

The Consumption of Angela Carter: Women, Food, and Power

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A great writer and a great critic, V. S. Pritchett, used to say that he swallowed Dickens whole, at the risk of indigestion. I swallow Angela Carter whole, and then I rush to buy Alka Seltzer. The “minimalist” *nouvelle cuisine* alone cannot satisfy my appetite for fiction. I need a “maximalist” writer who tries to tell us many things, with grandiose happenings to amuse me, extreme emotions to stir my feelings, glorious obscenities to scandalise me, brilliant and malicious expressions to astonish me. (Almansi 217)

AS GUIDO ALMANSI suggests, consuming Angela Carter’s fiction is simultaneously satisfying and unsettling. This is partly because, as Hermione Lee has commented, Carter “was always in revolt against the ‘tyranny of good taste’” (316). As a champion of moral pornography, a cultural dissident who dared to disparage Shakespeare, and a culinary iconoclast who criticised the highly-esteemed cookery writer Elizabeth David, Carter outraged many people. Yet this impiety also gives her work its appeal.¹ Like the critical essays, her fiction is deliciously “improper” in that it interrogates and rejects what Hélène Cixous calls the realm of the proper, a masculine economy based on the principles of authority, domination and ownership — a realm in which, disempowered and dispossessed, women are without property (“Castration” 42, 50). Her fiction has an unsettling effect precisely because Carter seeks to “upset” the patriarchal order, in part through her representation of consumption, which, by revealing and refiguring the relationship between women, food, and power, challenges the structures that underpin patriarchy.

Carter recognises that eating embodies coded expressions of power. She uses a quotation from Lévi-Strauss’s *The Raw and The*

Cooked (1981) as an epigraph to the chapter of *Expletives Deleted* (1992) dedicated to cookery book reviews, thereby demonstrating her recognition that food does much more than merely feed the body; when, what, how, and with whom we eat is intrinsically related to a society's most fundamental beliefs and philosophies. Following Lévi-Strauss, Carter's fiction illustrates that a culture can be understood through its food myths and metaphors and, furthermore, that consumption provides access to a society's deepest social unconscious. Eating acts as a muted form of expression that can make explicit what is otherwise only implicit and, in terms of gender relations, exposes the machinery of power that patriarchy seeks to disguise. For example, Carter sees Elizabeth David's *English Bread and Yeast Cookery* (1977), ostensibly a celebration of wholefoods, as part of a patriarchal conspiracy designed to yoke women to the kitchen, a plot "to get women back where they belong. Up to their elbows in bread dough" (*Expletives* 95).

Carter's suspicion that there is a gendered subtext to food-related issues is echoed in much feminist research on food, research that reveals how ideology is ingested as we eat and how acts of consumption superimpose the body politic on the physical body. Sally Cline proposes that there is a compelling relationship between women's eating patterns and patriarchal practices. Carter's fiction illustrates Cline's argument that "food and eating have become the terrain for the struggle between the sexes Food is the kernel of the political relationship between the sexes" (1-3).² Theorists of eating disorders, such as Susie Orbach, Marilyn Lawrence, and Kim Chernin, insist that food must be situated in the realm of the political, and they read women's problematic relationship to food simultaneously as a product of female disempowerment and a protest against patriarchy. As Chernin states, although it has enslaved women and been their enemy, "food holds the potential for symbolic representation and for meaningful enactment" (*Hungry* 114). As a recovered anorexic, Carter would perhaps have been particularly sensitive to such issues.³ Certainly, her fiction illustrates that consumption can be used both to exercise and to excise patriarchal power relations.

Margaret Atwood, with whom Carter was friends, and Sarah Sceats have written about the theme of food in Carter's fiction. In "The Infernal Appetites of Angela Carter," Sceats, inspired by Barbara Hardy's essay on Dickens and food, examines how Carter uses food to embody moral values. Sceats elaborates what she calls a "politics of appetite" and, drawing on Freudian terminology, outlines two distinct types of appetite in Carter's work: one driven by Eros and the other by Thanatos, drives which interact with each other in varying degrees throughout Carter's fiction, thus reflecting that power is unstable and that gestures of submission and insubordination are not necessarily discreet.⁴ Atwood's essay focuses on the relationship between food and sexuality via the figures of tiger and lamb in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), and argues that, while a gendered master-slave relationship is reflected in the roles of carnivore and herbivore or predator and prey, Carter challenges the binary nature of such roles by suggesting the possibility of synthesis.

Like Atwood, several critics have highlighted Carter's deconstruction of dualisms, which is by no means restricted to the roles of gustatory villain and victim.⁵ Carter's penchant for destabilising binary oppositions illustrates that, as Lorna Sage has argued, in several of her novels Carter is speaking the same language as Cixous (*Angela* 58). In "Sorties" (1986), her challenge to Hegelian metaphysics, Cixous proposes that patriarchal culture — the symbolic order — is structured by a series of gendered, hierarchical binary oppositions that privilege masculinity over femininity and thus reify female subordination: "Night to his day . . . Black to his white. Shut out of his system's space, she is the repressed that ensures the system's functioning" (67). Like Carter's, her aim is to problematise such dualisms in order to destabilise patriarchy. Drawing on Cixous' theory of binary oppositions, this essay will examine, within Carter's novels, the dualistic roles that Atwood identifies in *The Bloody Chamber*. I will argue that while Carter's earlier texts illustrate how binary oppositions, particularly the opposition between "consumer" and "consumed," work to endorse female oppression, the fiction that follows *The Bloody Chamber* success-

fully transcends such binarisms by celebrating the confusion of categories. Eating, an act which itself involves the erosion of boundaries (between self and other, subject and object, inside and outside), enables Carter's later heroines to challenge traditional gender roles. By surveying all her novels, I will highlight the ways in which Carter's shift in focus from women's exploitation to their empowerment, a movement described by Paulina Palmer ("From 'Coded Mannequin'"), is reflected in her changing representation of the relationship between women, food, and power, and in the transformation of women's symbolic status to consumer from consumed.

I. The Early Fiction: Oppression and Exploitation

In Carter's early fiction, power is connoted by consumption, and consumption is characterised by a struggle for power. Female disempowerment is signified by starvation and silence, while tyrannical patriarchal figures like Uncle Philip in *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) or the Count in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman* (1972) are characterised by a monstrous appetite. Both men are characterised by greed, and their metaphorical appetite for power is reflected by their physical capacity for consumption. When Melanie, the heroine of *The Magic Toyshop*, is sent to live with Uncle Philip, the toy-maker, after the death of her parents, she discovers him to be a forbidding figure who rules the house despotically. He has a gargantuan appetite, and, while Uncle Philip gorges himself at the tea table, his submissive wife, Margaret, timidly nibbles "a Baby Bear portion" (73). The distribution of power in their relationship is mirrored by the distribution of food, and is also reflected in body size. Whereas Aunt Margaret is so thin that she looks like "an icon of Our Lady of Famine" (113), Uncle Philip is an "immense, overwhelming figure of a man" (69) whose "presence, brooding and oppressive, filled the house" (92). His heaviness permeates the atmosphere around him: "His silence had bulk, a height and a weight. It reached from here to the sky. It filled the room . . . [and] could crush you to nothing" (168). The size of Uncle Philip's body reflects his authority and his physical domination of the world, while Aunt Margaret's fragile female form highlights how she has been diminished through a

literal process of reduction. The macabre and excruciatingly tight choker given to Margaret as a wedding present, which Uncle Philip makes her wear every Sunday at tea, directly inhibits his wife's ability to eat and symbolises her restriction. Margaret's suffering seems to stimulate her husband's appetite, indicating that Uncle Philip feeds off her disempowerment and is nourished by her nullification:

When she wore the collar, she ate only with the utmost difficulty. Sunday teas never varied. Always shrimps, bread and butter, a bowl of mustard and cress and a rich, light, golden sponge-cake baked that morning in the oven with the Sunday joint so that it had a faint savour of burnt meat fat. The table was littered with shrimp whiskers, the sponge-cake gobbled up to the last crumb — but all she could do was to sip painfully at a meagre cup of tea and toy with a few shoots of mustard and cress, although she had prepared the extensive meal. Uncle Philip broke the armour off a pink battalion of shrimps and ate them steadily, chewed through a loaf of bread spread with half a pound of butter and helped himself to a lion's share of the cake while gazing at her with expressionless satisfaction, apparently deriving a certain pleasure from her discomfort, or even finding that the sight of it improved his appetite. (113)

Likewise, in *Hoffman*, a fantastic picaresque novel which portrays a struggle between reason and passion, the autocratic and destructive power of the villain, a megalomaniac who wants to take over the world, is reflected by the nature and manner of his consumption. The egocentric Count, both a manifestation of Hoffman and a combination of Count Dracula and the Marquis de Sade, eats an extraordinary amount of food. Preparing breakfast, Lafleur, his valet, sets out a magnificent feast but, as the central protagonist, Desiderio, notes, the Count "ate very heartily; indeed, he ate with a blind voracity that demolished the spread so speedily the valet and I were hard put to it to seize enough to satisfy ourselves, although there was so much" (125). In this scene Desiderio's relationship to food underscores his feminisation — already suggested by his name — and illustrates that although femininity is signified by a subject's inability to consume in Carter's early fiction, sex is not necessarily tied to gender.

The theme of consumption reflects Carter's commitment both to socialism and to feminism, highlighting the intersection of class and gender politics in her work. In *Expletives Deleted*, she denounces *Vogue* magazine's use of food as an aspect of English upper-middle class style (93), and castigates the editors of *The Official Foodie Handbook* (Barr and Levy) as frivolous food-worshippers, self-defined "children of the consumer boom" who consider food to be an art which, Carter argues, "takes their oral fetishism out of the moral scenario in which there is an implicit reprimand to greed" (77). Originally made in 1984, the latter comments constitute a vitriolic attack on the "greed is good" ethos of Thatcherite Britain in the 1980s. Carter's railing against the "widespread and unashamed cult of conspicuous gluttony in the advanced industrialised countries" (*Expletives* 77) is echoed in much of her fiction, even that which precedes Thatcherism. Her implicit indictment of the Count's conspicuous consumption, as well as that of all her male characters who selfishly gorge themselves on luxurious foods, expresses her contempt for consumer culture and the worst excesses of Western capitalism which, like the Count's consumption, is ruthless, exploitative, and self-serving, and which works to perpetuate gross inequalities in hierarchies of power.

Often in the novels which precede *The Bloody Chamber*, the powerful not only eat, they eat the powerless. Carter makes this clear in *The Sadeian Woman* (1979): "The strong abuse, exploit and meatify the weak, says Sade. They must and will devour their natural prey. The primal condition of man cannot be modified in any way; it is eat or be eaten" (140). As Carter suggests, cannibalism symbolises the complete subordination of the dominated subject. For her, 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" (140). Cixous also sees cannibalism as an assertion of power, the expression of which is a product of patriarchal politics: "They grab you by the breasts, they pluck your derrière, they stuff you in a pot, they sauté you with sperm How difficult they make it for us to become women, when becoming poultry is what that really means!" (*Coming* 27-8).

Cannibalism and vampirism recur as dominant tropes in Carter's fiction; her earlier texts, mostly dark and disquieting, expose how the culturally sanctioned Sadeian philosophy of "eat or be eaten" operates to oppress women.

Almost all of Carter's early male protagonists exemplify the cannibalistic or vampiric character of male desire and have something in common with Uncle Philip, who is likened to Saturn, the power-hungry god who ate his children. Honeybuzzard, the central character of Carter's first novel, *Shadow Dance* (1966), a gothic exploration of life and relationships in the 1960s, describes his girlfriend, Emily, as "rich, moist and sticky My Emily is like nothing so much as the very best fruitcake, the kind with rum in it that you can get drunk on. I gorge on her" (59). Here Carter stretches gastronomic terms of affection to their logical and horrifying extreme to highlight the undercurrent of sadism in heterosexual romantic love.

Carter's fourth novel, *Heroes and Villains* (1969), is the story of a post-apocalyptic society inhabited by two groups, the Professors and the Barbarians. Here, myths and anxieties about cannibalism reflect a series of different power struggles involving class and clan status as well as gender. When Donally, the leader of the Barbarians, tries to assert his authority over Jewel, a young member of his clan, he provokes a violent response: Jewel screams, "did you become my father when you killed him? What, did you eat him?" (125). However, Jewel's main power struggle is with Marianne, a Professor's daughter and the central female character, whom he marries in order to control: "I've got to marry you, haven't I? Swallow you up and incorporate you, see. Dr. Donally says. Social psychology" (56). The image of marriage as a form of cannibalism confirms that, traditionally, when two people are married, they become one, and that one is the man. It explains common female anxieties about loss of selfhood and fears of being "swallowed" up by marriage when a woman gives up her surname in order to take that of the husband. The images which surround the wedding in *Heroes and Villains* reiterate the theme of cannibalism. As Mrs. Green, a surrogate mother figure to all the Barbarians, prepares the

bride, she simultaneously prepares the wedding feast. When she collects Marianne for the ceremony, "she brought with her the sharp smell of burned fat and roasting meat" (69). Marianne feels Jewel "has the hands of a butcher" (70), and when he produces a knife to enable them to mingle their blood during the wedding ceremony, she tells Mrs. Green, "I thought he was going to kill me, cut me up, fry me and distribute me in ritual goblets to the tribe" (76).

While Carter illustrates that the desire to control female consumption and to consume women is one means of exercising power over them, she also suggests that this desire is the product of male insecurity and, in particular, angst about the consequences of women's capacity to consume. Such anxieties stem from what Simone de Beauvoir describes as "the myth of woman as praying mantis" (231), or fear of what Barbara Creed terms "the monstrous-feminine." Both of these images articulate the ancient belief that women possess the power to undo or destroy men, a belief that works to justify patriarchal oppression on the grounds that the threat posed by women must be controlled. Creed cites the vampire-woman as one category of the monstrous-feminine and argues that she represents the archaic mother or the oral sadistic mother (72; 151). Haunted by both the knowledge that they are born from the female body and the memory of being dependent upon that body, men unconsciously fear a return to dependence on or domination, even engulfment, by a menacing female form. Carter demonstrates an understanding of such fears in "Lovely Linda," a review of the autobiography of porn star Linda Lovelace (reprinted in *Nothing Sacred*). Pondering this woman's ability to fit a foot into her vagina, Carter asks, "if she can engulf a foot, what else could she not engulf? The owner of the foot in his entirety? The world itself?" (149).

Male fears of engulfment are explored in *Shadow Dance*. Although Ghislaine has been brutally attacked by Honeybuzzard and is finally murdered by him, for Morris she represents a dangerous threat: "It seemed to him that she was a vampire woman, walking the streets on the continual *qui vive*, her enormous brown eyes alert and ever-watchful, and the moment she saw

him she would snatch him up and absorb him, threshing, into the chasm in her face" (39). Joseph in *Several Perceptions* (1968) and Buzz in the short novel *Love* (1971) are similar to Morris in this respect. In one of his dreams, Joseph orders an ice cream and receives his best friend's mother served on a dish. As he begins to eat, the woman grows and grows until the ice cream melts and buries him. He later tells her, "you swallowed me whole" (115). As the title of Carter's third novel indicates, *Several Perceptions* explores the disjuncture between appearance and reality. This discrepancy is exemplified by Joseph's attitude to his girlfriend, Charlotte. He describes her as a vampire, even though it is he, rather than she, who behaves vampirically. Joseph initially describes Charlotte as having "lips of treacherous vampire redness and a wet mouth which was a mantrap of ivory fangs. Witch woman. Incubus. Haunter of battlefields after the carnage in the image of a crow . . . His Madonna of the abattoir" (15). Yet, by the end of the novel, he no longer dreams of her "making fat meals off his heart," and wonders, "had it, in fact, been the other way around?" (113). Joseph's perception of himself as a victim of vampirism is suggested by his surname, "Harker," which links him to Jonathan Harker, the feminised narrator of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, who nearly becomes one of Dracula's victims and is almost raped by the count's three female vampire accomplices. However, by making Joseph a vampire rather than a victim of vampirism, Carter makes explicit what remains a mere suggestion in Stoker's text: In *Dracula*, when the count approaches and prepares to attack Harker from behind while the young man is shaving, the fact that Harker sees only himself in the mirror points to an affinity between the identity of the two men and implicitly suggests that Dracula is a projection of Harker's own desires, representing his repressed alter ego.⁶

Love focuses on the depressing lives of Lee, Annabel, and Buzz, three characters caught in a love triangle. Like Joseph, Buzz's fear of female consumption leads him into delusion. Although Buzz treats Annabel like a piece of food — he compares her skin to "chilled rice paper" (93), and handles her "as unceremoniously as a fish on a slab, reduced only to any-

mous flesh" (94) — his fears of *vagina dentata* prompt him to examine her internally before sex. Carter thus reveals the contradictions in women's lives that work to disguise the reality of their subordination and make oppression more difficult to challenge. However, she also questions the dominant (male) version of reality by exposing men as cannibals and vampires. In doing so, she implicitly ridicules male authority as immature since, in Freudian terms, Carter's cannibalistic male protagonists are all stuck in the oral (cannibalistic) phase of libidinal development.⁷ Thus, while Carter exposes the power dynamic in metaphoric cannibalism, she also mocks this manifestation of male power at every turn.

If Carter derides patriarchal power in her early fiction, she nevertheless seems incapable of thinking beyond the binary structures that endorse it. A sense of the inevitability of hegemony is conveyed by the strategies of subversion that her earlier heroines enact. In *Heroines and Villains*, for example, the story of Marianne implies that, in a culture structured by binary oppositions, the only way to escape oppression is to become an oppressor; or, rather, the best way to avoid being consumed is to become a consumer. When Jewel is attacked by the enemy, Marianne stabs the assailant repeatedly. Jewel's comment, "you haven't half butchered him" (109), draws a parallel between this scene and a previous one in which he butchered meat. Later, when Marianne scratches Jewel's back, she tastes his blood as a vampire might. When she usurps Donally, the head of the Barbarians, one member tells Jewel that she has "bewitched" him: "You can't keep your hands off her, can you, she's eating you" (144). At the end of the novel, Marianne takes control, announcing, "I'll be the tiger-lady and rule them with a rod of iron" (150). She becomes empowered by appropriating male authority and shifting her position within the existing socio-symbolic order, rather than by overturning that order.

In *Love*, the characters express affection through cooking and feeding. However, while Lee feeds Annabel, he simultaneously feeds on her; as a result, Annabel is devoured rather than nourished by his love. When they first meet, she paints a picture of Lee in which he looks "like a golden lion too gentle

to ever eat meat" (25), but this image soon changes: "if, at first, he was a herbivorous lion, later he became a unicorn devouring raw meat" (34). Lee stares at Annabel so penetratingly that she must cover her face with her hands. However, after her suicide attempt, the balance of power in their relationship alters radically. From the point at which she eats her wedding ring (a gesture that marks her refusal to be subsumed by marriage any longer), Annabel and Lee effectively swap roles. Annabel gets a job and starts to earn money which she keeps in an Oxo tin. The connection between food and money again indicates that food, like money, is a form of power. Yet, instead of using the money to buy freedom from her husband, Annabel uses it to buy "chocolate bars, cream cakes, sugar buns and other sweet, unnecessary things she consumed immediately" (76). Her unbalanced diet of sweets symbolises the unhealthy nature of her newfound power. Her appetite quickly assumes a cannibalistic air: "no longer bewitched, she became herself a witch" (77). Annabel uses her "curiously pointed teeth" in a ferocious sexual attack on Lee (16): "she lavished kisses on his throat . . . she cried out in a lonely voice and bit and tore at him so savagely he wondered if he would survive the night" (97). She marks Lee as a possession by making him tattoo his name on her arm; his status as a piece of food is indicated by the fact that the tattoo can be removed only by being "unpeeled like an orange or pared like an apple" (69). The futile and fatal consequences of this reversal in positions of power, however, are confirmed when Anna commits suicide by consuming gas fumes. At this stage in Carter's career, consumption for women is not merely miserable, it is deadly.

It is possible to argue that in these early works, Carter demonstrates, not her own failure to think beyond patriarchal logic, but rather the disastrous consequences of simply reversing binary oppositions. The problem is that Carter offers no alternative to such binary reversals. The strategies adopted by Marianne in *Heroes and Villains* and by Annabel in *Love* do empower the female characters, but only temporarily and on an individual basis, leaving intact the existing, patriarchal power structures. Irigaray stresses that reversing rather than

transforming positions of power is pointless: "It clearly cannot be a matter of substituting feminine power for masculine power. Because this reversal would still be caught up in the economy of the same, the same economy" (129-30). Cixous likewise argues that, to be truly liberating, subversion must take place at a more structural level: "Nor is the point to appropriate their instruments, their concepts, their places, or to begrudge them their position of mastery. . . . For us the point is not to take possession in order to internalise or manipulate, but rather to dash through and to 'fly'" ("Laugh" 257-8).

Mother, the leader of the feminist guerrilla group at Beulah in *The Passion of New Eve*, is another character who highlights the tragic consequences of a failure to transcend patriarchal concepts. Mother is a female counterpart to the misogynistic tyrant, Zero. While he intends to murder Tristessa (the Hollywood actress he hates), Mother — known as "ineradicable vent of being, oracular mouth" (61) or "Our Lady of the cannibals" (62) — aims to rid the world of men. However, like Zero, who dies in the chaos that he causes at Tristessa's house, Mother is ultimately destroyed as a political force: her nervous breakdown, induced by the failure of her plans, illustrates that a cannibalistic appetite is eventually destroyed in its own appalling wake of destruction. The logo adopted by one of the feminist guerrilla groups in *The Passion of New Eve* likewise points to the inadequacy of conventional definitions of power: the symbol for anatomical femaleness with teeth added to the inside of the top part represents the threat of *vagina dentata*; it also suggests that power based on domination exercised by women rather than men leads to nothing more than a vicious circle.

II. Transformations: *The Bloody Chamber*

The recipe for potato soup that Carter contributed to Sue O'Sullivan's book, *Turning the Tables: Recipes and Reflections from Women* (1987), is located in the chapter entitled "Changes," thus indicating Carter's belief that food can play a vital role in social revolution. It is in *The Bloody Chamber*, her revision of traditional fairy tales, that Carter begins to revise her own previous

representation of the relationship between women, food, and, power, by developing a more Foucauldian concept of power. Like Foucault, Carter is interested in how power operates on a micro-level, in how mechanisms of power in everyday social relations underpin larger power structures, and in the techniques and tactics of domination. Both writers expand the orthodox view of power as something associated with legislation and institutions by focusing on the "processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours" on an unconscious level (*Power* 97). In her earlier fiction, Carter seems to represent power as negative and repressive, associating it simply with exploitation. It is only in her later fiction that power is redefined along Foucauldian lines as something potentially positive and productive. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault rejects the conventional equation of power with oppression and corruption, contending instead that every moment of power contains the potential to be both positive *and* negative. He regards power as something accessible, transformable, and polymorphous, which transcends binary oppositions. Although several critics have commented on Carter's familiarity with Foucault's conceptions of discourse, sexuality, and the panopticon,⁸ they have overlooked the fact that Foucault also wrote about food. Foucault explores the relationship between the body and dietary regulation in classical civilisation in the second volume of *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* (1984), where he outlines how regimen became one means of regulating sexuality and encouraging the process of self-government in ancient Greek culture. While it is neither "a corpus of universal and uniform rules" (106) nor "unquestioning obedience to the authority of another" (107), Foucault describes regimen as "a whole art of living" (101) and "a whole manner of forming oneself as a subject" (108). Foucault notes that in some aspects of dietetics "one perceives the emergence of a general tendency toward a restrictive economy" (118), but nevertheless insists that regimen was not necessarily repressive. This more ambivalent view of the relationship between food and power emerges in Carter's fiction from *The Bloody Chamber* onwards.

The change in Carter's attitude to consumption is anticipated by events in *The Passion of New Eve*. Initially, this text seems to follow the pattern of previous novels. Evelyn, the central character, looks upon Leilah, an exotic dancer whom he takes as his lover, as "the filling in a chocolate sandwich or a layer in a mocha layer cake" (26). Zero, an exaggerated reflection of Evelyn who captures Eve in the desert, is economically parasitic (he pimps for his harem of wives, whom he has forced into prostitution), and sexually vampiric (the wives bear "angry marks of love-bites" on their necks and throats). Once again, femininity is signified by famine and emaciation: Tristessa, a famous movie star, is "cadaverous," "nothing so much as her own shadow, worn away to its present state of insubstantiality" (123). The narrator wonders, "What did Tristessa eat? In the kitchen in the basement, no larger than the galley of a yacht, they found only many tins of a powder that could be converted into a liquid diet by means of the addition of water" (130). Like Margaret in *The Magic Toyshop*, who is struck dumb on her wedding day, and like Annabel in *Love*, who speaks as little as she eats, Tristessa is famous for her silences. Yet, in *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter problematises the relationship between gender, food, and power that she ostensibly outlines: Tristessa, the epitome of femininity, is in fact a biological man. Tristessa's appetite is a function of her stereotypical femininity but, like her gender, her appetite is produced culturally, which indicates that the repression of female appetite, branded dangerous and sinful ever since Eve offered Adam the apple, is by no means natural or inevitable. As the title of the novel suggests, Carter is concerned with creating new images of femininity, a process that involves not only a revision of the Christian myth of creation, but also a reappraisal of the attitudes toward female consumption generated by that myth.

In its allusion to Christ's ordeal on the cross, the "passion" of the novel's title suggests that salvation may be born of suffering. At the same time, like the juxtaposition of agony and ecstasy in the Christian concept of the passion — agony caused by the contemplation of Christ's death, ecstasy because his death promised to redeem Mankind — Carter's title indicates her

intention to deconstruct dualistic thought. Thus, near the end of this novel, Carter gestures towards a more complex type of consumption than she has hitherto represented, one that exceeds simple binarisms. Eve is a transsexual, and Tristessa is a transvestite whose enactment of femininity is so successful that, according to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, it effectively makes her a woman.⁹ This is acknowledged by Evelyn's rhetorical question — "How could a real woman ever have been so much a woman as you" (128-9) — as well as by mother's refusal to give Tristessa a sex change on the grounds that she is already too much a woman. Thus, just as Tristessa and Eve are each woman and man, so in relation to each other they both become consumer and consumed. Stranded in the desert, they "sucked at the water bottle of each other's mouth for there was nothing else to drink" (149). Mutuality displaces domination to create a form of nourishment that is no longer premised upon the principle of negation, signalling a new development in Carter's representation of sexuality and the relationship between eating and power. The novel ends on a note of regeneration and possibility. As Eve sets sail across the sea to an Irigarayan "elsewhere," the (utopian) place Irigaray envisages existing beyond the parameters of masculine discourse (76-7).

The stories in *The Bloody Chamber* occupy precisely this place, demonstrating a shift from a feminism that focuses on women's pain, to a politics that stresses female pleasure. In making this shift, Carter eschews simple role reversal to create a synthesis between binarisms: masculine and feminine, predator and prey, consumer and consumed. As Atwood's essay deals with several of the stories, it is not necessary to discuss them here, but it is worth noting that Carter's deconstruction of the roles of consumer and consumed is not restricted to the tales that involve tigers and lambs. For example, in the title story, which is Carter's revision of "Bluebeard," the Marquis epitomises the cannibalistic appetite that characterises so many of Carter's male protagonists. His superficial "tenderness" belies his efforts to "tenderise" his bride, that is, to soften her up and lull her into a false sense of security. His cannibalistic desires are suggested by the wedding dress that he chooses, which makes her

look “like a Christmas gift of crystallized fruit” (7). The day after they are married, she notices him studying her “with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts on the slab” (11). When they consummate their marriage, the Marquis strips her, “gourmand that he was, as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke” (15), and while he remains clothed, she is “bare as a lamb chop” (15). As a wedding gift, he has given his bride a ruby choker which looks “like an extraordinarily precious slit throat” (11). Making her wear nothing but the choker, he covers it with kisses as if biting into her neck. Later, as he prepares to kill her, he screams, “don’t loiter girl! Do you think I shall lose appetite for the meal if you are so long about serving it? No: I shall grow hungrier, more ravenous with each moment, more cruel” (39). To those readers familiar with Carter’s earlier work, all this may seem familiar and conventional, until the blind piano-tuner and the heroine’s mother enter the scene. The piano-tuner, like Rochester in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Romney in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1857), is feminised by his disability, and is as meek and timid as the heroine who falls in love with him. The mother, who has killed a man-eating tiger, usurps the traditional hero’s role by blazing in at the last moment to save her daughter. Here, Carter celebrates the power derived from the destruction of a cannibalistic appetite, rather than from compliance with it.

The other tales in this collection echo the theme of resistance to and redefinition of traditional gender roles but, mirroring the overall development of Carter’s fiction in microcosm, the tales, read in sequence, become progressively more radical. Heroines who are initially complicit in their victimisation are emancipated when they cease to collude in their subjection by rejecting their status as comestible. Increasingly, Carter stresses the mutability of roles, and, as women become consumers, so the nature of consumption changes. Finally, in “The Company of Wolves,” a revisionary version of “Little Red Riding Hood,” the heroine, rather than being overpowered by her assailant’s cannibalistic sexual appetite, is empowered by the assertion of her own appetite. As she

gleefully jumps into bed with the wolf, it is clear that this new kind of power pleases both parties. In these tales, once Carter's heroines are acknowledged as subjects rather than objects, consumption becomes a matter of pleasure rather than terror.

III. The Later Fiction: Pleasure and Empowerment

In the way that they undermine oppositions, the female characters in *The Bloody Chamber* have much in common with the flamboyant heroines of Carter's last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* (1985) and *Wise Children* (1991). Carter's later female protagonists literally embody the disruption of binary oppositions: Fevvers is a bird-woman whose ontological status remains ambiguous — "Is she fact or is she fiction?" (7) — and Nora and Dora Chance are identical twins. Although these sisters inhabit a world structured by binary oppositions (north of the river / south of the river, middle-class / working-class, Shakespearean theatre / music hall, legitimacy / illegitimacy, high culture / popular culture), as twins — each both singular and plural, both self and other — their presence in the novel is disruptive of dualisms. Reflecting this disruption, the opposition between consumer and consumed is also called into question.

Carter's last two novels evoke a carnival atmosphere to explode categories of every kind. As in carnival, the protagonists of these novels are all performers: Fevvers is a circus aerialiste, and Nora and Dora are showgirl dancers. Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that carnival is a powerful means of subverting the status quo because it suspends the hierarchies which structure life (*Rabelais* 10). Carnival is "life turned upside down," "life the wrong way round" (*Problems* 101). Like eating, carnival — which is often associated with food — erodes boundaries, and Bakhtin demonstrates that eating forms an integral part of carnival and its capacity for disruption. According to Bakhtin, carnival banquets are "infused with gay time, moving toward a better future that changes and renews everything in its path" (*Rabelais* 302). For Carter and Bakhtin alike, eating is a crucial force in the transgression and transformation of the cultural order. Yet, as numerous critics have recently noted, if Carter invokes the disruptive potential of carnival, she also offers a cri-

tique of carnival, and her texts evince an increasing scepticism about its power to subvert.¹⁰ Carnival is, after all, a special, extraordinary occasion, and the subversions it permits are merely temporary. As Sage states, the carnival “has to stop . . . the whole point of the feast of fools is that things went on as they did before, after it stopped” (*Women* 188). Fevers is nobody’s fool, however, as her financial acumen and deft handling of the figures who attempt to dupe and manipulate her demonstrate. In fact, Fevers’ other name, Sophia, means “wisdom,” and Nora and Dora Chance are also “wise children.” As these facts imply, while Carter’s later heroines appropriate subversive aspects of carnival in their relationships to food, those relationships ultimately exceed the carnivalesque to constitute a more permanent and profound challenge to the dominant order.

The carnival atmosphere in the closing scenes of *The Magic Toyshop* points to the positive potential of carnival when, in the absence of Uncle Philip, life erupts in gustatory festivities. Food suddenly seems not only more abundant but more delicious, and the description of food reflects the party atmosphere: “the very bacon bounced and crackled in the pan for joy because Uncle Philip was not there. Toast caught fire and burned with a merry flame and it was not a disaster, as he would have made it, but a joke” (183). In their defiance of Uncle Philip’s rigid meal-time regime, which constitutes a defiance of patriarchal law, the characters eat whenever they like and make music, the Shakespearean “food of love.” Confirming carnival’s capacity to subvert the social order, this anarchic revelry immediately prefigures the fire which destroys the house, an event which provides another echo of *Jane Eyre* and *Aurora Leigh*. In all three texts, the fires, by consuming houses that represent traditional, inherited male privilege, symbolise the end of patriarchal authority.

The subversive and transformative possibilities of carnival which emerge at the end of *The Magic Toyshop* are employed and extended in *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*. Purportedly hatched from a shell at the turn of the century, Fevers not only represents the *fin-de-siècle* New Woman but is also “the newly born woman,” holding a new view of power, that Cixous and Clément describe in their book of that title. As a bird-woman she

is, to borrow a term from Kristeva (55), a “borderlander” who blurs the boundary between human and animal; as that total oxymoron, a “celestial fishwife” (43), Fevvers is simultaneously glorious and grotesque. She thus confounds all conventional binarisms, as indicated by her attitude toward food and eating.

In contrast to the skinny, insipid, silent waifs of Carter’s earlier fiction, Fevvers out-eats, out-talks and, at six feet two and fourteen stone, out-sizes everyone. She is a heroine of Rabelaisian proportions and has a Gargantuan appetite. Her consumption signals her status: “She was feeling supernatural tonight. She wanted to *eat* diamonds” (182). At the beginning of the book, during her interview with Walser, the American journalist, she sends out for food twice — once for eel pie and mash, and once for a bacon sandwich, which looks to Walser as if it is “for dire extremities of hunger only” (53). After drinking an entire case of champagne, she fortifies herself with gallons of tea which she sweetens with sugar that she lets stream from the bag into her cup. A self-indulgent Epicurean, Fevvers makes a joyous spectacle of her appetite and self-consciously challenges conventional notions of female delicacy and propriety. She stuffs herself, slurping and spilling food without inhibition, yawning and belching without embarrassment, yet such behaviour is endearing rather than disgusting. Walser certainly finds her sexy: “God! she could easily crush him to death in her huge arms, although he was a big man with the strength of Californian sunshine distilled in his limbs. A seismic erotic disturbance convulsed him — unless it was the damn’ champagne” (52).

Although Fevvers’ capacity for consumption is overwhelming, unlike the greedy patriarchs of earlier novels — and unlike Saskia in *Wise Children*, who makes “a career out of piggery” as a television chief (102) — her satisfaction is never dependent on another’s deprivation. Fevvers loves to share. In contrast to a “proper” economy, she represents what Cixous calls a feminine or “gift” economy, a form of social organisation characterised by generosity and openness to others (“Castration” 51, 53). Fevvers not only satisfies herself, she also feeds others: she succours the emaciated Mignon, another circus performer and a battered wife, with a box of chocolates and a bowl of bread

and milk, and she pays for the operation to give Toussaint, her faithful friend, a mouth. She saves rather than destroys, and her power is benevolent rather than malevolent. Such an economy, although defined by Cixous as feminine, is not limited to women: in *Wise Children*, Perry showers the people he loves with gourmet delicacies. He gives Grandma, the twins' surrogate mother, a Fuller's walnut cake when he first visits the girls and, on a day trip to Brighton, he conjures cream buns from her cleavage. During the war he saves them from the drudgery of rationing when he returns from South America with a car loaded up with all kinds of exotic goods. Perry's generosity illustrates that biology certainly is not destiny, and that not all men are predatory.

Fevvers is voracious, but she is no cannibal. As a bird-woman, she refuses to prey on either other birds or other people and, in this sense, she is a contrast to her mythological predecessors — both the Sirens who lured sailors onto the rocks and then ate their victims, and the insatiable, child-abducting harpies, all of whom were birds with the heads of women. Fevvers' attitude to consumption also provides a poignant contrast to that of Honeybuzzard, the predatory bird-man of Carter's early fiction. For example, when Fevvers bites into her bread while lasciviously eyeing Walser, he interprets her actions as a sexual tease rather than a sadistic threat: "the young man felt the hungry eyes upon him and it seemed to him her teeth closed on his flesh with the most voluptuous lack of harm" (204). Fevvers in fact rescues Walser from the jaws of death on at least one occasion, when he is attacked by Samson the Strong Man. Their shared ornithomorphic form confirms their affinity, as does their sexual appetite. When Walser first meets Fevvers, he thinks to himself that "he relished *this* commission" (11). At the close of the novel, as they climb into bed, Walser wonders, "am I biting off more than I can chew?" (293). Physical consumption and sexual consummation become similarly indistinct in *Wise Children*, when Dora provocatively flirts with her ex-lover, the waiter at the costume ball: "'I couldn't fancy swan,' I said to the waiter. 'Too many feathers. Have you got anything else a girl could nibble?' . . . I put that midnight date with the haggis out

of my mind; I'd got other fish to fry" (99). Later, describing Nora's boyfriend, Dora lewdly sings, "Tony, Tony, macaroni / Show us all your big baloney" (117). Such bawdy banter may be crude but it is never cruel. Like Fevvers, the twins are appalled by cannibalism. They hate Hollywood, where "hungry eyes and mouths [wait] to gobble you up, like the wolf in *Red Riding Hood*," and directors like Ghengis Khan feed carnivorous plants as they interview young actresses (117). With these heroines, any hint of cannibalism is purely playful, because here there is essentially equality of appetite.

Just as Fevvers rejects cannibalism, so she resists being cannibalised. Although she has a face "broad and oval as a meat dish" (12) which emerges from an application of cold cream "beefsteak red" (13), hair "thick as cream" (19), and false eyelashes "hairy as gooseberries" (40), this does not confer upon her the status of a comestible. Fevvers embodies the polysemic significance of "voler" ("to fly" or "to steal"), the French verb to which Cixous — who describes herself as a bird-woman (*Newly Born* 99) — ascribes such significance in her writing. Fevvers, who is literally able to fly, "steals" stereotypes of femininity in order to debunk them and flirts with the image of woman as food in order to deflate it. The same can be said of Nora and Dora in *Wise Children*, who arrive at a party, aged seventy-five, "caked" in make-up, sporting gold stilettos, silver mini-skirts, and stockings covered in silver stars, "dressed up," in their own words, "like fourpenny ham bones" (199). Their appearance and sentiments recall Irigaray's theory of mimicry: "One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it" (76). Irigaray argues that for a woman, to play with mimesis is to discover her exploitation through discourse without being reduced to that which she impersonates, and to submit to ideas about herself elaborated by masculine logic without becoming absorbed in them. To paraphrase Toril Moi, Carter's later protagonists "undo" conventional representations of femininity by "overdoing" them (140). The twins know that they look like "painted harlots, and over the hill, at that" (192), and one relative comments, as tactfully as she can,

"Don't you think you've gone a little too far?" (192). But excess is precisely the effect they are aiming for. When they enter the party, Nora exclaims:

"Oooer, Dor . . . We've gone and overdone it."

We couldn't help it, we had to laugh at the spectacle we'd made of ourselves and, fortified by sisterly affection, strutted our stuff boldly into the ballroom. We could still show them a thing or two, even if they couldn't stand the sight. (198)

At this moment, the two women are insurgent. Excess highlights the constructedness of femininity, and functions as a protest against social and political erasure. Nora stresses their resistance to invisibility: "our age and gender still render us invisible . . . we debate invisibility hotly" (199). Here there is a slippage between acting and acting up, as mimicry becomes a form of misbehaviour. Furthermore, for Nora and Dora, the body is a source of *jouissance*. The sisters take auto-erotic pleasure in presenting themselves "dressed up like fourpenny ham-bones"; as Kate Webb says, they "feast" on themselves (292). The pleasurable presentation of self as food is thus a double strategy of self-representation: Fevers and the Chance twins disrupt the singularity of binary masculine and feminine positions by assuming the positions of both subject/object, self/other, consumer/consumed. The heroines submit themselves to conventional representations of womanhood, only to subvert them. This is performance as protest, a protest that laughs out of existence the old iconographic tradition of women as food, while simultaneously proposing a new relationship between women, their bodies, eating, and pleasure.

The changing representation of the relationship between women, food, and power in Carter's work is mirrored by the transformation in images of the mouth, a transformation which marks the shift in her fiction from a focus on women as passive objects to women as active subjects. Fevers' power is signalled not only by what goes into her mouth, but also by what comes out. In contrast to the silent women of the early fiction, the heroines in Carter's last two novels have voices of their own, voices that are empowering on a personal level and subversive on a political level. Fevers narrates sections of *Nights at the*

Circus in the first person, and Dora is the undisputed narrator of *Wise Children*. Just as Fevvers' appetite redefines the notion of power, so her infectious laughter has the power to regenerate the world. As the term "belly laugh" indicates, the stomach connects food and laughter as subversive forces: "The spiralling tornado of Fevvers' laughter began to twist and shudder across the entire globe, as if a spontaneous response to the giant comedy that endlessly unfolded beneath it, until everything that lived and breathed, everywhere, was laughing" (295). Such *jouissance* makes it clear why the Medusa in the title of Cixous' famous essay is laughing. Although Fevvers' laughter has been read as subversively carnivalesque by various critics, her mirth clearly has more in common with Irigarayan than Bakhtinian laughter.¹¹ Carnival laughter may be "directed toward a higher order — toward change of authorities and truths, toward change of world orders" (*Problems* 104). Its ability to achieve such change is questionable, however, given the contradictions inherent in carnival and the limitations of the laughter it provokes, limitations perhaps best illustrated by Buffo the clown's own sadness; as Buffo notes, "Despair is the constant companion of the clown" (119). Whereas the carnivalesque laughter of the clown is associated with cruelty, derision, and destruction, Irigarayan laughter is linked to pleasure and desire. Furthermore, in contrast to the brevity of carnival laughter, Irigaray's laughter represents a more radical and permanent transformation. As she explains, laughter can function as a means of subverting the socio-symbolic order:

Isn't laughter the first form of liberation from a secular oppression? Isn't the phallic tantamount to the seriousness of meaning? Perhaps woman, and the sexual relation, transcend it "first" in laughter? . . . To escape from a pure and simple reversal of the masculine position means in any case not to forget to laugh. Not to forget that the dimension of desire, of pleasure, is untranslatable, irrecoverable, in the "seriousness" — the adequacy, the univocity, the truth . . . of a discourse that claims to state its meaning.

(163)

In contrast to the emphasis on the potentially subversive pleasures of the female mouth in *Nights at the Circus*, the earlier novels focus on the threat posed by the male mouth. Honeybuzzard

in *Shadow Dance* becomes almost a blueprint for Carter's patri-archs. His mouth is presented as the key to his character and the source of his power:

It was impossible to look at the full, rich lines of his dark red mouth without thinking: "This man eats meat." It was an inexpressibly carnivorous mouth; a mouth that suggested snapping, tearing, biting, a mouth that was always half-smiling in a pretty, feline curve; and showing in the smile, hints of feline, tearing teeth, small, brilliantly white, sharp, like wounding little chips of milk glass. (56)

In contrast to the male mouth, which represents power and denotes the ability to dominate, the female mouth in Carter's early fiction is associated with pain. Like his name, which combines what is sweet and soothing (honey) with what is unsavoury (the buzzard is a carrion-eating bird of prey), Honeybuzzard's mouth has an appalling erotic appeal for Ghislaine and Emily. Their seduction, however, costs them dearly: at the end of the novel, while Emily vomits, Honeybuzzard murders Ghislaine, his former lover whom he has already disfigured, by "ramming with death the hungry mouth between her thighs" (178).

Carter often uses images of force-feeding and food intolerance or food refusal to signify disempowerment and alienation. In *The Passion of New Eve*, Zero considers the primary function of the female mouth to be the service of his sexual needs; he makes eating and talking particularly difficult for his wives when he has their front teeth removed to prevent damage to his member. He anticipates Herr M. in *Nights at the Circus*, who forces Mignon, the orphan he adopts, to pose as a ghostly apparition of a deceased loved one for grieving relatives. He has her molars extracted in order to make her look more spectral, which in turn makes his business more profitable. If consumption signifies power, then toothlessness epitomises disempowerment, as it is considerably more difficult to eat without teeth. In her critical writing, Carter posits an explicit connection between silence, toothlessness and powerlessness, asserting, for example, that "as a woman, my symbolic value is primarily that of a myth of patience and receptivity, a dumb mouth from which the teeth have been pulled" (*Sadeian* 5). No wonder she

attached so much importance to having her own teeth: when asked by the interviewer John Haffenden how she saw herself, she replied, "I still have some of my own teeth: that's how I see myself" (78).

Cixous shares Carter's interest in the mouth. The critical work of these two women demonstrates an almost obsessive fascination with orality and, for both writers, the state of the female mouth acts as a metaphor for the general condition of women. Like Carter, Cixous is concerned about the ways in which women are silenced; in "Sorties," she laments "our beautiful mouths stopped up with gags" (69). In *Nothing Sacred* (1982), Carter reviews fashions in lip colour from Elizabeth 1 to Mary Quant and proposes that the painted mouth acts as a social index to women's subordination. Carter herself was more renowned for painting the air blue than painting her lips any colour at all, and took pride in her reputation for being "foul-mouthed" (*Expletives* 1). However, by the time she wrote *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, the female mouth had become for her something to celebrate with lashings of lipstick, just as Fevers and the Chance twins do. Nora and Dora insist that without their painted mouths they would feel mutilated and, even in her eighties, Daisy Duck, one of their father's ex-wives, still has "a rude joke of a mouth" (162). Dora's lips are essentially Irigarayan in character, indicative of the power and pleasure, or *jouissance*, that Irigaray suggests is located in the female body but repressed in the symbolic order. How different to "the wound in the face," the painted lips that Carter saw as a sign of woman's symbolic castration in *Nothing Sacred* (94).

Throughout her writing, Angela Carter demonstrates that consumption is one site where power relations can be investigated and refigured. However, an exploration of the theme of food and eating in her work illustrates how the flavour of her fiction changed during her career. Sarah Gamble argues that as Carter struggled to redefine her cultural environment, she also redefined her own response to that environment (4-5), and this is reflected in her changing representation of consumption. In the earlier texts, characters are caught in an "eat or be eaten" dialectic, and women are invariably the objects of consumption.

In later texts, Carter suggests that food can offer women a potentially vital means of pleasure and empowerment. Simultaneously, she illustrates that while the mouth has been a site of vulnerability for women, it can also be a source of strength. In other words, while the earlier fiction seeks to dispute patriarchal logic, the later texts strive to displace it. Ultimately, Carter's work becomes a celebration of a positive form of power, no longer based on positions of domination and subordination, which enables her heroines to transcend the binary opposition between "eat or be eaten." Her later female protagonists suggest that this new relationship to food is both predicated upon and the product of a transformed socio-symbolic order, a new economy in which women can have their cake *and* eat it.

NOTES

- 1 Carter defends the possibility of moral pornography in *The Sadeian Woman*. She makes her disparaging comments about Shakespeare in "Angela Carter's Curious Room"; she launches her diatribe against Elizabeth David in the essay "Elizabeth David: English Bread and Yeast Cookery," reprinted in *Expletives Deleted*.
- 2 Adams, Schofield, and Coward also discuss food in relation to gender politics.
- 3 In "Angela Carter's Curious Room," Carter's brother reveals how one summer she suddenly transformed herself from a dumpy teenager into a seductive sylph. Lorna Sage confirms that Carter was a teenage anorexic (*Angela* 4).
- 4 In "The Infernal Appetites of Angela Carter," Sceats reiterates the argument expounded earlier in "Eating the Evidence: Women, Food and Power," an essay which offers a broad survey of the slippery relation between appetite and power and which pays particular attention to the part that food plays in mothering. However, whereas "Eating the Evidence" examines the fiction of Alice Thomas Ellis, Doris Lessing, Molly Keane, Jenefer Shute, Angela Carter and Michèle Roberts, the later essay focuses solely on Carter. Whereas I am using Cixous's ideas as a framework for reading Carter, Sceats' works form a predominantly Kleinian psychoanalytic perspective.
- 5 Sage, Gamble and Peach all discuss Carter's preoccupation with calling binary oppositions into question (*Angela* 19; Gamble 6; Peach 167).
- 6 In *Nosferatu the Vampire*, Werner Herzog's film version of *Dracula*, Harker does indeed become a vampire.
- 7 See Freud's "Three Essays on Sexuality" (1905) and "Mourning and Melancholia," (1917, 1915) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*.
- 8 Sage states that Carter was reading Foucault in the 1970s (*Flesh* 14); Day notes that Carter was well-read in literary, cultural and political theory (11).
- 9 Butler argues that sex is a figurative or discursive effect of the performance of gender, and that gender performativity is constitutive of sex. Anticipating Butler's argument, Tristessa illustrates that identity has no biological essence.
- 10 Day (who seeks to reassess Carter's reputation as a postmodern writer by insisting that her feminism is grounded in the values of reason) and Fernihough (who argues that Carter's fiction blends materialist and poststructuralist philoso-

phy) both cite Buffo's nihilism as evidence to suggest that Carter critiques rather than celebrates the principles of carnival (186; 102). Similarly, Palmer argues that "rather than employing Bakhtinian ideas of carnival unquestioningly, Carter exposes their misogynistic aspect" ("Gender" 28).

11 See, for example, Magali Cornier 517.

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