines, most particularly, in Desiderio who functions as both subject and object of desire. Carter glimpses in the texts of the Marquis the possibility of a model that would 'ungender' sexual desire and thus, in her Sadeian yet utopian10 narrative, Infernal Desire Machines, she enables her characters, whether male or female, to inhabit various and even contradictory sites of subjectivity and desire. The positions we inhabit are learned constructs rather than innate biological functions of our gender; thus, our gendered identity is produced, primarily through our memories of possible identities. What, Carter wonders, might occur if we re-membered differently outside of the dialectics of male/female, aggressive/passive, potent/castrated? Teresa de Lauretis wonders the same thing when she writes:

[i]t may well be, however, that the story has to be told differently. Take Oedipus. for instance. Suppose: Oedipus does not solve the riddle. The Sphinx devours him for his arrogance; he didn't have to go to Thebes by that particular crossroads.

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10It is precisely Sade's attempt to locate his writing outside the status quo and represent the unrepresentable, that aligns his project with a utopian one. Hence, Carter's reinscription of the Oedipus "with a vengeance" is Sadeian and utopian at the same time. These apparent contradictions arise in Carter's work because of her refusal to inscribe an ultimate, unified master-narrative, as a replacement for what has traditionally gone before and which would, thereby, proscribe other possibilities. Her most utopian gesture is to imagine as yet unexamined possibilities for personal identity and for narrative.
Or, he kills himself in disgust, or, he finally understands Tiresias' accusation ("You are the rotting canker in the state") to mean that patriarchy itself, which Oedipus represents as he represents the state, is the plague that wastes Thebes--and then he blinds himself; after which possibly, Artemis would grant that he become a woman, and here the story of Oedipus could end happily. Or, it could start over and be exactly like Freud's story of femininity, and this version could end with a freeze-frame of him as a patient of Charcot at the Salpetrière. Or . . . .

(156. ellipsis in original)

Such reductions of men and women to their gendered-sexual functions, reductions that are the result of an insistent binarism in modern (i.e., post-Enlightenment) metaphysics, make voyeurs of us all: "[w]e become voyeurs upon our own caresses." writes Carter in The Sadeian Woman (8). Thus, the reader, of texts, of narratives, of representations, is inevitably inscribed as voyeur in Carter's text. Barthes writes:

[h]ow can we take pleasure in a reported pleasure (boredom of all narratives of dreams, of parties)? How can we read criticism? Only one way: since I am here a second-degree reader, I must shift my position: instead of agreeing to be the confidant of this critical pleasure--a sure way to miss it--I can make myself its voyeur: I observe clandestinely the pleasure of others, I enter perversion; the commentary then becomes in my eyes a text, a fiction, a fissured envelope.

(Pleasure 17)

We, the readers, are ourselves second-degree readers of Desiderio's critique of culture.

We are the desiring machines represented in the title, and, as such, our function is further
represented in the text. However, Desiderio's identity as voyeur (rather than exhibitionist), as sadist (rather than masochist), and ultimately as male (rather than female) is problematized in the text. As the ostensible writer of the text, its subject and active agent, and as, at the same time, the 'desired one'. that is, its passive object. Desiderio is morphologically engendered as both male and female: he is periodically feminized. Desiderio moves between the boundaries of gendered representation. Jordan claims that, in Infernal Desire Machines, "the speaking subject is the object of desire. as the text tells us, and the one who desires" (32). Desiderio is brutally raped and, according to de Lauretis, when a male is raped, he is "raped 'as a woman'' (Technologies 37). since gender is a discursive construct. Desiderio himself claims. "I am no longer the 'I' of my own story," (14); instead, he identifies himself as "posterity's prostitute" (14)--that is. he is no longer the subject of his own story, but its object. Significantly, the writing of his autobiography completes his "whoredom" (14). The use of these strictly 'feminized' tropes--moreover, explicitly misogynist metaphors--altogether complicates his gendered identity.

Albertina's gendered identity is also absolutely unresolved in the text.11 She inhabits different identities as the circumstances require. Originally, she is the black swan of Desiderio's dreams. To negotiate with the Minister of Determination, she is male, if effeminate--perhaps an hermaphrodite: however, to seduce Desiderio, she is a female creature formed by his desire, as he explains: "if Albertina has become for me. now. such

11Proust's Albertine--the intertextual referent for Albertina--is actually a homoerotic image for Proust in his autobiography, although he transcribed the image as female: see Deleuze and Guattari's The Anti-Oedipus. I will further engage the subject of the Proustian intertexts later in this section.
a woman as only memory and imagination could devise, well, such is always at least partially the case with the beloved. I see her as a series of marvellous shapes formed at random in the kaleidoscope of desire"(13). Specifically, she is formed by his desire to narrate. To quarantine the Count, she is the syphilitic offspring of desire; later, she is the Madam of a brothel; ultimately, she is the prize for Desiderio's heroic quest. She is idealized daughter, idealized lover, idealized woman, but her final incarnation is as hermaphrodite—this, she assures Desiderio, is who she really is. In fact, she is none of these and all—since she is, significantly, representation. Like Desiderio she traverses identities and this allows her to experience the permeability of all borders including those of the body (gender). This is something akin to the idea of persona, of course, but persona assumes the integrity of the self, whereas Albertina's representations are always idealized, reified, personified, objectified. She herself claims that she has "been maintained in [her] various appearances only by the power of [Desiderio's] desire" (204)—that is, by the authority of an author. Sally Robinson claims that

Woman, in Desiderio's narrative, occupies a range of traditional object positions: she is a fetish, a foil, the exotic/erotic object awaiting the hero at the end of his quest, but never a subject. She is . . . an object put into circulation according to the logic of male desire. As object of the male gaze, she is subject to regulation, exploitation and violence. Yet Carfer's overt and exaggerated masculinization of her narrative subverts the successful narrativization of violence against women—including the rhetorical violence that keeps women in the position of silent object. (22)
Thus, Albertina is the epitome of a 'literary', even pornographic, creation: she is created, that is authored, by Desiderio. "He is our guide, passive and vulnerable . . . . An agent of the Minister of Determination" (32), writes Jordan; hence, he is the one who determines representations (of desire). And he is the first to tell us that his representations—his versions—cannot be trusted to be faithful representations of historical reality; his first statement in the first chapter is: "I cannot remember exactly how it began" (15). He also concedes: "[n]ow I know that the manifestations of those days were—as perhaps I then suspected but refused to admit to myself—a language of signs which utterly bemused me because I could not read them" (25). As a manifestation of another's desire, Albertina is a representation of representations of desire. She is also, of course, a representation of idealized woman—the object of Desiderio's desire. And she is also, the image of the text—the object of narrative desire. In effect, Albertina is one of the narratives Desiderio narrates. \\

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12Indeed, Desiderio's problems with his memory extend to his misquotation of his sources. In a footnote to his own statement, "I remembered the words of another German savant," he attributes the statement, "[i]n the unconscious, nothing can be treated or destroyed" (186), to Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams. I have searched the Freud Concordance for this reference in vain. Freud actually wrote that, "[i]n the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten" (The Interpretation of Dreams 733). Desiderio seems to conflate Freud's theory of dreams and the unconscious with the Law of the Conservation of Energy, wherein "energy can be neither created nor destroyed" (Shipman, Wilson and Todd 74). It is thus made evident that Desiderio, indeed, re-members texts (i.e. 'remembers' them with a difference). Carter has some fun at the expense of her 'hero' and her 'reader' at the same time, as she manages to ask us to question Freud's, and Desiderio's credibility. Also, the singular switch of a 'c' (created) for a 't' (treated) marks how language is based on 'difference'; at the same time, we are led to ponder the close relationship between the verbs "to create" and "to treat." How one treats something, in some sense, determines that entity's ontology. Carter has. I would like to add, expressed her fondness for Freud. "I love Freud as though he were an uncle," she tells Lorna Sage. Yet, she realizes his fallible inconsistencies: "like those racists who don't notice their best friends are black, he made a mental reservation for those women he knew and admired and respected." She goes on, in this interview, to express her belief that Freud, like the rest of us, was a product of his time: "You can't jump out of your time, he could only think of women as castrated men because he couldn't think any further" (Sage, "Sideshow" 271).
dissolved in the medium of Albertina. Rather, from beyond the grave, her father has
gained a tactical victory over [Desiderio] and forced on [him] at least the apprehension of
an alternate world in which all the objects are emanations of a single desire” (13-14).
And this single desire, he says, is "to see Albertina again before I die" (14). And since
this is how Desiderio sees her (and wishes to see her), this is how we see her as well—it is
his story, his recollection of events, that we read.

According to Jordan, Albertina is both Desiderio’s "dream and also his alter-ego . . .

Though she changes shape and gender, the imaginary is female in this representation.
while the agent of reason, however disaffected, is male" (32). I do not share this
interpretation of the text because, "regardless of the gender of the text image" (de
Lauretis. *Alice* 119). Desiderio identifies across gender boundaries. He has a difficult
time sustaining himself on either side of the ideological divide and it is with regret that he
remarks his complicity with the victors (Reason) at the cost of the losers (Imagination).
In some sense, Desiderio is the third term projected by the binary paradigm: he is the
negotiation between reason and imagination, male and female. However, he is not the
resolution in Hegelian/ Marxist dialectic, but rather the representation of *différence* as
Derrida has taught us. Desiderio—'the desired and desiring one'--is situated outside the
dialectical binarism; what is desirable is something other than what is represented in a
metaphysics of insistent binarism. It is true that Desiderio believes his boundaries fixed.
his reality static, despite the unreal and impossible images he sees around him. "I could
not merge and blend with [the flux of mirages]; I could not abnegate my reality and lose
myself for ever as others did, blasted to non-being by the ferocious artillery of unreason.
I was too sardonic. I was too disaffected" (11-12), he tells us. In other words, Desiderio does not identify with the representations: he cannot easily suspend his disbelief. He, in fact, makes a rather severe and demanding reader of imaginative constructs--of fictions. Yet, in the very next breath, or paragraph, he comments on the change in his version of artistic perspective from "when [he] was young" and admired the static representation of the Egyptians. Now, he insists. "I did not believe statis [sic] was attainable. I believed perfection was, per se, impossible" (12). He survives. in fact, because he knows "that some things are necessarily impossible" (12). Desiderio, then, is the model of living with disbelief.

Desiderio could not, he explains, abnegate his own reality and lose himself as others did. He could not allow himself to be a naive reader: "[w]e did our best to keep what was outside, out. and what was inside, in . . . . But, if the city was in a state of siege, the enemy was inside the barricades, and lived in the minds of each of us" (12). Must reason and imagination divide into binary oppositions or is it possible that imagination (imagining) might create reason (reasonableness), and conversely that reason might envision imaginative possibilities? Need the hierarchizing of gender identities which, according to Cixous and Clément, lies at the root of all binarism. persist as a foundation of Western ideology? Like Albertina, Desiderio moves between/amongst identities--identities that "morphologically" (de Lauretis, *Alice* 119) engender him differently. *Infernal Desire Machines* is rampant with representations of desire, some of which are disturbing and even perverse, but none of which are outside the possibilities of imagination. Desiderio's affair with the Mamie Buckskin amounts to a disempowerment
which leaves him both sexually overpowered and submissive to the "fully phallic female with the bosom of a nursing mother and a gun, death-dealing erectile tissue, perpetually at her thigh" (108). His attraction to the bearded woman--herself a representation of a breakdown in gendered identities--suggests a decidedly complex bisexuality. His rape of Mary Anne is aggressive in the extreme, and, as he himself admits, almost necrophilia. One wonders if it is the fact that she is asleep during the sexual act or the fact that she is female that represents her as already 'dead' for Desiderio? Yet his own rape by the Acrobats of Desire leaves him passive, his identity under question. His hatred for his mother situates him easily--if inversely--in the psychic terrain of an Oedipal complex: his hatred seems to rest on the fact that she is, in his words, a prostitute "of the least exalted type" (16). His desire for Albertina is never actualized, even though he is supposedly situated in the "time of actualized desire"; thus, the reality of this ostensibly perpetual desire is put into question. His fear of castration is dramatized through his unconscious wish not to consummate his desire for Albertina. Instead, he waits patiently to consummate his (ostensible) desire while being a voyeur as others rape her. Ultimately, this desire for Albertina proves to be, in his own words, "as impotent as it is desperate" (14).

Desire, Carter seems to be saying, is a position one inhabits--a repetition of remembered (learned) expressions of desire, rather than something ultimately controlled by biology and therefore innate. One such memory, as Freud would have us believe, is the fiction of female castration and the male fear of woman predicated on her castration. This castration, however, is supposedly predicated on a 'sighting'; it is something we look
upon. as it were, voyeuristically, rather than enact in experience directly. Desire is a product of a discursive nexus--which might possibly be 're-membered' differently. Similarly,

'sex' as an object of biological knowledge appears regularly in the guise of biological determinism, threatening the fragile space for social constructionism and critical theory, with their attendant possibilities for active and transformative intervention, called into being by feminist concepts of gender as socially, historically, and semiotically positioned difference. (Haraway 197)

The possibilities of this "difference" are exactly those that Carter engages and attempts to re-member in all her many "exercise[s] in cultural history."13

As the speaking subject, Desiderio inscribes himself as "the active principle of culture"--the agent of reason, the Oedipal hero, author and authority. He also inscribes himself as the object of his discourse; he inscribes himself as whore--a word he also employs to designate his despised mother. What does this mean with regard to the process of narrativizing as Desiderio (and Carter) envision it? Jane Gallop has convincingly argued that sexual difference is based in Freud's system on a "sighting." specifically a sighting of the presence or absence of the phallus. Or, as Luce Irigaray puts

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13 "An exercise in cultural history" is the subtitle of The Sadeian Woman; however, as I hope to demonstrate throughout my investigation of Carter's texts, her novels are equally "exercises" in cultural history. By employing the term "exercise," I mean to underline the exploratory nature of her work and that the 'serious play' with various and different discursive foundations, beliefs and strategies enables a broadening of perspective even if it does not provide ultimate answers. This, I think, is the "educational challenge" of postmodernism as it is defined by Wilson and discussed in my Introduction. Elaine Jordan also remarks that Carter's allegory explores alternative perspectives (37).
it: "in Freud, sexual pleasure boils down to being plus or minus one sex organ: the penis. And sexual 'otherness' comes down to 'not having it'. Thus, woman's lack of penis and her envy of the penis ensure the function of the negative. serve as representatives of the negative, in what could be called a phallocentric--or phallotropic--dialectic" (Speculum 52)--in short, an Oedipal dialectic. In The Sadeian Woman, Carter, too, remarks the insidious nature of this Oedipal dialectic:

> [t]he whippings, the beatings, the gougings, the stabbings of erotic violence reawaken the memory of the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration, which is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, to which it is related in the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture. Female castration is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men's attitude towards women and our attitude to ourselves, that transforms women from human beings into wounded creatures who were born to bleed. (23)

In Carter's Infernal Desire Machines, this "complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture" is inscribed through an allegorical rendering of a war staged by the two dissenting antagonist-generals: the Minister of Determination and Doctor Hoffman. However, Carter deliberately spoils her lucid allegory of fantasy vs. reality, and in a particularly visible way. Having posed the allegorical conflict in terms of a struggle between two men, the Minister and Dr Hoffman. Carter reveals through her hero Desiderio that each deuteragonist in fact possesses the characteristics that ought to belong,
according to the logic of the allegory, to the other: in the empiricist Minister.

Desiderio discerns an unruly Faustian impulse, a strain of imaginative
overreaching (all in the service of everyday reality, of course), while Hoffman, he
discovers, is really a colorless empiricist, a Gradgrind. In short, what had been
posed as a polar opposition proves to be a complex and paradoxical
interpenetration. (McHale 144)

Interestingly, the 'visibility' of this despoliation of binarism and Oedipal logic is
intertwined through representation with what I would call the tyranny of vision. The
traditional story of femininity, since it is based on the sighting of an absence, is a product
of the tyranny of vision which goes hand-in-hand with the objectification of the female in
narrativizations of her experience. Moreover, this tyranny of vision is closely aligned
with the voyeuristic aspects of reading explored in Carter's text, as we shall see.

"Struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how
to see" (Haraway 194) and, writes Haraway. "[v]ision is always a question of the power
to see--and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices" (192).

'Objective' reality has generally been interpreted through/by means of a sighting. Thus,
what is seen is believed; what cannot be seen is not believed. According to feminist
critics like Mulvey, de Lauretis, Irigaray and Gallop (to name only a few) the hegemony
of 'vision' is a phallocentric aspect of culture. Seeing as believing is inscribed as male.14

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14I think that Carter, along with Donna Haraway, "would like to insist on the embodied nature of
all vision, and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body
and into a conquering gaze from nowhere. This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies,
that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping
representation. This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White" (Haraway 188).
For Irigaray and Mulvey, the 'voyeur' is always constructed as male; the female is constructed as 'exhibitionist' (Irigaray). As such, the voyeur cannot identify with the object, which is always morphologically female (de Lauretis. Alice 119) without undergoing a radical shift in identity. Likewise, the female reader of texts must undergo either some kind of existential cross-dressing, as Albertina appears to do throughout, or split-subjectivity: "the female as spectator [is] in the position of either narcissistic identification or some kind of psychic cross-dressing" (Hutcheon. Politics 151).

Albertina appears as so many different characters, under so many guises, that it is difficult to think of her as one character, rather than many. She appears to be the epitome of the notion of the female as "masquerade." in Joan Rivière’s terminology, and as such she must always function as the object of the gaze and the fulfilment of another’s desire. Hence, as female, she represents the very embodiment of the Doctor’s plan--she is "concretized desire" (219)--and her many disguises enable her to transcend her biological sex at will, thus making explicit woman’s position in regard to the Oedipal paradigm.

However, Carter’s novel renders 'looking' and the 'gaze'--and, therefore, reading and interpretation--as highly problematic.

I would like to return briefly to the OED in order to examine yet another signification of "machine" which proves highly illuminating for my reading of Carter's text: Machine: "a. to contrive, plot; b. To plot, devise schemes. To furnish (a tale) with the machinery of a plot." Plots, according to Peter Brooks enact desire as motor, eros as machine. In

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15This identification of male as voyeur and female as exhibitionist is parodied, ‘with a vengeance’, in Carter’s novel, Nights at the Circus, which I will discuss in Part II of my study.
"Narrative Desire," he argues that we need "to talk about desire not only as the motor force of plot but as the very motive of narrative" (48). and plot, he maintains.

is the organizing line and intention of narrative, thus perhaps best conceived as an activity, a structuring operation elicited in the reader trying to make sense of those meanings that develop only through textual and temporal succession . . . . Narratives both tell of desire--typically present some story of desire--and arouse and make use of desire as a dynamic of signification. (37)

Thus plot, for Brooks, is "a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text" (37), as it is for Desiderio: "And so I made a journey through space and time, up a river, across a mountain, over the sea, through a forest. Until I came to a certain castle. And . . ." (13 ellipsis in original).

In this mise en abyme of reading and of the inscription of narrative values, the Oedipal trajectory is represented and thwarted at the same time. Desiderio delays climax (just as his own 'climax' with Albertina is postponed) through suspense: he "must not run ahead" (13) of himself. he informs us from the very beginning of his account. Yet he will, periodically and consistently, thwart that suspense and that climax by revealing the outcome. Carter's text might be thus be labelled an example of what might be called "narrative interruptus." A close reading of Carter's title with its "machines" thus reveals, in advance of the beginning, the metafictional, that is reflexive, element of the text. Carter has admitted that her fiction "is often a kind of literary criticism . . . . [she has] spent time a long time acquiescing with Borges' idea that books were about books" (Haffenden 79). Thus, employing Brooks' terms, the novel, Infernal Desire Machines.
"offers a metaphor of life as desire but also of narration. telling, as another form of desire" (53). Brooks continues:

narrative as narrating . . . is in essence the desire to be heard, recognized, understood, which, never wholly satisfied or indeed satisfiable, continues to generate the desire to tell. the effort to enunciate a significant version of the life story in order to captivate a possible listener. (54)

Significantly, in Brooks' account, the "desire to tell" and the listener's "captivity" are equally products of narrative seduction.

Carter's desire to tell thus mirrors Desiderio's desire to tell, as well as Hoffman's and the Minister's desire to narrate (dictate) reality. Carter parodies the authorial function in her representations of authors, such as Desiderio who claims he does not want to be a hero, yet readily succumbs to--is seduced by--the desire to narrate his life as an Oedipal journey with profound meaning. Significantly, his transcendence is thwarted throughout the text. He is always "running ahead" (208) of himself and destroying the climax of his narrative as well as the reader's climax--and it is surely relevant in this discussion of readerly and writerly desire, that climax has a double meaning. Desiderio writes:

I have ruined all the suspense. I have quite spoiled my climax. But why do you deserve a climax, anyway? I am only trying to tell you exactly, as far as I can remember, what actually happened. And you know very well already that it was I who killed Dr Hoffman: you have read all about it in the history books and know the very date far better than I because I have forgotten it. (208)
Like Desiderio's climax, then, the reader's orgasm is deferred--even the 'little death' is postponed in this re-membered narrative. Moreover, Desiderio's lapse in memory effectively undermines memory as truth and exposes his narrative as a fictive construction of the past. Of course, the readers already "know very well" that this is also the case; we know that we are reading fiction.

Hohan, like Desiderio, constructs his reality through representation: he "[p]enned desire in a cage and said: 'Look! I have liberated desire!'" (208)--an obvious contradiction in terms. Carter's second pun on "pen" again draws our attention to the inscription of the ideology inherent in representation and the tyranny of those who have the power and authority to represent. Language represents language not reality. Desiderio conceives of his life as autobiographical picaresque: consequently, that is how he represents it. Although he claims to be an unwilling rogue, his narrative serves an ideological function, which is to support the State's version of historical reality. His narrative could have as easily been employed by Hohan, had he won the war of ideology. Hohan, had he proved victorious, would have endorsed another version of reality that represented "Leon Trotsky Composing the Eroica Symphony": Van Gogh "writing 'Wuthering Heights'": Milton "blindly executing divine frescos [sic] upon the walls of the Sistine Chapel" (198).

Significantly, elements of 'reality' remain: Trotsky's wire-rimmed spectacles, Van Gogh's mutilated ear, and Milton's blindness persist. However, the products of their own authorial visions--their authority--would be altered in Hohan's own authoritarian

16See the introduction for a discussion of the 'orgiastic' versions of reading contained in the texts of Scholes, Brooks, Barthes and, of course, Freud. Carter seems to suggest that the Oedipal dynamics of reading could also be re-membered differently, without the expected climax and closure.
version of history, as Albertina makes clear: "[w]hen my father rewrites the history books, these are some of the things that everyone will suddenly perceive to have always been true" (198). Essentially, Carter parodies such tyranny. However, historical narrative is exposed, here, as ideologically informed, as reproducing the status quo—the doxa. Desiderio conceives of his autobiography as hero making and refers to his tale as one of "picaresque . . . or even of heroic adventure" (14), but, as he says to the reader, "I was a traveller who had denied his proper destination" (220). Clearly, the central plot, the historical narrative, is resolutely Oedipal, but Carter undermines and exposes this plot by upsetting the naturalization of the Oedipal trajectory, deferring climax, "making the invisible visible," and effectively "de-doxifying the doxa" (Hutcheon, Politics 29) of narrative representations.
Chapter 3

Re-membering Desire

As we have seen in the last chapter, clearly Desiderio is both voyeur--observer/reader of texts--at the same time as he is represented as the object of our own gaze. We are, undoubtedly, the readers made flesh; and Desiderio is, if you will, the flesh made text, as he is the projection of the reader. In other words, Infernal Desire Machines might thus be described as an allegory of reading. As Desiderio observes the outrageous behaviour of the Count, for instance, he wonders, "[w]as I his observer, whose eyes, as they watched him, verified his actions? Did his narcissism demand a constant witness?" (127). This allegory of reading forces upon the reader the awareness of our complicity with the text. Our voyeuristic, and therefore passive, stance towards the text image permits the ontological and epistemological assumptions of that 'narcissistic' text.¹ And the most passive aspect of the reader's interaction with the text is the radical suspension of disbelief. Carter's literally incredible narrative, however, almost undermines the reader's passivity; it cries out for disbelief. Even Desiderio has trouble believing that which he sees around him. The reader as believer is replaced by the reader as disbeliever: voyeuristic passivity is countered by active interrogation and incredulity.

Brian McHale writes that, according to Maureen Quilligan, "all allegory, at all periods, is self-reflective because it is generated from the tensions between different

¹In Resisting Novels, Lennard Davis observes that the reader is always passive: "[i]ndeed, the experience of reading demands this domination and submission" of the reader (140).
meanings of polysemous words--systematic punning, in short" (145). Allegory, writes Quilligan, has a "tendency to slide tortuously back and forth between literal and metaphorical understandings of words, and therefore to focus on the problematical tensions between them" (67). This produces what McHale calls an

ontological tension: allegory projects a world and erases it in the same gesture, inducing a flicker between presence and absence of this world, between tropological reality and "literal" reality--literal in the literal sense of "words on the page." For what this flicker foregrounds above all is the textuality of the text.

If you ask what is the "realest" level of an allegorical text, the answer--upon which allegory, according to Quilligan, never ceases to insist--can only be the words on the page in front of you. (145-6)

Desiderio's function as investigator of veracity makes his allegorical function perfectly clear and the realization of his desire is a textual fulfilment, an erotics of the text, in the manner of Scholes and Brooks, as well as Barthes, as discussed in the Introduction. This is a salvation narrative, a narrative of transcendence, of overcoming the other, once again, represented in that mise en abyme: "And so I made a journey through space and time, up a river, across a mountain, over the sea, through a forest. Until I came to a certain castle. And . . . " (13). The ellipsis--or "points of suspension" as the French say--might mark suspense, were we not so well-versed in Oedipal salvation narratives. Instead, it only fulfills our expectations and marks the predictability of the text. We know as readers of narratives what the ellipsis most likely indicates, perhaps not in detail but in effect: all narratives must end, and in closure they inscribe the Oedipal
For, as Desiderio points out, we already know the story, and in one sense we do. and in another we do not. Certainly, we know the structure of the narrative to which he refers and, indeed, the one he is ostensibly producing will inevitably be Oedipal--rising action, crisis, recognition (anagnorisis), enlightenment, resolution, denouement, closure--even as we would be hard pressed to anticipate the details that give body to this structure. The reader, like Desiderio, need "only . . . to put one foot before the other, indefatigably in the wrong direction" and "instinct would guide" (121) us to the end. The Oedipal trajectory assures that he will reach the end. However, as we have seen, Desiderio repetitively thwarts this grand narrative in favour of a multiplicity of small narratives (Lyotard, Lyotard Reader 59). In another sense, we know nothing of the official history of Desiderio: it is not ontologically verifiable, as it is entirely fictitious. yet we suspend our disbelief. We know, indeed, the kind of history to which he refers and we can imagine it. We can almost imagine his heroic status within it. As readers, we allow, that is, conspire to allow, this fiction to exist because it is useful; it is perhaps a figure for a larger sense in which we conspire to allow lapses in ontology precisely because we know that all narrative partakes of what Desiderio's narrative partakes of--suspension of disbelief.

This is what Barthes calls a "perverse" reading, by which he means a reading which implies a split, a cleavage, wherein

the reader can keep saying: I know these are only words. but all the same . . . (I am moved as though these words were uttering a reality). Of all readings, that of tragedy is the most perverse: I take pleasure in hearing myself tell a story whose
end I know: I know and I don't know. I act toward myself as though I did not know: I know perfectly well Oedipus will be unmasked . . . but all the same. (Pleasure 47-8, italics in original)

Fiction is, in fact, the very model of "living with disbelief," accepting all narrative as essentially fictitious, allegorical, and susceptible to analysis in literary and linguistic terms. Those of us who study literature discover within fictive representations useful, valuable contingencies, partial truths. Perhaps it is only a question of what Lyotard has stated as the postmodern project which would wish to acknowledge the absence of unity and totality, and, perhaps, best articulated in his statement: "I deceive you the least possible (Differand 22).

Just as the ellipsis marked suspension of suspense, the repetition of the conjunction "and" in the narrative mise en abyme cited above ("and so I made a journey . . . . And...") is also of importance to the text, as it indicates supplementarity. For, according to Katherine Cummings and her reading of Jane Gallop's "father and daughter" and Shoshana Felman's "psychoanalysis and literature," the conjunction marks supplementarity as seduction (8), as desire for something "other," something other than the end. Cummings writes:

[i]n essence, wherever "and" appears, it asks for some other or something more. More precisely, on a local level "and" plays the part of provocateur and metonym, causing trouble in its immediate environs at the same time as it instantiates upset elsewhere. By implicating one subject in (the discourse of) the other--provocation in the operation of metonomy, for instance, which is also provocare, "to call
forth" --"and" consistently demands movement of and between terms. Their motion destabilizes hierarchies, dissolves boundaries, and so confounds oppositions. (8)
The "and," then, marks both repetition and resistance: the Oedipal discourse is inscribed and undermined. The "and" marks the recurring seduction of Desiderio and the reader by means of Oedipal narrative discourse. At the same time, the "and" undermines the death inscribed in that discourse as it interrogates the desire for closure and replaces death with supplementarity. Near the end of the novel, Hoffman reveals that he has learned there is nothing to distinguish between concrete and abstract: both representations are metaphors-effects of language. He admits that "all things co-exist in pairs but [his] is not an either/or world"; rather, he states. "Mine is an and + and world. I alone have discovered the key to the inexhaustible plus" (206). The key is "eroto-energy" (206) which serves in *Infernal Desire Machines* as a figure of narrative desire, an erotics of the text, which is fulfilled through supplementarity rather than death. "'And's' logic obtains, as well, in all here that resists a dominant discourse and that insists upon taking seriously the margins. The interplay of the two is best represented in the dialogue between the body of the book and its edges" (Cummings 8). In the case of *Infernal Desire Machines*, as we have seen, this interplay is enacted in the relationship between the body of the text and its titular naming. The proliferation of multiple significations for the title in the text demonstrates an appreciation for the marginal—a title exists, after all, on the margins, on the title page, on the cover. And the cover is the very image of textual containment. Carter demonstrates, however, that the words. "infernal desire machines." are multiplied in
textual representations—of objects, of actants, of readers, and, indeed, of textual mechanics—that proliferate in the text to such an excessive degree that they break down the boundary between the centre and its margins and suggest supplementarity, rather than definitive closure.

Supplementarity is also a function of generic inscriptions in *Infernal Desire Machines*. The interplay, between history and fiction, "metafiction and fiction or theory and story, since each of these is invariably given as supplement to its other" (Cummings 8), also surfaces in this text. Carter engages with memory as a function of narrativizing the self as history and as fiction. Hence, her work has much in common with historiographic metafictions (Hutcheon, *Politics*). However, while many historiographic metafictions, such as E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Timothy Findlay's *The Wars*, engage with a particular moment of human history--the Rosenberg trial, the partition of India, and World War I, respectively--*Infernal Desire Machines* engages with history in more general terms as a product of writing, of narrativizing the self and the other. Desiderio's function as historian, as he sees it, cannot begin at the beginning nor end at the ending, for linearity is not a function of "gathering together all that confusion of experience" (11), but editing, or re-collecting, is. Narrative desire and history are elaborated as edition/rendition, or what Mark Cheetham calls the "mnemonic reconstitution of meaning" (4). Desiderio and Carter, like all artists and writers, are "the mnemonists of culture. Their work is memory work, both personal and social, both intellectual and material" (Cheetham 1). "Memory, with its evanescent yet specific inflections of meaning, is history in a postmodern culture"
(Cheetham 7) and the correlate of memory, remarks Cheetham, is forgetting. However, there are other significant correlates to memory: fantasy and fiction, identity and subjectivity.²

Memory is the single most potent metaphor in Infernal Desire Machines for the production of narrativized histories and subjectivities: that is, 're-memberment' and hence, the role of memory in narrative production is remorselessly questioned in the text. That which accompanies memory is re-membrance (i.e. recognition with the inevitability of misrecognition--or even, as Haraway says, "pathologies of mis-recognition" [207])--to which Desiderio is certainly not immune. Memory is what Desiderio cannot escape, and memory is what he narrates. In the initial episode, Desiderio's "Introduction," he alerts us to the almost impossible nature of his task when he writes: "I must unravel my life as if it were so much knitting and pick out from that tangle the single, original thread of my self, the self who was a young man who happened to become a hero and then grew old" (11). This unravelling, as Desiderio defines it, involves options and choices: which thread does he offer up as significant in the mise en abyme he wishes to construct as a product of fate rather than choice? There are, Desiderio implies, many narratives that could be told, but he chooses to tell the one that just happens to make him a hero: he does not narrate

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²However, Cheetham's oppositional reasoning which installs forgetting as the correlate to memory, omits other possible facets of memory-work such as fantasy and fiction. It is these I would like to look at in terms of their relationship to memory. Jameson's concern for the loss of a true historical perspective in favour of the ahistoricism he claims has typified the postmodern suggests that, at one point, history was representative and that memory was, and possibly remains, unselective, pure and unadulterated by the contemporaneous ideological context. I find disbelief in this premise reassuring rather than overwhelming.
the life that ensues--the growing old. Desiderio objectifies himself as two different
people and remarks on the difference between his younger self and his present, narrating
self:

Old Desiderio asks young Desiderio: "And when [Hoffman] offered you a night
of perfect ecstasy in exchange for a lifetime's contentment, how could you
possibly choose the latter?"

And young Desiderio answers: "I am too young to know regret." (207)

Narrative takes hold of some events as narratable, and significant, and by exclusion
denies the significance of the unnarrated life. And it is the narrator who confers this
significance. Hence, what Desiderio chooses to narrate as history, and as his story,
inevitably involves omissions and narrative lapses. Yet he warns us that "[he] lived in the
city [and] . . . [n]othing in the city was what it seemed--nothing at all!" (11). Thus, our
first introduction to Desiderio is one which foregrounds the distance between the elder
narrating self and the youthful narrated self and acknowledges that history is, in this case,
something of a nostalgic rendition rather than an objective account. We must question
the reliability of the narrator. However, this is not simply an ironic questioning of
Desiderio; it is an interrogation of the reliability of all narrative production. "I can no
longer tell the difference between memory and dream. They share the same quality of
wishful thinking. I thought at the time perhaps I was a terrorist in the cause of reason;
though I probably tried to justify myself with such a notion later. Yet when I close my
eyes I see her still" (197), he writes. Thus, that which Desiderio remembers, he, in his
confusion, in fact 're-members', in that he puts together disparate elements, memories,
desires, fantasies and facts. the "confusion of experience . . . beginning at the beginning" (11). However, as we have seen, Desiderio commences the initial chapter with something of a contradictory admission: "I cannot remember exactly how it began" (15). The beginning of the narration is, in fact, its end.

In each episode, Desiderio effects what amounts to a rebirth, an overcoming, an enlightenment; yet the identities he discovers are often regenerations or reclamations--that is, recoveries. He is consumed by narrative and, if you will, reclaimed by yet another identity. The narrated "I" that Desiderio re-members is, therefore, something of a (re)collection of selves. After our initial introduction to Desiderio as narrator/author and elderly servant of the state (he is writing his autobiography in service to the state), we are initially greeted with a retrospective continuity when we meet Desiderio, a young, disaffected, male, civil servant--an identity he will lose and reclaim throughout the text. However, this identity is further refined when he is assigned a new identity as secret agent: "the computers constructed [him] an identity" (40) as an Inspector of Veracity. This identity will cease and re-emerge during the spectacular conclusion which signals James Bond films as parodic intertexts; for instance, Desiderio is asked, at one point, if he is "Licensed to Kill?"--i.e. designation 007 (94). Similarly, Desiderio's apparent irresistibility to various women and his escape from the determination police with his emergence from the chimney and from captivity, as "from a womb" (65), offer further parodic references to Bond films. However, his emergence from captivity also marks a

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3"As asked if the images of violence and desire reveal the workings of our unconscious, the Id, Carter replied, 'Partly, but they are also aspects of the popular material I use: B movies, newspapers, ballads. The end [of Infernal Desire Machines] is an elaborate parody of James Bond films" (Kenyan 22).
reclamation of a former, forgotten, then re-membered self that temporarily obliterates what was "left of the brisk young civil servant" (66).

Desiderio's next identity takes him "back to . . . earliest childhood" (66) whence he is reborn as Kiku and reunited with his indigenous roots. He opines:

[i]f I murdered Desiderio and became Kiku for ever. I need fear nothing in my life ever, any more. I need not fear loneliness or boredom or lack of love. My life would flow like the river on which I lived. I would become officially an outcaste but, since I had assigned my allegiance with the outcastes. I would no longer linger on the margins of life with a delicate sneer on my face, wistfully wishing that I were Marvell or that I were dead. (80-81)

Ironically, to murder one representation of Desiderio in favour of another representation--Kiku--will, in fact, doubly insure his death, for the river people mean to sacrifice Kiku in a perverse enactment of the wedding ritual and then consume him: "the paradox of the self becomes explicitly the paradox of narrative plot as the reader consumes it: diminishing as it realizes itself, leading to an end that is the consummation (as well as the consumption) of its sense making" (Brooks 51-2). Desiderio escapes from this death by swimming to shore, the cleansing waters affecting yet another symbolic rebirth into yet another marginal existence as part of a travelling carnival where, ironically, his marginality is ensured by his very normality. Here, again, he reclaims his identity--he re-members, that is, his identity as Oedipal hero and as the subject of yet another narrative.

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4Note that the first American edition, The War of Dreams, reads as follows: "signed my allegiance with the outcastes" (103), rather than "assigned my allegiance with the outcastes..
While living amongst the circus performers, Desiderio, in effect, hides his identity as narrative subject and pays dearly for it. As he watches the Acrobats of Desire dismember themselves, he is struck with ontological doubt. "I could not," he writes, "entirely suspend my disbelief, although I might lay it aside for a while. I knew there was more to it than met the eye although, in the finale, so many eyes met and greeted one's own" (114). All these eyes converge on him as he is brutally raped. In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter has this to say about rape:

in the mythic schema of all relations between men and women, man proposes and woman is disposed of, just as she is disposed of in a rape, which is a kind of physical graffiti, the most extreme reduction of love, in which all humanity departs from the sexed beings. So that, somewhere in the fear of rape, is a more than merely physical terror of hurt and humiliation—a fear of psychic disintegration, of an essential dismemberment, a fear of loss or disruption of the self which is not confined to the victim alone. (6)

Desiderio deals with his "dismemberment," after he is raped by the Moroccan acrobats, by playing marbles with the "twenty-seven eyes" which they have donated to him as recompense. The twenty-seven eyes, of course, are twenty-seven "I"s, as the eye confers reality and, hence, identity; he plays with these marble-like eyes/I's until they are utterly lost. He, then, emerges from "the mouth of the cave" (womb) in which he has been hiding to discover a "total realignment of the landscape during [his] oblivion" (119)—a shifting of his eyes/I's. Desiderio also states, "I found I was recovered," (119) thus
suggesting both the usual sense of recovery and the metaphorical one. The 'I' found another 'I' and another . . . and recovered another identity; ergo rebirth.

In the next episode, "The Erotic Traveller." Desiderio turns his "back on a whole sub-universe that had been wiped out with a huge eraser and on the corpse of yet another of [his] selves, that of the peep-show proprietor's nephew" (120). He is now reborn as the "creature" (141) of the Count who is represented entirely by his desire. The sadeian Count dons a macabre costume reminiscent of an executioner's mask and his body is covered except for his exposed genitalia. He personifies the logical and yet absurd outcome of the mythologizing of gendered subjectivity: the male as phallus. He is the parodic synthesis of desire and death: a synthesis of Count Dracula and the Marquis de Sade— an intertextual reference to Bram Stoker's fictitious character and to the real-life Marquis whom we know primarily by means of his own fictive texts, and whose name, according to Mulvey and de Lauretis, is inscribed as narrative in Western culture. What would it mean to be "the creature" of such a commingling? Both Dracula and Sade represent the erotic and death as narrative impulses. The Count, then, represents textuality doubly-encoded as desire and death. In an echo of Sade, the Count announces: "I have devoted my life to the humiliation and exaltation of the flesh. I am an artist; my material is the flesh; my medium is destruction; and my inspiration is nature" (126). Indeed, the Count's "conviction that he was a force of nature always suspended

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5 The Count, like the Marquis, was "sentenced to death in absentia by the judiciary of Provence, [and his] body was executed in effigy in the town square of Aix" (127). He is also, however, "the hereditary count of Lithuania" (129), which, though not Transylvania, yet evokes a mythologized Eastern Europe. It is typical of Carter to tantalize her reader with apparent similarities, while undermining absolute identification through changes in important details.
[Desiderio's] belief for a time, if never for long" (143). The Count, then, is one of the few who can engage Desiderio in identification and suspend his usual disbelief. The explanation for this symbolic reader identification becomes clear when we realize that Sade, according to Carter, in some ways anticipates Freud and, of course, it is Freud who identifies both death and desire as forces of nature: the death instinct and the pleasure principle. According to Peter Brooks, such a paradigm of narrative "proposes that we live in order to die, hence that the intentionality of plot lies in it orientation toward the end even while the end must be achieved only through detour" (108); thus Freud proffers "a dynamic model that structures ends (death, quiescence, nonnarratability) against beginnings (Eros, stimulation into tension, the desire of narrative) in a manner that necessitates the middle as detour, as struggle toward the end under the compulsion of imposed delay, as arabesque in the dilatory space of the text" (Brooks 107-8). This, as we have seen, is an Oedipal model. Sadism is "the only directly observable example that psychoanalysis encounters, of the death instinct at work" (50), writes Brooks. but we might suggest also that narrative, in so far as it is both sadistic and Oedipal, also inscribes the death instinct. I add a rather lengthy quotation from Brooks' "Narrative Desire" in order to delineate, carefully, the connection between sadism, Freud and narrative that is allegorized in Carter's figure of the Count:

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6In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter writes that Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir* "in many ways precedes Freud's essay on femininity, and should be seen in the same Western European context of competition and rivalry between women that devalues women as they act them out in the dramas of sexual life" (123).
[a]s a dynamic-energetic model of narrative plot, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* gives an image of how the nonnarratable existence is stimulated into the condition of narratability, to enter a state of deviance and detour (ambition, quest, the pose of a mask) in which it is maintained for a certain time, through an at least minimally complex extravagance, before returning to the quiescence of the nonnarratable. The energy generated by deviance, extravagance, excess—an energy that belongs to the textual hero's career and to the reader's expectation, his desire of and for the text—maintains the plot in its movement through the vacillating play of the middle, where repetition as binding works toward the generation of significance, toward recognition and the retrospective illumination that will allow us to grasp the text as total metaphor, but not therefore to discount the metonymies that have led to it. The desire of the text is ultimately the desire for the end, for that recognition which is the moment of the death of the reader in the text. Yet recognition cannot abolish textuality, does not annul that middle which is the place of repetitions, oscillating between blindness and recognition, between origin and ending. Repetition toward recognition constitutes the truth of the narrative text. (108, emphasis added)

When Desiderio announces that his single desire is "to see Albertina again" (14) before he dies, are we to understand that the final utterance of the novel, "unbidden she comes," marks Desiderio's death as, "with the possibility of total realization of desire, the self encounters the impossibility of desiring, because to desire becomes, and can only be, the choice of death of that same self" (Brooks 51)? I leave this question aside momentarily
(as it will resurface repeatedly) in order to continue my investigation of the inscriptions of Oedipal sadistic narrative in Carter.

What Carter terms "Nebulous Time,"7 in the episode subsequent to "The Erotic Traveller," is penetrated through "the massive, viridian door of the forest that we closed behind us" (165), writes Desiderio. Then, again through the ritual of water, rebirth and baptism (naming) are (re)enacted as his ship capsizes and he is washed ashore on the coast of Africa. In this episode, the Count is subjected to his own sadistic logic: he is prepared as comestible by his nemesis "to demonstrate the shocking tragedy of mortality itself, that all flesh may be transformed, at any moment, to meat" (Carter, Sadeian Woman 140). This is the shocking tragedy of narrative sadism as well. Moreover, this episode suggests that cannibalism is "the most elementary act of exploitation, that of turning the other directly into a comestible: of seeing the other in the most primitive terms of use" (Carter, Sadeian Woman 140). Here, "[t]he strong abuse, exploit and meatify the weak," (Carter, Sadeian Woman 140) in a sadistic terrorism of the imagination. McHale insists that, in the chapter "Lost in Nebulous Time," Carter has constructed an Africa wholly derived from European fantasy. She populates its coast with cannibal tribesmen straight out of party jokes, comic-strips, and slapstick comedy; while in the interior she places centaurs, in effect suppressing indigenous mythology in favour of an imported European myth. This is

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7In this episode, "Lost in Nebulous Time," Carter persists in her interrogation of the tyranny of vision through yet another mutation of the eye/I metaphor. Nebulous, of course, describes a state of uncertainty—a mist or vapour. "Nebula," the OED states, is "a film upon, or covering, the eye; . . . a clouded speck or spot on the cornea causing defective vision."
imperialism of the imagination, and Carter knows it; indeed, her purpose is to foreground it and expose it for what it is. Thus, we learn from her Dr Hoffman that nothing in the European castaway's experience of this Africa was real: the "hitherto unimaginable flora," the "herds of biologically dubious fauna," the "hitherto unformulated territory," all of it was only the reification of the castaways' desires. (55)

Even collective memory—that is, myth—is suspect. This time, Desiderio escapes being trampled to death by Centaurs when he leaps through a "wall of fire" (192) (trial by fire—generally another rebirth) and he is transported, finally, to his destination, to the father (hypostatized), to the castle (phallus), to the end of the Oedipal trajectory. Desiderio penetrates the plot space much as Carter's title penetrates the text. When he reaches the park surrounding Hoffman's castle he recognizes it and remarks: "I had seen it in the peep-show. It was the park framed by the female orifice in the first machine" (196). Both penetrations are repetitions of the multiple representations of Oedipal journeys toward closure within the text, journeys which are sometimes thwarted, sometimes satisfied. The ending of each Oedipal journey engenders another journey and thereby postpones closure—a technique learned from Scheherazade in The Thousand and One Nights. In short, although this text inscribes an Oedipal discourse meant to inform and uncover meaning, it seeks as well to inscribe Scheherazade who forestalled death by never allowing the story to end (Carter, Expletives 2).

Angela Carter's title—with its image of "infernal desire machines" which are finally realized, in representation, "at the end"—conforms to Brooks' notion that the initiatory
impulse to narrate, which is exemplified in the inscription of a title. is. ultimately. "desire for the end" (52). Thus, in Carter, the Oedipal trajectory is reproduced. At the same time, and despite narrative's desire for the end, closure in Desiderio's narrative is often deferred. The realization of desire, narrative or otherwise, is both at the end. and yet not at the end. Again we find that postmodern preference for the "both/and" logic, which undermines the binarism inherent in the "either/or" construction (Hutcheon. Poetics 49).

All of the episodes. or pétits récits, discussed above are repetitions of journeys remembered by the elderly Desiderio, as he acknowledges by objectifying himself thus:

[1]here was once a young man named Desiderio who set out upon a journey and very soon lost himself completely. When he thought he had reached his destination, it turned out to be only the beginning of another journey infinitely more hazardous than the first. (166)

In the transient belief that he has reached his destination—the end—he inscribes the Oedipal trajectory, and this trajectory was insured by his desire: "I wanted a heroic struggle to justify my murder to myself" (218), he writes.

Such a mythical-textual mechanics is inevitably inscribed in Infernal Desire Machines, but it is also problematized by a 'fault' in Desiderio's 'linear' memory, at least in so far as narrative is concerned. The obstacle/boundary, for Desiderio, resides within him: "the enemy was inside the barricades. and lived in the minds of each of us" (12).

Hence. Desiderio's narrative produces Oedipal and salvationist trajectories in which the anticipated end is undermined by yet another beginning. As previously noted, on the grand scale he denies us climax to his historical narrative, thus alerting us to the
significant difference between reality, which does not organize toward climax and resolution, and narrative which, in its Oedipal and sadistic logic, seeks "discharge" as Brooks would say. And why do we deserve a climax? Simply because we are accustomed to it; narrative is Oedipal and sadistic—it ensures climax. However.

Desiderio also thwarts climax in each episode: the little death, too, is deferred. "[T]he fulfilment of desire is a fiction," writes Jerry Aline Flieger (150). Desiderio continually postpones climax by 'slipping up' and revealing the ending prior to its occurrence in the linear narrative time of the text. Memory cannot be counted on to produce good, old-fashioned Oedipal suspense; memory, as Cheetham says, is postmodern history wherein climax is problematized.

Memory work occurs outside linear time and it is not, therefore, concerned with the linearity that traditionally preoccupies narrative. In Kristeva's terms, "[t]he time of history ... can be characterized as linear time: time as project, teleology, departure, progression and arrival. This linear time is also that of language considered as the enunciation of a sequence of words" (187). Memory work is not linear, however; it is a recollection and repetition, as Kierkegaard writes: "[r]epetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas repetition properly is repeated forwards" (3-4). Memory allows for

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A few examples of this "slip up" include the following: Desiderio forgets his narrative drive and gives away the climactic ending of an episode prior to its actual occurrence in linear narrative time (115); Albertine appears in disguise and Desiderio reveals that he did not at the time recognize her, thereby allowing the reader to recognize her identity before it is revealed in the linear progression of the story (131); Desiderio comments on something he learned "later" and thereby confounds the notion of linear narrative time (149); in advance of the ending Desiderio confides: "that was as close as I ever got to consummation" (202), thereby making it clear to the reader that the long anticipated union will not, in fact, occur.
contradictions to exist contemporaneously, and thereby "calls linear accounts of the historically significant into question" (Jordan 37). Desiderio. in *Infernal Desire Machines*, repeats forwards that which he recollects backwards. He begins at the ending.

Brooks explains that

[r]epetition is . . . a complex phenomenon, and one that has its history of commentary in philosophical as well as psychoanalytic thought. Is repetition sameness or difference? To repeat evidently implies resemblance, yet can we speak of resemblance unless there is difference? Without difference, repetition would be identity, which would not usually appear to be the case, if only because the chronological context of the repeated occurrence differs from that of the 'original' occurrence (the 'original' is thus a concept that repetition puts into question). In this sense, repetition always includes the idea of variation in time, and may ever be potentially a progressive act. (124)

Repetition, then, enacts a parody of the Oedipal trajectory; thus, *Infernal Desire Machines* does, indeed, put the concept of "original" into question. Recollection implies that there is more than one possibility raised by remembering—there is a collection of possibilities. The original evocations of Hoffman's illusory phenomena are dream-like evocations of memory: "a great majority of the things which appeared around us were by no means familiar, though they often teasingly recalled aspects of past experience, as if they were memories of forgotten memories" (19), observes Desiderio. This sounds teasingly like a description of representation (notably representation as it is problematized
in Carter's fiction) and it inscribes representation as memory gone awry, in an epidemic collection of possible and even contradictory significations.

Indeed, representation (titular, authorial or otherwise) is continuously multiplied and thus problematized in the text. Both Albertina and Desiderio serve as ambassadors to the other and from an/other (author/authority); they may be considered, in Derridean parlance, as "more or less explicitly instructed representatives, delegates, ambassadors, emissaries," or, as Derrida prefers to say, "envoys" ("Sending" 296). As such, they serve as titles, namings, or as Derrida would have it, "envoies" or "sendings." As "representatives" they have authority "to represent" another version of authorial authority. They "represent," then, two "representative," though opposing, representations of representation. Moreover, in Carter's text, they are representing, or representatives of, the already represented, that is, of the Minister of Determination and Dr Hoffman (both representative representations, or allegories if you will, of imagination and reason).9 Hoffman, according to the Minister's ambassador Desiderio, was "proliferating his weaponry of images along the obscure and controversial borderline between the thinkable and the unthinkable" (22). The Doctor and the Minister represent the binary poles of imagination and reason, irrational/rational. However, Carter demonstrates that the boundaries separating such oppositions are permeable, interpenetrative. The winner of

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9I recognize the awkwardness of my sentence structure and diction in these two sentences. Moreover, I willingly acknowledge the excess of repetition here; but I think such excess is necessary to enact my point that representative representations repeat and proliferate to an excessive degree in Carter's text. Only when we understand this excess in representation—the persistent, excessive evocation of the simulacra—can we really determine the uses and the significance of what I like to call, after Treichler, the "epidemic of signification."
the war represents the hegemonic ideology—the history we take for granted; however, this history is shown to be but one version amongst many and, thus, we glimpse the possibility of alternative worlds. The war of binaries is won, of course, by the representatives of realism and rationalism, the same victors as those of the Enlightenment. Both victories come at the expense of other possible worlds. "'The Doctor has invented a virus which causes a cancer of the mind, so that the cells of the imagination run wild. And we must—we will!—discover the antidote'" (22). insists the Minister of Determination. Perhaps the disease, as they say, may be preferable to the cure, since the Minister's method of countering the seemingly endless proliferation of imaginative phenomena is reality testing—a method akin to those used by "the medieval witch-hunter" (22)—which effectively rewrites the Cartesian *cogito* as "I am in pain. therefore I exist" (22). According to Brian McHale, Carter's personification of these two adversaries comes down to a variation "of the venerable mode of psychomachia ... allegories [which] typically involve the confrontation of warring principles, semantic oppositions personified; Manichaean allegories, we might call them" (142). According to McHale, Angela Carter

has adapted the inherent Manichaeanism of gothic horror fiction to her own uses in *Infernal Desire Machines*. Carter's allegory is particularly interesting because in it the Apollonian vs. Dionysian struggle has specifically ontological overtones: the Apollonian authority-figure, the Minister of Determination, is a relentless

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10 McHale refers to the view that allegory is the direct translation of abstract concepts into a transparently-motivated narrative, as "unenlightened" (143).
empiricist bent on preserving the integrity of reality against Dr Hoffman.

Dionysian agent of fantasy and pleasure. (143)

The Doctor and Minister, are named, in Carter's text, as representatives of contradictory versions of reality. Similarly, the title of the work, as we have seen, could be called a "more or less explicitly instructed" (Derrida, 296) representative emissary.

The title is another "sending"--a representation and a naming. And naming has a mythical tradition in patriarchal culture--it was Adam's assignment in the Garden and it has ideological implications:

the traditional process of naming--a belief in the identity of things with names, so that 'reality' may be known absolutely--provides a space of interrogation for postmodernism, which asks: whose 'reality' is to be represented through this process of naming? (Marshall 5)

As Radhakrishnan points out, postmodernism inaugurates reality as "maverick, local and regional, and discontinuous" (134). "By interrogating the logic of naming and representation," postmodernism refuses "to accept as 'natural' the one-to-one mimetic relationship of things with words, for example, to identify the concept of naming as an act of will, of power" (Marshall 6). What we name things to a great degree establishes our thinking about the object and, therefore, establishes how it is constituted. Naming, thus, controls and/or limits expectations, opens up, but then imposes limits. It is the very limits of naming and identities, that are so much under investigation in Carter's texts.

Naming as conferring a title--as linguistic representation--as we have seen, is investigated in Carter's own title. It is further interrogated in the titles of the separate chapters, the
titular headings of the representations of the samples, and the naming of the characters. Each naming relates to--calls--another naming; they interpenetrate. The title of one of Mendoza's samples is "The Mansion at Midnight": the title of one of Carter's chapters is "The Mansion at Midnight." The Moroccan "Acrobats of Desire" anticipate the ultimate acrobats of desire, those desire machines, the lovers, who are also already anticipated by the language of the title, and the readers who continuously perform their own acrobatics of desire. Indeed, the overall title of the work--the original envoy and ultimate naming--as I have been arguing, proliferates through an epidemic of representations. The title is represented and concretized in the final chapter: it is also, again, prefigured by one of the models portraying Desiderio in the perpetual embrace of Albertina. Indeed, "the models did . . . represent everything it was possible to believe" (108).

All these namings, entitlings, envoys prove to be significant. Inevitably, significance develops through interpretation and the inevitability of the reader's/receptor's search for meaning, desire for an end--that is, through my conclusions, my conferral of meaning. The peep-show proprietor, responsible for matching the slides with titular text, is, after all, blind. I am naming (conferring meaning on) the title, just as the title names (confers meaning on) the text. Nothing here is transparent; it is produced and constructed. Carter ensures that we will perceive the constitutive aspect of naming by providing an epidemic of representations of "desire machines." We cannot miss the multiple, interpenetrating and, sometimes, contradictory possibilities that arise from any linguistic representation. The inscribed interpretations of Carter's title disperse into many versions; moreover, the ontological limitations of naming, in terms of the two adversaries, the Minister of
Determination and Hoffman, can be observed in the fact that they are "named" as opposing entities, but their ontology represents an overlap or interpenetration. Naming then can also be viewed as a contamination.

The naming of Albertina is just such a contamination; she is an obvious reference to the Albertine of Proust's narrative, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and thus, that narrative penetrates and contaminates Carter's text. Albertina's naming foregrounds the thematic and structural significance of memory in the text (an obvious preoccupation in the Proustian intertext) and introduces the possibility that gender is a position one may inhabit, rather than a biological and determinant identity. One critic has written that Proust's homosexuality is reflected in his depiction of Albertine: "Albertine is a thinly disguised male character" (Hindus 141). This, combined with the interpretation of Albertine's lesbianism (Hughes 137), certainly problematizes the representation of Albertina in Carter's text. One telling detail, to my mind, is the actual name "Albertina." With the alteration of the final 'e' to an 'a'. Carter underlines the possibility of multiple gendered identities through a doubled naming: Albert and Tina. Indeed, in another of her novels, *Nights at the Circus*, Carter will name a character Albert/Albertina "who [is] bipartite, that is to say, half and half and neither of either" (59). The Albertina of *Infernal Desire Machines*, herself, insists: "I represent the divergent symmetry of asymmetry" (213). It is no accident, of course, that the name Albertina is an intertextual reference to Proust's novel, just as

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11One of Albertina's incarnations is as a black swan, recalling Proust's protagonist in Book I of *A la recherche du temps perdu*: "Swann."
It was not an accident of cultural history that Freud, an avid reader of literature, chose the hero of Sophocles' drama as the emblem of Everyman's passage into adult life, his advent to culture and history. All narrative, in its movement forward toward resolution and backward to an initial moment, a paradise lost, is overlaid with what has been called an Oedipal logic--the inner necessity or drive of the drama--its "sense of an ending" inseparable from the memory of loss and the recapturing of time. Proust's title, *A la Recherche du temps perdu* [sic], epitomizes the very movement of narrative: the unfolding of the Oedipal drama as action at once backward and forward, its quest for (self) knowledge through the realization of loss, to the making good of Oedipus' sight and the restoration of vision. (de Lauretis, *Alice* 125-6)

Significantly, the final words of Desiderio's text re-mark the event of closure as "the realization of loss . . . the restoration of vision." The Oedipal logic, the realization of Desiderio's desire, is a 'sighting' of a re-membered vision: "Unbidden she comes."

As well as underscoring the Oedipal narrative structure, the Proustian intertext also serves to assign to the female the value of the memory of loss; she is a "lack" and an "abyss," a "hole," the "dark continent" and the "unknown" of Freud:

[t]o summarize briefly: the function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is twofold: she firstly symbolises the castration threat by her real lack of a penis and secondly thereby raises her child into the symbolic. Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end. It does not last into the world of law and language except as a memory, which oscillates between
memory of maternal plenitude and memory of lack. Both are posited on nature (or on anatomy in Freud's famous phrase). Woman's desire is subjugated to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound; she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it . . . . Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning. (Mulvey 14-15)

Albertina exists, in Desiderio's text, as "dilatory space" (Brooks 108); she symbolizes the plot-space, as it is defined by de Lauretis (139): "[n]ot only, then, is the female position that of a given portion of the plot space; more precisely . . . it figures the (achieved) movement of the narrative toward that space. It represents narrative closure" (Alice 140). Albertina is Desiderio's "dream made flesh" (215)--dream made text. Desiderio's narrative desire to 'penetrate' the plot-space is paralleled by his desire to 'penetrate' Albertina. The latter desire is always deferred; and so, perhaps, is the former. The possibility of consummation is left in reserve as overflow and the continuous perpetual and unanswered desire of Desiderio. After Albertina's death, Desiderio's desire to narrate appears to enact his desire to see her again (14)--that is, to produce her as textual representation. Hence, his desire to narrate, to inscribe his Oedipal trajectory and re-mark its closure, also inscribes his motion ever forward toward the object, Albertina--a motion that is not ultimately satisfied by (dis)closure. Proust writes that women are "a product of
our temperament, an image inversely projected, a negative of our sensibility—"\(^{12}\) a statement that Irigaray identifies as the "specularization" of the female (82). As it turns out, Albertina's 'presence' in the text is analogous to that of the two absent (lost), specularized mothers: Desiderio's, who is dead and despised, and Albertina's own mother who is present only in death as Hoffman's embalmed wife. And Albertina's death, in effect, repeats the death of Desiderio's mother and of her own mother. The female in this text is undergoing, or has already undergone, erasure (castration). She is a representation of and repetition of death; this is the narrative sadism ensured by the Oedipal trajectory. Albertina, too, is already dead when narration takes place—not that she ever truly lived; she is always only a representation of the object of narrative desire. Thus. "[a]ll narrative may be in essence obituary in that . . . the retrospective knowledge that it seeks, the knowledge that comes after, stands on the far side of the end, in human terms on the far side of death" (Brooks 95).

As we have seen, the naming of the deuteragonists, the Minister of Determination and Doctor Hoffman is also significant; so, too, are the names conferred by their titles: Minister and Doctor. Ironically, their professional titles evoke images of healers:\(^{13}\) yet, they practice opposing methods of healing. Nevertheless, their naming evokes the notion

\(^{12}\)From Within a Budding Grove (955); cited in Luce Irigaray's Speculum of the Other Woman (82).

\(^{13}\)Healing (of disease) is a function of doctoring, most obviously; however the notion of 'ministering to' also evokes the notion of healer, both in the physical sense of nursing and in the spiritual sense of being one who ministers. Possibly the association of these two antagonists with healing only serves to heighten, through irony, their contradictory functions as perpetuators of dis-ease.
of the world which they inhabit—the fictional world—as somehow ill or dis-eased, and hence, in obvious need of ministering or doctoring. The Minister of Determination's cure is the institution of his programme, notably entitled, "the Rectification of Names" (193).

The Minister employs a team of "logical positivists" (194) to codify and fix "all the phenomena compiled by his computers in the solid concrete of a set of names that absolutely agreed with them" (194). "The Minister," writes Elaine Jordan, "will allow no gap between signifier and signified" (32); he outlaws "that shadowy land between the thinkable and the thing thought of"; if he ever "destroyed this difference, he would destroy [Hoffman]" (194).

As Jordan also points out, "[i]t is worth noting that E. T. A. Hoffmann's tale 'The Sandman' was the provocation for Dr Freud's meditation on 'the Uncanny'. on that which is disturbing because all too close to home, and the suspicion of whatever is too lifelike" (32). Hoffmann's naming, with a spelling change like Albertina's, also, like Albertina's name, calls to texts outside the text. It evokes the bizarre fantasy world of E. T. A. Hoffmann as well as Freud's speculations. The fact is that Carter's character Hoffman, with his own set of samples, "modified the nature of reality" (17) much as Freud did: reality, then, can be modified. The samples provide both visual and linguistic intervention in reality—what they represent is in some sense destined to happen in a repetition of remembered, that is, learned reality. This destiny often occurs with teasingly parodic differences. Representation affects how we see reality, but it does not entirely proscribe reality—we can tease out the differences. It is clear, then, that both Albertina and Hoffman are names which refer, intertextually, to other texts that also refer in
Chinese box style of regression to other texts—notably to Freud's oeuvre. This is convenient to my purposes here: were it not so convenient, we might find the texts refer in "potential infinite regress" (McHale 245) to epidemic proportions.

For instance, it is tempting, at this juncture, to turn to another text. Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* which analyzes the Oedipus in conjunction with Proust's Albertine:

> Albertine's face is at first a nebula, barely extracted from the collective of girls . . .

> [a]t last, within the magnified proximity, everything falls apart like a face drawn in sand, Albertine's face shatters into molecular partial objects. while those on the narrator's face rejoin the body without organs, eyes closed. nostrils [sic] pinched shut, mouth filled. What is more, their entire love tells the same story. (69)

One could easily develop the connections between Deleuze and Guattari's fragmented text and Carter's dispersion of selves, while focusing on the doubling of Albertina/Albertine, Proust/Freud, Oedipus/Anti-Oedipus. This would, no doubt, lead me to another and yet another text that could illuminate Carter's text. Metanarratives and reference texts could multiply to an unprecedented degree; the choice of when and where to stop and enforce closure is dictated by arbitrary and learned rules, rather than an inherent logic. Inevitably, we will return to Freud, return to Proust, and return to Deleuze and Guattari, so for the moment I prefer to return to the original envoy. Carter's text, since I trust I have made my point that intertexts, genres, and identities all multiply, divide and proliferate in Carter in an epidemic of signification.
Desiderio's "Introduction" to his ostensible autobiography, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, also opens with an epidemic of signification. Carter has said that "there's a materiality to imaginative life and imaginative experience which should be taken quite seriously" (in Haffenden 85). In the epigraph to the novel, Carter cites Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*:

(remember that we sometimes demand definitions for the sake not of the content, but of their form. Our requirement is an architectural one: the definition is a kind of ornamental coping that supports nothing.)

A definition, of course, accompanies any naming, and the name, here, is identified as nothing, an absence. Thus Carter alerts us to the problem of totalizing definitions and suggests that our reality is a function of memory, re-memberment and discourse. She further suggests that narrative is a form of coping, a means of defining, and an ornamental one at that. Moreover, the initial three lines of the novel represent a recurrent technique of Carter's: repetition, a panoply of word play and multiple meanings. *Infernal Desire Machines* opens thus:

I remember everything.

Yes.

I remember everything perfectly. (11)

I reproduce the concrete use of language in Carter's opening—the organization of text on the page—because language, its uses and abuses, its potential to represent, name and define, is everything in Carter. 'Re-memberment' is her mode. Such a style and ideology of writing provoke a questioning of origins, the integrity of the self, the body, and
boundaries; it questions, also, our dependence on sensory memory, particularly the tyranny of the visual or what Desiderio terms the "persistence of vision" (204). Carter uses repetition to mark memory as repetition with a difference which, in turn, marks her method as parodic (Hutcheon, Parody 6). "Narrative always makes the implicit claim to be in a state of repetition, as a going over again of a ground already covered: a *sjužet* repeating the *fabula*, as the detective retraces the tracks of the criminal" (Brooks 97). Narrative, then, partakes of the same trajectory as Desiderio when he tracks the 'criminal' Hoffman and the object of his desire, Albertina. "This claim to an act of repetition—'I sing of,' 'I tell of'—appears to be initiatory of narrative" (Brooks 97). Carter's own textual repetition immediately alerts us to the repetition inherent in memory and the word-placement on the page as well as the textual gaps in language are equally significant as they alert us to the inevitability of gaps in memory, in recall, in narrativizations of histories. The deceptively simple sentence structure—subject, verb, object—is a grammatical repetition in its own right, complete with inherent expectations and thematic as well as structural significance in the text.¹⁴ "We are bound by the terms of the sentence. Subject-verb-object" (French 290).¹⁵ The production of subjectivity, of verbal

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¹⁴It might also be added that linear time is that of "language considered as the enunciation of sentences (noun + verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending), and that this time rests on its own stumbling block, which is also the stumbling block of that enunciation—death" (Kristeva 192). Once again, we are confronting the death inscribed in narrative: narrative sadism.

¹⁵In an interview with John Haffenden, Carter mentions her inability to comprehend Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*. Nonetheless, French's text does, in fact, share some of the ideological concerns expressed in Carter's text. French writes: "[a]ll deaths are violent deaths, I suppose. You can see when you think the way I do, you never reach any conclusions" (384); and "[th]e stories all have to be changed" (387). French's text, however, with its version of social realism, does not engage with the problems of complicity and narrative representation to the extent that Carter's text does.
action, and of objectivity (objectification) represents the process of narrativization that Carter examines in *Infernal Desire Machines*: the modes of realist and modernist representation and what Peter Brooks has identified as Freud's "masterplot." Carter's play with the oft-repeated derivations of the term *remember* offers the opportunity to engage in some word-play of my own, word-play that is central to my reading of Carteresque allegory. It seems to me that the "I" of the subject, Desiderio (desire), will always be in question as it forms and reforms, recollects and re-members itself throughout the text. Desiderio is dis-membered, sodomized (possibly feminized), but, in any event, produced as object. He is later, re-membered (masculinized?) as heroic subject. Moreover, he is re-membered by the boat people as mythical object. He is re-membered again in a recuperative re-writing in a Swiftian dystopia, in the "loose *grammar* of Nebulous Time" (186, emphasis added). Then, re-membering his purpose, his Oedipal heroic, he regains access to the obstacle, but never quite reaches his climax—that is, he never quite reaches the point where he could say, "[t]his is the end'. Because it *would* have been" (*Expletives* 2), as we have seen.

Significantly, Desiderio's various identities are also produced through namings. Initially, he is identified and named as the desired one; thus he begins as the object of the narrative—indeed, it is 'his-story', so to speak, that is being recounted. At the same time, he accedes to subjectivity in that it is his utterance which we read; he thereby, as subject, recounts the story that objectifies him; that is, he colludes in the production of himself as object. Thus, he is, simultaneously, the desired one and the desiring one. However, this is not a transformation narrative of the modern paradigm, as Desiderio never arrives at the
promised land, at full understanding, at transcendence, at the end. In fact, Carter's text calls into question this teleological aspect of narrative, that others, including de Lauretis, have called Oedipal. Carter's narrative, which situates Desiderio simultaneously in the past and in the present--simultaneously present and absent, simultaneously subject and object--thus questions linear Oedipal narrative. Brooks, citing Sartre, argues that "[a]utobiographical narration must necessarily be 'obituary'--must in any event explicitly show margins outside the narratable, leftover spaces which allow the narrating I to objectify and look back at the narrated I, and to see the plotted middle as shaped by and shaping its margins" (114). Desiderio, then, is the verb that connects the I and the everything--the "I desire" and the "desired one" are re-membered through narrative production. Desiderio is memory re-membered. The "everything" he claims to remember is always already the object of narrative. The "everything," in terms of expanse, is humanly impossible, yet it is representative of the infinite objects of desire. The textual gaps are also a mise en abyme of the mental gaps in memory, narrative slips and memory lapses, lags and time effacements; they provide a spatial metaphor for Carter's textual practice. Her metanarrative, then, belongs amongst a hybrid of forms. The 'I' of Infernal Desire Machines remembers, that is, recalls but also, in the other sense of remember, as in, re-member, the 'I' rebuilds the materials of the past in an approximation of a whole, a whole self that is not retrievable because to "remember everything" is, surely, impossible, even in autobiography. Desiderio also 're-members' himself in his passage between gendered identities. Hence, a word such as 're-memberment' might best indicate my meaning in that it would be partial (again
considering the dual force of the term, partial): the re-memberment puts together the body as only a partial incomplete retelling and in a partial, that is, preferential, subjective sense.

Moreover, re-memberment alerts us to the construction of the body; its destruction or dismemberment, and its refabrication are reminiscent of the re-membering or putting together of a cyborg. Within a few lines of the initial passage cited above, Desiderio repeats, again, his assertion:

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

Desiderio's third repetition of his assertion that he remembers everything does little to convince the reader. In fact, he raises epistemological doubt by his own expression of self-doubt—that is, doubt of the self in the present and doubt of the self he remembers—or re-members, since he puts it together again. Desiderio can only construct himself as representation, as text. Outside the text, of course, he does not exist in our world or his own. His ontological status as fictive character is thematized through his own construction of himself as subject of autobiography. Thus, Carter draws our attention to the serious flaw in memory (in Desiderio). The self we remember is in constant evolution: it is both protean and unstable; it is a fictive construct. The past self is never recoverable in its entirety. Rather, one can only offer versions of the self, versions
undoubtedly altered by the history that has brought one to the point of telling, narrating, the past--"memories of forgotten memories" (16). Moreover, one's position in the discourse of the present moment affects the narration. Whether you are the narrator, the narratee or the narrated of a story, you are influenced by that story among others. For Desiderio, his function as a hero, as a spokesperson for the state, surely influences his version of events. Granted, Desiderio would eschew the title of hero given to him by the state, but the very act of writing his memoirs assures his complicity, at least to some degree, with the official version of history. Had Albertina's father won the war, official history would have been much different and would have made use of a different version of Desiderio. Desiderio's version of his past self--the re-memberment--will always be somewhat influenced by his constitution in the present moment, by the present self. This, of course, relates to the discourse of historiography. A history cannot repeat in toto the past moment; it must forgo this totalizing in favour of a partial recall/reconstruction according to the ideological principles upheld in the moment of the present. Desiderio, much like the Acrobats of Desire, or Humpty-Dumpty, cannot "put [himself] back together again after this dissolution" (120) as anything other than a representation of desire for the past, for total memory, for completion and for closure.

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16It is not impossible that the intertextual echo of the nursery rhyme is intentional. Carter has evinced, in her writing, her work in film, and in her function as editor of two collections of fairy tales, a decided interest in the cultural influence of fable, fantasy and folklore. It is this writer's opinion, also, that she thoroughly enjoys planting these intertextual references as clues to her reader. In Carter's short-story, "Black Venus," for instance, crossword puzzles appear to provide Carter with a powerful metaphor for the sometimes confusing relationship between reader and text--indeed, between reality and its interpretation.
"Desire as narrative thematic, desire as narrative motor, and desire as the very intention of narrative language and the act of telling all seem to stand in close interrelation" (Brooks 54) in *Infernal Desire Machines*. Desire, of course, is another term employed in the title which effectively penetrates the text—the plot-space. The title, in fact, is an evocation of desire—the desire to narrate life as meaning. "Desire is . . . [n]ot only . . . the motor force of plot but . . . the very motive of narrative" writes Brooks (47-8); furthermore, "[o]nce there is text, expression, writing, one becomes subject to the processes of desiring and dying" (53). In *Infernal Desire Machines*, Desiderio functions as a narrative device, that is as a "desiring machine," as Brooks describes it: he is a representation of the dynamics of the narrative text, connecting beginning and end across the middle and making of that middle—what we read through—a field of force . . . . If the motor of narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie *at the end*, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire *for* the end. (Brooks 51-2)

Despite his ostensibly singular desire to see Albertina again, Desiderio writes,"I myself had only the one desire. And that was, for everything to stop" (11). However, for Desiderio, the desire to narrate life as meaning is countered by his experience of memory as he says:

[a]nd, sometimes, when I think of my journey, not only does everything seem to have happened all at once, in some kind of fugue of experience, just as [Albertina's] father would have devised it, but everything in my life seems to have been of equal value, so that the rose which shook off its petals as if shuddering in
ecstasy to hear her voice throws as long a shadow of significance as the extraordinary words she uttered. (13)

The contemporaneous existence of two contradictory, even mutually exclusive experiences of history in narrative can best be explained by the insight that history is a product of our desire. Yet Carter, writes Robinson, systematically disrupts the pleasure of the text by foregrounding the enunciative apparatus behind its inscriptions of desire. If the pleasure of the text is dependent on identification with Desiderio who, after all, has been produced as a "war hero" by History, that pleasure is continuously disrupted by Carter's insistence on what that official History leaves unspoken: the complicities between desire and domination. (116)

In other words, Desiderio could tell his/story differently; in so doing he would inscribe an altogether different ideology of desire.
Chapter 4

The Machine Is Us

As well as the writer of the narrative we read, Desiderio is also the reader of his own past and the many narratives he has encountered. *Infernal Desire Machines* is his ostensible autobiography and it is a collection of different versions of reality. Desiderio is very much a disenchanted Gulliver writing for the state and against the state. Narratives of an "autobiographical cast," argues Brooks, "cannot evade an explicit concern with problems of closure, authority, and narratability" (114). Thus, the opening sentence, "I remember everything" remarks the existence of future and past in the utterance of narrative discourse. "Desire in its plastic and totalizing function, appears to me central to our experience of reading narrative," writes Brooks (37). Are we not then, as readers, "desiring machines," constantly probing the problematics of realism, verisimilitude, the plausibility of the text, just as Desiderio must do in his function as Inspector of Veracity?

In "The Mansion of Midnight," Desiderio is personified as reader--active interpreter--when, as a detective (the model of all interpreters of narrative), he seeks answers to the disappearance of the Mayor through the texts left behind: scraps of documents, the Mayor's home and family. He 'reads' Mary Anne's melancholy and her governess' indifference. As interpreter, he, thus, functions as voyeur. The reader of the Gothic is also constituted as voyeur, though he or she may not be forced to join in the spectacle as is the protagonist (Day 67). However, one thing is perfectly clear for both the readers of this text and for Desiderio as reader of other texts: we are voyeurs and the tyranny of our vision is systematically flaunted, interrogated and put into doubt. For if 'seeing is
believing' in post-Renaissance rationalist 'objective' discourse (Haraway), then 'seeing is disbelieving' in postmodernist discourses. Whereas “[m]odern aesthetics claimed that vision was superior to the other senses because of its detachment from its objects,” (Owens, “Feminists” 70), postmodern works upset “the (modern) belief in vision as a privileged means of access to certainty and truth” (Owens, “Feminists” 70). For Desiderio as reader, nothing he sees is believable: "I myself decided the revenants were objects--perhaps personified ideas--which could think but did not exist. This seemed the only hypothesis which might explain my own case for I acknowledged them--I saw them; they screamed and whickered at me--and yet I did not believe in them" (18). Moreover, "reality ratings" are close approximations of the requirement of verisimilitude and Desiderio's guise as "an Inspector of Veracity" suggests that such a position is just that, a pose (41). The desired and desiring one's function, as investigator of the 'truth', also positions him as secret agent, detective, spy in the Minister's narrative scheme. Yet, "any thing or person seen to diverge significantly from it or his own identity is committing an offence and may be apprehended and tested" (62);¹ the test of a definitive identity, inevitably, ends in one's death. The test for veracity, verisimilitude, reality, realism--in short, the test of narrative--is a test of one's mortality. Significantly, only that which is

¹One might wish to note here the use of both the masculine and indefinite pronouns which only serves to draw attention to the significant absence of the feminine pronoun, as if the female is subsumed in the 'it'--either indistinguishable from 'it', or altogether unidentifiable.
'real' is obliterated in this test; the illusions--the fantasies which the Minister wants to expose--are impervious to reality testing.²

The consummate image of the desire for realism (mimesis) in the text is the Minister of Determination whose desire is to do just that, to determine representation as presence and identity as stable, fixed:

[he called [his philosophy] his theory of 'names and functions']. Each man was secure in possession of a certain name which also ensured a certain position in a society seen as a series of interlinking rings which, although continually in movement, were never subjected to change for there were never any disturbances and no usurpation of names or ranks or roles whatsoever.

(24)

It may be noteworthy that each "man" is secure in his position and his name, while each 'woman' remains unnamed, thus without position. absent. Moreover, this theory of names and functions is the 'mirror walking down the road'³ theory of the mimetic text with its "attendant ideology of liberal humanism" (Lee 27), complete with its assumptions such as the value of biographical criticism, the direct correspondence between art and

²Reality ratings are yet another concept derived from Freud. See, for example, The Interpretation of Dreams, where Freud defines "reality-testing" as "testing things to see whether they are real or not" (720 fn).

³See Stendhal's Scarlet and Black (1830): "a novel is a mirror journeying down the high road. Sometimes it reflects to your view the azure blue of heaven, sometimes the mire in the puddles on the road below. And the man who carries the mirror in his sack will be accused by you of being immoral! His mirror reflects the mire, and you blame the mirror! Blame rather the high road in which the puddle lies, and still more the inspector of roads and highways who lets the water stand there and the puddle form" (365-6). As Alison Lee points out, this passage from Stendhal's text is often considered "an exemplum of Realist thought"(8).
life, and the transparency of language" (Lee 18). The realists believed that they could represent "an unmanipulated, natural chain of events" (Lee 11), "that perception could be pure, and that the facts in a novel should speak for themselves without authorial commentary and its attendant reader manipulation" (Becker 28, qtd. in Lee 9). Albertina indirectly explains the Minister's realist urges: "[h]e decided he could only keep a strict control of his actualities by adjusting their names to agree with them perfectly. So, you understand, that no shadow would fall between the word and the thing described. For the Minister hypothesized my father worked in the shadowy land between the thinkable and the thing thought of, and, if he destroyed this difference, he would destroy my father" (194). This "shadowy land" is something akin to the distance between the signifier and signified which, as Saussure has taught us, is arbitrary. However, as Lee observes, there are "[s]everal now untenable assumptions" in the realist paradigm (12). The first of these is the assumption, shared by the Minister, that objective reality is directly apprehended through visual perception; the second realist tenet, again upheld in the Minister's philosophy, is that narrative representation is a direct transcription of reality (Lee 12). Implicit in the Minister's view is the belief that "language is transparent, that 'reality' creates language and not the reverse" (Lee 12). The Minister

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5These assumptions are "now untenable" initially because of the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure developed in his Course in General Linguistics (1915) and further developed in subsequent theories of textuality. Most significantly, Saussure drew our attention to the arbitrary relationship between the signifier (i.e. the word in written or spoken form) and the signified (i.e. the concept or mental image), as well as the fact that words are distinguished from other words not by their mimetic relationship to the object but by their 'difference' from other words. These insights proved to be extremely influential in the development of structuralist and post-structuralist thought (Lee 20).
believed the criterion of reality was that a thing was determinate and the identity of a thing lay only in the extent to which it resembled itself. He believed that the city—which he took as a microcosm of the universe—contained a finite set of objects and a finite set of their combinations and therefore a list could be made of all possible distinct forms which were logically viable. These could be counted, organized into a conceptual framework and so form a kind of check list for the verification of all phenomena, instantly available by means of an information retrieval system. (23-24)

Realism and its representative in the text, the Minister of Determination, are problematic; both are tools "of ideological control, precisely because [they pretend] to be normal and neutral" (Lee 27). However, Carter's text teaches us that it is eminently possible to have "scarcely an element of realism and yet [be] . . . quite real" (*Infernal Desire Machines* 123).

As for the Doctor—he "is a mad scientist deconstructionist, part Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, part Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor" (Bayley 10). As Haraway reminds us, "[s]cience as heroic quest and as erotic technique applied to the body of nature are utterly conventional figures" (204). The Doctor's war against reality/realism seeks to perpetuate the imaginative possibilities of another textual erotics that counters realism—a textuality of limitless, unconfined imagination. For the Doctor "[r]eality is a purely linguistic construct and, if any mirroring takes place, it is of linguistic structures" (Lee 25). Of course, this is highly problematic since neither Doctor or Minister represents the other's antithesis, nor the ultimate adversary; both are implicated in the discourses they critique.
The fact that the Minister and Hofian share the same drive for power and control and in fact incorporate the same techniques only serves to verify that their determination of Desiderio's function is dependent upon their ideological stance—their vision, complete with its power and limitations, and the complicity of the text. Nor do either of them deny the power of representation; in fact, representation is, for both of them, the supreme power, the very thing they seek to control. This "complex and paradoxical interpenetration" (McHale 144) goes far beyond any identification of character traits that, logically, should pertain to one or the other, for both characters are would-be ministers of determination (MDs) who would 'minister to' and 'doctor' reality. They are each 'authors' of their own versions of reality (discourses) and yet they, too, are authorial representations and, as such, they offer us the opportunity to examine the notion of author/ity—the tyranny of their vision, their authorship. Here, of course, Desiderio is implicated, since he is the ostensible author of the text we read. Moreover, Carter, herself, is implicated as author/authority. Her questioning of authority is an interrogation of her own function in the text and her own ontological status as that authority. Thus, authorship is multiplied in an image of infinite regress in the text; as a result, one is hard put to confer any final authority. The author is dead; long live the author.6 Thus Carter asks us to question why certain "systems of power authorize some representations while

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6See Carter's story, "The Lady of the House of Love"—a story in which, according to Robert R. Wilson, Carter examines patriarchal authority ("Slip Page" 112). In this story, Carter writes: "Nosferatu is dead; long live Nosferatu" with the following parodic intertextual reference: "The king is dead; long live the King." Always authority is passed on in patriarchy and is conferred through the patronymic, which, de Lauretis observes, is one of the functions of the Oedipus: to transfer power through the male line (Alice 115).
suppressing others? Or, even more specifically, how is desire instilled through representation by the management of the pleasure of reading or looking?" (Hutcheon, Politics 143). Although all of these authorities struggle against each other, it is an ideological struggle and a struggle that finally "depends on persistence of vision" (Carter, Infernal Desire Machines 114): belief or disbelief. Of the Minister of Determination Desiderio observes: "[t]he Minister had never in all his life felt the slightest quiver of empirical uncertainty. He was the hardest thing that ever existed and never the flicker of a mirage distorted for so much as a fleeting second the austere and intransigent objectivity of his face even though, as I saw it, his work consisted essentially in setting a limit to thought" (22). For Hoffman, on the other hand, "the real world . . . is formed of malleable clay; its metaphysical structure is just as malleable" (35). Hoffman wants "[a]bsolute authority to establish a regime of total liberation" (38)--an obvious contradiction. Of Desiderio, we know that he is a somewhat unwilling author/authority. He often refuses to represent (his)story because, as he claims, we already know the outcome better than he does. As he insists: "Those are the dreary ends of the plot. Shall I tie them up or shall I leave them unravelled? The history books tie them up far better than I can" (218). Indeed, versed as we are in Oedipal narratives, we can anticipate that this historical, autobiographical, narrative assures that ultimately Desiderio "will have no option but to kill [Albertina]" (204), either literally, or through closure. Carter, herself the final authority one would suppose, absolutely refuses to confer authority on any version of reality--the Doctor's or the Minister's, Desiderio's or even her own. Desiderio, in all these systems, serves as "a narrative device . . . he is a way for the reader to pass
through possible options, as it were experimentally" (Jordan 36), much as Carter's title has served its purpose as a narrative device and as a way to pass through possible interpretations of the text. The final words of the novel are incredibly ambiguous: "Unbidden she comes." "But in the manner of so many fairy tales, the realization of desire comes in sinister forms, destructive of the self," writes Brooks (50). Is this another projection of Desiderio's unconscious (unbidden) desires? Is this Albertina raised from the dead (only to die again with the final punctuation—the ultimate closure)? Is this Carter writing herself, that is her representation and her death as author, into the text? And what of Desiderio's "one desire . . . for everything to stop" (11)? Yes, all narrative must end, but must it end so inconclusively? Oedipal models generally offer us much clearer resolutions, more certain deaths. However, in Infernal Desire Machines there is no such assurance, no certainty. There are possibilities. In Foucauldian fashion, power is multiplied and dispersed throughout this text, leading us finally to question any and all authority.

The questioning of authority is also, in patriarchy, the questioning of the Father. There are many images of the father in Infernal Desire Machines including, most obviously, Hoffman, father of Albertina and patriarch. Moreover, the Minister of Determination is a surrogate father for Desiderio, certainly. However, with the

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7 Since the narrative closure ensures Desiderio's 'death' (he will no longer be in representation), his earlier statement —"I had only one desire and that was to see Albertina again before I die"—either reflects a lapse in memory, an unconscious fear, or else the "she" in question is problematic indeed.

8 We might want to take note of the fact that, biologically, the father's sperm determines sex; in some sense, then, father and 'minister of determination' are synonymous.
destruction of the castle of the 'Father', of the phallus, Desiderio destroys his own phallic self; he is left impoverished, shorn, castrated--in Freudian parlance, he is feminized.

Death of the Father would deprive literature of many of its pleasures. If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories? Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus? Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origin, speaking one's conflicts with the Law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred? . . . As fiction, Oedipus was at least good for something: to make good novels, to tell good stories. (Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text* 47)

Contrary to what Barthes says here, death of the father does not put an end to narrative, it simply de-sires narrative, which may mean we will have to adjust our notion of what it is, exactly, that constitutes a 'good story', just as we are compelled to question gendered identity. Desiderio, however, concludes: "[m]y desire can never be objectified and who should know better than I?"(14); for his desire, to see Albertina again before he dies, is thwarted by the fact that he has (his narrative has) killed her. And this particular desire acknowledges the approaching death of the subject and the revivication of the object of narrative, especially when considered with his other attested desire "for everything to stop." We will wonder if these two desires are in conflict because they are contradictory, or if, as I suspect, they are tautological--that is, they amount to the same thing. For putting Albertina into narrative representation is assuring her objectification and, therefore, her death in narrative terms. Moreover, narrative must end--everything must stop. Desiderio's desires, then, to see Albertina and for everything to stop, are not contradictory; they are dual statements of but one desire, the desire for closure, which
Brooks maintains is always present from the initial provocation to narrate. However, there is no disputing that this is a story told differently. as the Father's authority is confirmed at the same time as it is simultaneously undermined by his death. In this alternative de-sired reality, one's desire can culminate in something other than death—in the recovery of the 'other' whose death has been inscribed in narrative. But if this is the case, it is not Desiderio, the disaffected Oedipus whose recovered sight marks his final transcendence, but the seemingly impossible—indeed unbelievable—return and revivication of the object of his desire, Albertina. She who recovers and returns constitutes a repetition, which though "unbidden" by the subject, Desiderio, nevertheless still "comes" back. Of course, there are alternate readings to the ending—to closure—in this text, as we have already seen. Alternatives which establish that de-sired, de-authored, de-authorized narrative may be possible, even if we must live with the memory of the (dead) Father. We may actively choose to disbelieve in (t)his authority.

Similarly, for the reader of Desiderio, nothing we read is believable in the strictest sense of that term, except perhaps the reality of the letters on the page. Everything represented is fictive and even fantastical; everything represented is, ultimately, a production of our own desires rather than a representation of reality. Everything depends on "persistence of vision" (107, 109, 205). Hence, we are left with "seeing as disbelief." We are forever outside the text; no matter how diligently we attempt to penetrate its ultimate meaning, this meaning will elude us. Any meaning we produce will always be a production of our position vis-à-vis the historical moment and our representation in gender, culture, ethnicity. As readers, like Desiderio, we are constructed by narrative and
confined by that construction. We are locked into a position of voyeurism. We are unable to act because of our passive stance and we are tyrannized by that "persistence of vision," for which, Carter maintains, we are ultimately responsible through our consent and our complicity. One's 'truth', then, resides only in perspective, as Desiderio observes when he articulates that the beliefs one upholds at a certain point in one's life may not pertain at another time:

[when I was young, I very much admired the Ancient Egyptians, because they searched for, arrived at and perfected an aesthetically entirely satisfactory pose. When every single one of them had perfected the stance which had been universally approved, profiles one way, torsos another, feet marching away from the observer, navel squarely staring him in the eye, they stayed in it for two thousand years. (12)

Egyptian perspective is something we readily dismiss today in favour of a different aesthetic of perspective. In literature, for instance, allegory has given way to realism. The point here, of course, is that our versions of perspective, of reality, are just that, versions, not 'truths'. And these versions tyrannize and control our perceptions. Of course, 2000 years is approximately the duration of one very pervasive version of reality--the hegemonic salvationist narrative of history as it has predominated in the West--since the establishment of year one, A.D., since the approximate beginning of Christian patriarchal history. Moreover, Desiderio claims immunity to the Hoffman effect: "And I, why was I immune? Because, out of my discontent, I made my own definitions and these definitions happened to correspond to those that happened to be true" (13). As far as he
is concerned, his version of events corresponds directly to the truth. He will discover, however, in "nebulous time," that reality only matches his conscious and unconscious expectations. Yet he will be immersed in other cultures that hold to different truths and that thereby question the ontological status of his own version of reality. We, of course, always believe our own versions are closer to reality--a fact which goes a long way to accounting for the attitudes of prejudice and superiority apparent in racism, misogyny, ethnocentrism, although this oversimplifies the problem. However, despite this oversimplification and our resistance to living with insecurity, with non-universalizing, non-totalizing mini-narratives, there may be unexamined possibilities available to us within the paradigm of postmodern disbelief in master narratives.

Amongst the River People, Desiderio will discover that perspective is an effect of language as well as visual representation: for them, "the problem of the particular versus the universal did not exist and the word 'man' stood for 'all man'. This had a profound effect on their societization" (71). Carter, I think, is, once again, writing tongue-in-cheek, for in common parlance "Man" has historically been claimed to represent both man and woman--an androcentric attitude inscribed in the (English) language and long problematized by feminisms which have "successfully urged postmodernism to reconsider--in terms of gender--its challenges to that humanist universal called 'Man'" (Hutcheon, Politics 167). Further, the River People had no precise equivalent for the word 'to be', so the kernel was struck straight out of the Cartesian nut and one was left only with the naked, unarguable fact of existence, for a state of being was indicated by a verbal tag which could roughly be
translated as 'one finds oneself in the situation or performance of such and such a thing or action'. (71)

Thus, Carter undermines the Cartesian cogito and questions liberal-humanist discourses based on the rationality and infinite perfectibility of 'Man'. Robert Clark comments that, in the fictional world inhabited by Carter's protagonist, "the new philosophical premise is not cogito ergo sum but desiderio ergo sum" (155). Carter's text makes it abundantly clear that our beliefs are more a function of the discourses in which we find ourselves and our desires, than products of any ultimate truth. In short, our 'truths' are discursive, limited, partial and contingent; accepting this is accepting disbelief in master-narratives in favour of micro-narratives--Lyotard's many small narratives. Further, Desiderio discovers that the River People's own (and different) psychology makes literacy difficult for them to attain. Their personal mythology, which has of course informed their ideology and practice, recommends that they consume him, literally, in order to obtain his gift of reading and writing. He will be murdered by his child-bride and consumed as the main course at the wedding feast. The death of their 'other' is just as firmly entrenched in the River People's mythical/psychological/cultural ideology as it is in the Western Oedipal trajectory, and death by cannibalism--so abhorrent, so taboo in our culture--differs only in kind, not in effect, from the death inscribed in Oedipal narratives as narrative consumption. Thus, through a parody of the Oedipal textual mechanics, Carter continues to interrogate that paradigm.

Similarly, amongst the centaurs, Desiderio discovers an utterly different system of belief that confers identity and establishes yet another version of 'reality'. The Centaurs
also venerate literacy: the "Scrivener"/writer and the "Cantor"/reader/interpreter of the holy texts hold, in this hierarchical culture, the most highly respected positions. They, along with the Smith and the "Tattoo-master," are the "cardinals" of their community (175)—that is, they represent the "cardinal" truths of their culture. Their language, too, constitutes and delimits what for them is deemed 'reality' and 'truth'. We read that

[t]hey had no vocabulary to express doubts. Nor were they able to express the notion 'death'. When the time came to identify this condition, they used for it the sounds that signified also 'birth' for death was their greatest mercy. In giving them death, the Sacred Stallion gave them an ultimate reconciliation with Him: they were reborn in the wild horses. (175)

Ironically, this religion evidences striking parallels with patriarchal Christianity: notably, in the belief that the life to come holds the reward of salvation from the suffering in the here and now, an ideological premise that limits and prescribes one's intervention in the present and insures a self-sacrifice (a sacrifice of self) in this life—martyrdom for the sake of eternity. "We have all been colonized by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfilment in apocalypse," writes Haraway (175). Thus, paradoxically, it is 'belief' in the salvationist (Oedipal) master-narrative that is exposed as a limitation, rather than disbelief. In this society, the body is inscribed with the mythology of the culture; the centaurs' bodies are tattooed with scenes from their spiritual mythology, in an effort to transcend what they are and to become more god-like—-that is, more Stallion-like. Carter, thus, allegorizes the writing of the body in discourse: centaurs write their subjugation to the dominant ideology all over their bodies. They are indelibly inscribed—-tattooed:
[t]hese tattoos were designed as a whole and covered the back and both arms down as far as the forearms; and the middle of the chest, the upper abdomen and the throat and face were all left bare on the males though the womenfolk were tattooed all over, even their faces, in order to cause them more suffering, for they believed women were born only to suffer. (172)

It is surely significant that the females are much more densely (dis)figured in this extremely patriarchal culture and, subsequently, subjected to greater pain, literally and figuratively. Carter, thus, points to and parodies the construction of both men and women in mythological (religious) narratives and marks the parallels between the Centaurion mythology--which seems absurd in its self-loathing, sado-masochism and reverence for horse-dung--and Western Christian salvationist belief, which has traditionally inscribed human nature as inevitably flawed and the female as inferior, more susceptible to temptation and, therefore, necessarily in need of male domination. Only through suffering and through slavish adherence to these grand-narratives (Christ-worship/Stallion-worship) does redemption occur, and this is always a function of faith--of belief.

Originally, for Desiderio and for the reader of Carter's text, the unreasonable devotion to the stallion seems absurd. However, through this allegory, Carter points to the absurdity of the master-narratives which perpetuate patriarchy in Western culture--whether these be the discourses of Christianity or those of Freudian psychology. This Swiftian satire incorporates the metaphor of self-mutilation, simultaneously sadistic and masochistic, as a trope for the penetration of our culture by patriarchal narratives and our equally absurd passivity in the face of such a sado-masochistic tradition. Thus, Carter satirizes our
submission to binary systems of thought in which one half of the opposition achieves ascendency at the expense of the 'other'. Significantly, when the centaurs stumble across the humans, they must partially rewrite their mythology to incorporate these aberrations; as their reality alters, so do their 'divine' texts. much as historical change has produced alterations in biblical hermeneutics. The irony, of course, is that both the Centaurion bible and Christian Bible are considered to be divinely inspired; yet, as we have observed, the centaurs rewrite their holy texts in order to incorporate their experience of reality.

The 'commandments', ten or otherwise, are not and never have been 'inscribed in stone'. despite the Old Testament metaphor; and, if we can rewrite texts to maintain the status quo, the possibility arises that we might also rewrite texts to alter the status quo.

The biblical intertext is unmistakable in Infernal Desire Machines, as is the Swiftian one. Desiderio is, from the very outset, a disenchanted Gulliver, but Carter makes certain that we remark the Swiftian intertext by. ironically. disavowing it: the Centaurs "were not Houyhnhnms" (187). In fact, the centaurs are both horse and man and "because they were men, they had many words to describe conditions of deceit" (187), as do we. and one of those words is fiction which Leslie Stephen argued "is really a kind of lying" (vol 4: 73, qtd. in Lee 11). Significantly, within the Centaurion and River People's societies the ability to read texts (interpret reality) and to inscribe texts (construct reality) raises epistemological and ontological questions. What is the war against reality but the war between different versions of reading, different schools of interpretation, different readings of the text: one which claims that representation reflects truth and another that denies the mimetic relationship between representation and reality? The metaphors of
war employed in Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines* undermine the naturalization of these boundaries between fact and fiction: "I could not abnegate my reality and lose myself for ever as others did, blasted to non-being by the ferocious artillery of unreason" (11-12). writes Desiderio. For the text, the world, reality, exist without question, though our access to these is finally and always mediated by belief, or disbelief—by ideology, ways of seeing, by language in all its forms and manifestations.

Having only just concluded my discussion of the 'original' envoy—the title of Carter's text—I have been led into a labyrinth of multiple investigations and significations. Carter's text begins outside the text, in the margins/on the cover/ beyond the boundaries. yet, the title permeates the text proper. The title, itself, demonstrates that meaning is constructed both inside and outside any single discourse; boundaries of discourse, even of novels, are not vehicles of containment, but are interpenetrable or, to use another metaphor, even “immunodeficient.” Donna Haraway's thesis in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* assists our understanding of what immune system might mean as metaphor:

the immune system is an elaborate icon for principal systems of symbolic and material 'difference' in late capitalism. Pre-eminently a twentieth century object, the immune system is a map drawn to guide recognition and misrecognition of self and other in the dialectics of biopolitics. That is, the immune system is a plan for meaningful action to construct and maintain the boundaries for what may count as self and other in the crucial realms of the normal and the pathological. (204)
Carter, by questioning the naturalization of boundaries of the body, text, self and other, manages thus to question the autonomy of any single universalizing body/discourse and to suggest, rather, that boundaries between various sites of meaning—between title and narrative—are in fact permeable; no beginning originates outside of discourse. The origin of discourse is always another discourse; one heralds the other. "The constructions of an organism's boundaries, the job of the discourse of immunology, are particularly potent mediators of the experience of sickness and death for industrial and post-industrial people" (Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 208). In Carter's text, the questioning of these boundaries through their interpenetration, problematizes dis-ease and death as it is inscribed in narrative. Character names, titular namings, the arbitrary namings of the slide-samples—all namings in Carter's text are repetitions, intertexts within and outside of her work and they are yet another means of 'breaking down' the boundaries that contain text. Hers is a text that represents the breakdown of containment and barriers as permeable, the body as contaminated, not immune. Hers is a dis-eased text wherein external factors penetrate and permeate altering the make-up of the text. The immune system has failed. Language itself, naming, is not sufficient to contain meaning; even the boundaries (imaginary) of language are questioned. There is no protection against the interpenetration of discourses, against the onslaught of exteriority: disease. Moreover, there is rejection as well as recuperation. "Immune system discourse," writes Haraway, "is about constraint and possibility for engaging in a world of full 'difference', replete with non-self" (214).
Chapter 5

Epidemic Desire and Re-cover(ing)

Language, in Carter's text, proliferates in such a way as to represent representations to epidemic proportions and this 'epidemic' inevitably becomes the focus of investigation. I think that what we have here, in the multiplication of representatives, representations, authors and authorities, is what Paula Treichler calls an "epidemic of signification," by which she designates the constantly contested and proliferating meanings of AIDS in our culture, but which Donna Haraway suggests might well apply widely to the entire "social text of sickness" (Simians, Cyborgs and Women 203). I think that there is a relevant relationship between this biopolitical-scientific discourse, with its proliferation of contested meanings, and the comparable over-determination of meanings in Carter's texts. If, as Haraway claims, the immune system is the prevalent metaphor for biopolitical considerations of the boundaries of the body and if "[s]cience as heroic quest and as erotic-technique applied to the body of nature are utterly conventional figures" (205), then Carter's interrogation of narrative's heroic quest and the boundaries of body (gender), author and authority is a similar contestation of boundaries, performed in aesthetic-cultural terms, rather than bio-political. Thus, this "social text" is relevant to both discursive formations.

I am led to deem Carter's text an epidemic of signification in terms of the inscription of different genres as well. Infernal Desire Machines provides us with a meditation on the ancient topos of life as a voyage: Ulysses, Gulliver's Travels, Robinson Crusoe, Tom Jones are all, like Carter's novel, episodic narratives which exemplify this metaphor and
serve as intertexts in the fiction. *Infernal Desire Machines* also, however, partakes of the more recent model of secret-agent thriller: Desiderio as agent of one regime is thus destined to fall into the embrace of the agent of the enemy. Good guy/bad guy narratives are heavily encoded: we read them with ease in Western societies, which are permeated with such narrative explanations for the victory of good over evil. Television and film, as well as popular novel forms, propagate this narrative and the expectations it creates of a simplistic binarism. Another obvious topos in *Infernal Desire Machines* is that of science fiction: "[t]he topos of fantastic invasion and rationalistic resistance" (McHale 78). In short, Carter elaborates the ontological confrontation between this world and the "world next door" into a literal agonistic struggle, analogous to the science-fiction topos of the 'war of the worlds'" (McHale 79). Thus, various fantasy lives are explored in *Infernal Desire Machines*. It amounts, in fact, to a study in genres. Carter may claim that "genre-wise there is a bit of everything" in *Infernal Desire Machines* (Sage 22), but this mix is more deliberate and canny than her remark suggests. The highly symbolic world of the gothic fable is explored in "The Mansion of Midnight"; the life on the margins, on the river, the life on the road as a picaro, the carnival. life outside of time—all culminate finally at the Oedipal arrival at the phallic Castle. the home of the father, hypostatized.

No matter what the 'generic' intertext—and they are prodigious—in each episode, we see life constructed as plot. Our readings of plots are so ingrained as to be insidious. We tend to apply narrative logic, Oedipal logic, to reality—a logic learned from the stories we learn and re-tell, but not inherent in, or natural to either these narratives or to reality. The stories we tell fit a paradigm of learned, received traditions, or plots. The novel's peep-
show provides yet another *mise en abîme* for the containment of these plots. These, mostly pornographic, representations are arbitrarily identified by verbal tags--texts which accompany each visual representation. However, the peep-show proprietor is blind; he cannot read the verbal narrative he ascribes to the visual representations--the relationship between signified and signifier is absolutely arbitrary. The seemingly consistent, insistent and inherent logic of representation is exposed as arbitrary and upheld only by consensus--a con of our senses--as if seeing is believing. Barbara Herrnstein Smith writes that "the traditional discourse of value . . . reflects an arbitrary arresting, segmentation, and hypostasization of the continuous process of our interactions with our environments or what could also be described as the continuous interplay among multiply configurable systems [sic]" (31). It is the tyranny of visual perception--the persistence of vision--which comes under interrogation here. A particular and persistent vision (version) of reality is upheld by traditions, practice and consensus at the expense of all other possible alternatives. This tyranny of vision is put to the test during what Carter calls nebulous time,"the time of actualized desire." when everything the actants see is put into ontological doubt--just as everything we 'see' in the fiction, *Infernal Desire Machines*, falls under the categorical suspension of belief.

Teresa de Lauretis concludes her provocative and thorough delineation of the Oedipal trajectory in cultural narratives with the following statement: "I am not advocating the replacement or the appropriation or, even less, the emasculation of Oedipus" (*Alice* 157), as these would result in a simple reversal of a binary hierarchy. Rather, she argues that, through "remakes" and "rereadings," we may accomplish "an interruption of the triple
track by which narrative, meaning, and pleasure are constructed from his [Oedipus'] point of view (Alice 157, emphasis added). Carter's text provides us with just such a remake.

When presented with the fulfilment of his desire, the longed for and indefinitely postponed consummation with Albertina, Desiderio wavers: consummation with Albertina carries a heavy price--death. And, as we have seen, the death inscribed by narrative is the price we have had to pay for our orgiastic Oedipal stories. Albertina is exchanged for the possibility of becoming the subject of his own narrative. "If narrative is governed by an Oedipal logic, it is because it is situated within the system of exchange instituted by the incest prohibition, where woman functions as both a sign (representation) and a value (object) for that exchange" (de Lauretis, Alice 140). But irony of ironies--the fulfilment of Desiderio's life as narrative and Oedipal trajectory leaves him finally with a sense of disappointment: the text lets him down. Desiderio, with hindsight, remarks: "[a]ll I know is, I could not transcend myself sufficiently to inherit the universe . . . . [W]hen I close my eyes I see her still" (197). Thus we observe the failure of the Oedipus to permeate beyond a single strand--a unitary, solitary, infinitely repeatable paradigm that leaves man, sans woman; irrevocably 'she' remains only and always the object of his (unconsummated and infinitely repeated) desire. While the 'original envoy'--the title of the work--penetrates the plot-space and culminates, finally, in the representation of the lovers as the ultimate repetition and return to the "infernal desire machines" of the title, Desiderio will end his days, his narrative, in absolute frustration, denied the Oedipal closure he was led to expect. As he acknowledges: "[t]here was once a young man named Desiderio who set out upon a
journey and very soon lost himself completely. When he thought he had reached his destination, it turned out to be only the beginning of another journey infinitely more hazardous than the first" (166). No wonder he is disaffected: no wonder he disbelieves. He had expected an heroic Oedipal journey. "I wanted a heroic struggle," he claims, and to the reader he laments: "[i]f you feel a certain sense of anti-climax, how do you think I felt?" (218). His own narrative "coffin[s] young Desiderio" (221), while Carter's narrative manages to petrify in representation the narrating Desiderio--"an old hero, a crumbling statue in an abandoned square" (221). Albertina's and Desiderio's deaths are prefigured by narrative itself and, hence, as Desiderio puts it, "absolutely predictable" (221).

However, and of course, there may be another way to view the text. To consummate, in the Oedipal paradigm, as Brooks has made clear, is to bring death, and the text will end, but "[i]t is the role of fictional plots to impose an end which yet suggests a return, a new beginning: a rereading" (109). "Unbidden she comes"; but of course, she/it is not unbidden. Rather, according to Brooks, closure was hailed from the very inception of narrative in that the desire to narrate is always, inevitably, "desire for the end" (108). However, it just may be, yes,

[i]t may finally be . . . that repetition speaks in the text of a return which ultimately subverts the very notion of beginning and end, suggesting that the idea of beginning presupposes the end, that the end is a time before the beginning, and hence that the interminable never can be finally bound in a plot. Any final
authority claimed by narrative plots, whether for origin or end, is illusory.

(Brooks 109)

Carter views the self in continual 'recovery' from plot, from the narratives of sadism—the Oedipal versions which inscribe us. She attempts, to use de Lauretis' terms, "to construct the terms of reference of another measure of desire and the conditions of visibility for a different social subject" (*Alice* 155). These recoveries do not offer the transcendence of the modernist rebirth; there are the scars ("left by her castration" [Carter, *Sadiean Woman* 23]). Instead, these recoveries offer a provisionality that enables life at the cost of continual vigilance and questioning of received ontologies and epistemologies. For every reclamation brings with it its own ideological assumptions: each discursive nexus is similarly riddled with the dis-ease of representations and to some degree, as Derrida has shown, we cannot do without them (Derrida, "Sending"), but the plenitude of them, and the limitations of each, should teach us a healthy skepticism, and interrogative attitude. Whom and what can we believe? Construction of boundaries occurs through consensus, not because of natural barriers, as Haraway's discussion of biopolitics points out.

All of this comes down to one consistent in-*sight*: representation is ultimately fallible and the tyranny of vision—that is, "the persistence of [some] vision[s]" (205) at the expense of others—has resulted in a version of reality with which many cannot identify; nor can they support it. One is faced with the prospect of systematic disbelief in representation, not at the expense of reality, but in favour of a continuous and persistent interrogation of representations, a questioning which may present alternatives of which
we have not, heretofore, thought. We can remain victims to and of representation--to "the privileging of the self through the pathologizing of the Other" (Smith 38), or we can choose a skepticism based on contingency. This disbelief is a disease, a breaking down of boundaries, a permeation of immune systems, which provokes a lapse in security. because it allows only for a provisional existence. However, one can contest received and negativized notions of pathology or breakdown:

[breakdowns play a central role in human understanding. A breakdown is not a negative situation to be avoided, but a situation of non-obviousness, in which some aspect of the network of tools that we are engaged in using is brought forth to visibility . . . . A breakdown reveals the nexus of relations necessary for us to accomplish our task . . . . This creates a clear objective for design--to anticipate the forms of breakdowns and provide a space of possibilities for action when they occur. (qtd. in Haraway 214)

Thus, it may be that we have to live with dis-ease--without consolations, without assurances, and with disbelief. But has not our existence always been provisional--a question of faith? This contingency is all we ever really had, but it does offer some easement from the tyranny of the progressive, post-Enlightenment paradigm of transcendence, patriarchy and racial exclusion: "location is about vulnerability; location

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resists the politics of closure, finality . . . feminist objectivity resists 'simplification in the last instance'" (Winograd, qtd. in Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 196).

In conclusion, I would like to turn to two very different potential readings of "desire machines" just touched on earlier. The first is proffered by Deleuze and Guattari and offers schizophrenia as a model for coping with the Oedipus. The second text is that very powerful evocation of the cyborg text as it is described in the work of Donna Haraway. Significantly, both texts explore alternatives to Oedipal poetics and, therefore, can be seen to merge with Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines*, which is, itself, "an exploratory fiction, a sort of allegory of options, which evokes recognitions of past, present and future possibilities" (Jordan 37). In the epigraph to *Infernal Desire Machines*, Carter, citing Alfred Jarry's *Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll Pataphysician*, directs us to contemplate and "[i]mage the perplexity of a man outside time and space, who has lost his watch. his measuring rod and his tuning fork"—in short, who has lost his Oedipal model.

Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* helps us understand the connection among "desire machines," the social text of disease discussed above, and the inevitable necessity of living with disbelief. Originally published in 1972 as *L'Anti-Oedipe*, this volume commences with a chapter entitled, significantly for my purposes, "The Desiring-
Machines." This chapter, according to Foucault's introduction to the text, "seeks to
discover the 'deterritorialized' flows of desire, the flows that have not been reduced to the
Oedipal codes and the neuroticized territorialities. the desiring-machines that escape such
codes as lines of escape leading elsewhere" (xvii). For Deleuze and Guattari, "desiring
machines" are actually repressed by the Oedipus (3). This alternate view of desire has
much in common with Carter's reading of Sade in which she argues that repression,
through the mythologized versions of masculinity and femininity inscribed in the
Oedipus, is by far a greater enemy to human freedom that the Marquis' more direct
articulation of desire, despite its perversity. For Carter, Sade's representation of the
violence in gendered sexual and social relations is a far less insidious problematic than
the more sadistic and covert misogyny inherent in Oedipal dynamics. For Deleuze and
Guattari, the question is not that of knowing if women are castrated; rather the question is
whether or not
the unconscious "believes it." since all the ambiguity lies there. What does belief
applied to the unconscious signify? What is an unconscious that no longer does
anything but "believe," rather than produce? What are the operations, the artifices
that inject the unconscious with "beliefs" that are not even irrational, but on the
contrary only too reasonable and consistent with the established order? (61)

And they continue thus:

[w]e are not saying that Oedipus and castration do not amount to anything. We
are oedipalized, we are castrated; psychoanalysis didn't invent these operations, to
which it merely lends the new resources and method of its genius. But is this
sufficient to silence the outcry of desiring-production: We are all schizos! We are all perverts! We are all libidos that are too viscous and too fluid... And above all, what brings about our sickness? Schizophrenia itself, as a process? Or is it brought about by the frantic neuroticization to which we have been delivered, and for which psychoanalysis has invented new means--Oedipus and castration? (67-68)

Carter does not shrink from representing our perversions, our libidos, our illness--schizophrenia (a [re-]collection of selves).3 She confronts these head-on, so to speak, because it is in their permitted and traditional silencing that we have been able to disregard the "duplicity of that [Oedipal] scenario and the specific contradiction of the female subject in it" (de Lauretis, Alice 157), in favour of a unifying, totalizing version of the universal human subject. Confront it head on, like the Marquis de Sade; make it plain. Schizophrenia, which in Deleuze and Guattari is conflated with multiple personality disorder, is our illness and perhaps, as they see it, our cure. We must live with ironic and suspicious regard for the possible contradictions in the human (no longer singular) self. Because the "'working through of desire'... will not be accomplished by

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3Jean Baudrillard proffers this pertinent if polemical definition of schizophrenia: "too great a proximity of everything, the unclean promiscuity of everything that touches, invests and penetrates without resistance.... The schizo is... open to everything is spite of himself, living in the greatest confusion.... What characterizes him is less the loss of the real... the pathos of distance and radical separation, as is commonly said: but very much to the contrary, the absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things, the feeling of no defense, no retreat. It is the end of interiority and intimacy, the overexposure and transparence of the world which traverses him without obstacle. He can no longer produce the limits of his own being, can no longer play or stage himself, can no longer produce himself as mirror. He is now only a pure screen a switching center for all the networks of influence" ("Ecstasy of Communication" 132-3). Schizophrenia, then, as Baudrillard hyperbolically describes it, is most certainly an expression of the breakdown of boundaries between self and other.
another normative narrative wrapped around a thematics of liberation" (de Lauretis, *Alice* 156). No, the "real task," as de Lauretis sees it,
is to enact the contradiction of female desire, and of women as social subjects, in the terms of narrative; to perform its figures of movement and closure, image and gaze, with the constant awareness that spectators are historically engendered in social practices in the real world. (*Alice* 156)
The enactment of this contradiction is, it seems to me, central to Carter's text. Desiderio is not, finally, confined in the perpetual embrace of Albertina, first prefigured in the sample, PERPETUAL MOTION--a fact which asks us to question if he is, finally, confined by the embrace of narrative.

While Carter's text might be designated schizophrenic, in so far as schizophrenia is defined in *Anti-Oedipus*, it might also be seen, in its attention to the relations between human and "machines," in Donna Haraway's terms, as a cyborg allegory:

[t]he cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of Western science and politics--the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other--the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. (150)

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*It should be clear by now that by the term "machine" I intend both the technological artefact as well as the narrative one.*
Carter, herself, represents such a border war between the Minister's "reality" and Hoffman's "imagination." As Haraway states, "[t]he stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination" (150), or what I would call memory, re-memberment and imagination in Carter's text—a text which is, like the cyborg myth, an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction. It is also an effort to contribute to socialist-feminist culture and theory in a postmodernist, nonnaturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end. The cyborg incarnation is outside salvation history. Nor does it mark time on an Oedipal calendar, attempting to heal the terrible cleavages of gender in oral symbiotic utopia or post-Oedipal apocalypse. (150)

Carter's fiction, then, is in narrative terms certainly a cyborg text. She represents the lovers as cyborgs—a technological and human commingling—but, and more significantly, it is the text itself, *Infernal Desire Machines*, which is the cyborg: a production of human imagination and rationalist technology which looks at itself, in a reflexive manner, as just such a production. The representation of the interpenetration of technology ("[w]riting . . . was and is the most momentous of all technological inventions," says Walter Ong [85]) and flesh—title and text—is a cyborg representation. This cyborg, then, delineates the construction of subjectivity and identity produced within and through the narratives of sadism, but Carter also makes clear our complicity with these narratives. Carter's strategy
remains one of installing the Oedipus over and over, repetition to the point of absurdity, the point of parody, that ironizes the entire Oedipal strategy, even as it installs it, and, thereby, opens the way for thinking 'other'-wise, for re-membering differently. Carter's irony, in Haraway's terms, "is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humor and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method" (Haraway 149). Irony is the end, but not the end, in Carter. With the proliferation of 'sites' of discursive positioning available to character and reader alike in Carter's text, the possibility of multiple, partial and contingent identities is raised and proffered as yet another site from which to construct different narrative possibilities and hence, other identities. As Haraway says, "[t]he cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code" (163). Carter begins to encode this self, in her cyborg representations of Desiderio, as I have demonstrated. Desiderio is that self who "is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly" (Haraway 193). Need I remind you that, at the beginning of his narration, Desiderio observes: "I am an old man and no longer the 'I' of my own story" (14). Finally, like the cyborg, Carter appears to be "resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity" (Haraway 151); moreover, again, like the cyborg, her work is "oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" (151).
I have focused my discussion on Carter's title—specifically the significations of the title—and yet the title has provided access to an ever-expanding, labyrinthine, (re)collection of possible sites of investigation. I have, in effect, attempted to enact Carter's technique of allowing the 'representative' envoy (the title in this instance) to overlap and interpenetrate other boundaries, other discourses. I have engaged, as Carter does, in extensive and serious play with the polysemy of language; intertexts. in my discourse, are citations and embedded in citations are other citations. I have also attempted to avoid a totalizing narrative, but I, too, am implicated in the inscription of the Oedipus "with a vengeance." In my own text, I also seek to approach an "epidemic of signification," an explosion of possible (and even contradictory) readings. not only because to engage fully one must fully engage the method under examination, but because to do otherwise, that is, to determine a fixed, stable, and ultimate meaning, would be to install a master-narrative, a totality that requires, in its completeness, in its closure, that we believe. Rather, I want to open up the possibilities of and for disbelief which are evoked by the postmodern interrogation of the grand récit in favour of multiple narrative possibilities which must, therefore, allow for contemporaneous contradictions. Nonetheless, my own text, has, in effect, re-covered Carter's text—that is, renamed it with my own desire for significance and meaning. And, in closure, my text inevitably re-enacts the Oedipal journey toward illumination and fulfilment. I can no longer defer climax. My narrative must end. I am, thus, thwarted in my own desire to devise a

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1Much as Freud is 'embedded' in de Lauretis' text, in Brooks' text, and, ultimately, in Carter's.
strategy to "cheat the inevitability of closure, to chase away the demons, to keep them away for good" (Carter, Expletives 3); or, as Carter says elsewhere, to find some way to perform the "death-defying double somersault of love" (Infernal Desire Machines 214) in order to defy the closure--the death--that was insured from the very initiatory desire to narrate, from the very commencement of my text on its title page. Carter's death-defying strategy 'doubles' the Oedipus, simultaneously and paradoxically conferring closure and deferring it. Her strategy, it appears to me, partakes of supplementarity and parody through repetition with a vengeance. Her text offers the reader a sustained examination of the potential possibilities available through re-membering differently the multiple 'machinations' of desire. The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman interrogates "Oedipal desire and how desire infects interpretation" (Cummings 6. emphasis added), and, thus, affirms that the Oedipal trajectory is indeed alive, although it begs us to question if it is entirely well.
PART TWO

Confidence in Disbelief: Re-membering Narrative

The difference between mad people and sane people . . . is that sane people have
variety when they talk-story. Mad people have only one story that they talk over and
over.

--Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior.*

Chapter Six

Comic Contagion: The Ludic Game

In *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman,* we see Angela Carter
perpetuating disbelief in the master narratives of Western culture, particularly the Oedipal
paradigm, through a strategy of repetition and re-memberment that undermines this very
paradigm by means of parody, allegory and semantic play. One could easily make the
same argument for *Nights at the Circus.*¹ *Nights,* published in 1984, is the penultimate
novel written by Carter. Before her death in 1992, she published only one more novel,*
*Wise Children.* In *Nights at the Circus,* Carter further exploits our incredulity through
her use of the techniques of magic realism, once again, to undermine the Oedipal

¹Further reference to *Nights at the Circus* will employ the simple abbreviation *Nights.* Once
again, I cannot ignore the implications of any such seemingly arbitrary choice. Why *Nights* and not
*Circus*? In my reading of the narrative strategies employed in Carter's novel, I will foreground the
Scheherazadean quality of *Nights,* thereby linking the novel with an even more famous collection of
'nights,' *The Thousand and One Nights,* to be exact.
narrative, but also, in Jerry Aline Fleiger's terms, to construct "something" (5) other.

through a kind of comic contagion we might well call down-right hysterical.²

In Fleiger's terms,

the postmodern is not so much a question of a historical period as it is of an
attitude, implying a radical perspective on reading and writing, an openness to what
French theorists call désir. and the comic recognition that when all is said and
done, systematized and accounted for, "something" is still taking its course, going
its own merry way. (5)

In other words, "something" remains unaccounted for, "something" remains, in Derrida's
terms as deferral and trace, in Freud's as excess, in Carter's as doubling. In the next two
chapters, I will argue that Carter, through a process of doubling, produces a comic text
that begs us to question the apparent coherence of realism, the assumption of the
transparency of language, and the traditional representation of woman. "[T]here is
something peculiarly comic about the bizarre symptoms surrounding and inhabiting the
contemporary text" (Fleiger 3). Ultimately, what Fleiger recognizes as permeating the
postmodern is an "ineffable something" that "lends a plural and playful quality" (5) to
postmodern texts, "something" that contributes a "permeability to suggestion or double
meaning" (5), which demonstrates a "tendency to duplicity" (6) and "traces of
overdetermination" (6). "[I]n the postmodern literary and theoretical text . . . we may
encounter a particularly persistent exploration/exploitation of desire at work (or at play)"

²The term "hysterical," in the sense I am using it, requires considerable theorizing and
explanation. For the moment I am drawing on the implications of comic hilarity, while I point forward to
subsequent chapters.
Fleiger further explores the relationship between the "postmodern concept of text (as effect of desire) and the psychoanalytic concept of the comic (as symptom)" (7), and proceeds to describe this relationship as one of "postmodern contagion" (7). Once again, metaphors of disease surface around any delineation of the postmodern. Thus, along with many postmodern theorists such as Lyotard, Bataille and Derrida, Carter seems to be engaged in the postmodern "preoccupation," identified by Fleiger in The Purloined Punch-line: *Freud's Comic Theory and the Postmodern Text*: "the finding of a comic strategy for getting around the ideology of closure and of dialectic totality" (xi). Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines* demonstrates one attempt at circumventing the telos-driven narrative; *Nights at the Circus* illustrates another strategy.

Fleiger refers to "the comic as symptom and scene of postmodernity" (xi), and puts forth a reading of Freud that "proposes the joke scenario as the paradigm of narrative itself" in contradistinction to the "oedipal scenario" (18). Fleiger's text attempts to challenge the prevailing, Baudrillard-inspired and defeatist view of postmodernism as "proclaiming the death of Freud's intersubjective oedipal paradigm in a narcissistic, antisocial age" (ix) by theorizing postmodernism as "a moment of enhanced social possibility rather than a phenomenon of reaction" (ix). The "possibility" glimpsed by Fleiger surfaces through a comic engagement with Freud and a "recasting of [the] oedipal drama as a comic play of shifting roles rather than as a tragic fate assigned by gender" (ix)--which is exactly what I see emerging in Carter's comic vision, particularly in *Nights at the Circus*. Significantly, Baudelaire's theory of laughter "as modern symptom" and Freud's "'comic' theory of the human being" (x) enable Fleiger to theorize this intersection
of the "comic" and the "postmodern"--an intersection borne out in Carter's writing.\footnote{In an interview with Lorna Sage, Carter has discussed her respect for Freud, while maintaining that he was a product of his age ("Savage Sideshow" 271). Her short-story, "Black Venus," is an ironic rewriting of Baudelaire's life and texts--specifically, selections from \textit{Les Fleur du Mal}.}

Moreover, my discussion of \textit{The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman} has already detailed one of Carter's strategies for "defying closure," as she puts it. In \textit{Nights}, we can observe a greater attention to the effects of the comic mode, as this novel is a comic fantasy about a new symbol of femininity which unites being a woman with being free, without bowing to essentialist, concrete definitions of femininity. 

\ldots The comic form of this novel ensures that the utopian enterprise can find a happy ending without being reduced to facile propaganda or deceptive wish fulfilment. (Schmidt 73)

\textit{Nights at the Circus}, like its predecessor, \textit{Infernal Desire Machines}, is a picaresque allegory, but this time the \textit{picaro} is a woman, Fevvers the fantastic \textit{aerialiste} (Haffenden 77). In an article entitled "Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions," Elaine Jordan writes that "\textit{Nights at the Circus} is a carnival of writing" (38):

\begin{quote}
[i]n \textit{Nights at the Circus} for the first time in the longer fictions. Carter's narrative voice is multiplied, the chronology rumpled (beyond her very common device of saying what happened and then elaborating that bare and often shocking information), not only to interpolate individual stories but also to give different versions of the same events, from different perspectives. (39)
\end{quote}

Part I of the novel centres on Fevvers' narration, with telling asides from Lizzie, her foster-mother, who exemplifies an unlikely cross between a man-hating witch and a
devout Marxist. These narrations are interspersed with eruptions of other voices, which I will discuss further in Chapter Eight. At this juncture, I would agree with Ricarda Schmidt, when she says, "[w]ith this night-long Scheherezadic [sic] narration by the highly articulate, educated Cockney giantess, overflowing with vitality, the theme of the novel is developed beautifully: a fantastic sketch of female freedom, of woman as the miraculous bird archaeopteryx" (68).

Fevvers commences narrating after her evening's theatrical performance is completed, but the theatre as a metaphor for narrative and for life, with its attendant promise of spectacle, never entirely leaves this text. Fevvers' fantastic "autobiography" (Nights 57) originates with her birth from an egg. Parentless, she is raised by her foster-mother who also works in the brothel that provides Fevvers with her first home—a home for which she feels great nostalgia. "Thus she fantasizes a beginning for herself outside the Oedipal triangle, outside the Law of the Father," writes Schmidt (67). Fevvers' versions of her story, however, are only versions, and they are meant for public consumption—literally, for publication in a newspaper, as they are told to Walser, the truth-seeking journalist. Figuratively, however, her various stories provide metaphors for the production of new, different and multiple subjectivities in the novel. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Seven, Fevvers assumes many identities in the novel: bird, angel, freak, witch, wonder, and woman, to name a few. The fact that she can aspire to so many identities suggests the power of the masquerade, which allows for multiple subjectivities (Russo 218). Moreover, these multiple and even contradictory identities also suggest that femininity is a construct of social, cultural, and even economic discourses, rather than an inescapable
essence (Schmidt 68). As Walser observes in the novel: “in order to earn a living, might not a genuine bird-woman—in the implausible event that such a thing existed—have to pretend she was an artificial one” (Nights 17). Regarding this passage, Robinson remarks,

[t]ake away the “bird” from “bird-woman” and what you have is the notion that a “genuine” woman, in order to take an active subject position, must pretend to be “artificial”—a woman masquerading as an idea of woman. That “idea” of woman originates in a masculine desire to contain women, and Carter’s text plays on the significations of that idea. (123)

Thus, Fewers’ self-representations invite us to question and to respond with disbelief to normalizing, essentialist versions of woman. Fewers performs her femininity, just as she performs in her various roles as “Winged Victory” (37), “Cupid” (38), “Azrael, the Angel of Death” (79), “Dark angel of many names” (75), “Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states, being on the borderline of species, Arioriph, Venus, Achamatoth, Sophia” (81), “Scheherazade” (40) and, ultimately, “the great confidence artiste” (90). Fewers’ life, then, is a persistent theatre, where she plays herself as spectacle.

In “Petersburg,” Part II of the novel, Carter reflexively explores human experience through the carnivalesque and magic-realist figure of the world as circus, a self-conscious exploration which further underscores the notion that subjectivity is constructed through personal performances on the stage of the world:

*As Judith Butler says, “[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (25).*
[w]hat a cheap, convenient, expressionist device, this sawdust ring, this little O! Round like an eye, with a still vortex in the centre; but give it a little rub as if it were Aladdin's wishing lamp and, instantly, the circus ring turns into that durably metaphoric uroboric snake with its tail in its mouth, wheel that turns full circle, the wheel whose end is its beginning, the wheel of fortune, the potter's wheel on which our clay is formed, the wheel of life on which we all are broken. O! of wonder; O! of grief. (Nights 107)

In this section of Nights, Fevvers' voice is only occasionally heard. Rather, in Part II, we encounter a collection of narratives, told from the points of view of the various circus members. All these narratives confront Fevvers with "manifestations of belief in false hopes" (70), writes Schmidt. In this section, Walser sacrifices his identity as journalist, for the opportunity to become a clown. When he first applies his clown make-up, we sense the beginning of his transformation: "he looked in the mirror and did not recognise himself . . . [H]e felt the beginnings of a vertiginous sense of freedom" (103). The freedom in the masquerade, or, in a politics of positioning rather than essentialism, is a theme that Carter's text attempts to theorize as I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters.

In Part III, "Siberia," Walser's and Fevvers' stories are narrated in alternating chapters. Again, Walser undergoes transformation; this time he changes his clown identity for one as Shaman. As Schmidt points out, the Shaman and Fevvers have much in common: within their own cultures they are dependent upon society's belief in the magic that they perform and represent; they are also dependent on that belief to produce the necessary recompense, in the Shaman's case food, in Fevvers' case hard cash dollars,
to continue in the life of dissimulation, or magic (*Nights* 185, 264; Schmidt 71). Of the
two, Fewers is the most vulnerable, because, according to Schmidt, "she has no ancestors
in the confidence trick" (72). However, in Chapter Seven, I will argue that Fewers has
plenty of predecessors—almost every novel written, every story told, partakes of the same
kind of 'confidence trick' as that employed by our fantastic heroine.

As well as the metaphor of the confidence trick, the metaphor of contagion is also a
particularly apt figure for the narrative of *Nights*, for the novel installs a Cassandrian
narrative which I define in Chapter Eight as an evocation of both an hysterical (in the
dual, or contaminated, sense of the term) and a utopian-inspired prophetic mode.
Cassandrian narrative, I will argue, partakes of both belief and disbelief, through a
contamination of traditional categories. It, therefore, asks us to question traditional
mythologizing narratives of identity and gender. The Cassandrian narrative enables us to
conceive, through myth, the inadequacies of myth in conveying human experience. It is.
thus, a particularly postmodern mode because it installs that which it seeks to subvert.

Cassandrian narrative combines both the mute madness assigned to women through
traditional representations, with the empowerment of voice, symbolized in the figure of
the prophetess. "Of course, to represent the historical range and variety of female
experience chiefly in terms of such extreme figures as the sorceress and the hysteric may
seem, on the one hand, hyperbolic and, on the other hand, reductive" (xii), writes Sandra
Gilbert in her "Introduction" to *The Newly Born Woman*. "[H]owever," she continues,
"the paradigms of sorceress and hysteric become increasingly convincing when one
contextualizes them with contemporary anthropological theory about . . . ‘sex-gender systems’” (Gilbert xiii). And, indeed, as Cixous points out.

men and women are caught up in a web of age-old cultural determinations that are almost unanalyzable in their complexity. One can no more speak of “woman” than of “man” without being trapped within an ideological theater where the proliferation of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications, transform, deform . . . and invalidate in advance any conceptualization. (“Sorties” 83)

As difficult as this analysis might be, it is useful to ponder the possibilities of thinking differently and of establishing an identity, conceived differently—a new identity for woman, for man, for hysteric, for sorceress, for Cassandra. As Jordan notes.

[s]ome myths have more power than others, overtly or covertly; the more veiled they are, the more dangerously perhaps they lie coiled in and round the psyche and behaviour. Whether a myth is liberatory or oppressive depends on the existing power relations, the company it keeps, the context of its use. (23)

Cassandrian narrative will be shown to ‘unveil’ the presuppositions that exist in Oedipal narrative and, thus, to undermine our usual expectations of narrative representation. In short, it could be said that Carter invokes myth in order to defeat it. Cassandrian narrative, through a postmodern comic mode, suggests the potential of rewriting the Oedipal narrative. Fleiger asks:

should the postmodern comic be analyzed as a literary mode/technique? Or should it be considered a philosophical symptom of what Lyotard has called “the
postmodern condition?” Or ought it to be analyzed as a philosophical tactic for eroding traditional metaphysics from within? (8-9)

I would venture to say that the postmodern comic mode serves all three functions in *Nights*. As Carter puts it in the novel, “those who play the Ludic Game sometimes win but sometimes . . . lose” (202, ellipsis in original); in the next two chapters, I hope to show that it is well worth taking the risk.
Chapter Seven

Re-membering Narrative: The Confidence Trick

I don't want realism. I want magic . . .

I don't tell truth. I tell what ought to be truth.

—Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire.

One function of the postmodern text, according to Fleiger "is to play the role of trickster . . . exposing the trickery which sustains the myth of the finished literary masterwork, and reactivating the literary game in the bizarre hope of not winning" (52). Certainly, it is clear that Angela Carter’s Nights at the Circus plays such a role. Similarly, Donna Haraway observes a potent model for the construction of narrative identities in the depiction of the ancient figure of the trickster. One such evocation of the trickster in First Nations' mythology is the coyote. Haraway views the world as a "coyote, a figure for the always problematic, always potent tie of meaning and bodies" (201); this construction of reality might provide an interesting view of the texts of the world, the narratives and, in turn, might help us to undermine the boundaries that exist between object/subject, masculine/feminine, truth/fiction, reader/text, for boundaries, as Haraway insists, are produced: "[b]oundaries are drawn by mapping practices; 'objects' do not pre-exist as such. Objects are boundary projects. But boundaries shift from within; boundaries are very tricky" (201). It is, then, the mapping practices, themselves, which for me entail the practice of representation, that must come under question. Significantly,
then. Carter manages to undo the boundaries of self and narrative through a process of doubling through contamination.

Like Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines*, *Nights* is a narrative that incorporates the Oedipal trajectory, installs its dynamic to an absurd degree, and, thereby, demands that we question the very ideology that is being inscribed. However, in *Nights* at least one other reading is possible— one which foregrounds the positive potential of living with disbelief by means of an extended play on the metaphor of 'the confidence trick' and the inscription of what I would like to call 'Cassandrian narrative'. In my next chapter, I will define Cassandrian narrative and discuss its use in Carter's text. However, before we can even begin to understand the implications of disbelieving narratives, we must confront a model of disbelief that has a long history in Western literature: the confidence trick.

Chaucer's *Absalom*, the "gulls" of Renaissance and Restoration drama, Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* are but a few instances in literature of the exploration of gullibility, or excessive credulity. What interests me in Carter's text is not only the production of Walser as a "gull" of Fevvers' confidence trick, but the reflexive production of the reader as a "gull" of narrative. Fevvers' final words to Walser and to the reader, as well as the final words of the novel, suggest that more of us have been fooled than we may wish to believe: "'To think I really fooled you!' . . . 'It just goes to show there's nothing like confidence'" (*Nights* 295). In this chapter, I argue that our confidence is sorely tried, particularly our confidence in narrative identities, as these are constructed through realist modes of representation and Oedipal textual mechanics. As a result of
questioning these modes of narrative representation, our confidence in the identity of
Woman, as she is constituted in these 'incredulous' narratives, is also undermined.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides us with only a few possible readings of the
certainty trick:

*Confidence trick* (game, etc.): a method of professional swindling, in which the
victim is induced to hand over money or other valuables as a token of 'confidence' in the sharper. *Confidence man*: one who practises this trick; a professional
swindler of respectable appearance and address.

*The American Heritage Dictionary* offers this definition of "the confidence game": "[a] swindle in which the victim is defrauded after his confidence has been won." These
definitions of the certainty trick allow us to speculate on Carter's examination of
narrative as certainty trick *par excellence* in *Nights at the Circus*. When we express
certainty in narrative representation, in what, exactly, are we expressing belief? What
is one's investment in narrative if it is not the highly valued property of belief? What is
the experience of reading, but the combination of "'a little primitive technology and a big
dose of the will to believe'," as Walser says (16). In fact, the reader suspends disbelief,
much as the 'gull' of the certainty trick must put aside his/her incredulity in order to
express confidence in the "sharper," much as "Miss Fevvers is asking us to suspend
disbelief" (15). Ironically, reading the certainty trick as an analogy of fictional
narrative enables us to examine narrative as a kind of exploitation of the reader, because,
after all, the act of reading is also implicated in the logic of the certainty trick. Like
Walser, the narrative forces us, however briefly, to "contemplate the unimaginable—
is, the absolute suspension of disbelief” (17). We, as readers, are the victims of the confidence game. For, as Lennard Davis argues, the activity of reading is the ultimate in reification. Rather than actually seeing and perceiving the sensual reality of human life, a patent simulacrum of a human being made up purely of linguistic symbols with certain rules of recurrence is presented as if it were human. And what is more to the point, it is conceived as an object of desire. We seek to locate ourselves in the character and to merge with the character.

(Resisting 136)

If Davis is correct, and one of the primary motivations for reading is identification, then the magic realism of Carter’s text presents a problem for the reader, as does the resultant identification of narrative with the confidence trick. The reader of Nights is going to have to come to terms with his or her identification, along with Walser, as a dupe of narrative. much as Walser, as we shall see, must come to terms with his being duped by Fewers. Yet, we may be able to come to see that in contemporary postmodern culture lapses in credulity may be the occasional method of coping with the many contradictory, yet valid. claims upon our attention. Perhaps, we must construct a model of disbelief that empowers and values, rather than disempowers and devalues, the dupe, the gull. Such a model, we shall see, would thus re-empower the reader of narratives.

One common confidence trick of narrative is the mirror effect of Realist representation. “Realism,” writes Catherine Belsey in Critical Practice, “is a culturally relative concept, of course . . . . But the term is useful in distinguishing between those forms which tend to efface their own textuality, their existence as discourse, and those
which explicitly draw attention to it. Realism offers itself as transparent” (51). Thus, traditionally, we have assumed a mimetic relationship between life and art; “Classic Realism” is based on this assumption (Belsey, Critical 51). Postmodernist writing, as practiced by Angela Carter, exposes this assumption as a confidence trick. Alison Lee explains: "Realism has little to do with reality. It is, rather, a critical construct which developed in a particular social and ideological context" (3). Belsey further outlines the ideological assumptions which attend Realist representation:

classic realism offers the reader a position of knowingness which is also a position of identification with the narrative voice. To the extent that the story first constructs, and then depends for its intelligibility, on a set of assumptions shared between narrator and reader, it confirms both the transcendent knowingness of the reader-as-subject and the “obviousness” of the shared truths in question.

(“Constructing the Subject” 362)

Further, the assumption that the Realist novel objectively tells the truth about life is problematic and "is certainly part of the belief that the novel should mirror the world, and through this impersonal mirroring show 'truth'. It is a common Realist sentiment that fiction is to be mistrusted unless it pretends to be something else" (Lee 11). What Carter's 'magic realist' mode implies is that fiction should be mistrusted precisely if it pretends to be something else. Magic realism tends to draw attention to the fantastic and the constructed nature of the text. Unlike the Classic Realist text, which “instills itself in the space between fact and illusion through the presentation of a simulated reality which is plausible but not real” (Belsey, “Constructing” 369), the magic realist text foregrounds
the contradictions inherent in representation. Like intertextuality, magic realism makes the reader confront the 'imaginative' elements of fictive creations and to recognize that the 'meanings' represented therein are ones which are constructed in language, and therefore in narratives, not 'real' meanings found in the world. According to Christopher Norris, 

_Nights_ is 

a book much concerned with the topics of _mimesis_, repetition and the non-originality of origins. It belongs—ino far as such labels serve any useful purpose—to the species of 'magical realism', doubling back and forth between naturalistic detail and a 'post-modern' stress on those elements of fabulous narrative contrivance that resist the strong pull toward mimetic illusion. (51)

One way in which Carter resists mimetic illusionism is by producing a narrative that lacks authority; the narrating voice is always suspect. Elaine Jordan remarks that _Nights_ represents something of a departure for Carter in terms of its narrative technique (39). Within the first chapter alone, consisting of approximately fourteen pages, the narrative point of view shifts so many times that belief is severely problematized, producing wonder with its persistent wandering. We do not know, with any certainty, who is speaking. Occasionally, the point of view appears to be that of Fewvers; other times it definitely seems as if Walser's is the dominant point of view; more often, there is a third and unnamed point of view—but one which can hardly claim objectivity. The reader, within moments of beginning the novel, is struck by the problems arising in credulity. This narrative is utterly unbelievable. A number of interpolations suggest the narrator's presence, but the 'objectivity' of the narrator is severely undercut by Walser's
parenthetical disbelief: when confronted by the shuddering of Fewvers' "uncomfortable-looking pair of bulges," we read the following: "(‘How does she do that?’ pondered the reporter)” (8). When reminded that Fewvers was rumoured to have begun her career in freak shows, we read: "(Check, noted Walser)”(14). And, when confronted by the leisurely pace with which Fewvers travelled through the air, we read: "(But surely, pondered Walser, a real bird would have too much sense to think of performing a triple somersault in the first place)” (17). There are other, more direct, indications that the point of view is Walser's, although it remains ostensibly third-person objective, such as when the narrative enters into Walser's point of view to observe, rather derisively, of Fewvers, "[s]uch a lump it seems" (16). However, later, Walser sees this “lump,” this “it,” much more favourably, when he admits to being pleasantly "surprised at her wholesome look” (18). These discrepant views of Fewvers do not enable any singular, unified, or objective perspective of either her or of Walser, whose speech only seems confused and paradoxical. Similarly, an 'objective' view of Walser is also undercut, but by direct narratorial commentary, as in the expressed opinion that "[h]e was like a handsome house that has been let, furnished" (10). The narrator further remarks that "his habitual disengagement was involuntary: it was not the result of judgment, since judgment involves the positives and negatives of belief" (10); moreover, he is described as a "kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness" (10). Thus, any 'objective' view of Walser is similarly undercut by the narrator's point of view. Finally, there is considerable confusion when one tries to ascertain the point of view in any direct address of the reader as is posed in the question, "a touch of sham?”(8), when Fewvers pops the cork with her
teeth. Or, one wonders, whose point of view is being expressed by the provocative language employed in passages such as the following:

[and this twice-used ice must surely be the source of the marine aroma--something fishy about the Cockney Venus--that underlay the hot, soiled composite of perfume, sweat, greasepaint and raw, leaking gas that made you feel you breathed the air in Fewvers' dressing-room in lumps. (8)

Indeed, the narrator later continues, this time, seemingly representing Walser's perspective. "[w]hen she got round to it, she might well bottle the smell, and sell it. She never missed a chance" (9). However, logically, this cannot be Walser's point of view because he is, as of yet, ignorant of Fewvers' mercenary motives. Carter writes that, for Fewvers, the "music of the spheres was the jingling of cash registers. Even Walser did not guess that"(12). The narrative's point of view, then, much like its subject, is extremely unstable and, thus, uncertain. We have no easy assurances here; the reader does not know quite who is speaking, much less who or what to believe. The challenge represented by Fewvers, "'[i]s she fact or is she fiction?'" (7), is the identical challenge posed by the novel--what is the difference between fact and fiction, in so far as both are revealed to us through the medium of language and through narratives? It does not necessarily follow, however, that the lack of objectivity, or consistency, or even credulity, necessarily implies a lack of significance. It could be said of narrative then, as it is said of Fewvers: "'[i]f she," or it, "isn't suspect, where's the controversy? What's the news" (11).
This variety of narrational modes contributes to the multiplicity as well as the uncertainty of the text. As in *Infernal Desire Machines*, we see an "epidemic of signification," but rather than the repetition of the Oedipal narrative in its standard quest mode, we may observe, instead, a multiplication of narrative possibilities and perspectives. Where repetition places one "in the Oedipal position of acknowledging a critical debt, revision enables [one] to differ from what has been written or otherwise give voice to dissent" (Cummings 5). Such a multiplicity of narrative techniques inevitably invites us to contemplate the 'differences' with an eye to understanding the role of multiplication, rather than the ironic, parodic effect of repetition which we observed in *Infernal Desire Machines*. At the conclusion of the novel, we see Walser's story of his self shift from an objective point of view ("he") to a subjective point of view ("I") (294); this shift is recurrently mirrored in the structure of the novel which continually alternates between first-person narrative and third-person narrative, again undermining any stable point of view. Moreover, together, Lizzie and Fewers are formidable narrators, who effectively complicate reality, rather than clarifying it, at least insofar as the realist reader. Walser, is concerned. We read that Walser continued to take notes in a mechanical fashion but, as the women unfolded the convolutions of their joint stories together, he felt more and more like a kitten tangling up in a ball of wool it had never intended to unravel in the first place; or a sultan faced with not one but two Scheherezades, both intent on impacting a thousand stories into the single night. (40)
In effect, the confusion that reigns in the first chapter, stands as a *mise en abîme* for the point of view in the remainder of the novel.

In Part III, "Siberia," the point of view is continually shifting between first and third persons, leaving us hard-pressed to determine, definitively, the origin or authority of any narrative discourse. The first line of one paragraph begins, "[t]he giantess found herself trapped" (205), while the first line of the very next paragraph shifts to the perspective of the very same giantess: "I have broken my right wing" (205). This first-person perspective persists until the end of the chapter, when Fewers, ever the punster, asserts that "big birds must look after themselves, so I'd better snap out of it sharpish. hadn't I!" (208). The question left with us: who is the addressee of this confession. The reader, it seems, is the only 'character' who, in the absence of Walser, can hear the confession and authoritatively grant its integrity, as well as the integrity—or reality status—of the fiction, itself. In the absence of Walser, then, the reader must assume his position of authority. We must take our turn at author(iz)ing the text. We must come to terms with disbelief.

Significantly, then, the first and subsequent four chapters are narrated primarily by Fewers in the first person—in what might be viewed as the 'confessional mode'. When we next encounter first-person narrative in Part III, not only does it appear to be highly unstable, but it seems to represent a return, like Fewers' return to self, but admittedly both are returns with a difference. Fewers' name, besides evoking her mythical generation through a childish nickname, evokes the
fevers and fervors of enforced marginalization and compensatory witchcraft . . . .

As culture has constructed her, "woman" is "the dark continent" to which woman
must return . . . .

But returning, a sorceress and a hysteric—that is, a displaced person.

(Gilbert xv-xvi)

In the next chapter, I will discuss the relevance of the figures of sorceress and hysteric as
figures of displacement, but for my purposes here, I would insist that Carter enacts, in her
representations of the formation of subjectivity, a model of narrative dynamics: both
narrative and subjectivity are implicated in the refusal, as well as the complication of,
stable identities. Fevvers and Walser, then, through the continual displacement of their
respective subjectivities, stand in as figures for the multiplication of possible
identifications of narrative. Through her problematization of personal subjectivity and
narrative identifications, Carter thus problematizes belief in any singular, stable and
coherent version of the self or of narrative.

Moreover, whenever someone else is attempting to make Fevvers into the object of
their own life story, she tricks them. Walser, the reader, the Duke, the Colonel and
Rosencreutz would all like Fevvers 'pinned down', although for very different reasons.
The Colonel makes his living on the effectiveness of her trickery; his motto, in fact, is
"[t]he bigger the humbug, the better the public likes it" (Nights 147). As the reading
"public," we must be taken aback by the potent irony in such a statement. Rosencreutz
and the Duke believe in Fevvers' mythical status and power, as a symbolic woman. The
reader knows she does not exist as such, yet conspires with the author to believe in her
'flights' of fancy. Whether she is fact or fiction, all want her ontological status verified. For some it is belief in her potential, her magic that inspires confidence. For others, it is disbelief that makes her so compelling; for, as Walser asserts, only if she is suspect is she significant. Like the stories she tells, which are multiple and varied, each spinning out of the last, her identity and significance shift, depending on whether it is she or the narrator, Walser or Lizzie, Carter or the reader who is re-iterating her stories. None of those who question her will ever be satisfied; that is unless we alter the questions we pose to Fevvers, and by implication, to narrative itself. Just as Carter's narrative tricks us by "making strange" whenever we attempt to apply Realist codes of interpretation to extract the truth of the narrative, Fevvers forestalls any assumptions of the truth status of either her self, or of her narrative. The question we must abandon is the very one that puts us in a position of credulity or incredulity: Is the winged woman fact or fiction? What she is, is the very figuration of narrative: she is a plot--a product of narrative--a 'novel' creature. And as Hayden White suggests, the representation of historical reality (i.e. 'truth') and of fictive constructs are not clearly antithetical; in fact, representation in either mode partakes of the codes of the other in a contamination of categories which is clearly figured by the contamination apparent in the representation of Fevvers and her history as unbelievable (The Content of the Form). Just as the normalizing coherence of a singular self is put into question, the normalizing coherence of Realist narrative is problematized by the text. Fevvers systematically refuses objectification in other people's narratives and, thereby, embraces her subject status--her right to be the centre of her story and to
establish the ontological status of her own narrative. At the same time, her narrative partakes of an Oedipal dynamic. In *Nights*, Carter thematizes, indeed she parodies, the female's 'petrification' in the Oedipal discourse. Fewvers' youth is spent in "a wholly female world" (38), with. I would venture to suggest, an intentional double pun on holy/holey. Specifically, she is raised in a brothel where women "only sold the *simulacra*"--"for pleasure has no real existence unless given freely" (39). In this environment, Fewvers functions as a living statue of the Winged Victory; she waits to be released from her prison. She waits to realize her 'self' as she explains to Walser:

I existed only as an object in men's eyes after the night-time knocking on the door began. Such was my apprenticeship for life. since is it not to the mercies of the eyes of others that we commit ourselves on our voyage through the world? I was as if closed up in a shell, for the wet white would harden on my face and torso like a death mask that covered me all over. yet. inside this appearance of marble, nothing could have been more vibrant with potentiality than I! Sealed in this artificial egg, this sarcophagus of beauty, I waited. I waited . . . although I could not have told you for what it was I waited. Except, I assure you. I did *not* await the kiss of a magic prince, sir! With my two eyes, I nightly saw how such a kiss would seal me up in my *appearance* for ever! (39, ellipsis in original)

In the character of Fewvers we see the production of Oedipal desire, and at the same time the refusal of Oedipal objectification. Fewvers, like Albertina in *Infernal Desire Machines*, is a creature of "dream and abstraction" (30)—not a 'real' human being, but a fantasy. She is "twice as large as life and as succinctly finite as any object that is
intended to be seen, not handled" (15), "intended," that is, by narrative discourse. Her existence seems to cry out, "LOOK AT ME!" (15). Indeed, she is the centre of attraction 'under the Big Top'. She is the object of male approbation--the object of the male gaze. In an heterosexual economy, she personifies the object of desire: the desire for eternal life (Mr Rosencreutz); for pleasure (the Corporal); for power (the Duke); for truth (Walser); for meaning (the reader)\(^1\)--all of which are potentially achieved through her (sexual) submission to male domination (the phallus). Fewvers' hymen, then, is the boundary to be overcome. Rosencreutz is willing to pay an incredible price "for the privilege of busting a scrap of cartilege" (80). Walser is compelled to pursue the ""only fully-feathered intacta in the history of the world'" (294). However, she keeps thwarting narrative closure--that is, thwarting the Oedipus and the objectification of the female inherent in that paradigm--by regression and "impeding the fulfilment of the male's desire, as well as narrative closure" (de Lauretis, Alice 142). She effectively thwarts us all--the Corporal, Rosencreutz, the Duke, Walser, and the reader. With Rosencreutz, she is prepared to clench her teeth and think of England (Nights 83). However, when she makes a full estimation of her plight, of her (in)significance as object, she simply decides to undermine the female role provided her by an Oedipal-textual dynamics and to produce a knife of her own (a knife which, earlier in the novel, is associated with the

\(^1\)I would like to recall here the generalized construction of the universal reader as male in those metanarratives of narrative composed by Brooks, Scholes, Barthes and Freud and cited in my introduction. I would also like to remind my reader, that according to Winnett, Hutcheon, de Lauretis and others, the female reader is caught in a psychic bind when reading Oedipal narratives that represent the subject of narrative as necessarily male, while the object is necessarily female.
threat of castration), thereby refusing ritual sacrifice. Here, Fevvers might be described, in words employed by Clément to describe Victor Hugo's Esmeralda, as a "bee-woman, wasp-woman, stinging with her dagger anyone who would attempt to rape her. She is 'a fairy or an angel'" (25). In order to impede the Corporal's Oedipal progress, Fevvers, "[a]n old hand at seduction dinners" (171), satisfies her voracious appetite and in so doing outdoes and outlasts his own: "'the impresario lapsed into a slumber'" (171).

With Walser, Fevvers takes over the narrative, allowing him only a reportorial function that undermines his perennial disbelief: "Jack Walser, originally a sardonic contemplator like Desiderio, is knocked on the head, taken apart, and puts himself together, in the wake of the New Woman, as a man who can love and is worth loving" (Jordan 38). Walser, we note, will lose his 'innocence'--the sense that he is an unlived-in house, inhabited only by the furniture, the memories, of others. According to Lizzie, he is just "'[n]ot hatched out, yet'" (171). However, after his meeting with Fevvers and the love that ensues, Jack will "never be the same again" for he learns

the meaning of fear as it defines itself in its most violent form, that is, fear of the death of the beloved, of the loss of the beloved, of the loss of love. It was the beginning of an anxiety that would never end, except with the deaths of either or both; and anxiety is the beginning of conscience, which is the parent of the soul but is not compatible with innocence. (Nights 293)

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2Carter writes, "it may be that a large woman with a sword is not the best advertisement for a brothel" (Nights 38).
Ironically, the readers, too, will never be the same again once they lose the innocent assumption that narrative represents the truth. With closure, the death inscribed in narrative, the reader, too, will experience the anxiety that accompanies doubt and the resultant "beginning of conscience" that accompanies disbelief.

With the Duke, Fewers is bereft of her knife, so she simply jumps, in Shandian fashion, out of the chapter into the next, and onto a train penetrating deep into the heart of Mother Russia, into the Siberian landscape--into the plot-space which, de Lauretis tells us, is morphologically female.\textsuperscript{3} But we know that Fewers despises landscape; she says, "I both hate and fear the open country. I do not like to be where Man is not" (81). For Fewers the experience of the landscape is like being "thrust into the heart of limbo" (225). She feels both claustrophobic and agoraphobic as she moves "deeper and deeper into an unknown terrain" (226). As a female in an Oedipal paradigm, and, therefore, as an object, she simply cannot be seen where Man is not. Significantly, it is here, in Siberia, that Fewers is deprived of her status as object of the male gaze, and her sense of self shifts accordingly:

[d]ay by day she felt herself diminishing, as if the Grand Duke had ordered up another sculpture of ice and now, as his exquisite revenge on her flight, was engaged in melting it very, very slowly, perhaps by the judicious application of lighted cigarette ends. The young American it was who kept the whole

\textsuperscript{3}For instance, one might consider the violence embedded in such constructions as "the rape of nature," which feminizes the landscapes and masculinizes violence. Such language, according to de Lauretis, "at once defines nature as feminine, and rape as violence done to a feminine other (whether its physical object be a woman, a man, or an inanimate object)" (Technologies 42).
story of the old Fewvers in his notebooks; she longed for him to tell her she was true. She longed to see herself reflected in all her remembered splendour in his grey eyes. She longed; she yearned. To no avail. Time passed. She rested. (*Nights* 273).

In this section, Fewvers appears to be lost in the female, as the female is lost in narrative representation. Significantly, in an Oedipal paradigm, where landscape is feminine, she is uncertain of her own reality. In this paradigm, then, it is Walser who can confer meaning. He is the authority and can verify the ontological status of her narrative.

because he possesses, in his notebooks, the story of Fewvers which can verify her reality status; however, he cannot fulfill this function as he is, similarly, lost in the landscape.

Both Walser and Fewvers fall victim to the Oedipal paradigm.

For Fewvers, her story is her meaning--her existence pales, when she is no longer putting her life into narrative discourse. Her confession, contained in Walser's notebooks, must be heard to be authorized. "The confession," writes Foucault, "unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (*History of Sexuality* 1, 61-2). The reader and Walser, then, share the role of confessor, but our narrative satisfaction is undermined by the contradictions inherent in her representation and the subsequent disbelief which results from such contradictions. How are we to reconcile the fact that Fewvers finds her meaning as she is reflected in the male gaze, Walser's grey eyes, and simultaneously, that
she refuses her objectification, narrative closure, by escaping petrification in the Oedipal trajectory—that is, by thwarting male desire? Addressing this apparent (and inherent) contradiction, de Lauretis insists that if women spectators in an Oedipal paradigm (the same would apply, I think, to women readers) are "related as subject,"

it is in so far as they are engaged in a twofold process of identification, sustaining two distinct sets of identifying relations. The first set is... the masculine, active. identification with the gaze (the looks of the... male characters) and the passive. feminine identification with the image (body landscape). The second set, which has received much less attention, is implicit in the first as its effect and specification, for it is produced by the apparatus which is the very condition of vision (that is to say, the condition under which what is visible acquires meaning). It consists of the double identification with the figure of narrative movement, the mythical subject, and with the figure of narrative closure, the narrative image. Were it not for the possibility of this second, figural identification, the woman spectator would be stranded between two incommensurable entities, the gaze and the image. Identification, that is, would be either impossible, split beyond any act of suture, or entirely masculine. The figural narrative identification, on the contrary, is double; both figures can and in fact must be identified with at once, for they are inherent in narrativity itself. (*Alice* 143-4)

This passage aids in an interpretation of Fevvers' apparent complicity with the gaze.

Fevvers serves, in *Nights*, as a figure for the figural identification outlined by de Lauretis, and as such a figure, she is contradictory, and therefore, necessarily doubled. As de
Lauretis explains, the female is constituted in a doubled, contradictory identity; in an act of psychic cross-dressing, she identifies with the active male principle, at the same time as she observes herself being constructed as image of the gaze. However, it is the final line of the passage cited above that most intrigues me, for it asserts that such a doubled-identification is inherent in narrative; indeed, it is inherent in the narrative I am discussing and it is figured, primarily, in the character of Fevvers who is not "stranded between two incommensurable identities," but rather, is continually negotiating through a refusal of belief in her definitive position as object in an Oedipal paradigm. As she herself attests, explicitly, addressing Walser, but implicitly, addressing the reader: "as to questions of whether I am fact or fiction, you must answer that for yourself!" (292). She also insists that she is not waiting for the traditional ending, "the kiss of a magic prince," for she sees that such a kiss would result in a kind of death that would confine her to her "appearance forever" (39, italics in original). According to Schmidt,

Fevvers needs to see herself mirrored in the eyes of the others. But in contradistinction to the Lacanian constitution of the symbolic 'I', where the mirror image comes first and the symbolic 'I' follows from it, the miraculous Fevvers is the inventor of her own singularity for which she seeks acclaim. She, however, functions as a mirror image for the readers of the novel, representing an image of a freedom which does not yet exist in the non-fictional world. (72)

Fevvers, then, represents "the creation of a new signifier which is still without a corresponding signified in the world outside the novel" (Schmidt 73). No wonder at our disbelief, but no wonder we are happy to embrace it.
In a sense, the "new signifier" represented by Fevvers posits a contamination of binary categories of object/subject, masculinity/femininity, active/passive and fact/fiction. Such a contamination begs us to question the initial integrity of such representational categories. It also, thereby, leads to a possible re-interpretation of the contaminated nature of 'female' identity, for Fevvers is, at once, woman and not woman. She is a confusion of categories which include bird, angel, monster, woman, object of the gaze and subject of narrative. While she is constructed as object of the male gaze, she constructs herself as subject through her insistence on narrating her own life, as Robinson attests:

[wh]ile Fevvers is placed as the object of various male gazes in the text, she simultaneously places herself as the subject of her own story. Her strategy to this end is to turn the gaze on herself by actively staging her difference and by intervening into the hom(m)o sexual economy that requires Woman be made into a fetish-object to safeguard male subjectivity. (23)

In being seen, she is objectified; in being heard, she attains subject status. The difference between these ontological positions will be the focus of the next chapter, but for the moment it is the contamination--the overlapping of categories which we are accustomed to keeping separate--that most interests me. We learn that Fevvers, in fact, "looks wonderful, but she doesn't look right" (Nights 159, italics in original). Such a statement inevitably begs the question, just what is right?

The 'rightness' of any singular, universalizing and totalizing vision of female identity is interrogated in Carter's fiction through a parodic examination of one of the most
pernicious figurations of woman in Western culture: woman as contaminated, as soil(ed).

Carter manages to invert this stereotype and revalue the positive potential of contamination as a breakdown of unitary and confining categories. Significantly, Fewers, in the first section of Nights, is represented, through Walser's point of view, as inveterately 'soiled'--contaminated. He continually dwells on the filthiness of Fewver's apparel: her "down-at-heel pink velvet slipper trimmed with grubby swansdown" (41); her "grubby dressing-gown, horribly caked with greasepaint round the neck" (19). He sees the 'Cockney Venus' as uneducated, of the lower classes, and coarse; he is impressed by her unfeminine enormity and appetite. However, his appreciation is, in effect, conveyed as repulsion through the sarcasm in the tone:

she gorged, she stuffed herself, she spilled gravy on herself, she sucked up peas from the knife; she had a gullet to match her size and table manners of the Elizabethan variety. Impressed, Walser waited with the stubborn docility of his profession until at last her enormous appetite was satisfied; she wiped her lips on her sleeve and belched. (22)

Fewers is, in fact, a character negotiating the last days of the nineteenth century:

[if]or we are at the fag-end, the smouldering cigar-butt, of a nineteenth century which is just about to be ground out in the ashtray of history. It is the final, waning, season of the year of Our Lord, eighteen hundred and ninety nine. And Fewvers has all the éclat of a new era about to take off. (11)

Thus, in characteristically ironic fashion, Carter draws our attention to the final days of the rule of patriarchal Christianity, as she underscores the rise of--that is, the “take off”
of the "new woman" who is hardly represented here, despite her wings. in the traditional
nineteenth-century guise (disguise) of angelic femininity. What Coventry Patmore
labelled 'the angel in the house' is a concept decidedly under question, since the house
under consideration is, in fact, a brothel. Fewvers, we learn, was raised amongst "women
of the worst class and defiled" (21, italics in original). According to Carter,

in a world organized by contractual obligations, the whore represents the only
possible type of honest woman. If the world in its present state is indeed a
brothel--and the moral difference between selling one's sexual labour and one's
manual labour is . . . an academic one . . . . [a]t least the girl who sells herself
with her eyes open is not a hypocrite and, in a world with a cash-sale ideology.
that is a positive, even a heroic virtue. (Sadeian Woman 57-8)

Thus, it is possible for us to see that Fewvers' pragmatic estimation of her cash value, in
terms of selling herself as spectacle and monster, can be seen, as it is by Carter at least, as
an honest and even heroic virtue.

Fewvers' second 'home' is Madame Schreck's. Like Sade who "creates a museum of
woman-monsters" (Sadeian Woman 25). Madame Schreck displays women as
monstrosities, where, once again, woman's function is to be observed and objectified.
Monsters, Foucault reminds us, are "etymologically, beings or things to be shown"
(Madness 70). Significantly, Fewvers informs us that those who view the women, are
responsible for constructing them as monsters: "there was no terror in our house [the]
customers did not bring with them," she insists (Nights 62). Fewvers' third 'home' is with
the circus, where as a freak of nature, a woman and a monster, she is, once again, the
object of the gaze. Elsewhere, Carter has written that "[a] free woman in an unfree society will be a monster" (Sadeian Woman 27). And Fewvers is even more of an abomination than a free woman, for she is also part bird/angel. And the fastidious Walser--he bathes immediately after his initial encounter with Fewvers--is simultaneously repulsed and compelled by such a creature. Carter underscores the connection between images of the soil(ed) and the female through Walser, who describes Fewvers in strictly feminine metaphors as "a mistresspiece of exquisitely feminine squalor" (9), and thus demonstrates the deeply imbedded malevolence toward the female's appetites and desires (sexuality). Moreover, as the mythic daughter, engendered by the rape of Leda by the god Zeus in the manifestation of a swan, Fewvers is the symbolic offspring of an overwhelming male violence. She is also gendered by a similar malevolent sadism: as a fictional representation, she is produced as a female object by a male Oedipal narrative. However, somehow this originary violence has backfired.

Significantly, Fewvers is just not set up to succumb to the mythic depiction of herself as a woman defiled, as the soil(ed). She revels in her appetites. She revels in her verbosity. She is more than 'woman' after-all. Or is she? So wonders Walser, after Fewvers has nearly been sent plummeting to her 'death' by a "plot" (160). Carter's metafictional text thematizes Fewvers' double identification through a doubling of narrative "plots," plots which, in an Oedipal textual dynamic, would most certainly ensure the death of the female. Fewvers, however, as physically doubled and therefore "other," is impervious to "plots." Simply, the status of Fewvers as passive object, already inscribed in narrative discourse, combined with her doubled identification with the active
subject of narrative, begs the question of the ontological status of all representation as overdetermined by discourse. Once again, we sense the contamination of categories. Fevvers' simultaneous objectification and disavowal of Oedipal petrification through her own narration suggest the real, political possibility of re-writing the Oedipus. Carter articulates Walser's dilemma as he confronts the paradox of Fevvers who is at once a 'woman' and yet not 'woman' as he understands the word:

Walser, half-laughing, half-wondering, almost, yet not quite, convinced himself the woman had been in no more danger than a parrot might be if you pushed it off its perch. And though he was altogether unwilling to believe this might be so, still he was enchanted by the paradox: if she were indeed a lusus naturae, a prodigy, then--she was no longer a wonder.

She would no longer be an extraordinary woman, no more the Greatest Aerialiste in the world but--a freak. Marvellous, indeed, but a marvellous monster, an exemplary being denied the human privilege of flesh and blood, always the object of the observer, never the subject of sympathy, an alien creature forever estranged. (161)

Walser's last comment is, unbeknownst to him, ironic, for it adequately describes, not the imaginary configuration of the alien creature it claims to characterize, but the actual position of woman in patriarchal cultures. But Walser, ruminating on female identity as he sees it, continues thus:

[s]he owes it to herself to remain a woman, he thought. It is her human duty. As a symbolic woman, she has a meaning, as an anomaly, none.
As an anomaly, she would become again, as she once had been, an exhibit in a museum of curiosities. But what would she become, if she continued to be a woman? (161)

What she would become is exactly the question the novel seeks to explore. However, as Carter insists in *The Sadeian Woman*, “as a woman, my symbolic value is primarily that of the myth of patience and receptivity, a dumb mouth from which the teeth have been pulled” (4-5). Thus, to succumb to such a symbolic representation is to succumb to one’s silencing. And Fevvers does not give up her voice in favour of her symbolic function. One thing she will become, by remaining “a woman,” is a narrator—a teller of her own tale.

“As her nickname, the Cockney Venus, already suggests, Fevvers is, beyond doubt, a woman” (Schmidt 67). Yet her wings serve to mark her own desire to ascend above the Oedipal discourse which would constrain her as “only a bird in a gilded cage” (190) (a woman), by simply preventing her from succumbing to subjugation. “In her voyage through the world of this novel Fevvers does not simply become men’s passive object, for her wings ensure that she herself constitutes a formidable subject which others must react to” (Schmidt 68). With the help of her wings and her voice, she rises above her petrification in the Oedipal discourse that would confine her in representation. Carter parodies the requirement for the death of the female by means of her objectification in an

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The pun on "bird," in British English a slang term for woman and comparable to the Canadian English term "chick," marks Fevvers as transcending not only her captivity, but specifically her captivity in the category "woman," in so far as that category is objectified, by the term "bird," as object of the male gaze.
Oedipal paradigm, when Fevvers reveals her terrible secret: "I dye" says Fevvers, which is "to tell the truth and nothing but, the only deception which I practice on the public" (25). The pun on dye/die might suggest to the reader that it is the Oedipal narrative dynamic which practices the greater deception, by not allowing for the possibility of female subjectivity. Of course. Fevvers' desire to overcome her confinement is Oedipal and she is thus thrust into the position of hero/male, but the obstacle, itself, is her 'self'--that is, her positioning in discourse. As Toril Moi points out, in more general terms.

[the attack on phallocentrism must come from within, since there can be no "outside," no space where true femininity, untainted by patriarchy, can be kept intact for us to discover. We can only destroy the mythical and mystifying constructions of patriarchy by using its own weapons. We have no others.

("Representation of Patriarchy" 398)

Fevvers' insistence on being heard as well as being seen allows her to circumvent Oedipal closure and the death inscribed in that paradigm. The Oedipus is apparently being invoked to defeat the Oedipus. A female, states Carter, with potent irony.

is most immediately and dramatically a woman when she lies beneath a man, and her submission is the apex of his malehood . . . . This is the kind of beautiful thought that has bedevilled the history of sex in Judaeo-Christian culture, causing almost as much confusion as the idea that sex is a sin . . . .

The missionary position has another great asset, from the mythic point of view; it implies a system of relations between the partners that equates the
woman to the passive receptivity of the soil, to the richness and fecundity of the earth (*Sadeian Woman* 7-8).

It is this identification of the female with the soil which is both evoked and refused in the figure of Fevvers; she cannot lie flat on her back, as "nature had equipped her only for the 'woman on top' position" (*Nights* 292).

Carter further parodies such reductive iconography in the representation of the ascendent male principle: Walser is represented by his desire as the phallus personified—a cockeral, that is, a rooster—crowing "[c]ock-a-doodle-do" (236). He is simply a buffoon: "his [clown] disguise disguises—nothing. He is no longer a journalist masquerading as a clown; willy-nilly, force of circumstance has turned him into a *real* clown" (145, italics in original). But, insists Carter, anyone, man or woman, who succumbs to such mythic representations, is ultimately victimized by the double-edged sword of patriarchy. "The notion of a universality of human experience." writes Carter, "is a confidence trick, and the notion of a universality of female experience is a clever confidence trick" (*Sadeian Woman* 12); 'clever' because it assigns to the 'other' a determinate representation in discourse; it denies a plurality and multiplicity of meaning, and effectively divests the 'other' of self-definition and access to meaning, that is, to power. While Man's identification with phallic power reduces him to the spectacle of a

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1 Similarly, as we have seen, the Sadeian character in *Infernal Desire Machines*, the Count, is represented entirely by his desire. He dons a macabre costume reminiscent of an executioner's mask and his body is covered except for his exposed genitalia. He personifies the logical and yet absurd outcome of such mythologizing of gender subjectivity; the male as phallus. However, the Count becomes trapped by his own discursive positioning: "his insistence on the authority of his own autonomy made him at once the tyrant and the victim of matter, for he was dependent on the notion that matter was submissive to him" (Carter, *Infernal Desire Machines* 168).
cock crowing, Woman's identification with the soil, for instance, determines her as simultaneously fertile, fecund and defiled, dirty. In this version of female subjectivity, woman "loses herself completely" (Sadeian Woman 8). Fevvers refuses this identification and, in Nights, if anyone loses himself, it is Walser.

Initially, it appears that 'Realist' authority is conferred on Walser, the objective, fact-seeking, 'truth'-telling journalist, who will record Fevvers' life and expose her as a fraud. In fact, he suggests that she should "tack a tail on the back of her cache-sexe; it would add verisimilitude and, perhaps, improve the performance" (17). He retains "the privileged irresponsibility of the journalist, the professional necessity to see all and believe nothing which cheerfully combined, in Walser's personality, with a characteristically American generosity towards the brazen lie" (9-10). However, the problem with Walser is that he has learned little from his experience of the world: "sandpaper his outsides as experience might, his inwardness had been left untouched" (10). According to Robinson, "[i]t is precisely the neglect of 'experience' in postmodern/poststructuralist theory that Carter critiques in her novels" (79). Robinson also points out that the term 'experience', here, is best understood as akin to de Lauretis' definition of experience as a "'personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world'" (Alice 159; Robinson 79). Robinson further elaborates on this point: just because experience "is a construct rather than an essence, it does not follow that it is, thus, without authority in constituting subjectivity" (79). Hence, although Walser assigns himself the task of interpreting the meaning of Fevvers' narrative for
publication in his newspaper, his authority, while conferred, is also undermined. Carter writes that Walser's was a typically Oedipal and "picaresque career" (*Nights* 9); he had "discovered in himself a talent with words, and an even greater aptitude for finding himself in the right place at the right time" (9). However, ironically, "*himself* he never found, since it was not his *self* which he sought" (10, italics in original); not, that is, until he loses "*himself*" in his Oedipal quest to expose Fewvers to the world. The verbal violence, employed by Carter, to describe Walser's attitude toward Fewvers, attests to his position of authority, but also alerts us to his Realist presuppositions: "Walser is here, ostensibly, to 'puff' her, and, if it is humanly possible, to explode her, either as well as, or instead of" (*Nights* 11). Walser's authority is undermined further, when he turns into a buffoon on his Oedipal quest to 'explode', that is, obliterate, both her story and her hymen. As a clown, his face is painted a macabre white which underscores his position as a representative of the white, male ideology and, even more importantly, marks his own petrification in that discourse. We should not forget that 'masculinity' is an ideological construct; even if that construct is discursively empowered, it is still imposed. Significantly, his transformation is not the traditional enlightenment of Oedipal trajectories or of realism; but rather his reportage (inscription of meaning) becomes mere 'crowing'. Nor is he able, finally, "to judge, punish, forgive, console" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 1, 61), as he would a confession, for Walser has escaped from the white mask of authority and, as a consequence, from the Realist paradigm of narrative, to find "*himself,*" instead, located in the mode of magic realism, "in a place where no facts, as
such, existed!" (260). So Walser exchanges the identity of Realist, truth-seeking reporter of the facts, and dons, instead, the identity of a shaman. Thus, he finally acquires an 'inner life', a realm of speculation and surmise within himself that was entirely his own. If, before he set out with the circus in pursuit of the bird-woman, he had been like a house to let, furnished, now he was tenanted at last. even if that interior tenant was insubstantial as a phantom and sometimes disappeared for days at a time. (260-261)

One problem suggested by Walser's transformation is the discovery of some essential 'inner self' that presupposes an originary essence outside of discourse. And this may be Carter's intent. I might add, however, that Walser's new identity is another provisional re-writing of the Oedipus. He is the New Man--newly constructed--walking away from the Old Adam/Eden that inscribed patriarchy and the Oedipus. As Carter maintains, freedom will only be possible when "the Old Adam, exemplified in God, the King and the Law, the trifold masculine symbolism of authority, will take his final departure from amongst us" (Sadeian Woman 24). Never mind that Walser's progression is Oedipal, since he overcomes the Old Adam in his transformation to the New Man. Once again, I remind you that the inscription of the Oedipus is not, necessarily, antifeminist, because only in the epidemic inscription of Oedipal textual dynamics may we begin to recognize the problems for female (and also male) subjects embedded in this narrative structure (de Lauretis, Alice 157). In one sense, then, the repetition of the Oedipal dynamic is another way of "making strange" or "magicking," as Carter calls it.
When Walser finally arrives at his destination, the barrier he originally sought to transgress is no longer there to be overcome: Fewver's hymen is non-existent. And its existence, as a boundary to his heroic progress, is exposed as a fiction—"a confidence trick" (*Nights* 294). Significantly, the absence of her hymen is now seen by Walser as an interesting curiosity. Why he wonders, did she seek to hide its absence? "‘Fevvers, only the one question . . . why did you go to such lengths, once upon a time, to convince me you were the ‘only fully-feathered intacta in the history of the world’? ’” asks Walser. And Fewvers replies: "‘I fooled you, then!’ she said . . . ‘You mustn’t believe what you write in the papers!’” (294). Since we are reading “papers,” we are similarly admonished to question what is represented in language, since language can hide “absence,” and provide only an illusion of transparency. Thus, the quest to determine the ontological status of Fewvers no longer enthrals Walser. Nor should it enthrall us; for it has become abundantly clear that Fewvers is the figuration of narrative, and both are incredible. Like Walser, we should no longer feel compelled to produce a Realist representation of “the truth” of Fewvers, of the narrative. In short, we must accept this condition of disbelief. For Walser, it appears, the obstacle to his progress was his 'self' and his preconceptions regarding reality. And only a knock on the head, which effectively erases the memory of his discursive positioning, allows him to take up an identity that is capable of accepting the fictionality of all representation and the possibility of change. Walser's story is of a progression from the third-person 'he' to the first-person 'I', at least as far as he tells it:

Jack, ever an adventurous boy, ran away with the circus for the sake of a bottle blond in whose hands he was putty since the first moment he saw her. He got
himself into scrape upon scrape, danced with a tigress, posed as a roast chicken, finally got himself an apprenticeship in the higher form of the confidence trick, initiated by a wily old pederast who bamboozled him completely. All that seemed to happen to me in the third person as though most of my life, I watched it but did not live it. And now, hatched out of the shell of unknowing by a combination of a blow on the head and a sharp spasm of erotic ecstasy, I shall have to start all over again’. (Nights 294)

Perhaps, Carter intends her narrative as a 'significant' blow on the head (and a 'sharp spasm of erotic ecstasy'?), but I am not certain that a total erasure of the collective memory is a viable solution. As is clear from the excerpt just cited, Jack Walser inscribes his transition from Jack who "watched" his life, but "did not live it", to an "I" who is hatched, as Fevvers was hatched, and is, thus, reborn "to start all over again."

Significantly, both birth and rebirth are provisional engenderings. To be "hatched out of the shell of unknowing" is to be made aware of one's positioning in discourse and is, thus, to be enabled in the construction of that positioning. Conceivably, we might re-write narrative pleasure, as Carter appears to have done, to include female experience as one possible form of erotic experience, which suggests the possibility of rewriting gendered identity; both of which, in turn, suggest alternatives to strictly Oedipal narratives with their exclusively male erotics of the text, such as those inscribed in the work of Scholes, Brooks, and Freud. "Nights at the Circus," writes Robinson

...is particularly concerned with enacting the contradictions between Woman as object of official narratives and women as subjects of self-narratives. The text
enacts a conflict between the female protagonist's story and the story that a male reporter attempts to tell about her. (23)

As the novel ends, Fewers begins, again, to narrate. To Walser's questions, "What is your name? Have you a soul? Can you love?" Fewers replies, with exuberance and "newly armed": "That's the way to start the interview... Get out your pencil and we'll begin!" (Nights 291). This narration, it is implied, begins as the novel's narration ends for the reader. It thus extends beyond the end of the novel, beyond our gaze. Thus, our confidence is being sorely tried. Fewers is a fiction; she cannot exist other than as language printed on the page. The end of the novel ensures her end, does it not? But in a metafictional move, Carter suggests that we can disbelieve this Realist convention of narrative closure; it is not a question of suspending disbelief, but of embracing it. We can come to terms with our incredulity, with being duped by Fewers, much as Walser does. by accepting incredible alternatives to an Oedipal textual mechanics; for the Oedipal narrative in its Realist mode is, itself, incredible and we have accepted its dominance for far too long. Along with Walser, we can revel in our gullibility, for the potential of disbelieving narratives, as Carter has shown us, can move us beyond the Oedipal requirement for death, for closure. Hatched out of the shell of unknowing, like Walser, the reader must "start all over again" (294), just as the narrative must start all over again, but this time not for our eyes. Moreover, Fewers insists on circumventing the reader by creating her own self this time through her own narration. As Clément argues, "it happens that women talk, that they step out of their function as sign" ("Guilty One" 28). But it is also true that
it is not yet a question of autonomous language. There is no doubt that woman might speak by herself, from herself; at least she is recognized as a producer of signs, whereas the other function allotted to her, like the linguistic function, strictly concerns the exchange between the groups. Duet, song, representation of a relationship as spectacle: exchange object and theatrical object; object of theater, women in the initial exchange. ("Guilty One" 28)

Fevvers is "transformed back into her old self again, without an application of peroxide, even" (Nights 293), as she begins to tell her tale anew, just as Jack reconstructs himself. Like Scheherazade, she begins again, but this time we are not designated as the authorities who will confirm her status. We are left in the dark, in a state of unknowing, and like Walser we must construct our 'selves' anew.

Of course, the concept of a coherent, singular self is, itself, something of a fiction--a confidence trick. In keeping, then, with what Waugh calls "the 'classic' view of postmodernism" (Feminine Fictions 209), Carter's novel problematizes the 'universal' subject:

[t]he constituent elements of the post-modernist text seldom integrate thematically nor do the characters cohere psychologically: discontinuities of narrative and disjunctions of personality cannot be overcome--as they often can with canonical modernism . . . --by an appeal to the logic of a unifying symbolic metalanguage, a dominant stable discourse, settled hierarchy or the constituency of the core self. (Currie 54, cited in Waugh, Feminine Fictions 209-210)
As Waugh asserts, "[t]he 'subject', whether masculine or feminine, clearly is historically determined and discursively situated, but human will, subversive desire, and the consolidation of human connectedness can still exist as forces of political change" (Feminine Fictions 210). Jordan argues that "[t]he end of Nights at the Circus indicates that the production of new selves, as well as the deconstruction of old fixed identities, is very much a part of Angela Carter's discourse" (27). Of course, it is my contention that the self is a narrative production and, therefore, that Carter not only foregrounds the production of "new selves," but also the production of new narratives.

Carter's text suggests that to undo further the boundaries established by representation, we may need to embrace the figure of the dupe, the gull as representative readers with whom we can identify as we embrace, rather than suspend, our disbelief in 'tricky' trickster narratives. "Perhaps our hopes for accountability, for politics . . . turn on revisioning the world as coding trickster with whom we must learn to converse" (Haraway 201). Such a revisioning of the world, then, would entail a revisioning of narrative as coding trickster and of readers, as needing to suspend our belief, rather than our disbelief. In so doing, we might "converse" with the trickster narratives, the trickster world(s), and find new means of permeating boundaries. Fevvers, for instance, is not confined by the boundaries of her fictional world. When things get too hot, she simply jumps into the next chapter. Why did anyone ever believe that a character must be confined by boundaries of representation such as chapters? In what sense are chapters realistic? They may be naturalized modes of representation through narrative, but they are confining and, in fact, imposed on the representation of reality. And, as if in response
to my questions, Fewvers herself points out in conversation with the Escapee: "'Look, love,' I says to him, eventually, because I'm not in the mood for literary criticism . . . . 'I'm not the right one to ask questions of when it comes to what is real and what is not, because, like the duck-billed platypus, half the people who clap eyes on me don't believe what they see and the other half thinks they're seeing things'" (244). Significantly, "[t]hat shut him up" (244), as it may momentarily silence our own persistent questioning of the 'realistic' nature of representation. Narrative, especially in its Realist mode, is, thus, exposed as a trickster. As Carter writes, "what . . . would be the point of the illusion if it looked like an illusion? For . . . is not this whole world an illusion? And yet it fools everybody" (16, italics in original). This statement must be read ironically, however; it is yet another confidence trick, for Carter's novel definitely looks like an illusion in that it eschews Realist narrative conventions in favour of magic realism. But by drawing attention to the fact that we are consistently fooled by the illusions of representation, she draws attention to our own gullibility in the face of all narrative representation. She inscribes illusion, in order to undermine it. Thus, Carter presents alternatives to received narrative traditions, one of which is embracing our disbelief as means of undermining the boundaries which have, heretofore, restricted movement.

In Nights, the Realist journalist Walser finds himself finally in a place where "there existed no difference between fact and fiction; instead, a sort of magic realism" (260). He finds, that is, discovers, "himself" in fiction. Similarly, the reader also finds herself in a place where there appears to be no difference between fact and fiction, "instead a sort of magic realism." The possibility arises, then, that this is where she, too, may discover her
"self." What does it matter, then, if Fewvers is true, or if the fantastic narrative she tells is mythical or factual? What matters is that her story is told differently. As Catherine Clément observes,

[i]f women begin to want their turn at telling this history, if they take the relay from men by putting myths into words . . . it will necessarily be from other points of view. It will be history read differently, at once the same in the Real and an other in the Imaginary. These narratives, these myths, these fantasies, these fragments of evidence, these tail ends of history do not compose a true history. To be that, it would have to pass through all the registers of the social structure, through its economic evolution, through analysis of the contradictions that have made and are making its history . . . . Instead. it is a history, taken from what is lost within us of oral tradition, of legends and myths--a history arranged the way tale-telling women tell it. And from the standpoint of conveying the mythic models that powerfully structure the Imaginary (masculine and feminine, complex and varied), this history will be true. On the level of fantasy, it will be fantastically true: It is still acting on us. In telling it, in developing it, even in plotting it, I seek to undo it, to overturn it, to reveal it, to expose it. ("Guilty One" 6, italics in original)

Within the context of narrative production (tale-telling) and its reception, woman as confidence 'trickster' seems to acquire new meaning. In the trickster narrative we may discover, as Walser does when he loses his very 'self', that there is an incredible "freedom that lies behind the mask, within dissimulation, the freedom to juggle with
being, and, indeed, with the language which is vital to our being" (*Nights* 103)--with narrative representations.
Chapter Eight

Re-membering Cassandra: Oedipus Gets Hysterical

Now, wings without arms is one impossible thing; but wings with arms is the impossible made doubly unlikely--the impossible squared.

--Nights at the Circus (15).

"[A]ll literature," writes Fleiger, "is engaged in a perpetual conversation about desire" (244). Thus, narrative, as I have been arguing, is a site of seduction; however, the pleasures of such seduction have traditionally been Oedipal. In this chapter I propose to remain focussed on narrative seduction, but as it is demasculinized, or de-oedipalized, through the figures of the sorceress and the hysteric combined in a doubled, or a Cassandrian, seduction. In the previous chapter, I discussed Fevvers as a doubled figure: she is constructed as an object of the gaze, but it is in her narration, or the voicing of her stories, that her subjectivity is realized. We also saw how Carter, in trickster fashion, rewrites Oedipal narrative to include female erotic experience, as well as male.

According to Robinson, Carter's work is among that which represents woman as readers, as well as writers, of cultural narratives and models a contestatory practice of reading. This practice can be metaphorically described as a double, doubled, and doubling interpretive methodology--a conceptualization that is certainly not new to feminist theory or criticism, but which can be further elaborated in the specific context of narrative. (Engendering 18)
It is these alternative forms of narrative and reading as also double, doubled and doubling that I would like now to address; or, in other words, as cited in the epigraph to this chapter, Carter’s representation of “the impossible squared.”

According to Robert Rawdon Wilson, we consistently face a problem in this postmodern climate of disbelief: what are the possibilities of political action in a territory of such uncertainty where boundaries are continually dissolving, reconstituting and generally making it impossible to take a definitive, that is ‘bound’ stand. As indicated in my Introduction, Wilson sees Shakespeare’s Hermia, of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as symbolizing the essence of this challenge because she exemplifies the prototype of seeing, as he says, with “parted eye.” In this chapter, I will argue that the figure of Cassandra offers us a similar paradigm of narrative--one that is inherently doubled as she represents the ambiguity of the sorceress and the hysteric. In her function as seer, she is empowered as one who can identify and confer ‘truth’; as a hysteric, she is disempowered, robbed of voice, and mad. Yet, these apparently contradictory aspects are not engaged in a war of binary oppositions within woman; rather, they combine in the Cassandra figure and lead us to an understanding of the possibility of comprehending the incommensurable existence of contraries. Thus, Cassandra represents belief and disbelief at one and the same time. She, therefore, represents another means of dealing with 'double vision'. I intend the preposition “with” to be read in its double signification--dealing *with* the problems which arise when we recognize that reality is inherently doubled through its mediation and constitution in language and, as well, our own need to negotiate *with* the perceptual experience of double vision that appears to be our legacy as
postmodern subjects. The former aspect of doubling leads us to examine the doubled aspect of representing the object—in this case the doubling of Fewvers and of the narrative. The latter suggests something quite different: the need to understand the implications of double vision as a means of interpreting this reality, of reading narrative. In short, then, the former affects ontology, the latter epistemology.

Epistemologically, then, what inevitably emerges from this double vision, this seeing with "parted eye," is disbelief. Of course, I mean disbelief in the master-narratives of western culture, but I also intend disbelief in numerous other senses of the term: disbelief as awe (as in questions such as Christa Wolf's, "Shouldn't we think . . . that which 'is actually impossible'?"1); disbelief in the sense of disavowal, cynicism, and the continuous questioning of received ontologies and epistemologies; and finally, disbelief as a refusal to believe, uncritically, in representation. John Mepham identifies "disbelief in the possibility of distinguishing between fantasy and reality, the autonomy of art" (Mepham 155) as a fashionable position in postmodernist culture. In fact, he claims that Wolf's Cassandra refuses to adopt this "fashionable position" (155). In his expressed fear of fashionable positions, Mepham represents an attitude toward the postmodern that has undermined its significance especially in academic and intellectual circles that expressly fear the taint of the fashionable. Disbelief, whether fashionable or not, seems to me to represent an opportunity to value double vision as a tool for learning through irony, parody, interrogation, and problematizing without necessarily drawing definitive, universalized conclusions. Disbelief is also a figure for reading, responding, interpreting—

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1See the Introduction, 44.
-it is a crucial aspect of the infamous postmodern condition. Interestingly enough, 'condition' is often a term we use to designate an illness or disease, such as hysteria, for instance. Hence, one might say that the postmodern disease is disbelief, but this condition need not be met with hopelessness, or accompanied by paralysis in the face of persistent relativism—not, that is, if we accept the responsibility of producing constructive models of living with disbelief. Perhaps, we will comprehend that seeing with "parted eye" is seeing the 'partial' (contingent) nature of our understanding and, thus, we may reevaluate the predominant pathology of postmodernism and. in the spirit of disbelief, we may construct models of contingent, contextualized and particularized positions.

To construct such a model I turn to the multiple versions of Cassandra as she is reconstructed in numerous (and often contradictory) instances. The title of my thesis is repeated in this section as well; both titles cite Laurie Layton Schapira's *The Cassandra Complex: Living with Disbelief*. As mentioned in my Introduction, Schapira cites others, who, in turn, cite yet others. Thus, in a Chinese-box style of embedded citation. I draw on Schapira's work, which finds one of its authorities in Wolf's *Cassandra*, which, in turn, draws from Aeschylus' version of Cassandra in the *Orestia*. The *Orestia*, of course, is based on Homer's inscription of the oral tradition, that is, of language itself. And language, itself, we have learned, this time citing my own Introduction, "is everything" (41). The present day evocation of Cassandra, then, is, as Wolf would say, an intertextual "fabric" (*Cassandra* 142). Jungian psychologist Schapira explicitly equates the hysterical with the figure of Cassandra. In *The Cassandra Complex: Living with Disbelief: A Modern Perspective on Hysteria*, she examines the Cassandra myth in an effort to discern
the relevance of that myth to hysteria as it is expressed today in the contemporary feminine psyche (11). "The woman I identify as having a Cassandra complex." writes Schapira, "exhibits a specific hysterical pattern, including a marked split in the personality" (9). According to Schapira, hysteria, or "wandering womb." (58) may be understood, symbolically, to mean "an ego which is not grounded in the emotional, imaginal matrix of the Self" (58). For Schapira "hysterical symptomatology is the unconscious expression of repressed feminine values and compensates for prevailing patriarchal values; further, mediality is a central feminine value being carried by the hysterical today" (58). Hystera, we might say, then, is the narrative expression of the (re)surfacing of the repressed "other" of patriarchal culture. Since "our culture is informed by Apollonic consciousness" (Schapira 10), Cassandra represents a resurfacing of the repressed feminine and a voice of subversion, for she denies Apollo. Schapira's symptomatology might allow us to speculate in a very preliminary way on a possible model of Cassandrian narrative. Such a narrative, to be consistent with Schapira's, would question the unitary self and celebrate a roving, fragmented, constituted and situated self; it would attempt to "revision" (i.e. see anew and revise) and give expression to those feminine values repressed in patriarchy by demonstrating the social construction of all value. Finally, Cassandrian narrative would allow for multiple perspectives and would act as a mediating expression between belief and disbelief.

As well as being informed by Schapira's work, my theorizing of Cassandrian hysteria as a paradigm for narrative textual dynamics in Carter's Nights is highly influenced by Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous' fiction/theory, La Jeune Née, or Newly Born
Woman. In fact, if I did not know better than to presume influence, I would surmise that it is as if Carter discovered a ready-made cast of characters in Catherine Clément’s “The Guilty One” and Hélène Cixous’ “Sorties,” which are the two companion pieces of the dialogue contained in La Jeune Née. Indeed, Carter’s “New Woman” most certainly echoes in my mind with Cixous’ “newly born woman,” or “la jeune née.” According to Sandra Gilbert in her Introduction to La Jeune Née: "the newborn woman, transcending the heresies of history and the history of hysteria, must fly/flee into a new heaven and a new earth of her own invention"(xiv). This is precisely what Carter’s heroine literally does and what the other female characters in the novel accomplish, at least symbolically—all fly and flee into new paradigms of experience. Further, they transgress history and received modes of representation, in order to explore a new invention, a new story imagined differently, a new signifier (Schmidt 73), a Cassandrian narrative, which enables them to construct subjectivities of their own, no matter how unbelievable, or unrealistic, at least within an Apollonian or rationalist world view.

Two further points must be made regarding La Jeune Née, if we are to understand fully the Cassandrian paradigm. First, as Betsy Wing notes in her "Glossary," the significance of Cixous and Clément’s work will be missed if one does not take into account the primacy of hearing (and, therefore, by extension speech): hearing and speech, as we shall see, are the primary loci of symptoms in the hysterical. Traditionally, our culture grants priority to vision; "the feminist critique, however, links the privileging of

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I will also argue that Walser completes a similar transformation; thus Carter illustrates that the Cassandrian narrative does not reduce characterization to traditional models of gender that posit feminine and masculine as irreconcilable contraries.
vision with sexual privilege" (Owens, "The Discourse of Others" 70). Luce Irigary has observed:

[i]nvestment in the look is not privileged in women as in men. More that the other senses, the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, maintains the distance. In our culture, the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing, has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations . . . . The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality. (qtd. in Owens, "The Discourse of Others" 70)

Thus, the shift in the work of feminist theorists and writers to a study of the materiality of the body has produced a renewed interest in other modes of experience, other sensory investments. And Carter is very much interested in the materiality of our experience, sensory and otherwise: "she left us a legacy, and what we learn from her work is, as Simone de Beauvoir says, the material conditions of our existence and the power that comes with knowing those conditions" (Gass 8). As Wing points out, the multiple significations of the title La Jeune Née must be "heard": in La Jeune Née, "the disturbance leading to hysteria . . . is often something heard but not yet understood" (165). Further, citing Cixous, Wing writes, "the reign of the Symbolic begins in myth when 'insistent death penetrates the Great Woman through her ears'" (Wing 165 [Cixous 106]). The title thus enacts the focus on hearing, and, therefore, on speaking and narrating. Under the glossary heading "La Jeune Née," Betsy Wing writes the following:
Hear here: La Genêt: a feminine writing outlaw. (The reference is to Jean Genêt, French writer, homosexual, and convicted criminal, who wrote of outlaws, outcasts, sexual masks, and social roles.)

Là je n'est: There I, a subject, is not.

Là je une nais: There I, a subject (a feminine one), am born.

Clément and Cixous seek what has been set aside as not-the-subject. By taking what is not-the-subject for their subject, they write themselves into history. To do this, they do not hesitate to steal, in their capacity as outlaw (la Genêt), past Freud's blind spots to take his instruments to do their work. (166)

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that the representation of Fevvers and the narrative dynamics of the novel, in a particularly postmodern paradox, symbolize the denial of the subject as Woman (i.e. an Oedipal textual dynamic) and, at the same time, the birth of the subject as Woman 'newly born' (i.e. a Cassandrian narrative dynamic). I will show how Carter writes Woman into history, by stealing Oedipal narrative for her own purposes and by, thus, stealing "past Freud's blind spots." Finally, I will show that Carter achieves this by reinvesting "the voice" of Woman with a Cassandran power that enables Woman to be heard.

Another word of auditory significance in this text is "jouissance" with which, on the phonic level, one should hear: "j'ouïs sens: I hear meaning." Meaning, writes Wing, "is about as elusive (illusory) as the desired 'fusion and community' . . . of jouissance, but the search and desire for it goes on" (165):
In the case of the hysteric, "what is heard" provides the clue for these driven women that all is not as it seems, all is not well. Even though they repress the knowledge and cannot speak it, their bodies must tell what they know. The Great Mother heard her death; the hysteric heard an unacceptable sense. (Wing 165-6)

With these insights into the relationship between the hysteric, who is a figure for something "heard but not yet understood" and Cassandra, who spoke truth, although her speech was always only understood as the rantings and ravings of the hysteric, we can see emerging a provocative figure for narrative production and reception that does not inscribe only the Oedipal dynamic we saw in the textual mechanics outlined by Brooks, Scholes, Freud et al. Lorna Sage, one of the first critics to associate the work of Carter and Cixous, observes: "Carter speaks the same language as someone like Hélène Cixous" (Angela Carter 58). According to Sage, the passage in Cixous's work that most explicitly echoes Carter's own textual practice is from "La Sexe ou la tête?" and reads as follows:

origin is a masculine myth . . . . The question ‘Where do children come from?’ is basically a masculine, much more than a feminine, question. The quest for origins, illustrated by Oedipus, doesn't haunt a feminine unconscious. Rather it's the beginning, or beginnings . . . starting on all sides at once, that makes a feminine writing . . . . (Sage, Angela Carter 58 [Cixous, “La Sexe” 54-5])

Cassandrian and hysterical narrative then may be further refined to include aspects that evade or undermine the search for origins, and that problematize realistic and Oedipal representation in favour of meanderings and wanderings that offer only provisional sense.
Cassandrian narrative undermines the tyranny of vision in western metaphysics and concentrates its interest on hearing and narration (telling) in addition to sighting. It should be noted, however, that Cassandrian narrative concentrates on hearing in a visual medium, that of print; it, thereby, may be seen as a patently paradoxical and postmodern narrative model as it installs the very thing it seeks to subvert: vision.

The combined insights of Schapira, Wolf, Cixous and Clément enable me to posit this paradoxical, postmodern and alternative figure for narrative textual dynamics—a figure which combines the prescience and magic of the seer/sorceress with the 'mute' madness of the hysterical. Cassandra represents such a doubled figure for a narrative paradigm which is doubled in contending with disbelief: she is prescient and, at the same time, unbelievable; both verbal and mute (unheard). She (and the narrative paradigm she represents) is further doubled in that she is at once dismissed as mad, yet she also adheres to some, albeit partial and contingent, truths in her role as philosopher/seer. This contradictory pathology has long been associated with the figure of the hysterical sorceress. Aeschylus described Cassandra, in *The Agamemnon*, as “driven to the point of madness by the impact of the prophetic fit” (qtd. in Schapira 54); Freud remarks “the painful affect, crying, screaming, raving” (qtd. in Schapira 54) of the hysterical; finally Schapira cites physician William Harvey’s seventeenth-century record of “mental aberrations, the delirium, the melancholy, the paroxysms of frenzy, as if the affected person were under the dominion of spells” (qtd. in Schapira 54). Harvey’s version, thus, effectively links the hysterical symptoms with witchcraft and magic. Cassandra, then,
exemplifies the roles of hysteric and sorceress, as these are developed by Clément and Cixous.

Cassandra could thus be said to represent the mediation, or negotiation, between a number of contradictory positions, including sane/mad, truth/fiction, real/imaginary, belief/disbelief. In Wolf’s text, for example, she represents a woman who can predict the future, but only in so far as she can interpret the past and the present. Since she is unheard and not believed, it is difficult for her to believe herself, yet it is clear that what she foresees does come to pass. In effect, Cassandra epitomizes the readers’ position in relation to narrative and narrative’s position in relation to reality. What we can see is that Cassandra is right, even though she is not believed. Perhaps, what we can barely believe has more credibility that what we have previously thought, especially considering that what we have traditionally believed has lost most, or all, of its power of persuasion. The grand narratives have failed to provide us with convictions. In the postmodern age, we have come to see that narratives do not tell truth in any straightforward, unproblematic way. Nor can we ‘read’ either narratives, or the reality that they represent, in an unproblematical fashion. The narratives of a postmodern cast make this ambiguous and uneasy relationship between representation, interpretation and ‘truth’ abundantly clear: one way in which they do this is by reproducing totally unbelievable stories (a woman who flies!). However, if we have learned anything from Cassandra, it is that disbelief (skepticism) does not, necessarily, deny the possibility of a contingent and partial ‘truth’.

If we cannot believe what we see and hear in narratives, as narrative transcriptions of reality are always problematic as we have seen, nevertheless, we can attribute some
provisional truth to the narratives that re-present reality, even if that truth is only that fiction lies. As we recognize the truth, we are in the position of the seer, but as we question this truth, we are thrust into the position of the Trojans. We are split between belief and disbelief, but not irrevocably. The only way to negotiate this contradiction is through some form of mediation—believing in, and even celebrating, our experience of disbelief. Thus, as Schapira says, Cassandra represents mediarity; she demonstrates the mediation between these two poles of epistemological and ontological positioning and offers us another model of living with disbelief—with narratives, that is, fictions, as our only guide to knowledge and understanding. At least the Cassandra evoked by Wolf—a late twentieth-century evocation of the mythical prototype, changed by time, by history, and by women's endeavours to recuperate and revalorize the silenced voices of the past—represents a negotiation of both time and space, a negotiation that could easily be considered another definition of narrative. Today we are able to believe Cassandra (Troy fell), at the same time as we must disbelieve her, as she is a mythical, fictional construct. Her truth is irrevocably provisional and transitory. It is this Cassandra who is consistent with the contradictory images of the hysteric and the sorceress.

In order to understand fully the Cassandrian narrative paradigm, it is important, first, to explore this ambiguity “of the witch and her daughter, the hysteric” (“Guilty One” 34). Jane Gallop, in *The Daughter’s Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, devotes her final chapter to an analysis of the conflicting views presented by Cixous and Clément in *La Jeune Née*. Gallop claims that throughout the book, both writers are asking whether or not the hysteric is actually a victim or a heroine (133). Clément, says Gallop,
determines the hysteric’s role as ambiguous: “she both contests and conserves” (133). Further, writes Gallop, “[t]he hysteric contests inasmuch as she ‘undoes family ties, introduces perturbation into the orderly unfolding of daily life, stirs up magic in apparent reason’. . . . But the hysteric’s contestation is contained and co-opted” (Gallop, citing Clément, 133). We can, employing Clément’s own words, undermine her own estimation of the limitations of the hysteric, by pointing out the hysteric’s positive function: “[w]hen the line is crossed, contagion is produced . . . . The witches’ madness is contagious and rapidly transmitted. It is an epidemic” (34). In contrast to Cixous’ view of the hysteric as a creative force, Clément insists that the hysteric is not creative: she “does not write. does not produce, does nothing--nothing other than make things circulate without inscribing them” (37). However, the hysteric does talk--she narrates--as witnessed by Freud’s record of Dora among others. Also, it seems to me that putting things into circulation without inscribing them, implies the possibility of re-creation, for the hysteric, in her double function, utters both falsehoods and truths. Hence, our position vis-à-vis hysterical narrative is to acknowledge the circulation of things--ideas and ideologies--without necessarily subjecting them to a binary system of valuation--belief or disbelief. This act has the potential to recreate “the other.” The hysteric, as she is constituted in Clément’s remarks, is a very postmodern figure contesting the very thing she installs. Moreover, Gallop goes on, insightfully, to remark that although Clément’s version of the hysteric’s role appears to be “resolved into an irresolvable but stable and determinable ambiguity” (133), yet, the book continues, and
the ambiguity defined by Clément seems not so stable, not so easy to declare and accept as such. Just as the hysteric perturbs the orderly unfolding of family life, might she not likewise disturb the position of authorial mastery in this book? This cannot be considered a failing in a book where the desirability of a masterful authorial discourse is itself called into question. . . . To choose ambiguity is to choose to give up one’s masterful position . . . . (133-4)

We might note that, like Infernal Desire Machines, Nights refuses absolute closure and undermines both the reader’s and the narrators’ mastery over the text. The text is put into circulation—circulation without inscription is a function of an hysterical narrative—but it never reaches completion and can, thus, never be mastered. Nights chooses ambiguity, the ambiguity inherent in Cassandrian narrative.

Sandra Gilbert confirms the creative potential of the hysterical narrative when, in her illuminating “Introduction” to La Jeune Née, she acknowledges the possibility of a “creative ‘hystérie’ unleashed from the hyster and dedicated at last to ‘the other history’ which Cixous has called for” (xv). An example of such a liberation can be seen in Wolf’s text, wherein the protagonist, Cassandra, appears precisely to represent this “other history,” as her voice is returned to her. In Cassandra, the protagonist has her turn at telling the story. Interestingly, she construes her traditional and representative silencing as an attempt to suppress female versions of history. With the hysterical narration of her own version, her traditional ‘madness’ is transformed into her ‘prescience’. As such a doubled symbol, she is, thus, an extremely appropriate precedent for Fevvers’ function of installing hysterical narrative and of subverting it in Nights. Although Clément often
speaks of the hysteric in the past tense, even she concedes that the history of the hysteric “is the history that is not over . . . . The myth transmits itself making changes in accordance with historical and cultural evolution. It varies, it changes feathers” (6), or fewvers, who, as we saw in the last chapter, is committed to ‘changing her feathers’ by taking her turn at telling her tale. And narrating as well as being heard are central to the Cassandrian paradigm, as I shall explain.

As well as representing the female’s construction in mythic representations, Cassandra is a postmodern trope, undermining that which she installs. Cassandra could be seen as a figure for women as victims of representation--objectified, unheard, essentially dead. At the same time, Cassandra figures women’s empowerment through the double aspect of narrating their own stories and being heard. Like Desiderio’s writing in Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, Fewvers’ narration has a public role, her story a public function. Like Infernal Desire Machines, Nights commences as an ostensible autobiography, but the autobiographical form is not sustained throughout. Instead, Nights performs an hysterical wandering that produces more wonder than belief. There are eruptions of other third-person narrative forms, narrations by Walser and a third-person omniscient narrator who remains nameless. Similarly, subjectivity--the first-person version of the self--could be seen to be undermined by eruptions of ‘other’ received discourses and versions of selfhood. As I argued in Chapter Seven, the production of ‘selves’ for both Fewvers and Walser could be said to figure, metaphorically as it were, the process of producing narratives.
Fewers narrates her past to Walser, the truth-seeking journalist, and, in so doing, she utterly seduces him. Thus, we see narrative as seduction and Walser as reader in the age-old Oedipal relationship discussed in the Introduction. This is a strategy akin to what Irigaray calls mimicry: a self-conscious performance, by women, of the place traditionally assigned to Woman within narrative and other discourse. It is by this and other similar strategies that Fewers appropriates the gaze to herself as an index of her subjective agency, and simultaneously, gains control over her narrative. (Robinson 24)

However, as we have seen, Fewers refuses objectification in the Oedipal textual dynamic, at the same time as she inscribes it, with her seduction of the reader, of Walser. Moreover, as an ostensible “autobiography,” with the expectations of realism inherent in this form, the deviations from realist norms alert us to the magic, carnivalesque elements—elements of jouissance—which will persist throughout this text. Fewers, for instance, alerts us to the fictive construct she narrates and, thereby, the fictive construct called the ‘self’, since it is her ‘self’ that she constitutes in her narration. Even the slightest pretense to realism and a unified singular self is undermined when we read such statements as “‘Fevvers’ . . . she will be to the end of the chapter” (13), followed, after not one but two chapters, by Fewers’ own acknowledgement, “[a]nd so the first chapter of my life went up in flames” (50). Such metafictive devices undermine the readers’ confidence in the ontological status of Fewers’ narration, as well as in representation; they also force us to take part in the Cassandrian textual dynamic by seducing us into suspending our belief and thus constituting us as disbelieving readers (i.e. Trojans).
Lizzie and Fewers both represent the bewitching power of narrative. Fewers, herself, refers to Lizzie as a "witch," but goes on to explain, in a direct address to the reader:

[now, when I call Liz a 'witch', you must take it with a pinch of salt because I am a rational being and, what's more, took in my rationality with her milk, and you could say it's too much rationality as procured her not altogether undeserved reputation, for when she puts two and two together sometimes she comes up with five, because she thinks quicker than most. (225)

Much as narrative can play with linear time, Lizzie plays with time through the intercession of her magical clock. She is, perhaps, responsible for Fewers' miraculous retrieval from the hands of the Duke; and, somewhat parodically, it is she who applies the peroxide that keeps Fewers "a bottle blonde" (294). And, much more significantly, she makes an attempt to reverse the Oedipal paradigm of narrative by "[fixing] Walser with her glittering eye and [seizing] the narrative between her teeth" (Nights 32). She is also a devout Marxist, although how she reconciles "her politics with her hanky-panky" (225) is a question for Fewers. The narrator refers to Lizzie explicitly as "the witch" (60) and Walser feels trapped by their narrative. In fact, he feels that "[h]e must not leave the room until [Fevvers] and her familiar [are] done with him" (52). Fewers, in effect, imprisoned him, with her words; she "lassoed him with her narrative and dragged him along with her" (60). She thus causes Walser considerable problems, as Robinson notes:

while her active gaze and narrative control signal gender disruption to Walser—he had not bargained for an enigma who spoke back—she does not, thus, position
herself as masculine. She disrupts the singularity of masculine/feminine positions by representing herself as both spectacle and spectator, and forcing Walser to do the same. (125)

The importance placed on "narrative control"—speaking and hearing as a negotiation with, and as a figure for, empowerment—is echoed also in La Jeune Née. An audience, notes Clément, is necessary for the performance of the "spectacular side of sorcery and hysteria" (10), because the hysteric and the sorceress make "manifest the festival in their bodies, do impossible flips, making it possible to see what cannot be represented, figures of inversion" (23); this inversion, which literally transpires in a visual realm through Fewvers' acrobatics, is also accomplished, figuratively, through her verbal acrobatics in her function as hysteric narrator and through the function of the hysterical narrative in Nights:

[s]ince the etymological root of the word "hysteria" is the Greek hystér, or womb, the hysteric is, after all, the creature whose wandering, even wondering, womb manifest the distinctively female bonding, or bondage, of mind and body, the inescapable female connection between creation and procreation, the destiny that is inexorably determined by anatomy. And the sorceress--the witch, the wisewoman, destroyer and preserver of culture—is she not the midwife, the intermediary between life and death, the go-between whose occult yet necessary labors deliver souls and bodies across frightening boundaries? (Gilbert xii, italics in original)
In Nights, we can observe Lizzie ‘delivering’ Fevvers across boundaries such as chapters, delivering correspondence of the Marxist movement in Russia across political and territorial boundaries, delivering lectures on reality to both starry-eyed protagonists, Fevvers and Walser. In a sense, she serves as a plot device, one that devises strategies to outmanoeuvre the traditional “bondage” of plot, politics, reality. Fevvers (and indeed, Walser, as we shall see) serves as a figure of creation—as she creates her narrative out of memory, experience, and invention—and procreation, as she creates, recreates, or in other words, procreates her “self” many times over. It is Cassandra, then, who best represents the combination of the characteristics contained in Fevvers and Lizzie, as both are confined in the bodies of Woman, yet both aspire to the power, symbolized in the magic of the sorceress, to traverse those very boundaries—boundaries which are obstacles in an Oedipal paradigm. Cassandra is inherently doubled in that she incorporates creation/recreation/procreation, as well as the transformative power of destruction (Oedipus), and serves as intermediary between these two contradictory, but not necessarily incommensurable, models of narrative.

Like Cassandra, Fevvers can locate her origins in early Greece. She is, if you have any belief in her account (a belief, which we saw in the last chapter, is problematic), the offspring of Leda and the Swan. She is the daughter of a definitive Oedipal narrative: a rape. Such an auspicious beginning for the female protagonist of this novel leads Sage to remark that “Fevvers is a symbol come to life as a character” (Sage, Angela Carter 48, italics in original), rather than woman objectified as object. What Sage is suggesting is that although Fevvers is a product of myth, history and tradition, Carter endows her with
a character as well, a character that can resist being objectified as a virginal sacrifice on May Day, and reified as a "Yeatsian golden bird" (Sage, *Angela Carter* 48), precisely because this character has the power of the seeress to see that she is positioned by discourse, and not, necessarily, imprisoned by it. Moreover, Fewers has the magic (or audacity) of the witch to refuse her objectification, primarily by choosing to tell her own story. Thus Carter acknowledges the significance of history in our positioning, at the same time as she offers us alternative positions from which we can, if not erase history, at least rewrite its effect. Fewers is born of Oedipal narrative, but she also differs from it, in that her narrative, while it reproduces many an Oedipal dynamic, produces something other, something beyond repetition, something Cassandrian: prophetic and hysterical. According to Clément, the sorceress inhabits a position outside of the Oedipal dynamic and "outside the family":

> [f]rom this position . . . she will derive two gifts which are the very opposite of the Oedipus: "the illuminism of lucid madness, which, depending on its extent is poetry, second sight, a sharp penetration, speech both innocent and cunning, and above all the ability to believe all one's own lies". This is what settles the problem of what is true: she is true because she believes her own lies. She deceives "herself," she doesn’t deceive anybody. But she does not deceive herself, she repeats, she anticipates, she is not in the present, she is the obscure past of paganism, shaking up the present to arrive at science. (54-5)

Interestingly, Carter creates a heroine who is, most emphatically, "outside" the traditional family. Carter situates Fewers during the final days of the nineteenth century, thus
evoking a utopian and *fin-de-siècle* decadence, as well as the promise of change. Fewers is also, thus, situated as a contemporary of Freud, whose *Studies on Hysteria*, with Joseph Breuer, was first published in 1895. However, as the above quotation suggests, as a hysterical narrator, Fewers is quite literally "shaking up the present to arrive at science," in that she anticipates the twentieth-century woman, whom science will vindicate and who will be reconstituted by revisionist Cassandrian narratives, such as the one Fewers tells. Further, drawing on Clément’s insights above, we can see how Fewers conforms to the hysterical paradigm. The theme of deception is central to the figure of Fewers and her narration. Moreover, she possesses, as a fictive construct, the ability to be “not in the present,” but to, nonetheless, anticipate the “New woman,” with her “illuminism of lucid madness . . . [her] second sight . . . [and her] speech both innocent and cunning.” And, more importantly, Fewers’ hysterical narrative, while not strictly antithetical to “the Oedipus,” since it incorporates Oedipal dynamics, does manage at the same time, to question the hegemony of this narrative form. In short, Carter’s text explores the narrative possibilities inherent in the Cassandrian model of contestatory madness and illuminating magic. Symbolically, Carter suggests that the origins of narrative are Greek, indeed even Oedipal, but that we need not be resigned to the death inscribed in this discourse. There are other possibilities in narrative, such as those glimpsed in Wolf’s *Cassandra*, as Laurie Melissa Vogelsang explains:

> [t]here would seem to be alternatives and life in the very processes of reading and of narrative. At the conclusion of Cassandra’s narrative (and it must end) comes
her death. Yet the story can be retold and reread and hence revived. Like the author Wolf, we as readers are not tied to any final interpretations. (372)

Moreover, Carter’s narrative, like Wolf’s, presents alternatives to the “processes of reading and of narrative,” alternatives that I have labelled Cassandrian.

Clearly, deception is a central aspect of the Cassandrian narrative, but deception which serves to illuminate the lies that pass as truths. In my previous chapter, I discussed the “lie” as confidence trick, and as inherent in Realist representational codes, which reproduce certain ‘truths’, such as the universality of human experience, the resultant inescapability of gendered identity, and the transparent referentiality of language in representing these ‘truths’. Magic realism explicitly inscribes a thoroughly incredible and incredulous narrative, and thereby, ironically, exposes as ‘lies’ the ‘truths’ inscribed in Realist modes of representation. According to Norris, the magic realism in Nights “deconstructs the conventions of mimetic realism, resisting all attempts to naturalize its various extravagant scenes and episodes” (52). In this sense, then, magic realism is Cassandrian: it tells a truth, though we perceive such truth as unrealistic, as deceptions, as lies. Magic realism, says Carter, is “[a]nother way of magicking or making everything strange,” and it is a way “to take metaphor literally, and in some respects Fevvers in Nights at the Circus starts off as a metaphor come to life—a winged spirit” (qtd. in Haffenden 92-3). If Fevvers is a "metaphor come to life," one we should take "literally," we may wish to ask just what it is she represents.
Fewers is a Cassandrian narrator extraordinaire: we cannot definitively determine the truth of her narration, as she admits to telling both 'truths' and 'lies'. She would obviously be seen as a thoroughly compromised narrator in the Realist tradition, as she blatantly admits her lack of candour. She has lied, but only partially. As she explains to Walser, she made "grievous use" of him by tricking him into conveying information regarding the struggle of the proletariat in Russia to "comrades in exile" (292). She apologizes for deceiving him further: "we played a trick on you with the aid of Nelson's clock" (292). However, she continues: "[w]e told you no other lies nor in any way strayed from the honest truth. Believe it or not, all that I told you as real happenings were so, in fact; and as to questions of whether I am fact or fiction. you must answer that for yourself!" (292). Of course, the question of Fewers' credibility is posed to the reader just as it is posed to Walser. Her credibility and the credibility of the narrative are inseparable issues. As I argued in the previous chapter. Fewers is, herself, the representation of narrative incredulity. She undergoes identity shifts throughout. Carter's text, then, is included amongst those that do indeed undermine the concept of a coherent psychological self--but only when that self is conceived in terms of a unified inner essence. What they do not reject is the necessity for assuming a self-concept which recognizes the possibility of human agency, the need for personal history, self-reflexiveness, and the capacity for effective action in the world. (Waugh, Feminine Fictions 210, italics in original)
Fewers, then, is very much a Cassandrian narrator as she can be said to figure one central element of the female in representation: she simultaneously speaks truth and yet is unbelievable and even perhaps, incomprehensible. We have already seen in the last chapter how Fewers' narrative severely tries our belief: how she and narrative in general conspire to dupe us. Moreover, Fewers remarks, in a telling comment, ostensibly explaining the fate of the mute, black, man-servant, Toussaint, that "'it is the lot of those who toil and suffer to be dumb'" (60). She goes on, however, in an Hegelian/ Marxist analysis, to explain the irony in Toussaint's later surgery, which reinvests him with a voice: "'consider the dialectic of it . . . how it was. as it were, the white hand of the oppressor who carved open the aperture of speech in the very throat you could say that it had, in the first place, rendered dumb . . .'" (60, italics in original). Similarly, we might note the explicit irony in a narrative that inscribes the Oedipal paradigm, at the same time as that paradigm is being undermined through the continuous provocation of disbelief, and, more importantly, by providing the traditional object of that paradigm (Woman/Fewers) with a voice, thus allowing her access to subjectivity. According to John Meapham woman's incomprehensibility is typical, in so far as she is constituted in representation:

[w]e are all in the same situation when it comes to understanding anything at all. since everything is textual--a past event, a life, a society--all present themselves to us, for our will to meaning to get to work on, in the form of words, utterances, texts. Often, perhaps too often, the item that gives rise to crisis by simultaneously inviting and defying understanding is represented as a woman: Mary Crick in
Graham Swift's *Waterland*; Sarah Woodruff in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman; A . . .* in Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie.* and so on.

(Mepham 148-9, ellipsis in original)

We could easily see Cassandra as a paradigm case for the *impenetrable* woman and Fewvers as yet another evocation of the same: this is best seen, perhaps, in her symbolic self-representation, when she confides, "*intacta as I am*" (82). "I myself," continues Mepham, "prefer the idea [presented in Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot*] that the unmasted 'truth' is a greasy pig" (149). For Carter, the unmasted truth is embodied in a creature, part angel, part bird, part witch, but all woman.

We might well ask what it is about Carter's narrative that makes it significantly different than the usual Oedipal scenario. Clément describes Freud's work on hysteria in the following terms: "[a]n entire sequence is set up: acrobatic shamans, witches' flights, clowns, convulsions, and scenes of the hysteric's arched bodies; *magic, spectacle, and illness*" (13, italics in original). Significantly, Carter sets up the same sequence. The structure is like that of *The Thousand and One Nights*--"nights" perhaps representing an intertextual echo in Carter's own title. In fact, Fewvers is something of a Scheherazade, "spinning another story out of the bowels of the last one" (Carter, *Expletives Deleted 2*).

But the characters are all marginalized, all anomalies: acrobats, clowns, shamans, witches, and women. In short, the characters conform to the magic and spectacle of the scene of hysteria as it is described by Freud.3

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3As well as a Freudian intertext, there is an obvious temptation to attribute Bakhtinian notions of 'carnivale' to *Nights* ('at the circus,' nonetheless), but my interests lie elsewhere at present. Carter claims that she only read Bakhtin upon the suggestions of others who had already read her completed novel.
In the world represented in *Nights*, even the freaks, the “ex-centrics” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 12), the marginalized are on their own Oedipal missions; their obstacle, however, is their petrification in that discourse. Images of imprisonment abound in the novel and are closely linked with discursive communities. Strictly female communities in the novel include Ma Nelson’s brothel, where women are confined in their representations as objects by the economic necessity of administering to male desire. Here, we encounter a community of prostitutes, but the pretense of female sexual pleasure is questioned when Carter writes that “a sub-text of fertility underwrote the glittering sterility of the pleasure of the flesh available within the academy” of Ma Nelson’s (39). And the daily academic pursuits of the women, which included studying, reading, stenography, typing and music, were followed, “after they put away their books” by what amounts to “poor girls earning a living, for, though some of the customers would swear that whores do it for pleasure, that is only to ease their own consciences . . . . No woman would turn her belly to the trade unless pricked by economic necessity” (39). Thus, through economic necessity, women are confined to their role as objects of male desire. Similarly, Madame Schreck’s museum of women monsters offers further examples of women as anomalies, who are confined by their gender, as objects of the gaze. Madame Schreck “chose to dispose of [the women] in a series of tableaux” (62). This community of women is a “chamber of imaginary horrors” (70) comprised of symbolic representations of female identities which further perpetuate and reproduce these representations as confinement. These symbolic representations of Woman include: the childless, or infertile, woman as an abomination (Fanny-four eyes’ “mamillary eyes” (69)); the threat of castration (Cobwebs evokes
images of the spider's immediate consumption of her mate); traditional notions of female sexual perversion (Albert/Albertina's bisexual nature); female passivity (the Sleeping Beauty); woman as diminutive, childlike, and in dire need of protection (the Wonder); or, woman as gigantic, monstrous and the agent of death (Fewvers as "the Angel of Death" (70)). Such a community is entirely dependent on male voyeurism for its existence—a voyeurism which—as a function of the eye, of seeing—produces both Oedipal desire and repulsion. Walser, we note, simultaneously experiences both "revulsion" and "enchantment" as Fewvers relates this story of her imprisonment (69).

Carter further explores women as anomalies, outside the social order, through the representation of female incarceration. She employs Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon design for a prison, perhaps via Foucault's discussion of the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*, to symbolize women as, once again, confined as "objects of [the] gaze" (*Nights* 213). The convicts in this prison are convicted murderesses; convicted, specifically, of murdering their husbands. But,

[t]here are many reasons, most of them good ones, why a woman should want to murder her husband; homicide might be the only way for her to preserve a shred of dignity at a time, in a place, where women were deemed chattels, or, in the famous analogy of Tolstoy, like wine bottles that might conveniently be smashed when their contents were consumed. (210-211)

These women are forced to sit in a cell where they are forever being watched and are never allowed to communicate with each other. They are allowed "neither privacy nor distraction, [in] cells formulated on the principle of those in a nunnery where all was
visible to the eye of God” (212). Here they must sit until they acknowledge, “not their
guilt—most of them had done that, already—but their responsibility” (212, italics in
original). With potent irony, Carter thus points to the fact that these women, who are
victimized by patriarchal violence, are also forced to acknowledge responsibility for that
victimization.

Notably, the brothel, the museum of women monsters and the women’s prison are all
overseen by women: Ma Nelson, Madame Schreck and the Countess P. This effectively
underscores the pervasiveness and reproduction of patriarchal ideology. Countess P. is
doubly guilty of course, since she, in fact, murdered her own husband before becoming
the warden of the prison which incarcerates women for committing exactly the crime of
which she is guilty. The irony, of course, is that she is, herself, thus incarcerated, both
within the prison, as she keeps constant vigil over the prisoners, and within ideology: “for
the price she paid for her hypothetical proxy repentance was her own incarceration,
trapped as securely in her watchtower by the exercise of her power as its objects were in
their cells” (214).

The obstacle, for all of these women, then, is their confinement in ideological
representations of Woman. However, all of them eventually escape their confinement.
Some of the prostitutes establish businesses of their own, whereas Jenny secures an
advantageous marriage to Lord Muck—particularly advantageous, since the wealthy
husband conveniently “chokes to death on the bombe surprise” (46) which we note is a
speciality in Lizzie’s family’s business (47). Who do you think “put the bomb in the
bombe surprise” (225), asks Fevvers, implying that the “witch” (225) Lizzie has a few
things for which she must account. We are led to believe that a similar fate awaits Jenny’s second husband, Singer of sewing-machine fame, as he “ain’t feeling any too chipper, these days,” which causes Lizzie to wonder, “poker-faced, ‘whether all his millions will console [Jenny] for her loss’” (47). The female ‘monsters’ find homes, or establish new ones, where they are embraced for their difference rather than displayed: Wonder is welcomed back into her family; Albert/Albertina becomes employed by the now wealthy Jenny, who considers her a “treasure” (86); Fanny establishes an orphanage, “so now she has twenty lovely babies to call her ‘mama’” (86); Cobwebs becomes a painter in chiaroscuro, thus making “the shadows work for her” (86); and Beauty continues to dream, a dream that according to Fevvers, “will be the coming century” (86).

The prisoners escape and establish a female Utopia (with the help of a vial of frozen sperm). And although the drive of all of these anomalies, these women, to overcome their obstacles is Oedipal, their resultant liberation puts them in a position to reconstruct themselves outside of that paradigm. As Clément points out in “The Guilty One,”

[s]ocieties do not succeed in offering everyone the same way of fitting into the symbolic order; those who are, if one may say so, between symbolic systems, in the interstices, offside, are the ones who are afflicted with a dangerous symbolic mobility. Dangerous for them, because those are the people afflicted with what we call madness, anomaly, perversion. (7)

Moreover, Carter’s work does exemplify Clément’s insight that “women, who are . . . bearers of the greatest norm, that of reproduction, embody also the anomaly. Women, whom Marcel Mauss associates with neurotics, ecstastics, drifters, jugglers, tumblers, are
double” (“Guilty One” 7-8). Women “are the epitome of paradox, order and disorder” (8); therefore, what better narrative paradigm to represent women, but one that incorporates the same paradoxical qualities as they do.

The circus, the apes, the outlaws and others, all represent further examples of communities outside the social order, wherein “everyone is ex-centric” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 71). These ex-centrics all wander and wonder, in hysterical fashion, in search of new modes of being. One example of an entirely male, but nevertheless ex-centric, community in the novel is Clown Alley. The community of Clowns is explicitly compared to New Testament theology, which, Carter implies, is another patriarchal and ideological prison. Significantly, according to Clément, Freud identified “clowning” as “specific to hysteria in boys, the imitation of animals and circus scenes which are explained by a fusion of games with sexual scenes” (Freud, qtd. in Clément 12).

Clément further observes that “[w]ith the circus and the cinema, we have moved into the institutionalization of hysteria: spectacle cashing in on the exchange of money” (13). Fewers is clearly cashing in on her function as spectacle, but so, also, are the other performers in the circus, including the clowns. According to Buffo the Great, whom Schmidt identifies as a Christ-figure, the clown possesses a unique privilege: “‘[w]e can invent our own faces! We make ourselves’” (121, italics in original), says Buffo.

Significantly, the possibility of creating one’s own face, no matter how confining that creation becomes, is here seen as originally reserved for men, although the Cassandrian narrative offers other options for women (and perhaps for men as I will show in my discussion of Walser’s transformation). The women, as we have just seen, are originally
constructed as objects of the gaze, whereas the men are able to construct their own subjectivities. Nonetheless, once an identity is constructed, it is immutable. Buffo continues thus:

"[t]he code of the circus permits of no copying, no change. However much the face of Buffo may appear identical to Grik's face, or to Grok's face . . . it is, all the same, a fingerprint of authentic dissimilarity, a genuine expression of my own autonomy. And so my face eclipses me. I have become this face which is not mine, and yet I chose it freely . . . .

"Yet," he went on. "am I this Buffo whom I have created? Or did I, when I made up my face to look like Buffo's, create. *ex nihilo*, another self who is not me? And what am I without my Buffo's face? Why, nobody at all. Take away my make-up and underneath is merely not-Buffo. An absence. A vacancy." (122)

According to Norris, "Angela Carter's clown, is an adept of deconstruction before the letter, of a gestural writing that effaces all signs of origin and exists only in the moment of its own production" (52). But at least one of the clowns, Walser, is able, through his hysterical wandering in a place where no facts existed and his imposed state of absolute wonder, to construct a new identity. He, thus, transgresses the boundaries of the immutable self, and embraces disbelief in his historical representation as realist reader and authority. Walser is "[p]recipitated in ignorance and bliss into the next century" where he "took himself apart and put himself together again" (294).
Walser's transformation is an hysterical one that transcends Oedipal requirements for an autonomous, universal and immutable self. His transformation is, also, entirely comical. Walser is something of a Humpty-Dumpty, but the egg is the "shell of unknowing" (294). As he faces his future "[s]mothered in feathers and pleasure as he was" (294), all he can hear is Fevvers' laughter which "seeped through the gaps in the window-frames and crack in the door-frames of all the houses in the village. The villagers stirred in their beds, chuckling at the enormous joke that invaded their dreams, of which they would remember nothing in the morning except the mirth it caused" (294-5). The comic nature of Carter's text further elaborates its hysteric and hysterical quality. When the sorceress laughs, says Clément, it is "petrifying and shattering constraint . . . . Women-witches often laugh . . . . [Their] laughter keeps a wide gash bleeding in the man's breast. Even that way she soils" (32-33). We are reminded here of Walser's view of Fevvers as soiled, but also of Clément's assertion that the sorceress "transforms, she acts: the old culture will soon be the new. She is mixed up in dirty things; she has no cleanliness phobia . . . . She handles filth" (36). In The Purloined Punch-line, Fleiger reads Cixous' "Laugh of the Medusa," as a demonstration that "laughter figures as an important metaphor for revolt as well as a symptom of the human desire that motivates this revolt" (12). Further, Fleiger's reading of Freud "proposes the joke scenario as the paradigm of narrative itself" (18). Thus, a joke is necessarily at play within the master-narrative of subjectivity, the "oedipal scenario" (18). In her extremely

*At this point, I would also like to draw, once again, on the implications of comic hilarity evoked by the term, "hysterical."
informative text, *Telling Tales: The Hysteric’s Seduction in Fiction and Theory*.

Katherine Cummings connects the comic and the hysterical, when she insists that the hysteric’s narratives consisted “of such literary improprieties as jokes, puns, romances, metaphors, and metaphysical speculations” (26). Thus, “[b]ecause hysterical discourse is replete with these kinds of literary devices, it might be argued that hysteric’s narratives both hooked Freud on narrativity and more generally affected his style”:

he chose an hysterical construction as the model of narrativity, if only because its choice further testifies to the (seductive) power of hysteric’s tales. Had they had less of an impact, in other words. Freud would not have listened to poetry and heard “hysterical phantasies” there. (26)

In her function as tale-teller, Fewers seduces us, lassoes us, just as she does Walser, with her presentation of life as a comedy. We hear of her trials and tribulations, her close-encounters with sexual aggression, her fragile bird-like status, her angelic salvation of others, her spectacular performances; we experience her trickery, her witchery and her bewitching of Walser and the reader, all resolved to comic effect, as long as we become comfortable with disbelief. If we continue to expect narrative to represent reality unproblematically, then our experience may be more tragic than comic. In *Nights*, we see what Fleiger observes as a “comic process, read as a symptom of a subversive desire which aims at unworking repression in every sense of the term” (11). The discourses of clowning and hysteria in *Nights* evoke for us the subversive and “poststructuralist notion of irony as (comic) contagion--a kind of transmissible fascination with ‘the uncertainties of discourse’” (Fleiger 14). According to Fleiger,
the postmodern reader laughs. In laughing, the reader enters a comic transaction in which the gay seems to have become not only a preferred literary technique but also a vehicle for criticism and theory; indeed, all this clowning seems to invite a willful confusion between literature and theory, and an inmixing of theoretical fields. (20)

Indeed, “comic technique has been brought into play not only in recent literature and criticism but in theoretical writing as well . . . --theory that makes extensive use of comic imagery and device in its efforts to ‘unwork’ or ‘deconstruct’ assumptions about language, writing, and knowledge” (Fleiger 21), as well as subjectivity, identity and gender, I might add. Moreover, the comic mode interrogates and subverts our usual expectations and received traditions (Fleiger 21). And if you do not think so, then, as Fevvers would say, you have “got another think coming” (231). Appropriately, then, Carter’s work also subverts these expectations and traditions. It can be said of her work, as Clément says of Cixous’, that it is "halfway between theory and fiction" (xi); in this aspect, her work is, itself, doubled--a product of contagion. Employing Clément’s words, we can say of Nights, that “[a]n entire fantastic world, made of bits and pieces, opens up beyond the limit . . . . For the witch (the hysteric), breaking apart can be paradise, but for another, it is hell. It is ears that walk armed with a knife, bird-headed bellies open” (33-4).

Obviously, in a narrative paradigm based on the figure of Cassandra, the seeress, vision cannot be altogether abandoned; however, along with Cassandra we may have to learn to interpret our sightings as partial. We may find we are afflicted with double
vision. Donna Haraway, for one, finds this not an altogether negative prospect, when she writes: "[f]eminism loves . . . the sciences and politics of interpretation, translation, stuttering, and the partly understood. Feminism is about the sciences of the multiple subject with (at least) double vision" (195), since "[s]ingle vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters" (154). Further, "[w]e seek not the knowledges ruled by phallogocentrism (nostalgia for the presence of the one true Word) and disembodied vision, but those ruled by partial sight and limited voice" (196).

Carter's own work presents, through its 'Cassandrian narrative' (i.e. partial [in both senses of the word] sight and understanding), a doubled discourse--seeing with "parted eye" as Wilson says. This concept of double vision is also extremely significant in a postmodern frame, for, like Cassandra, it problematizes belief. While double vision obviously places emphasis on visual perception, it undermines visual perception at the same time. Double vision is a central mode of irony; and, writes Gilbert, "for the sorceress, irony is the privilege of marginality" (xiii). Thus we perceive vision as at once useful, yet complicitous. Carter is, of course, implicated in the postmodern dilemma: complicity with the very discourse she is trying to critique (Hutcheon, Politics 149). We comprehend the critique of the visual through a visual medium, that of reading text.

Moreover, Fewers is an extraordinary 'vision'. However, the fact that she is so extraordinary marks her as a curiosity, a question of possibilities outside of our normal expectations. Seeing Fewers is disbelieving. Thus the tyranny of vision is interrogated and undermined through our doubled and ironized vision.
Furthermore, as identity is re-constructed in *Nights*, escape from the Oedipus might well be the last Oedipal mission. Fevvers, as we have seen, creates and recreates herself as both object and subject of narrative. Similarly, Walser has a doubled-identity as both hero and obstacle in the quest--both male and female. In a sense, then, his quest is, in fact, a "regression" (in Freudian terms) to a pre-Oedipal stage prior to the inscription of gendered subjectivity. De Lauretis writes:

> [o]ne can of course remark that the term "regression" is a vector in the field of (Freud's) narrative discourse. It is governed by the same mythical mechanism that underlies his story of femininity, and oriented by the teleology of (its) narrative movement: progression is toward Oedipus, toward the Oedipal stage (which in his view marks the onset of womanhood, the initiation to femininity); regression is away from Oedipus, retarding or even impeding the female's sexual development, as Freud would have it, or as I see it, impeding the fulfillment of the male's desire, as well as narrative closure. (*Alice* 142)

In this space, then, Walser becomes conscious of the 'fictionality' of all representation and the possibility of re-writing the fiction. If subjectivity is discursively produced, then we can re-write the discourse that inscribes sadism and thereby denies the female subject. According to Cixous, woman is victim to a rather large lie, perpetrated by the tyranny of the visual: "the 'dark continent' trick has been pulled on her: she has been kept at a distance from herself, she has been made to see (= not-see) woman on the basis of what man wants to see of her, which is to say, almost nothing" (68). It might be argued that Carter is simply reversing the hierarchy of the male/female binary by putting the woman
on top and that this reversal is hardly a tenable solution to gender inequities as these are inscribed by narratives and elsewhere. I would argue, however, that both Walser and Fevvers (despite the gender of their text-images) actually vacillate between gendered positionalities in their constitution as both hero (speaking subject) and barrier (object of discourse), as do Desiderio and Albertina in *Infernal Desire Machines*. Walser is (d)emasculated only in the sense that Fevvers is de-feminized; both are de-mythified, in a particularly postmodern way, through the inscription of myth. Robinson insists that *Nights* pushes “official narratives of gender to their limits in order to dismantle them” (130). In other words, Carter attempts to ‘de-doxify’ the doxa (Hutcheon, *Politics* 29) of gendered subjectivity and she, therefore, problematizes the assumptions inherent in the representations of both male and female desire.

As well as wondering and wandering, the hysteric has been defined by Cixous as, “she, who is distance and postponement, [who] will keep alive the enigma, the dangerous delight of seduction, in suspense, in the role of ‘elope’, she is Helen, somehow ‘outside’” (67-8). I remind my reader that Fevvers is introduced in the first paragraph of the novel as “Helen of the High Wire” (7); however, rather than ships, this “Helen launched a thousand quips, mostly on the lewd side” (8). Moreover, as an eloper she is, as Cixous defines the term, “carried away with herself and carried off from herself” (68). Furthermore, her narrative is one of continual deferral; it is, itself, an eloper. Significantly, in its hysterical quality of being carried away by and from itself, the narrative of *Nights* represents tales which are "epidemic" in terms of their multiplicity. Further, the narrative’s quality of “distance and postponement” undermines, at the same
time as it installs, an Oedipal trajectory. Fevvers, in fact, does not write her tales, she narrates them, which is consistent with the Cassandrian need to be heard and the hysteric’s failure to write at least as far as Clément’s characterization of her goes. This concentration on giving voice to experience, in turn, may allow us to undercut the primacy of vision and embrace another sense perception, that of hearing, but not without dealing with the postmodern paradox, for although Fevvers narrates her own story, it is only through reading, with our eyes, that we can begin to suspend our belief. For feminists such as Cixous, giving voice and being heard are powerful metaphors for female empowerment and understanding, and as we have already seen, vocalizing and being heard are central elements of Fevvers’ narration, where seeing is disbelieving. We must learn, then, to recognize that through our doubled sight, our disbelief in what we read, we may learn to hear the other of what was said (Bouchard 17). We must attend this doubling and displacing “slight-of-hand, or ear, rather” (Nights 90).

Notably, Walser serves the same function for Fevvers as Freud did for Dora and the other hysterics: both record the hysterical narrations. In Gilbert’s words:

[i]n the past, surely--despite the struggles of “sorceresses” and “hystercs” like Barrett Browning, Dickinson, and Woolf--the pen/penis has been the privileged marker that was thought to leave the most significant traces on the apparent vacancy of nature, the blank spaces that had to be filled to “make” history. Thus women’s words, traditionally relegated to margins, are inevitably the signs of the repressed, enigmatic hieroglyphs of an absence violently striving to become a presence. (xvii-xviii)
Fevvers' narration gives voice to her experience at the same time as it leaves the writing to Walser. However, Walser is seduced by the "caress in her voice" (42):

[her voice. It was as if Walser had become a prisoner of her voice, her cavernous, sombre voice, a voice made for shouting about the tempest, her voice of a celestial fishwife. Musical as it strangely was, yet not a voice for singing with; it comprised discords. her scale contained twelve tones. Her voice, with its warped, homely. Cockney vowels and random aspirates. Her dark. rusty, dipping, swooping voice, imperious as a siren's. (43)

"Yet such a voice could almost have had its source, not within her throat but in some ingenious mechanism or other behind the canvas screen, voice of a fake medium at a seance" (43). Clément argues that Freud was seduced in like manner by Dora and the other 'hystercs'. Traditionally, the hysteric's symptoms have included a feeling where the voice is "[b]locked in the unspeakable." symbolically attested to by manifestations of symptoms in the body. As Clément explains:

[the sore throats, the pain of gorge rising, the mountainous passes where Dora recognized her desires, run everywhere inside them [hysteric and sorceress]. And then, the cries, the cries that never come out, silent cries, the mouth opening on nothing; coughing fits, colds that impede communication. (36)

Thus the hysteric represents a contradiction that is central to the Cassandra figure.

According to Cummings, the hysteric "speaks a double language and inhabits at least two states of mind" (27)—belief and disbelief, perhaps? All of Freud's early writings "remark upon the hysteric's contrary actions, contradictory utterances, and unconscious
ambivalence . . . . [T]he standard account of hysterical symptomology leads us to expect that the talking hysteric will produce a contradictory and convoluted discourse” (27n). The speaking voice of the hyster, of Cassandra, is problematic: her need to be heard is recorded by Wolf, by Freud, but her ability to speak is disempowered by her interlocutor’s failure to believe. At least, according to Clément, Freud failed to believe the hyster’s tale of seduction, just as the Trojans failed to believe Cassandra’s prediction of the fall of Troy. Moreover, as Cummings points out, these “seduction scripts . . . have been written by masterful males” (5); whereas, alternative revisions of the hysterical model of narrative may “represent [the hyster’s] defense . . . [and] compose an Oedipal double cross” (5). Clearly, then, to seduce through narration, with the voice, is central to the figure of Cassandra. But, as Cummings points out, we need to think seduction doubly as both an instrument of patriarchal domination and a potential vehicle for challenging male hegemony. Thus doubled, seduction never serves nor subverts the status quo in monolithic fashion, as would a less ambivalent event; rather, it upholds the law and perverts the law in one stroke.

(5).

Fewers is able to narrate, although what she narrates is unbelievable. However, just as Wolf’s recuperation of Cassandra has provided her with an audience—we ‘listen to’ what the Trojans would not hear—so Carter’s production of the Cassandrian narrative and the Cassandra-like Fewers has also found an audience. As unbelievable as the narrative is, it, nevertheless, provides us with insights into the problems of the representations of woman as anomaly, as mad, as witch, as hysteric. Hence, through a hysterical narration,
the reader can "hear" the production of a new and Cassandrian narration which both
inscribes and subverts hysteria, and lands us in a utopian realm imagined by Cixous and
expressed by Gilbert:

the country of writing ought to be a no where into which we can fly in a
tarantella of rage and desire, a place beyond "vileness and compromise" where
the part of ourselves that longs to be free, to be an "it" uncontaminated by
angel or witch (or by sorceress or hysteric) can write itself, can dream, can
invent new worlds. (xviii)

Thus, Fevvers and the narration in Nights both inscribe and transcend her construction as
woman, whether by 'woman' we mean angel, witch, hysterical or sorceress. Her versions
of history, unbelievable in the present context, represent utopian gestures towards a new
narrative which may give voice to a new world, a new man and a new woman. This
conclusion may sound a little too utopian to be truly postmodern: indeed, I invite you to
approach my work with disbelief, while you seek only to uncover the alternatives that
may be imagined in, if not realized by, a Cassandrian narrative, such as the one I am
myself producing.
Chapter 9

CONCLUSION

Narrative in Re-mission: The Fictions of Angela Carter

As I wonder about the alternatives to an Oedipal paradigm of narrative textuality and, thus, wander through the various discourses of and on the postmodern paradox, I am forced to acknowledge that my own narrative is a Cassandrian production, full of questions, intertexts, self-narration and the eruption of a multiplicity of other voices, a plurality of perspectives. The new woman and new man represented through a Cassandrian narrative have, if only provisionally, put the Oedipus into re-mission. While Oedipal textual dynamics continue to be deployed by feminist postmodernists such as Angela Carter, we can observe in the two novels I have discussed here, the possibility of putting the Oedipus to work with a new mission, that of rewriting gendered subjectivity and narrative possibilities. Our cultural and social environments have evolved to a point where Oedipal textuality can actually be employed, albeit in rather tricky ways, to undermine the sexuality implicit in this very paradigm of narrative. As Carter points out, we now inhabit a world characterized by disbelief, in which the only inescapables, the only things incapable of revision, are the facts of birth and death and even these may be understood differently at different times and by different cultures:

[s]ince human beings have invented history, we have also invented those aspects of our lives that seem most immutable, or, rather, have invented the circumstances that determine their nature. Birth and death, the only absolute
inescapables, are both absolutely determined by the social context in which they occur. (Carter, Sadeian Woman 11-12)

Such a re-mission was a possibility glimpsed by Deleuze and Guattari as early as 1972 (the same year as Infernal Desire Machines was published), when they issued that first volume of Capitalism and Schizophrenia, entitled Anti-Oedipus. According to Brian Massumi’s insightful guide to their work, Deleuze and Guattari are, like Carter, interested in conceiving reality differently and in “the invention of new typology of cultural formations” (3). In fact, Deleuze’s goal “is the invention of concepts that do not add up to a system of belief or an architecture of propositions that you either enter or you don’t, but instead pack a potential in the way a crowbar in a willing hand envelops an energy of prying” (8). This “energy of prying” and of trying to conceive a world differently constructed is pervasive in Carter’s work. In Infernal Desire Machines, we observe an insidious and expansive repetition of the Oedipal paradigm that brings that very paradigm into question and in Nights, we experience a breakdown in our sense of secure belief through a multiplication of perspectives and points of view—a multiplication that asks us to question the integrity of reality and the entire concept of truth. I have identified the wandering and wondering perspectives in Nights as an hysterical and Cassandrian narration, but one could apply, equally as well, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of schizophrenic, or wandering, “nomad” (Massumi 4) thought. Both of Carter’s narratives have much in common with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of schizophrenia, which as Massumi explains, differs significantly from our usual understanding of this pathological condition. In Capitalism and Schizophrenia, writes Massumi.
the clinical schizophrenic's debilitating detachment from the world is a quelled attempt to engage it in unimagined ways. Schizophrenia as a positive process is inventive connection, expansion rather than withdrawal. Its twoness is a relay to a multiplicity.... Schizophrenia is the enlargement of life's limits through the pragmatic proliferation of concepts. (1)

In fact, schizophrenia, or, what Deleuze and Guattari also called, "Nomad thought," does not lodge itself in the edifice of an ordered interiority; it moves freely in an element of exteriority. It does not repose on identity; it rides difference. It does not respect the artificial division between the three domains of representation, subject, concept, and being; it replaces restrictive analogy with a conductivity that knows no bounds. (Massumi 5)

Finally, and most importantly, Deleuze and Guattari's project "is conceived as an open system. It does not pretend to have the final word" (Massumi 7). Significantly, their work poses the same questions we see emerging in Carter's work, particularly Nights: "The question is not, Is it true? But, Does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?" (Massumi 8).

Schizophrenic thought, then, is anti-representational, at the same time as it paradoxically represents itself to us. However, it attempts to take account of the forces-cultural, social, economic—that inform and delimit representation. It attempts to work outside the bounds of representational thinking, while being, admittedly and necessarily, confined by them. Even from the brief summary of Deleuze and Guattari provided by
Massumi and my earlier discussion, it is possible to see how Carter’s texts conform to their notions of a schizophrenic—some might say, postmodern—insight into the doubleness, duplicity and ultimate multiplicity of perspectives. As Brian Massumi says, schizophrenia, “goes by many names. ‘Philosophy’ is one. Not just any philosophy. A bastard kind” (1). We might then, as I have been arguing, name this schizophrenic, nomadic narrative Cassandrian. In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter herself acknowledges the unsettling ambiguity inherent in the figure of Cassandra when she asks:

[w]as there not Cassandra, who always spoke the truth, although admittedly in such a way that nobody believed her. And that, in mythic terms, is the hell of it. Since the female oracular mouth is located so near the beastly backside, my vagina might indeed be patronizingly regarded as a speaking mouth, but never one that issues the voice of reason. In this most insulting redefinition of myself, that of occult priestess. I am indeed allowed to speak but only of things that male society does not take seriously. I can hint at dreams. I can even personify the imagination; but that is only because I am not rational enough to cope with reality.

(5)

However, Carter’s *Nights* suggests that the Cassandrian narrative, rather than revelling in woman’s incomprehensibility, can turn the tables and question the rationality that constructs reality. Clément writes that the hysteric is “yesterday’s victim of torture who anticipates the new woman” and Fevvers represents the hysteric, the sorceress and the “New Woman” (*Nights* 281) at once. Re-writing the myth of hysteria, the figure of the witch/sorceress as inscribed in the omnipresence of the transcendent angel through a
Cassandrian narrative, Carter produces a parodic text that illuminates much of the so-called 'dark continent' of femininity.

As I wrote in the opening paragraph of my Introduction, naming in Carter turns the "proper upside down," but "naming a symptom does not deal with it." Thus, naming narrative Cassandrian does not deal with it once and for all; there is no final definitive answer being put forth by the ambiguous and paradoxical narrative, only a negotiation with narrative under the name of Cassandra. Rather than definitive answers, Cassandrian narrative offers us only the questionings, partial truths and possibilities of the nomadic schizophrenic text.

According to Sage, Angela Carter herself possessed a schizophrenic or "nomadic sensibility" ("Savage Sideshow" 275):

[her particular circumstances and talents are precisely adapted--or rather, she has brilliantly adapted them--to mapping out the changeling worlds engendered by our decline and fall. Her alertness to signs and symbols and her skill in recreating them are of a piece with her nomadic sensibility. (275)]

Her writing career spanned more than two decades (1966-1991). She has produced many more novels, volumes of short stories, film scripts, radio plays, cultural criticism and literary reviews than is indicated in my discussion. Indeed, had I space enough and time, I would like to discuss all of her work, focussing on the narrative strategies employed therein. Instead, I have focussed on close readings of two of her major works, and perhaps a third, The Sadeian Woman, primarily because such detailed analysis has not been done before, but also because her work is so expansive and so multifaceted that a
unified singular interpretation is impossible. In short, interpretation of her work must necessarily partake of the epidemic proliferation of meaning that the works themselves inscribe. Interpretation, like her novels, must remain open-ended.

Carter’s work, to my mind, demonstrates her commitment to a feminist narratology; however, others differ in their estimation of Carter’s feminist commitment. Paulina Palmer sees Carter’s career as breaking down into two distinct stages, the first roughly pre-feminist, wherein Carter behaves like a “male impersonator” (190) and the second stage, which is more commitedly political and feminist. I have argued, alternatively, that *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, which according to Palmer belongs properly amongst the prefeminist archive, is, in fact, fully feminist in the same sense as the work of Virginia Woolf is feminist. The distinction between types of feminism I am employing here and that informs Palmer’s critique is articulated in the classic debate between Toril Moi, who deems new, contestatory and deconstructive strategies of representation as laudably feminist and Elaine Showalter, who seeks rather to find images of strong women being represented in feminist work (Moi, *Sexual/Textual*). Showalter’s argument that Virginia Woolf’s novels do not present strong images of women and therefore fall short in feminist terms is countered by Moi. She maintains that it is in Woolf’s deconstruction of archetypal male narrative models that we can locate an exemplary feminist practice. I have tried to demonstrate that it is to this latter category of writing that Carter’s *Infernal Desire Machines* belongs and, thus, while it fails as feminist text for theorists such as Palmer, following from Showalter, it succeeds admirably in the terms put forth by Toril Moi.
Obviously, while *Infernal Desire Machines* does not conform to Showalter's model of feminism, it does conform to Moi's. *Nights at the Circus*, on the other hand, would conform very well with both Showalter and Moi's articulation of feminist narrative practices as this novel does present images of strong women to epidemic proportions. Palmer is more than ready to grant that *Nights* represents a second stage in Carter's writing—a stage which is committedly feminist. However, I would maintain that this text is feminist, not because of the representation of strong images of women, although these are significant, but because, as in *Infernal Desire Machines*, it also, as I have been arguing, deconstructs traditional patriarchal Oedipal narrative models, by means of a variety of strategies including installing a paradoxical Cassandrian narrative, foregrounding narrative's complicity with the confidence trick and suggesting, if not always implementing, alternatives to an Oedipal narrative poetics. Hence, I disagree with Palmer's stage theory of Carter's work, in so far as she constructs it.

What I do see emerging in the twelve years between the publication of *Infernal Desire Machines* and *Nights*, is an increasing commitment to theorize ways of undermining the death inscribed in an Oedipal textual dynamic. As we have seen, Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines* undermines the Oedipal trajectory of narrative through its persistent parody and its repetition "with a vengeance" of that very model of narrative. Through such an epidemic representation of the Oedipal dynamic, Carter evokes incredulity toward the overdetermined nature of all narrative. Thus, her readers are left to contemplate the problem of living with our disbelief. Carter thus interrogates the meanings imbedded in the Oedipal structure. The later novel seeks to undermine the
Oedipus, but through a somewhat different strategy of *jouissance* or play. The Oedipus is invoked here, but it never completes its course, because too many stories, too many versions, get in the way of the telos-driven narrative. Both novels, however, seek strategies to enable the reader to think differently about history, gender, subjectivity and representation. Angela Carter’s work teaches us that we must learn to see the “something other”:

> [w]hether we refer to this phenomenon, this mysterious “something,” as the intrusion of desire in language (Julia Kristeva), as the decentering of the subject (Jacques Lacan), as the invasion of discourse by figure (Jean-François Lyotard), as the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence (Derrida, Paul de Man), or even as the subversion of androcentric language by a “(M)Other tongue” (feminist theory), it does seem that this pervasive something has a contagious and seditious quality, capable of subverting conventional notions of subjectivity, rationality, and consciousness as it spreads across disciplinary lines, touching philosophy, literature, criticism, the social sciences. Indeed, in the late twentieth century, the boundaries between psychic and real, fact and fiction, literature and theory all seem to have been eroded from within. (Fleiger 2-3)

While the former novel takes seriously its many-headed missions, the latter finds ways to laugh at the ludic and ludicrous game of narrative.

In her recent book on Angela Carter, Lorna Sage is reluctant to designate Carter’s work as postmodern, because such a term suggests “terminal reflexiveness, a notion of fiction as a vacated fun-house, a spatialized model of narrative, which I don’t think fits
exactly” (Angela Carter 58). Instead she prefers labels such as “Linda Hutcheon’s ‘historiographic metafiction’, or Brooke-Rose’s ‘palimpsest history’.” (58) because these theories accentuate the significance of time and history in enabling and disenabling historical positionings and identities. However, as my idea of the postmodern is not in conflict with either Hutcheon’s or Brooke-Rose’s views, for me Carter is well-placed in that ‘archive’. She most certainly illustrates, admirably, what is theorized by one of the preeminent theorists of the postmodern: Lyotard has written that “it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented” (Postmodern 81). Moreover, current theoretical debates teach us that in the contemporary world, with its collapsing metanarratives, we “cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the ‘lack of reality’ of reality, together with the invention of other realities” (Lyotard, Postmodern 77). What is, certainly, problematic (and Sage notes this) is whether or not one can reconcile Carter’s overt, committed feminism with her postmodern practice. Here, again, I am led back to Donna Haraway, who is able to theorize a particularly postmodern role for agency in her theories of “situated knowledges” and “partial positionings.” I remind my reader of Cixous’ definition of a feminine writing which was cited by Sage: “it’s the beginning, or beginnings” rather than the endings and search for Oedipal origins that define a “feminine writing” (Sage, Angela Carter 58 [Cixous, “La Sexe” 54-5]). Through circumventing beginnings, middles and ends, deferring closure, demonstrating the provisional nature of identity and the multiple perspectives enabled by her own narrative models, Carter is able to provide narrative with a new mission that puts the Oedipus into doubt, or re-mission.
One of the most provocative images of re-mission is that of the cyborg representation, convincingly put forth by Haraway:

Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other.

The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture. We have all been colonized by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfilment in apocalypse. (175)

Haraway's text, here, could be read as an eloquent summary of Carter's accomplishments, particularly her subversion of the Oedipal narrative of origins and ends, with its inherent sadism and death. Like Carter, Haraway helps us come to terms with living in a state of disbelief, dis-eased, but in re-mission. She also offers one of the most provocative possibilities for coping with what has been derided as postmodern 'relativism'. "For political people social constructionism cannot be allowed to decay into the radiant emanations of cynicism" (184), writes Haraway. Instead of relativism, Haraway posits a "politics of positioning" (193) which is exactly what I see emerging in Carter's interrogation of narrative representations with their implicit epistemologies and ontologies. Carter's narratives are implicated in the postmodern, but also seek, as part of the feminist project, the possibilities for agency and objectivity. "Feminist objectivity is quite simply situated knowledges" (Haraway 188) and the postmodern interrogation of
universalizing, totalizing truths, also allows only for situated knowledges. According to Lyotard, "Postmodern Knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable" (Postmodern xxv). Carter’s texts teach us means of coping with the incommensurable, ways of living with our disbelief.
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