

Re-situating the Body:  
History, Myth, and the Contemporary Women's Writings  
in English and Japanese

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Ph.D.



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Abstract

This thesis analyses contemporary literary attempts by Western and Japanese writers to defy patriarchal control over the female body. Situating the female body through myth, religion, and various forms of art as “grotesque” is Western culture’s means of control over nature. Contrary to this, Japanese culture originally had more harmonious concepts of the mind and body, but was transformed into a similar pattern to that of the West. During the period of cultural transformation, one example of literary resistance by woman writers appeared as the Tale of Genji, arguably the first novel in the world, which uses an ambiguous narrative method and the concept of the grotesque body. Contemporary women’s writings still employ similar strategies, though more direct and effective. From the beginning of the twentieth century and through the development of consumer society, more bodies are regarded as “grotesque” but there are also cultural exchanges in the world which seek to subvert such tendencies. Despite unmistakable cultural differences between western and Japanese representations, they often influence each other and draw on similar strategies. Both use the motif of the grotesque body to create a reverse discourse, and to re-situate the body, as the symbol of the retrieval of a “natural” and sexual body which is found in Japanese Myth. English and Japanese women writers also manoeuvre to strike a balance between fantastic and more conventional narrative modes. Though the majority of Japanese writers are still working within a broadly realistic mode, those writers analysed here use fantastic mode as a weapon of formal and ideological subversion. The writers analysed include Angela Carter (who lived in Japan), Margaret Atwood, Fay Weldon, Muriel Spark, Yuko Matsumoto, Rieko Matsuura, Yoriko Shono, Yumiko Kurahashi. Their work is situated in relation to earlier imaginative writing, myth, legend and examples of the Gothic mode.

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## Introduction:

### Melting Down of the Boundaries

#### Re-situating the Body

As a symbol of nature, life, and contradictorily, of limitation, decay, and death, the human body has long been handled with desire and fear. The body, especially that of woman, has been drawn, sculptured, painted, engraved, moulded, described, narrated. These days, from the late twentieth century on, more and more women writers have started to write about the body, especially the grotesque body. And this is not only happening in the West, but also in other cultures such as Japan.

This may be interpreted as a move to counteract the social control over the female body which has enormously intensified in the last century. The human body has always been a major object for artistic and commercial creativity but is now inflected through the world of consumerism, mass production, and the worship of a Hollywood-based "showbiz" world. On the one hand, the ideal of a flawless, beautiful woman, whose image has in fact been artificially created with the help of cosmetics, make-up, lighting, computer graphics, and cosmetic surgery, becomes the norm. On the other, more and more bodies outside that norm are regarded as grotesque and abnormal.

Contemporary culture is indeed obsessed with the body, never the natural body, but the body in its most artificial and unnatural forms. The body must be cosmeticised, dieted, exercised and reshaped, even reduced to anorexic proportions in order to arrive at the consumer ideal, whereas the natural part of the body, its decay, excess, fat, and wrinkles are intensely detested. A woman is led to regard her reproductive function more as an object of horror. The body is no longer ours. The social control over our bodies is so strong, that we feel isolated from them. We are suffering from the unachievable image of a body which never grows old, reproduces,



or dies. And the main sufferers are women.

Almost everywhere, the exploitation of the female body and the degradation of woman is visible, and though Western feminism has made tremendous strides in acting to emancipate women culturally and economically there is much left to be done. Theoretical manoeuvres are important but maybe their effects are indirect for many people and do not reach all women in the same way. Although the problem of the body not only exists in Western culture, but also in Eastern countries, Western feminism is not entirely appropriate as a mode of analysis for cultures outside the West. Even though Western ideologies and cultural products have penetrated the globe, we still need to consider cultural differences which determine whether a culture may or may not be ready to absorb a certain theory. Moreover, now that national and cultural boundaries are loosened by global commerce, by communication networks and the mass-media, it is no longer appropriate to take one particular culture as the model for all. It is not enough to attack a single oppressor; it is not enough to reveal one system of oppression. We need to look deeper. Questions that have to be asked about the concept of the body include issues such as: what is the history of the body? Is it a universal phenomenon? Does it reflect a certain truth? Is the female body doomed to be abjected because of its natural function? We now need to re-situate the body.

And indeed, many writers in the contemporary West and East are making efforts in this direction. Feminists have started to write about the body in new ways. They often describe the bodies of the abject, the grotesque, and the borderline creature: monsters, ghosts, and freaks. By revealing the system that constructs grotesque body, such writers attempt to reverse the hierarchy of mind over body. In fact, literary texts are important in the project of re-situating the body. Ideologies are carried by formal narratives (history, myth, fairytale, and literature) and cultural concepts of the body are transmitted through them. New narratives constructed by

women writers reflect our desire to mend the split concept of mind/body.

My project is to trace such manoeuvres, and to try to create a new narrative myself. Such a discursive project cannot be theoretically pure, and is bound to be cross-cultural, since I believe, in this era of hybridity, that it is not only inappropriate but impossible to talk about a culture as an isolated entity. New and revealed narratives may be similar in form, but carry different resonances from one place to another. We cannot understand the situation of one culture unless we examine others. It is, therefore, important to decode the so-called “cultural difference” which is perhaps now preventing us from breaking through invisible borderlines.

If contemporary women writers attempt to demolish such body-phobia, to break down the distinction between mind and body, then my work too is part of such a project. By thinking about the body in the West and in Japan, I would like to explore the concept of the body in relation to each of their respective cultures, and in terms of reciprocal influence. I decided to focus on Japanese culture, in part because it is where I come from, and also because of its particular view of the body. The origins of hatred of the body seem to lie deep in Western culture where the body has always been regarded as subordinated to mind. While mind is the equivalent of transcendence, immortality, the unchangeable ideal, the body is something to be repressed and controlled. The mind and the body are split in such dualistic thoughts. On the other hand, in pre-historic Japanese culture, it was not so. It would seem that the mind/body dualism did not exist.<sup>1</sup> However, it has come to assume the same dualistic function as in the West, while the residue of the original ideal remains.

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<sup>1</sup> Hiroshi Yokoyama, for instance, argues that the harmony between cerebral and earthly quality is highly cherished without privileging either. See Hiroshi Yokoyama, Shinwa-no-naka-no-Onnatachi: Nihon Shakai to Joseisei (Women in Myth: Japanese Society and Female Sexuality), (Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 1995).

## Subject/Object Dilemma

Cross-cultural research raises many difficulties. A careless application of any one view may lead to the fortification of Orientalism and the subjection of one culture to another. Japan stands in a particular relation to these issues.

To ask whether Japan is part of the East or the West may sound absurd to the Western reader, but this is the very question which most troubles Japanese society. Today, Japan is enjoying material abundance and is certainly one of the richest countries in the world. Like Western countries, Japan participates in the decision-making of world politics. With a successful high-tech industry, Japan is among the most "developed" leaders in the global economy. Japanese people feel themselves to be part of the West, but when they come into actual contact with it, they are often shocked to realise that the West sees Japan as definitely part of the East. They are baffled by the questions which the Westerner asks with the expectation of an exotic and typically "oriental" answer. The disjunction between the cultural expectation of the Westerner about the Japanese and their own self-image, between object and subject status, produces confusion and identity-crisis.

Perhaps a similar crisis is taking place across the globe. At the turn of the millennium, and well into the post-colonial era, we are witnessing further dissolution of former political and economic enclosures. Traditional imperialism as the desire for territorial expansion (which had resulted in the two World Wars and countless conflicts all over the world) seems to be becoming a thing of the past. Every corner of the world is now under the influence of or affected by consumerism and with only one common faith, in the Consumer society, today's world is a huge entangled mesh of numerous political and/or religious sects that cannot be so easily categorised into the simple former oppositions of Coloniser versus Native, Communist versus Democrat, Fascist versus Liberal. At any one moment, it is not at all clear which group is allied to which, and which opposed to which, and there is a sense of continuous political



flux.

Confusion is increased if older economic categories seem no longer to hold much significance. The countries which used to be termed “developed” were supposed to be on a level above those termed “developing.” However, it is now evident that it is not necessarily true that the “developed” is more enlightened and culturally more endowed than the “developing.” The fact is sometimes merely that the former exploits the latter in order to “develop.” The “developed” is now facing global pollution and destruction of natural resources, and having to change its image from “benevolent provider” as it used to be, to “evil exploiter” or “bringer of extinction.” It is understood the “first world” needs to learn from the “third world” a more humane way of life. Western intelligence is no longer regarded as superior wisdom, and the flow of knowledge is no longer one way.

Under such circumstances, the distinction between the West and the East (or the Orient) is also blurring. In this era of internet communication and world commerce, you can buy almost anything produced in the East in the West, and vice versa if you have money. You can travel anywhere by air but only if you have money. Other cultures exist on the shelf of the travel agent waiting to be consumed: merchandise to be picked and devoured. Since the West and the East influence each other, it is almost impossible to name something unique to the one or the other. Until recently, the East was rephrased as “the developing” or “the unenlightened.” It was colonised, occupied, explored, and exploited by the West. It was the object to be explored, conquered, and gazed at. It served the West as a source of commerce as well as of inspiration. After two World Wars, however, the situation has changed. Asia has seen an economic boost, has developed quickly and moved into prominence in the world economy. Exemplary in all of this compared to other cultures, and hence the most confused, must be Japan. After World War II, Japan extricated itself from the Fascist regime under the occupation of Americans and, adopting Western

ideology, developed strong economic power. Economic success has brought with it a political power, and now Japan participates in world politics as one of the decision-makers. It is no longer an object to be seen, since it has acquired the power to gaze. Standing on the side of the exploiter of world labour with the Western countries, it identifies itself as one of the “developed” and tends to include itself in the category of the West instead of the East. In fact, contemporary Japanese culture on the surface is not very different from that of America or Europe. Japanese watch American TV programs, listen to American pop music, read imported paperbacks, eat MacDonald’s and spaghetti. In short, they accept the Western ideology and see the world from the Western perspective.

#### In the Void of Two Texts

From one point of view, all of these might be described as progress or an enlightened step forward, but, as I mentioned before, it has negative side-effects. The problem brought about in Japanese society by such an extreme Westernisation is a form of identity-crisis, a confusion of subject/object status. A significant factor in its development was the American occupation after World War II. Though Japan has never been colonised, during the American occupation, a colonialist practice was carried out in the way that Elleke Boehmer might perceive as “imperialism” since it involves “the authority assumed by a state over another territory · authority expressed in pageantry and symbolism, as well as in military power” (2).<sup>2</sup> As Boehmer remarks, “Empire was itself, at least in part, a textual exercise” (13). In this case, the message behind the “text” was that everything Western was superior, affluent, correct, glamorous, and victorious. While the Japanese scarcely found enough food, the American soldiers handed out colourfully wrapped chocolate bars and played around with girls. In the post-war era, the West assented to this textual

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<sup>2</sup> Elleke Boehmer, Colonial & Postcolonial Literature (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995).

version as a justification for transforming Japanese society into a manageable form. The Japanese were to be re-educated according to this "text." However, the "text" created for them by the West set the Westerner as subject and the Japanese as object. Even though Western authority might successfully enlighten Japanese society and allow "the entry of once-colonised Others into the West" (Boehmer 7), it does not promise those Others the full status of the Western subject. Instead, the West still expects this Other to remain as Other. Simply speaking, there are two texts which the West has imposed on Japanese society. One is the text of imperialism in order to control Japan and transform it into a version or copy of the West, the other is of what Edward Said calls Orientalism, which expects Japan to be different. And actual Japanese society passes into a void between the two.

This confusion of subject/object can be seen to account for the kind of identity-crisis from which today's Japanese society suffers. For instance, you see many posters and advertisements on Japanese TV or magazines in which Western models with blond hair and blue eyes sell products. It seems that foreign models still appeal to the deep-rooted insatiable longing in Japanese people to become Western, even when such products do not always fit the Japanese. Fashionable clothes manufactured by Western designers are not really for the petite Japanese. However hard they may try to identify themselves with the Westerner, it is impossible to become one as an unmistakable difference has been set up between the two. The sense of isolation grows deeper when the Japanese find themselves pictured on Western TV in absurd outfits that look only remotely like Kimonos. However hard the Japanese might strive for subject status as the gazer, they continually find themselves the object of the gaze. There is an enormous disparity between their own sense of themselves and the Western image of what it is to be Japanese.

It is time to question this situation. As long as the Western "text" remains a

norm, Japan has no alternative but to see itself as the Other. If it keeps avoiding questions about originality, identity and the issue of subject/object, then the current identity-crisis, the sense of incongruity, and the lack of self-confidence will not be easily overcome.

### Orientalism

This crisis is not only a problem for the East, but also for the West. After the dissolution of Empire and its ideologies, the alternative set of texts, those of Orientalism, now have a stronger hold among the Western perception of the East. Sometimes this is hidden under the guise of cherishing other unique cultures. However, an often overlooked problem of such an Orientalist attitude (as Said suggests) is that it ignores and erases the actual entities, and forces on them the identity it wants them to have. It has little, if anything, to do with the real Eastern part of the world:

[S]uch locales, regions, geographical sectors as “Orient” and “Occident” are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West (Said 6).<sup>3</sup>

And as with Imperialism, Orientalism has been performed through a textual construction. It is “a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment.” And such an investment has “made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness” (Said 6) to the extent that Orientalism seems to have been absorbed “into the general culture”

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient [1978] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

(Said 6).

Indeed, the majority of Western people have a vague and Orientalist idea about Japan and Japanese culture. I am sometimes surprised at the imbalance in the number of cultural exchanges between the West and Japan. Western products, cultural or not, are to be found in every corner of Japan. There are millions of books translated from English to Japanese. However, it is much more difficult to find Japanese novels translated into English here. The cultural exchange is still more or less one-sided, which inevitably results in a one-sided view of Japanese culture by Western people. The view of Japan is an amalgam of fictions and constructions and empty statistics.

As long as we take such a practice for granted without questioning “a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world” (Said 12), we cannot escape from the ideology of Orientalism, which not only causes the West to miss the opportunity to broaden its perspective, but also effectively silences the Other.

The silencing effect that Orientalism induces in people in the East is the issue Gayatri Spivak speaks of in her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” when she describes “epistemic violence”:

The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity (280-1).<sup>4</sup>

Spivak tells us that urging colonial subjects to speak for themselves is futile, as they

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<sup>4</sup> Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. Marxism and Interpretation of Culture, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988). 271-313.

do not possess the language of subjectivity. Not only by blindly forcing Western theory upon the East, but also by carelessly trying to represent the subject in the East, the intellectual might merely fortify the constitution of Other.

The historic and economic situation of Japan is very different from that of India, and I understand the purpose of the American occupation was different from that of Imperial colonisation. However, I think what Spivak says of the constitution of the Other in the heterogeneous and stealthy project of the subject on the dominant side and its permeating silencing effect may help us to understand the dilemma which Japanese society seems to be facing. The American occupation might be a thing of the past, but we need to realise a textual practice can have a long lasting effect, and it can reach to the foundation of a culture, transforming its mode of perception.

### Silencing the Women

My project is partly aimed at an attempted reconciliation or overcoming of the troubled subject/object status. But it is also a feminist project, because this issue surrounding the silencing of the Other, as Spivak poignantly argues, has double significance for women in the once-colonised:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third-world woman" caught between tradition and modernization (306).

Though I am well aware that Japanese woman cannot be included with the "third-world woman," the way in which the Japanese woman has been robbed of speech is quite similar to what Spivak describes. The majority of the Japanese who appear in the news bulletins are male, as they dominate the world of politics,

business, and academia. However, it does not mean they have nothing to say. On the contrary, they want to speak but they do not have the proper tools for it.

Feminism, especially that which belongs to post-colonial discourse, may look like an appropriate tool to tackle this difficult situation, but the reality is more problematic. Though many Japanese women resent the unfair treatment of women in male-centred society and want a change, it does not seem that they find in Western feminism an appropriate tool. I often come across a hostile reaction towards anything “feminist” among Japanese women, not to mention men. Surely this originates from the fact that Western feminist theories are culturally specific to the West. Though it is obviously necessary to customise the theory accordingly, the feminism which prevails in Japan is still largely Western and therefore a discourse with which the majority of women do not feel comfortable. Perhaps this is because Western theorists take it for granted that their problems are shared by others. Or perhaps it is because Japanese feminists cannot quite find the way to articulate the problem, caught as they are between subject and object: they are doubly trapped in the void.

### Textual Attempt

How can we make an adjustment to Western feminism for it to become a useful tool for Asian women? If Imperialism and Orientalism, or any ideologies, including that of patriarchy itself, are constructed through discourse, then their overcoming must, at least in part, be a consequence of textual practice. Textual practice might find less resistance among Asian women. The kind of political feminism which currently prevails in Japanese feminist discourse presupposes the kind of subject which produces a sense of incongruity in Japanese women since it is the Western subject which positions the Japanese women on the side of the Other. Such forms of feminism often claim to represent “the women’s voice.” However it is

extremely dangerous to have recourse to the notion of “a universal patriarchy.”

Judith Butler warns:

That form of feminist theorising has come under criticism for its efforts to colonise and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression, but because they tend as well to construct a “Third World” or even an “Orient” in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-Western barbarism (Gender Trouble 3).<sup>5</sup>

It might end up erasing all differences between Japanese and other Asian cultures. And in spite of, or rather because of its good intentions of enlightenment, feminism might reduce itself to a powerful colonising discourse, thus unwittingly oppressing some of the women which it claims to represent, and causing “the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from ‘women’ whom feminism claims to represent” (Butler, Gender Trouble 4).

It is impossible to create “the women’s voice,” since gender is not the only axis on which identity is constructed. There are many other axes such as race and class, and as Butler suggests, “it becomes impossible to separate out ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (Gender Trouble 3). Similarly Susan Bordo insists:

We always “see” from points of view that are invested with our social, political, and personal interests, inescapably “centric” in one way or another, even in the desire to do justice to heterogeneity (140).<sup>6</sup>

We therefore need to be careful not to put too much emphasis on sameness, but to look for and accept difference and variety. An attempt to build an all-inclusive

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<sup>5</sup> Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Susan Bordo, “Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism,” Feminism/Postmodernism, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990).



theory, the one Bordo calls the “view from nowhere” (136), always runs the risk of colonialism. As she rightly suggests, “no theory - not even one which measures its adequacy in terms of justice to heterogeneity, locality, complexity - can place itself beyond danger” (140). Even though the oppression could be found in the East as well as in the West, the type and the history of oppression must certainly be different.

The careless application of Western feminist theory to Japanese culture, therefore, does nothing but harm. Yet, what I would like is not the deconstructionist “dream of everywhere” (Bordo 142), which “long[s] for adequate representations - unlike Cartesian conceptions, but no less ambitiously, of a relentlessly heterogeneous reality” (145). I think falling into a pitfall of “deconstructionist erasure of the body” (Bordo 145) only serves to fortify the mind/body dualism in which the female body comes to be repressed by simply dissolving “Nowhere” into an “Everywhere” which is just as empty. Putting too much importance on theoretical correctness, we might run the risk of moving towards that endless condition of “feminist gender-scepticism” (Bordo 151) which currently prevails among academic theorists.

Such scepticism is only “operating in the service of the reproduction of white male knowledge/power,” Bordo suspects. The tendency to appreciate “professionalism” and “neutrality” is only “the distinctively twentieth-century refurbishing of the view from nowhere” (151). Even when one cannot take gender out from other constitutions of identity, “one cannot be ‘gender-neutral’ in this culture” (152). We have to resist the temptation for utopian universalising theorisation, and “be pragmatic, not theoretically pure” (153). Encouraged by this phrase, one of my footings is to be found in gender theories, though it will not be confined in them. My aim is not to reduce my argument to the forms of one theory, but to create a new narrative which accepts the body, including abnormal and grotesque bodies in the way that many contemporary writers of fiction have suggested.

## Telling Stories Differently

Power, according to Foucault, works not only by prohibition but also by reproduction. The current contingent, and historically constructed power-relation can only be maintained by repetition and reproduction in performance. Butler calls for the concept of gender performativity:

There is not gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results (Gender Trouble 93).

It suggests the heavy dependency of power upon the Other. It might remind you of the Hegelian Master-Slave discourse, in which “the unexpected dependency of the master on the slave in order to establish his own identity through reflection” (Butler, Gender Trouble 44) is revealed. This dependency is precisely that which could be used by a feminist project to undermine the current power-relation, since the ruling of the master can be disrupted according to the rebellious performance of the slave. If the identity of the master is not a fixed one and requires repetitious affirmation, then neither is the identity of the slave. Applying this argument to women’s oppression, the current status of woman does not have ontological meaning. The task is, therefore, not to seek for a universal identity outside power, but to find disruption from within. It requires a repetitious performance, though this time, it is to reflect an unexpected gaze.

My thesis, with the purpose described above, is manifold. It starts from the analysis of the way in which patriarchy was introduced into Japanese society. This is intended to put forward some counter-evidence against the argument which claims the universality and legitimacy of patriarchy, as it suggests forms of non-patriarchal organisation in the past. My examination of The Tale of Genji is situated here – a text believed to be the first novel ever written in the world. It was produced by a

Japanese woman in the early eleventh century at the moment when Japanese society began to transform itself into a patriarchal formation. The analysis of this long novel may offer us some insight into Japanese culture before its transformation into a fully patriarchal society. I try to excavate the elements which were in Japan before it was affected by the Chinese law system, elements which provide a vision of what the cultural difference might be between the West and Japan. It is also worth paying attention to some of the techniques used by the author of The Tale of Genji, which show a surprising similarity to those employed by contemporary women writers in Japan and the West. We might see how such techniques function to elide the silencing effect of patriarchal society.

The next stage of my argument involves the analysis of contemporary novels by woman writers. Postmodern and feminist enquiries have managed to destabilise the legitimacy of patriarchal order in the West, and in Japan as well. Once silenced women writers in Japan are again being heard, and they are using strategies of Western writers to represent themselves. In fact, in spite of their apparent cultural difference, contemporary writers of Britain and Japan show incredible affinities in the way they tell their stories. The use of fantasy, fairytales, legends, and grotesque motifs in particular are common to both. I hope that my analysis might find some connection between Japanese women writers and British, and help to encourage a mutual understanding. I hope this may help to provide Japanese writers with the place they deserve in world literature, and may bring them more recognition and appreciation in the Japanese literary world as well, since they are more or less regarded as eccentrics and their work certainly not considered as "authentic" as the literature produced by men.

I set aside a considerable amount of space for an analysis of the writing of Angela Carter, as she functions as an important bridge between the two cultures. She lived in Japan for more than two years, and cultural influences from Japan can

be found in her later fantastic novels. These novels exemplify ways in which Japanese and Western cultures influence each other, since Carter is now very popular among Japanese readers, and many are influenced by her. The flow of knowledge is no longer one way, but more and more a mutual fortification.

This is an attempt at pragmatic feminist research, the kind that Susan Bordo encourages. I hope that this may make its contribution to work which makes feminism less colonising, to produce a more diverse and accommodating discourse. It might not be an altogether orthodox type of literary thesis, but it is a different kind of performance that I intend. It is an attempt to reproduce, repeat, and reflect differently, to return an unexpected gaze from the gazed onto the gazer.

## Chapter 1:

### History, Myth, and the Birth of the Female Ghost

#### The Body in Myth

Western myths and religions have long situated the human body in relation to ideas of the transcendental. The body symbolises that nature against which the human mind has to fight. It is something to be conquered, controlled, and repressed. For man who aspires to godly existence, immortality, and transcendence, the female body, because of its reproductive function, is always attributed to the side of nature by patriarchal discourses, and, therefore, also symbolises something which requires repression or control. Woman, in this way, comes to occupy a very contradictory place: she is there for man to assure him of his competence and superiority, while she is also there to lure him into corruption, mortality and human limitation, as illustrated in the legend of Genesis: she is an ambiguous object of desire and horror at the same time (Beauvoir 171-229).<sup>1</sup>

This dualism of body and mind is displayed in many other myths and fairytales in the West, among which is the Oedipus Myth. It may be read as typical of an attempt to deny the horror of human corporeal limitations and to seek for a rational explanation of the origin of human beings. It also betrays itself as a patriarchal attempt to secure the legitimacy of their dominance, if you notice the absence of woman as an active agent in the myth. Besides, the traps and downfalls are set by female characters, thus causing them be blamed. Power works through narrative: by creating such mythical discourse, the patriarchal system seeks to deny its precarious foundation, while it relegates the unexplainable to a dismissable place of the "Other," the woman.

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<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex [1949], ed. and trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997).

The displacement of this “horror” onto woman is stated in Laura Mulvey’s analysis of the Oedipal drama as adapted in David Lynch’s film, Blue Velvet (1986). She recognises the hybrid nature of the Oedipus Myth as that of an initiation rite and also as that of the psychological struggle of infantile desire. Mulvey sees the scene in which Oedipus solved the riddle presented by the Sphinx as that of an initiation into the narrative of a young man’s rite of passage, and “the founding moment of a subjectivity that is centred on human consciousness, that is, on man’s awareness of his own rationality” (47).<sup>2</sup> Following Hegel’s discussion of Oedipus, she extends its implications from the drama of one particular human being, to that of the social “transition between two cultures, in which one is characterised by the philosophical abstraction of Greece and the other by ‘Egyptian’ symbolism” (48). Comparing Western culture with the highly symbolic and hieroglyphic meaning-system of Egyptian culture, which always hints at another thing, she maintains that Western culture particularly glorifies the reason of human beings, and at the same time diminishes the enigma imposed by the unknown Other:

Oedipus, on the other hand, inaugurates the triumph of rationality. He is the proto-typical philosopher, for whom thought can be expressed without mediation and obscurity. It is the anthropocentric answer ‘Man’ that causes the Sphinx to throw herself from the rock and kill herself (48).

Mulvey also points out the way (obvious in Gothic fiction as well) in which female characters are placed always on the side against reason. The Sphinx here is one of the typical female monsters which persist even today in cultural representation, symbols of a “monstrous maternal,” “that must be defeated for the tale to reach its appropriate conclusion” (41). Mulvey presents Oedipus’s crucial

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<sup>2</sup> Laura Mulvey, “The Pre-Oedipal Father: the Gothicism of Blue Velvet,” Modern Gothic: A Reader, eds. Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith (New York: Manchester UP, 1996), 38-57.

encounter with, and murder of, an old man immediately before the Sphinx scene (who is, of course, Laius, his father) as a hidden initiation scene of Oedipal drama. For Oedipus to marry Queen Jocasta, he has to eliminate his own father, and that is what he accomplishes; from this act, he earns his punishment. What is monstrous here fluctuates from archaic mother to ordering lawful father, as if “Laius and the Sphinx are doubled in the narrative structure” (Mulvey 42).

This explicitly illustrates the contradiction that though the real horror, in fact, comes from the reality that the paternal law can be so easily destroyed and replaced and, because of the unlawful incestuous desire of the son for his mother, can be transferred onto the female monster. To avoid facing this reality, the female monster is used as a substitute source of horror which justifies the murderous attack. The horrible monster is, therefore, a construction of the law itself, to support its own system. It is a fabricated story to assure the power of its solid foundation, while in fact it is precarious and fragile. Butler calls it “the radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female ‘Other’” (Gender Trouble vii).

This dependency is so total that the monster can never really be killed. In fact, in the Oedipus myth, too, though Oedipus manages to get rid of the Sphinx temporarily, he does not kill her. The Sphinx destroys herself, or so he convinces himself. But is she really destroyed? You never know. Or rather, it may be that he leaves open the possibility of the existence of the monster. Even though he satisfies himself with the fantasy of killing the mythic horror, he needs the monster as a site onto which he can transfer the horror. Without it, he cannot enjoy illusory mastery and competence. However, the only inconvenient consequence of this not-killing is that it may come to haunt him in the future, might face him with the ultimate reality where the reason of “Man” fails. Oedipus blinds himself so that he might not see the real body of the horror. Sexual instinct is sinful in the Western concept: woman is to blame as she stirs desire in man.

However, this kind of mind/body dualism is not as universal as has been assumed by Western feminists: Japanese myths suggest tendencies against such repression of the body. As if to prove how important and indispensable woman's sexual and mythical power has been, the positive value of the body is exemplified in Amaterasu, the goddess of the sun, the chief of all gods in Japanese myth. It is highly unusual to have a female chief in any myths in the world (Yoshida and Hurukawa 10).<sup>3</sup> When a first-wave Japanese feminist, Raicho Hiratsuka, writes, "In the beginning, woman was the sun,"<sup>4</sup> she makes it clear that in Japanese culture women had originally been associated with the primary sun rather than the secondary moon as is the case in Western culture. Unlike the lower status of Western goddesses, she is the most powerful and most benevolent. And while Western goddesses are sometimes cruel and lack human emotion, Amaterasu is very sexual and human. One episode tells that she once locks herself in a cave, being upset. Having lost the sun, the other gods are plunged into darkness and at a loss. They cudgel their brains, and they have a feast in front of the cave in an attempt to lure Amaterasu out. One of the goddesses dances and shows her genitals, while other gods laugh out loud at it. Amaterasu, intrigued by their laughter, comes out of the cave, thus shines onto the world again. Fertility and sexuality are closely connected here, none of which posits any threat or hatred. Sexuality in woman is glorified.

The indigenous Japanese religion, as illustrated in the Amaterasu myth, highly regards harmony between body and mind. It detests any repression of bodily need, including sexual desire. The ideal is the embrace of the body and not its transgression. Japanese myths, for example, carry no trace of repression of

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<sup>3</sup> Atsuko Yoshida and Noriko Hurukawa, Nihon-no-Shinwa Densetsu (Japanese Myth and Legends) (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Raicho Hiratsuka, in the forward of the first number of the journal, Seitou (September, 1911) , of which she was one of the founders.



sexuality, nor is the concept of sin associated with sexual activity (Yokoyama 153).<sup>5</sup> The myth tells that the country, Japan, was produced through the sexual act of a god, Izanagi, and a goddess, Izanami.

One Japanese mythic folk tale, “Momotaro,” features an opposition similar to the Western Oedipus myth between human beings and monsters, and suggests some interesting points of difference between Western and Japanese culture. As in the Oedipus Myth, this tale features a young man’s rite of passage, which culminates in the battle with mythic monsters whose defeat ensures his reward and his passage into maturity. The story goes like this: A long time ago, there lived a boy, who was born from inside a peach, and was called Momotaro. He grew up and one day departed to conquer ogres, called *Oni* in Japanese, which were causing trouble by eating human beings. On the way to the island where the ogres lived, he employed a monkey, a pheasant and a dog to support him. They fought with the ogres together, and were successful in defeating them.

Unlike the Oedipus myth, in this story the hero does not signify human rationality; rather, he is strongly connected with other life forms, such as plants and animals. Claude Lévi-Strauss analyses various myths including the Oedipus myth and draws out the conflicts surrounding the theme of autochthonous origins of human being as one of the main factors found in them (Lévi-Strauss 206-31).<sup>6</sup> Adapting this analysis, Momotaro can be seen quite clearly having an autochthonous origin, but his conflict is not as strong as Oedipus’s. Though he fights with the mythic figures to restore order, this does not amount to the denial of his origin, as in the Oedipus myth.

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<sup>5</sup> Hiroshi Yokoyama, Shinwa·no·naka·no·Onnatachi: Nihon Shakai to Joseisei (Women in Myths: Japanese Society and Female Sexuality)(Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology [1963], trans. Claire Jacobson and Brook Grundfest Schoepf (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

His achievement is partly human, partly inhuman; while Oedipus defeats the Sphinx solely on his own, without any supernatural help (Mulvey 41),<sup>7</sup> it is not Momotaro alone who beats off the ogres. He could not have succeeded without the help of the animals. Similarly there are many other stories encouraging a harmonious relationship between human, nature and animal.

From these myths and folk tales, can be seen a greater tolerance towards the mythic "horror" than in Western myths: they do not attach so much importance to human rationality and reason as in Western culture and, therefore, hostility against the non-rational is less harsh; nature is not seen in an adversarial relation to human beings; the uncanny and the non-human is not so much of a threat to human totality; the female body does not evoke so much terror and disgust, and therefore, it does not come to assume something to be repressed and conquered.

#### Historical Speculation

It has been suggested that the more positive value that Japanese culture originally attributes to the female body might originate from the difference between farming and hunting culture. As Akiko Kagiya points out, "Motherhood as a source of fertility is especially emphasised in farming cultures" (18),<sup>8</sup> as women are thought to be in closer contact with nature. In a farming culture, nature is not an object to conquer, but the nurturing "mother", with whom people have to be in harmony in order to obtain a harvest.

Therefore, the concept of female impurity or sinfulness used to be alien to Japanese culture, though women during their menstruation period had to keep away

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<sup>7</sup> See Jean-Joseph Goux, *Oedipus, Philosopher* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993). Cited in Mulvey's "The Pre-Oedipal Father: The Gothicism of *Blue Velvet*."

<sup>8</sup> Akiko Kagiya, "Bosei-no-Tagisei" (Equivocality of Motherhood), *Bosei-wo-Tou* (*Questioning Motherhood*), ed. Haruko Wakita, vol. 1 (Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 1985).

from religious activity (Miyata 22).<sup>9</sup> Women's social status was high, since they, with their mythical power, were in charge of protecting their families from evil spirits, as well as securing harvest and thus, protecting the community (Miyata 8-9). The community could not live without female power. It was so vital, that no wonder many communities in those days had a female chief. Prayers and festivals for the sake of good harvest played an important role and, according to Miyata, many such rituals were carried out by women in Japan.

Not only did women dominate the religious and mythical roles, many assumed political leadership. Ancient Japan saw a number of female rulers; gender hierarchy appeared much later in Japan than in most other cultures (Piggott 3).<sup>10</sup> This is especially unique considering the fact that Japan is in East Asia where, under the strong influence of Chinese patriarchal ideology, male rulers have been the norm. In first century China, for instance, the following account appears in one of the Chinese classics: If woman rules the country, it would not remain undisturbed; if a hen crows like a cock, its owner would not flourish (qtd in Piggott 4). Female rulers in ancient Japan ruled the society with a male partner, in the system called *Himehiko*-system. The primary ruler was the female one, who was in charge of spiritual rites as "Mother of the community." The male partner was secondary, and in charge of actual politics.

Not only on the community level, but also on the household level, women's status was relatively high. It is believed that housewives in Japanese pre-historic society, because of their mythic power, were in charge of the God of the house. Some

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<sup>9</sup> Noboru Miyata, Onna no Reiryoku to Ie no Kami (Women's Spiritual Power and God of Household) (Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 1983). Miyata suggests the concept of women's impurity or sinfulness became prevalent in Japan after the influence of Buddhism or Confucian.

<sup>10</sup> Joan R. Piggott, "Himehiko and Himeou: A Study on Gender Hierarchy and State Formation," Gender and Japanese History Vol.2: The Self and Expression/ Work and Life, ed. Haruko Wakita and Susan B. Hanley (Tokyo: University of Tokyo, 1995).

areas have records that housewives were called “the priest of the house” (Miyata 9). Even today, there remains a phrase “*Kami-san*,” which literally means “God,” used by a husband to call his wife. Moreover, in those days, the word “*oya*” (parent) meant only female mothers (including female ancestors); mothers had immense influence upon daily life as “Mother of the community” and had more power over their children than fathers (Kagiya 31).

Female mythic power and sexuality were in very close relation. As I mentioned above, fertile farming and sexual activity were both regarded as sacred and to be cherished. According to the renowned Japanese anthropologist, Kunio Yanagida, vital parts of those ritual related to farming in Japan had originally fallen under the jurisdiction of women, just as childbirth did. They were carried out by women and often with highly sexual implications. One such example is that of a rice-farming village in Kyoto, where the female members of the village make two penis-shaped objects out of vegetable and dedicate them to the shrine in spring (vital season for rice-farming). It is said that, if you bring back home some of these objects and eat them, you become pregnant (Miyata 14). As shown in this ritual, the symbol of fertility was not only female genitalia. The male penis was also regarded as a fertility symbol, rather than the symbol of power, or signifier, as in the Western culture. And while customs of penis-worship could be seen in Japan as well, they were in conjunction with labia-worship, and were based on the cherishing of sexual activity itself. Woman was the sun in her community, who plays a vital role in bearing posterity and taking care of the harvest. She was closer to nature, and god. Yanagida calls this highly regarded women’s spiritual power “*Imo-no-Chikara*” (Female or Sisters’ power).<sup>11</sup>

In fact, the high status of women in ancient Japan suggests evidence for the

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<sup>11</sup> Kunio Yanagida, *Imo-no-Chikara*, rev. ed. (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1984).

possible existence of a matriarchal culture. It is so unique in the world that Dorothy Dinnerstein for example dismisses the possibility of the existence of a pre-historic matriarchal society as “a fantasy projection”:

Folk tales describing such a period make excellent sense as a fantasy projection back into our species' past of a central drama in each individual's past. As a possible record of real events, they make (to me at least) very ambiguous sense indeed. It seems improbable not only biotechnologically, but psychologically as well, that the hand that rocked the cradle can ever in fact have predominated in the ruling of the world (203).<sup>12</sup>

Though she acknowledges that her formulation is constructed from the point of view of the Western white middle-class, and might not be applicable universally, she assumes that current gender arrangements originate from our “humanness,” i.e., from the peculiar human conditions in connection with our huge brain and bipedalism. Consequently, compared with other animals, the human baby is born more helpless and requires a longer period of nurturing, thus making its mother depend on others for a long period during and after her lengthy pregnancy. According to Dinnerstein, together with the lack of methods of contraception, this has made woman the sole caretaker of babies, while it has made man the main breadwinner until recently. It also prevents one half of human beings from pursuing what that huge human brain makes it possible to pursue, while the other half can freely do so. This gender imbalance has had psychologically maiming effects which are still at work today to maintain the patriarchal division of gender and this in spite of the fact that modern technology has almost entirely reduced its necessity.

I personally agree with Dinnerstein's opinion that such a divisive

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<sup>12</sup> Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise [1976] (New York: Other, 1999).

arrangement can cause the mother to have immense and harmful influences on the human being's psyche in his/her infancy, and this in itself contributes to the maintenance of further gender division in favour of patriarchy. When only the mother takes responsibility for raising the baby, she comes to be regarded by the baby as the total authority during infancy, the only one who can give it nourishment and respond to its needs, but who can also withdraw capriciously and even inflict death. The baby has to obey and satisfy her in order to get what it needs. Thus, she acquires some kind of superhuman quality and becomes what Melanie Klein calls an 'IMAGO' which makes the baby adore/abhor her, as Dinnerstein argues. Mother is the first Other, who cannot be controlled at the baby's will, who is "the will's first, overwhelming adversary" (166). She, and consequently woman in general, is imprinted on the baby's psyche as something outside the rational, more than, or less than human, and "to contain [the will of woman], to keep it under control and harness it to chosen purposes, is a vital need, a vital task, for every mother-raised human" (161). On the other hand, father, whom a baby meets later, represents something rational, more human, an order, rational law and control. According to Dinnerstein, this condition makes every human being (men and women) consent to the rule of patriarchy as a kind of refuge. Patriarchal male authority seems more human and finite, compared with the traumatising rule of superhuman and infinite female authority. Through the patriarchal system, man, by controlling woman and treating her as an inferior being, enjoys the fantasy of controlling this superhuman irrational mother figure, and of revenging her at the same time. Woman also enjoys it vicariously. This patriarchal repression of woman is, therefore, as Dinnerstein rightly puts, a "neurotic" (200) attempt to handle the human malaise, which originates from the female monopoly of child-rearing. Dinnerstein offers an alternative origin myth to the rationalist tradition of social contract.

Though I agree with Dinnerstein on many points, her assumption that human

physical peculiarity might inevitably lead to an oppression of women is refutable. Contrary to her supposition, pre-historic Japanese society accepted the rule of the hand that might have “rocked the cradle.” Dinnerstein’s theory, based on the function of the maternal body and its biology, might in fact function to reify the current power-relation, in which “biology is destiny.” Such a supposition based on “the ostensibly natural facts of sex” might be “discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests” (Butler, Gender Trouble 7). It might be a myth created by power itself, in order to make the maternal body “the Other.”

Gerda Lerner also refutes Dinnerstein’s assumption of female dependence on man-the-hunter, suggesting that “the most egalitarian societies are to be found among hunting/gathering tribes, which are characterized by economic interdependency” (29),<sup>13</sup> though she points out that what has been interpreted as female dominance by feminist anthropologists and writers is, in fact, merely complementarity, as apparent in the absence of clear-cut male dominance, and concludes that no matriarchal society has ever existed as “the mirror image of patriarchy” (31), that is, as the society “where women-as-a-group have decision-making power over men or where they define the rules of sexual conduct or control marriage exchanges” (30).

What is found in Japanese pre-historic society is certainly more than just matrilineal or matrilocal, if not that which can be strictly defined “matriarchal” as the equivalent of patriarchal. Among the many female rulers, the Empress Himiko in the late second to third century, for instance, is said to have a tremendous power over the community. What then made possible this condition whose existence is thought impossible? What made theorists and anthropologists believe in the impossibility of its existence to begin with? Considering this may shed some light on

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<sup>13</sup> Gerda Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy (New York: Oxford UP, 1986).

the "biology is destiny" formulation, revealing that it was fabricated to suit the culturally and politically specific need of power and is neither universal nor inherently human.

As I am not an historian, I shall confine myself largely to speculation about various factors which are unique to Japan. The first is Japanese dietary habits. Even before the beginning of cultivation, Japanese people were not as carnivorous as the West; they mostly lived on plants, fish, shellfish, or some small animals. Because of its geographical location, being surrounded by sea, and its mild climate, finding food is not thought to have been difficult. It is unlikely that large-scale hunting was required and this means that comparatively less physical strength was necessary. And though there was also a clear gender division of work in pre-historic Japanese society, it did not mean the superiority of one sex over the other. As in other societies, it is assumed that men were in charge of fighting and hunting, while women were in charge of collecting vegetable and child-rearing. However, one analysis shows that almost seventy percent of the food was vegetable, and women's dependence on men concerning food was consequently minimal or it may even have been that men, in this way, depended more on women (Kagiya 20). Furthermore, the sea protected the country from attacks from outside. There were tribal fights within but not large-scale wars with other races or nations which might have needed extensive organisation of male force and therefore contributed to patriarchal organisation.

This comparatively reduced dependency of women on men does not mean that women were not at all attributed those mythical powers which Dinnerstein claims women in patriarchal society inevitably assume. On the contrary, no matter whether the society is matriarchal or patriarchal, a child is born from a woman, and a sense of wonder concerning childbirth seems to make people believe in female spiritual power. It seems though that woman's power in Japan was a less negative



one than in the West; it is a fertile, benevolent power which nourishes the society.

So why has such a culture in which feminine power was respected and glorified turned into a patriarchal one? Historical documents tell us that it started to transform when a foreign tribe from the Continent (said to be ancestors of the current Emperor) came to rule the country (Kagiya 31). They brought with them the patriarchal belief systems of Buddhism and Confucianism. They were good at what patriarchy is always good at: War. After Japan interfered in the war in the Korean Peninsula and was defeated, external tensions resulted in national warfare. The Emperor's tribe with its patriarchal values were final, victorious, and a centralised state with a Chinese law and administrative system which was established at the end of the seventh century.

With the introduction of patriarchy, women's social status began to deteriorate. The head of the household was transferred to a "father to son" inheritance, and children were regarded as belonging to their father's family. The legal term for "a child" often designated only "a male child." In such a system, the social value of female members of the family was significantly reduced. Political positions were allotted only to men, with the exception of the ladies of the court. Women were thus driven out of the public and into private spaces.

It is at this time that the deprivation of women's political and social status also coincided with the oppression of sexuality and female power. Since the earlier indigenous Japanese values of liberal sexuality and female magical power were out of accord with patriarchal order and law, they were bound to be repressed. The Emperor tribe and the Fujiwara clan (which became the most prosperous Japanese aristocratic family through the marital bond with the Emperor's tribe) manipulated folk beliefs for that purpose, as Buddhism or Confucianism was regarded as too radical at that time. They made a new religion, Shintoism, out of the Japanese myth

in order to legitimise the rule of the Emperor tribe and the Fujiwara clan.

Amaterasu, expressing female sexuality and people's adoration towards it, was the first to be repressed. The obligation for a princess to serve as the Vestal Virgin was established, as the shrine itself was moved away from the capital to a suburban town, Ise. Amaterasu, thus gradually lost her image of fertility and sexuality, and was transformed into a serene "virgin goddess" instead, and made quite irrelevant to daily life (Yokoyama 126). Though there remained more of the female principle in Shintoism than in Buddhism or Confucianism, this separation of sexuality from spirituality seems to me critical in degrading women's cultural status in Japan.

#### Residue and Conflict

The patriarchal influence on Japanese culture was contagiously powerful, but was not able to entirely erase what existed before. Some areas of contemporary Japan have maintained, and still maintain, the kind of female worship seen in ancient Japan. There are still rituals in which women take the primary roles. A folk religion, Fuji-ko, for instance, which prevailed against the frequent governmental prohibition and regarded Mt Fuji as a sacred mountain (Miyata 92-99), emphasised the virtue of harmonic sexual activity. Yanagida points out that mountains, especially the beautiful ones, have been seen as maternal sites in Japan, and going into the mountain means going back to the womb.<sup>14</sup>

Centuries on we may still witness the residue or eruption of the repressed matriarchal principle; it is not hard to imagine the intensity of conflict between the patriarchal and matriarchal principle at the time of the introduction of the Chinese

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<sup>14</sup> Akiko Kagiya explains that, before cremation began, it was customary to carry the corpse on such a mountain and bury it there, as it was believed that the spirit incarnates there. Also mountain ascetics used to lock themselves during the winter in a mountain cave, and come out in the spring, which is also reminiscent the cycles of pregnancy and childbirth. p.35.

patriarchal law system. Referring to the theory of political anthropologists such as Christine Gailey and Viana Muller that the formation of the state brings about gender hierarchy, replacing gender complementarity in the pre-state stage, Piggott indicates the peculiarity of Japanese society, which produced as many as six women rulers between the end of sixth century and the end of eighth century, while consolidating its state system. She suggests that the matriarchal system in Japan still had some influence at that period, even though it was after the formation of the state and the introduction of a male-dominant political system. The fact that a kind of gender-complementary ruling system, *Himehiko-sei*, could ever exist as late as the eighth century (though the import of Chinese cultural and political systems based on the Confucian idea<sup>15</sup> began in the third century) proves there was a fundamental difference between the Chinese social structure and that of Japan (Piggott 5).

#### Rise and Fall of the Feminine Literary Community

We might well say, during that period, there was a power struggle between matriarchy and patriarchy. In the Heian period, while the struggle was still going on, patriarchy started to take over, not only on the surface, but also in the infrastructure of Japanese society. The Confucian idea, characteristically hierarchical and male-dominant, started to permeate.

In spite of their past association with the sun, women had already started to lose their original status as early as the Heian period, and were associated with the moon, which is secondary and peripheral. And it is in this period that female-friendly marriage also started to disappear. Until this period, the prevailing marriage system was matrilocal *tsumadoi-kon*, or uxorilocal *mukotori-kon*, in which a woman could stay after the marriage in her family's house in which she was familiar

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<sup>15</sup> Basically, Confucianism attaches much importance to hierarchical order. Obedience of servant to his lord, younger to elder, women to men are the main three teachings. It tells women to obey first her father, then her husband, finally her son.

and could raise children, while the man had to pay her visits there or to move into the female family house in the case of *mukotori-kon*. As H. Richard Okada suggests, this practice “afforded women a great degree of stability and support” (163),<sup>16</sup> just as much as “the possibility of economic independence” derived from the fact “women could inherit, own, and bequeath property” (Heinrich 409).<sup>17</sup> However marriage like today, where women are brought into their husband’s house, came into practice around this period, as described in The Tale of Genji which was written by Murasaki Shikibu (or Lady Murasaki) probably at the beginning of the eleventh century. Since polygamy was the common practice in those days, women’s condition was seriously worsened by relocation to the male domain. I believe that it is not a coincidence that women writers appeared in great numbers in this period when they began to be robbed of their former status and reduced to a peripheral existence. Their desire to protest, subvert, or at least to check, the growing patriarchal order must have found its way into writing.

Another important fact that contributed to the florescence of women writers in the Heian period is that they had the newly acquired means to voice and express their feelings. Gendering of writing is, indeed, one of the peculiarities in this period: there was a distinction “between vernacular writing done in ‘the woman’s hand’ (*onna-de*) and Chinese writing done in ‘male letters’ (*otoko-moji*)” (Schalow and Walker 1).<sup>18</sup> This double structure of the written Japanese language was, according to Mara Miller, developed due to the inappropriateness of the Chinese ideographic system, which is the first writing system in Japan, adapted around mid-sixth century

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<sup>16</sup> H. Richard Okada, Figures of Resistance (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Amy Vladeck Heinrich, “Double Weave: The Fabric of Japanese Women’s Writing,” Contemporary Japanese Literature, World Literature Today special issue 62.3. (Summer, 1988): 408-414.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker, Introduction, The Woman’s Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women’s Writing, ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1996). 1-18.

in conjunction with the Chinese legal codes, Buddhist religion, Confucian rites, etc (477-93).<sup>19</sup> Miller suggests that the Chinese ideographic system (*kanbun*) “was not only complicated and difficult to learn but also syntactically inappropriate to Japanese and lacking in vocabulary for all things distinctively Japanese” (480). As time went by, a much simplified new vernacular writing system, *kana*, was developed, which was no longer ideographic but phonetic. According to H. Richard Okada, most scholars agree that *kana* came into use some time during the early decades in the Heian Period, which starts from 794 (160). As Paul Gordon Schalow and Jenet A. Walker point out, “modes of vernacular writing in Japanese were essentially invented by court women in the Heian period at a time when women were largely excluded from the benefits of literacy in Chinese” (5). Thus, paradoxically because of their exclusion from official Chinese language, Heian women obtained an advantage as the main practitioners of the vernacular writing system, which was much more suitable for Japanese expression, and which helped women to become literate in a shorter time, an important factor in this period.

Perhaps some explanation is necessary. Though official political power was already dominated by men, women in this period maintained a certain degree of power and influence. However, what I mean by the word “women” here is not the commoners but women in high society. Social conditions peculiar to this period required such women to be literate as well as to have various skills such as poem-making, calligraphy, music, sewing, painting, incense-making, etc. The Heian period is marked by its cultural splendour on a matchless scale, which was basically supported by Fujiwara wealth. The Fujiwara clan, though private, dominated high political power, by making their daughters bear the next crown prince. As Norma Field suggests, “the logic of Japanese imperial rule is that mythic reality is embodied

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<sup>19</sup> Mara Miller, “Canons and the Challenge of Gender: Women’s Voices in the Japanese Canon,” The Monist: An International Journal of General Philosophical Inquiry, 76.4. (October, 1993): 477-93.

by the emperor, who represents a continuity from that time in the beginning when heaven and earth were linked and divine rule was established" (23),<sup>20</sup> and the blood line is of importance. The mechanism worked like this: once the crown prince was born to their daughters, the family persuaded the emperor to abdicate, leaving the young new emperor in the charge of the grandfather, who reigned as regent. It was, therefore, extremely important for the Fujiwara clan to raise the daughters in such a way that the emperor chose their son as a crown prince. For those outside of the Fujiwara clan, too, daughters were very important, as they "could only advance themselves by marrying their daughters or sisters into the Fujiwara clan" (Miyake 88).<sup>21</sup> Heinrich describes the Heian period as "the only time in Japanese history when parents rejoiced at the birth of a daughter rather than a son" (409), though their importance is only as the pawns. Yet, however limited their privilege might have been, they were initially provided a high education to be a good wife, which in the Heian period was equivalent to a refined lady.

At the court, these highly educated wives and consorts of the emperor, together with their female attendants (mainly daughters of lower aristocratic family or local governors) created artistic and cultural salons where there was mutual encouragement to produce stories, poems, and essays. According to a famous anecdote, the Tale of Genji was written by Murasaki Shikibu under the command of her guardian in such a salon, to entertain a princess. Even if the anecdote is not true, encouragement for women to produce literary works was most certainly there. As Okada mentions, these salons not only provided women "a room of their own" in the sense Virginia Woolf used, but also "a feminine communality" (Okada 162), and sponsorship. It certainly contributed to the florescence of women's writing in this

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<sup>20</sup> Norma Field, The Splendor of Longing in the Tale of Genji (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> Lynne K. Miyake, "Woman's Voice in Japanese Literature: Expanding the Feminine," Women's Studies 17 (1989): 87-100.

period, supplementing the newly obtained feminine authorship by means of vernacular writing.

The vernacular writing, used vigorously by court ladies, as I described above was therefore regarded as “the women’s hand” and “functioned as a ‘private,’ or supplementary, mode of social communication and artistic expression in contrast to *kambun*, which signified the hegemonic discourse of ‘public’ (i.e., governmental, legal, ritual, historical, and other) constructs” (Okada 160). Okada claims that this peculiar condition of *kana* in the Heian period, with its resistant or transcendental nature, makes possible the birth of a literature of resistance, such as the Tale of Genji. Okada cites many figures of discursive resistance in *kana* texts, one of which is the heroine of another Heian text, the Tale of the Bamboo-Cutter (Taketori Monogatari), who resisted all of her suitors, including the Emperor. Similar characters, such as Tamakazura, or Ukifune, appear in the Tale of Genji as well. As the vernacular writing is allotted to a personal realm, in opposition to the official, public realm of the Chinese writing, it might have served as a vehicle for the expression of the repressed as a means of resistance.

It was also a well-recognized fact that the *kana* system was “flexible enough to accommodate native phenomena, Japanese syntactic structures, and personal feelings” (M. Miller 481). As opposed to the foreign, official, objective, Chinese writing system, the *kana* system is aligned with the native Japanese, with the personal or private, and subjective. This advantage was, however, far from overlooked by men, but soon to be cherished by them as well. A collection of Japanese poem-songs in vernacular writing, for instance, compiled at the command of Emperor Daigo around 905 in an attempt at establishing a native literary masterpiece, includes two prefaces, one in *kambun* and the other in vernacular writing, which “formally legitimized the displacement of Chinese poetry by Japanese and in so doing elevated the status of *hiragana* [vernacular] writing” (Okada 160).

This draws out an interesting point: Japanese culture attributes certain positive values to what is characteristically female or feminine. This, Miller succinctly claims, is very different from the tendency in Western theory (most markedly perhaps in modern psychoanalysis) to set the feminine merely as the lack, or the negative other. In Mara Miller's words: "The feminine is seen as offering alternative sources of positive value rather than as negations of positive value" (M. Miller 481).

Another illuminating fact to be noted is that the first poetic diary written in vernacular writing by a man (The Tosa Diary, written by Ki no Tsurayuki in 935) was created under the guise of woman's work, as if the female persona was necessary to produce such a personal work as a diary out of the regulation of the official Chinese writing. For the act of resistance and transcendence as such, the resistant nature of *kana* must have been necessary. According to Mara Miller, the moral authority for the Japanese is not the objective justice or transcendental law as in the Western case, but community standards and public opinion (M. Miller 486-7). In order to express a personal view, which is repressed in daily official life, he needs to use "the women's hand" that is permitted as a vehicle of personal emotion. Mara Miller rightly concludes:

identification with women was crucial to the development of a man's identity as a Japanese, and reliance on women's contributions to the culture was essential in the creation of Japanese national identity (484).

This diary or personal record form still remains as one of the main literary genres, called the "I"-novel, in Japan today, and is used both by men and women. What is worth consideration is that one of the characteristics of Japanese culture is this "personal" quality, which is also synonymous with the feminine.

The Tosa Diary also posits an interesting issue: "masculinity" and



“femininity” in literary style were regarded by men in the Heian period at least as a matter of choice, not as determined, or given, by their biological sex. The arbitrariness of gender representation is peculiarly remarkable and still in practice as on *Kabuki* stage (the traditional Japanese play, in which all roles are played by male actors), of which I make a further analysis later in Chapter 2. However, while the freedom in choosing gender presentation is sanctioned with men, it is not with women. Women’s *Kabuki* appeared in Japanese history, but has since been forbidden by the government. Similarly, while men took liberties in adopting vernacular writing, women in the Heian Period were discouraged from using Chinese writing, let alone to show off their knowledge of *kambun*.

After the Heian period, vernacular writing was to be manipulated and abused by men and, having lost its resistant quality, soon ceased to be the female province. Perhaps the Heian period can be described as the last era when women enjoyed their acknowledged status as “the guardians of the distinctively native culture” (M. Miller 484).

Whilst during the Heian period, as I have argued above, Japanese society had almost shifted from a matriarchal to patriarchal structure, Heian women retained certain privileges, such as their own language, authorship, education, though these were limited to a means by which men used women to gain power. Through education and “the feminine communality,” women were well aware of the fact they were pawns susceptible to political change, and if their guardians or fathers died, their status would be lost altogether. And as I mentioned before, the instability of women would only be worsened by the new marriage system which came into practice in this period. It is important to note that in most of the cases, writers in this period were court women attending the Empress or consorts, or other high rank ladies, who produced their work in response to a request which was circulated in the court. In other words, such works were written for women. Writers at court saw the misery

experienced by their guardians when they lost their fathers, or lost the Emperor's favour. They wrote stories describing their guardian's misery with sympathy, supposedly by way of protest, as the ones who shared "the feminine communality." Remarkably enough, arguably the first novel in the world, the Tale of Genji, was written by one of those Heian court ladies, in "the women's hand" for women.

In spite of such a rich literary tradition of women writers in the Heian period, Japanese society has become one of the most patriarchal cultures in the world ever since. The trace of matriarchy seems to have disappeared; "the women's hand" fell out of women's province; the female communality was displaced by the warfare of men. As the Middle Ages was a period of war, military governments used the Confucian, highly patriarchal ideology, to stabilise their hierarchical order and as an ideological reinforcement of its military power. After the Meiji Restoration, European humanism was introduced and provided some impetus for the establishment of equal opportunity. However, the Japanese government remained highly patriarchal, particularly as a consequence of the wars in the first half of this century which served to make its hierarchical system intractable. Though the defeat in World War II destroyed Japanese society, the miraculous economic growth afterwards was made in the same military manner; men work hard and devotedly, while women stay at home taking all the responsibility around their house. This structure was developed under the government's initiative. It should be noted that women's oppression in Japan has always been effected through governmental manipulation. Typically, after the Meiji Restoration, when a few women appeared as the first generation of feminists, the government suppressed its movement by way of prohibiting all political activities by women. During the wars, as in the West, however, the state recruited women as a necessary labour force, which inevitably led to the formation of women's groups. But they were suppressed again as soon as the

war was over. The government extolled, "Women, go home, have babies in order to rebuild our nation." The concept of maternity was praised in that period as a way of excluding women from the political centres of power. When the economic reformation was accomplished, negative effects such as exploitation of the natural resources of Asia, and environmental hazards, began to attract criticism from other countries. In accordance with their claim for a re-examination of the Japanese social system, and also in tune with the feminist movements outside Japan, the second generation of feminists appeared in the seventies. Thus it is only recently that Japanese society has started to experience a serious re-evaluation stage. Yet the power struggle is only at its beginning. The speed of its reformation has been slow, and the grip of feminism on women has been relatively weak. The governmental systematic manipulation is still at work, through minute daily matters, the taxation system, child-care provision and work opportunities.

The literary world in Japan likewise became male-dominated after the Heian period. Notwithstanding the fact that Japan originally had a rich tradition of women writers from such an early period, which is exceptional in the world, the tradition was erased from the surface of history. The Tale of Genji managed to survive, tactfully escaping the censorship, by being read as a mere love story of a male aristocrat who had affairs with many women, or as a customary handbook teaching the way of proper behaviour to your superiors. Accordingly the book can be read as a handmaiden to the dominant ideology, if its original status as a woman's work for women's communality is dismissed. And yet, legend goes that Murasaki Shikibu and other famous women writers in the Heian period had a ruined end or miserable death, as if to say, "If you write, woman, you will lead a miserable life like them." Other women writers after the Heian period and until about the time of the Meiji period are mostly invisible. It seems that they lost their voice when the female

communality was lost, and their language was appropriated by men. It reminds me of the Graie story, shown in Nina Auerbach's Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction. The Graie are three mythical sisters, who share a single eye between them, which is passed from sister to sister:

They spend their lives endowing each other with vision: apparently it has never occurred to any one sister to keep the eye and run away. That is the hero's job. Perseus steals the eye, forcing them to reveal the whereabouts of their other triad of sisters, the irresistibly hideous Gorgons. Once the Graie are dispossessed of their eye, the Gorgons are doomed: Perseus triumphantly wears Medusa's fanged, snaky head as his second shield, whose magnetic ugliness turns his enemies to stone. Sisterhood seems powerless against the hero's theft of the communal eye (Auerbach 3).<sup>22</sup>

Perseus steals the eye away from the sisters, and uses them to destroy their monstrosity. It is difficult to fail to notice a parallel between this mythic story and Japanese literary history. Just as Perseus uses Medusa's head to destroy the Gorgons, so prohibition for women writers in Japan has been strongly at work. Until very recently, this situation had not changed on the whole. There are a number of women writers, but their works have been categorised as a "women-school" literature, equivalent to inferior literature, regardless of their particular merits. Often their works were put into a single volume of an editorial series, while each male writer was allotted one volume. Most authoritative literary figures, who appear as columnists or literary critics in newspapers or magazines and are responsible for choosing winners of literary awards (a usual way to make a debut as a writer in Japan) have been male. There has always been a censorship which works

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<sup>22</sup> Nina Auerbach, Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978).

to eliminate inappropriate (in men's view) writers from the surface of literary history (Ariga 43-60).<sup>23</sup> This process is now at last being brought to attention by feminists critics within and outside of Japan. Those works written by women in the Heian period have started to be re-evaluated, while other censored writers are being recovered. It is through this re-evaluation that the feminist quality in the Tale of Genji was re-discovered. Reformation, however, is still only just beginning.

Kyoko Nagatsuka succinctly points out the similarity of the condition of women in the Heian period and today, as they both suffer from patriarchal oppressions while keenly aware of the existence of a less biased society (4).<sup>24</sup> The existence of a certain amount of women's communality is what they share as well. It is no wonder we are witnessing the rise of many women writers today as, I believe, women writers in the Heian period and today have certainly something in common to say.

#### Foundation

Matriarchy as a system might have been repressed by the imported patriarchy, but as I mentioned earlier, it could not entirely erase respect for the feminine mythic power and sexuality which has been so vital to a farming culture. They still exist, hidden in rural traditions, or religious myth and folk tales. In Japanese myths and folk tales, for instance, you can find many women who magnanimously provide goods. They possess mythical power, and are respected by men. They are goddesses whom you should please, and when you fail to do so, you are struck by misfortune. Amaterasu, the goddess of sun, is typically such a provider of life. The princess in The Tale of Bamboo-Cutter is also one.

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<sup>23</sup> Chieko M. Ariga, "Who's Afraid of Amino Kiku? Gender Conflict and the Literary Canon," Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future, ed. Kumiko Fujimura-Fenselow and Atsuko Kameda (New York: The Feminist Press, 1995). 43-60.

Another popular folk tale, “Tsuru Nyobo (The Crane Wife),” also has a mythic woman. One day, the protagonist rescues a crane from a trap. Then he is visited by a beautiful woman, who asks him to accept herself as his wife. She weaves beautiful cloths everyday, while she tells her husband never to watch her during the work. The cloths sell well, and the husband is made rich. However, one day, he breaks the promise, and finds his wife in the shape of a crane, who weaves her feather into a cloth. She accuses him of seeing her and vanishes. Another one is “Urashima Taro,” in which the male protagonist rescues a turtle. The turtle then offers him a ride to the underwater Palace. In the Palace, he is entertained by feast and dance, and days (the number varies according to versions) pass without his realising it. On his return, the princess gives him a packet. In some versions, he is told not to open this box. When he returns home, everything has changed and he learns that 100 years (or 300 years) has passed. When he opens the packet, a smoke rises, and he transforms into an old man.

Common to both tales, and to other tales as well, is that the goddess figure is associated with nature. This goddess figure treats the protagonist well but when he fails to obey her order, she punishes him. She can be considered as a representation of nature in a farming culture. As to nature itself, a sense of wonder and awe is directed towards her as she possesses the key to fertility, prosperity, life and death. Hiroshi Yokoyama points this out as the characteristic difference between Japanese Goddesses and Western Goddesses. According to Yokoyama, Japanese Goddesses, unlike Western ones, do not loudly assert themselves. They mostly provide men with goods in a more passive way. Even when they use their mythic power, their close connection to nature is not denied, and their power is regarded in a positive way. This contrasts with the typical Western Goddesses, who tends to be a mirror image of the aggressive male Gods, who kill and eat their children, and is hated in the most

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<sup>24</sup> Kyoko Nagatsuka, Kaguyahime-no-Hangyaku (Tokyo: Sanichi Shobo, 1988).

negative way (Yokoyama 75, 77, 91).

In such folk tales, you can certainly find the residue of a culture in which women enjoyed respect and possessed a positively influential status as holders of the key to fertility. Perhaps, no matter how hard a late-developed patriarchy attempted to repress it, its success in this venture might only be superficial, and the original way might appear in the form of rural rituals or folk tales like those described above and waiting to be re-discovered. Denis De Rougemont, in his analysis of myths, writes:

a myth arises whenever it becomes dangerous or impossible to speak plainly about certain social or religious matters, or affective relations, and yet there is a desire to preserve these or else it is impossible to destroy them (21).<sup>25</sup>

What is lurking in Japanese myths is the very feminine power which patriarchy has attempted to destroy. In the same way, as Schalow and Walker suggest, the Heian legacy might have carried over, in spite of censorship, enough to influence today's women writers:

Most significantly, the legacy gives modern women writers a strong proprietary sense toward the Japanese literary language, a sense that differs markedly from the often-noted discomfort of European and American women who struggle with an alien, male-dominated language when they write. It would seem that in Japanese women writers' confident ownership of a "woman's language," their discursive experience most diverges from that of non-Japanese women writers (5).

Therefore, before moving onto the actual comparative study of Japanese and

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<sup>25</sup> Denise de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, Rev. and Aug. ed, trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Harper Colophon, 1974).

English contemporary writers, it is more than appropriate to look back at the work of Murasaki Shikibu (or Lady Murasaki) who produced the famous Tale of Genji in the Heian period, which marks the end of the transition period to strong patriarchy. It is claimed to be the first novel in the world, and it marks the birth of the first female ghost in a novel. It might give us a hint in our search for the way in which, and the reason why, women writers use certain motifs or imageries, regardless of the time and space to which they belong.

### The Novel of Ambiguity

The Tale of Genji<sup>26</sup> is presumed to have been produced in the early eleventh century, mid-Heian period, when court women enjoyed “marginal centrality” (Heinrich 409) as we saw in the previous section. An anecdote claims that it was written under the command of the author’s guardian, Empress Shoshi, to entertain a princess. It was circulated in draft form even as it was being written, and “there is no hope of ever possessing the ‘final’ form of the novel as Murasaki Shikibu ‘originally’ wrote it” (Field 5). According to Field, scholars today recognise three groups of texts. It is surprising that though it was written nearly one thousand years ago, it still maintains its popularity, and is being reproduced even today in various translations, dramas, comic books, etc., and “continues to participate in the generation of Japanese letters” (Field 9). These reproductions follow a long tradition among readers, “of filling in perceived gaps in the work” (Field 8), since The Tale of Genji is a literature of ambiguity, which intrigues the reader so much that he/she is driven to reconstruct the story. Field points out that it is not a “sense of deficiency”

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<sup>26</sup> There are two popular translation works of Murasaki Shikibu’s The Tale of Genji. The one is by Edward Seidensticker (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) and the other is by Arthur Waley (Oxford: Alden & Mowbray, 1935). References to the Seidensticker translation are indicated with S in front of the page number, while those to the Waley version are with W. The brief summary can be found in Appendix 1.



but its unique property of ambiguity and a sense of void that “prompted these readers to produce their own narratives” (9).

Ambiguity is a feature of women’s writing all over the world: it is a common strategy of the woman writer to avoid outright attack from “male authority.” But I find that it is especially marked in Japanese women’s writing and particularly so in the Tale of Genji. It is a consequence of the particular social, cultural and historical situation I have described, but also it is a consequence of the linguistic condition of Japanese.<sup>27</sup> One effect of this is that the reader is invited to participate in the narrative, as the narrator directly tells the story to the reader as if she/he is within the story. And the narrative wavers between the narrator and the characters, thus making the reader slip deeper into the story. “This rich ambiguity and complexity result from the lack of clear morphological distinction between direct and indirect discourse in classical Japanese,” as Miyake analyses (“The Narrative Triad” 83).<sup>28</sup> As well as these structural origins of ambiguity, rhetorical conventions of poetry, *waka*,<sup>29</sup> which consists of the vast part of the tale, also evolves that “the Genji reader plays a highly collaborative, participatory role” (78), since *waka* is an intellectual game of deciphering the content, which necessarily requires the participation of the reader. The ambiguity of the tale, thus exists in many layers, structurally and rhetorically, and is bound to increase over the course of time since language and cultural customs change.

This ambiguity may serve to imply what a character or the author cannot say

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<sup>27</sup> Japanese grammar does not require a subject to be specified in various cases and thus leaves it to the reader’s speculation. Even when it is specified, the Japanese self “is not a bound entity but ‘crafts’ itself according to the circumstances into which it is placed,” as Lynne K. Miyake suggests (“The Narrative Triad” 83).

<sup>28</sup> Lynne K. Miyake, “The Narrative Triad in The Tale of Genji: Narrator, Reader, and Text,” Approaches to Teaching Murasaki Shikibu’s The Tale of Genji, Approaches to Teaching World Lit. 47, ed. Edward Kamens (New York: MLA, 1993). 77-87.

<sup>29</sup> See Notes at the end of this chapter.

directly in a society where self-assertiveness is regarded as bad manners, and direct criticism of a man by a woman as unfeminine and close to impossible. It is, in fact, through their poetry that major female characters manage to express their feelings, though it is done indirectly through attribution of their feelings to external objects such as a tree or a flower.

Ambiguity is not only a structural and grammatical feature, but also a thematic one: it marks the birth of the female ghost character in the woman's novel. Also, besides the major beautiful heroines who never criticise Genji, there are other less attractive minor heroines and comical old female characters who might be called grotesque characters. They all serve to make the tale ambiguous through the constitution of an alternative story. They function as mitigators, or even as mediators. Indeed, this ambiguity might have helped the survival of this novel during the heavy censorship of female writings in the later period.<sup>30</sup>

Though written nearly a thousand years ago, it is not inappropriate to apply Western contemporary critical approaches to it, considering that the Tale of Genji is still alive, stimulating and participating in modern literature. Amy Vladeck Heinrich claims "we must acknowledge that modern Japanese literature is constructed from a dual heritage received from both East and West" (408), but the reverse is also true, as The Tale of Murasaki was written in English by Liza Dalby in 2000, and was to become a best seller. Western feminist approaches are relevant in the study of this tale, since, though we saw the efflorescence of women writers in the Heian period, their voices waned after the Medieval period, and "Japanese women

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<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, the tale's ambiguity may also have encouraged "incorrect" interpretations. Ambiguity is a double-edged sword: it can become evasiveness at any point. As we saw in the previous section, the tale was produced in "the feminine communality", and without whose communal knowledge, it is difficult to supply the appropriate sub-text with which to fill in the gaps. As early as in the twelfth century, it was used as an anti-liberal text which is set against "feminine communality"; the Buddhist and Confucian scholars used it as a textbook for teaching desirable relationships between men and women, or between lord and servant, or as a guide to etiquette.

writing in the twentieth century are in a remarkably similar position to that of American and English women, with their more silent past” (Heinrich 408).

Even though the Tale of Genji survived as a masterpiece through the course of time, certain qualities in it had been severely repressed. Indeed it was only after the seventies, in the last century, that its woman’s voice of resistance was re-discovered when scholars started applying Western Feminist theories to this “national masterpiece”.

Many features of the tale today attract the attention of scholars of psychoanalytical criticism, as well as feminist critics. The sense of gaps in the Tale of Genji, which have prompted many to produce new versions, can be analysed as originating from the sense of lack in Genji’s unconscious. His pursuit of an ideal woman is never-ending, because of his impossible incestuous desire for his dead mother, Kiritsubo, and also because of his desire to possess all women. There remains always a sense of lack, or incompleteness, which drives Genji on to another woman-hunt. Some of the major heroines in the tale can be regarded as a Kiritsubo-Fujitsubo line, for they are all substitutes for Genji’s deceased mother Kiritsubo and his stepmother Fujitsubo, to whom he has transgressive and incestuous desires.

Their status as surrogates is made quite explicit, as in the case of a character, Young Murasaki. She is spotted by Genji when she is a very young girl with remarkably similar features to his mother, and is abducted by him to be brought up to become his lady. Kimi Komashaku describes this relationship as a “Pygmalion-complex” and also brands the first physical contact between Young Murasaki and Genji as a “rape” (138).<sup>31</sup> Though her substitute status, instability as an unofficial wife, and the series of Genji’s affairs with other women, bring much

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<sup>31</sup> Kimi Komashaku, Murasaki Shikibu-no-Messeiji (Message from Murasai Shikibu) (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 1991).

misery to her, she has no means to express it. As a woman of high rank and status, Lady Murasaki has to conceal her feeling under the guise of an understanding wife. Her divided self is only expressed as a monologue or in the conversation with other females behind a screen, using somebody else's misfortune as a pretext, or in highly ambiguous poetry. Even when she is "raped" by Genji, she shows her anger only in her monologue:

Since she had not imagined at all that Genji had had such an intention, she could not help feeling silly about herself and thought, "why have I thought of his lousy intention as an impartial trustworthy one."  
(Aoi:359; S 180)

However she can only show Genji her anger through her silence. When he pays her a visit next day, she does not say a word to him, nor does she give him poetry in reply. The highly ambiguous technique of the *waka* poetry offers her rare occasions to imply her feeling to Genji. Without it, she would have to remain silent. An example of such rare occasions: when Genji breaks to her the news that he had a baby girl by another woman, Lady Akashi:

She looked aside, whispering as if to herself: "There was a time when we seemed rather a nicely matched couple.

"I think I shall be the first to rise as smoke,  
And it may not go the direction of that other."

(Miotsukushi:111; S 277)

In the English translation, the highly ambiguous nature of this poetry mostly disappears, as it would have to make the missing information explicit by referring directly to the original poetry, written by Lady Akashi. In the tale, a shared vocabulary serves to introduce the resonance of the original verse but in a highly ambiguous manner. Without such ambiguity, she can never directly criticise Genji.

The metaphors of fences, screens, and go-betweenes, are some of the most

important features of the tale, as Ellen Peel states. She presents a range of devices working as mediators between characters in the tale, starting with concrete entities such as blinds, and screens, over which it was customary for men and women to speak in the Heian period. The dual nature of such mediation is a reflection of the ambiguity of the tale itself. Screens and blinds made communication possible, since the custom prohibited adult men and women to communicate without them. However they are also posited as yet another prohibition on more direct communication.

Moving away from the concrete entities, she also produces letters as such mediators:

letter writing, when contrasted with silence, is a medium that connects people, bridging a gap between people who may be unable to speak to each other; when contrasted with speech, however, letter writing separates people and makes communication less direct (109).<sup>32</sup>

Letters in those days are often accompanied by a *waka*. The letters' function, as an ambiguous expression, is intensified, "since *waka*," Miyake suggests, "are genderless, tenseless, and often devoid of both honorifics and pronouns, they suggest a point of view that is not first person" ("The Narrative Triad" 83). *Waka* makes indirect letters more indirect, insofar as they become non-personal.

### The Birth of the Female Ghost

The Tale of Genji is arguably the first novel that features a female ghost. Unlike the silent Lady Murasaki, the ghost figures in the tale explicitly criticise the hero. Lady Murasaki can only express her feelings in a heavily guarded manner as shown above, and she can never criticise Genji to his face. She dies in shock and

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<sup>32</sup> Ellen Peel, "Mediation and Mediators: Letter, Screens, and Other Go-Betweens in The Tale of Genji," Kamens 108-14.

misery, after Genji takes the Third Princess as his official wife. Her fate can be compared to the silent angelic women in Western literature. Just like her, angelic women in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein [1831],<sup>33</sup> for example, die miserable deaths. Instead of the angelic women, the monster in Frankenstein expresses anger.<sup>34</sup>

In the Tale of Genji, one example is the episode of Lady Rokujo and Aoi, Genji's first official wife. The Aoi episode has been the focus of various literary critics, because of its theme of spirit-possession. Spirit-possession serves as another effective but indirect means of expressing women's anger. The female ghost first appears in the episode of Genji's secret affair with Yugao, another self-denying minor heroine in the tale. She dies of seizure when she is with Genji in a deserted hut. Genji, and he alone, witnesses the apparition which then appears. Its identity is unknown, but it says, "Though I have admired you, you have neglected to visit me and keep this creature at your side to fuss over when there is nothing distinguished about her" (S 71), and it is described as "an exceedingly beautiful woman" (S 71), suggesting it is Lady Rokujo's spirit.

In the Aoi Episode, the identity is made clearer. Shortly before Genji's

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<sup>33</sup> Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, 1831 Edition, ed., Johanna M Smith (Boston: Bedford, 1992).

<sup>34</sup> The concept of the monster as the alter ego of the angelic woman comes from Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic. It argues that while angelic woman remains silent and ideal for men, the monster carries out all the rebellions which subvert the order, but that the latter is a repressed unconscious of the former. However it also stimulates an argument that this kind of dichotomy traps women into another stereotype. Indeed after this influential book, it became almost impossible to read Bertha except as Jane Eyre's hidden anger. Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea, on the other hand, brings Bertha back as a human being, not a stereotype. Applying Gilbert and Gubar's theory, one can view the monster in Frankenstein as similar to the woman of those days in its condition of life; they both are figures of the deprivation of language, both are confined, and valued by their appearance: in a sense, they can be interpreted as sisters. I have argued elsewhere that this novel shows the impossibility for women to live in the existing social order, where they have to live either as angels or monsters, and in both cases have to die. While silent angelic women in the story have to die a miserable death as if punished for their silent conformity to the society, the monster is driven to the lifeless world. They both display the injustice of society, though it is easier to see the explicit rebellion of the monster.

pregnant official wife, Aoi, falls ill with a seizure, she and her rival, Lady Rokujo, had a carriage quarrel, in which Lady Rokujo is humiliated. Aoi's illness is diagnosed as spirit-possession, though the identity is not known. While exorcists are called in to treat her publicly, Genji is summoned to her bedside according to the possessing spirit's wishes. There he, alone again, witnesses the altered look and voice of his wife, and is terribly shocked to realise they are Lady Rokujo's. The fact that the apparition can be seen only by Genji is an important point. Through the "oblique aggressive strategy" (Lewis 32),<sup>35</sup> not only Lady Rokujo, but also the possessed Aoi and Yugao, manage to accuse Genji. Doris G. Bargaen rightly suggests the interaction between the possessing spirit and the possessed (95-130).<sup>36</sup> As he claims, it is inappropriate to attribute the motivation for spirit-possession only to the jealousy on the side of the possessing spirit, because in spirit-possession, both possessing spirit and the possessed are united in aggression. It is "an esoteric spiritual rite in which the psychologically allied women bent their repressed anger at the third party - Genji - and at the polygynous society that allows men to neglect their women with near impunity" (Bargaen 101). It is worth noting that both the possessed are taciturn women and "even if it appears to be hostile to the 'victim,' the possessing spirit functions to express female grievances" (Bargaen 101). By terrifying Genji alone, "Aoi and Rokujo have - in the ecstatic state of possession - each managed to merge with her worst rival in love who becomes, ironically, her best ally in revenge" (Bargaen 110). Bargaen also suggests the liminal state of spirit-possession which allows human beings to transcend individual boundaries (115). In the state of possession, Aoi, in pregnancy (another liminal state) fulfils her desire to become

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<sup>35</sup> Ioan Myrddin Lewis, Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

<sup>36</sup> Doris G. Bargaen, "Spirit Possession in the Context of Dramatic Expressions of Gender Conflict: the Aoi Episode of the Genji monogatari," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 48.1(1988): 95-130.

someone else, in this case Lady Rokujo, who is desired by her husband. This brings about another interesting point of argument: Aoi and Lady Rokujo, in spite of apparent rivalry, have a sense of intimacy, or sisterhood. In a society where women are forced to be silenced, the female ghosts function as a medium for them to speak out, without breaking the prohibition. It is of remarkable significance, that this first novel by a woman features ghosts, in a similar manner to that which Mary Shelley applies some eight hundreds years later.

### Unmaking of the Hero: Tamakazura

Tamakazura is one of the minor heroines in the tale. Because she is minor, it seems the pressure to make her “proper” for the society is less severe; she becomes the rare character who mocks Genji’s supposedly almighty power, and demonstrates that he is “far from being the controlling center of the work,” but as “constituted by his heroines as they are by him” (Field 17). She is a stepdaughter of Genji. Interestingly, Genji, though secretly desiring her of course, “urges Tamakazura to think of him as her mother, for whose death he is responsible” (Field 101). Here he assumes the role of a stepmother. Field analyses it as a mock stepdaughter tale, which was very popular in the Heian period. Its features are similar in many ways to “Cinderella” or “Snow White,” significant among which, Field points out, are courtship of the heroine and opposition of the stepmother, the heroine’s confinement and/or flight due to cruel acts by the stepmother, redemption by way of marriage, and punishment of the stepmother. Tamakazura’s episode has those features described above, though they are significantly reversed. The suitor and the stepmother are the same person, Genji. Redemption by way of marriage, therefore, only means another confinement.

Field also points to a further significance of the status of Tamakazura as a stepdaughter. As the stepmother-stepdaughter relationship sets up a kind of



incestuous taboo between Genji and Tamakazura, the transgression of it, if successful, makes Genji a mythic hero (Field 102, 158). However, he fails, and he cannot even exercise his authority to make Tamakazura his relative's wife. Tamakazura, in this way, serves in the unmaking of the hero, and the denial of his transcendental quality.<sup>37</sup>

Resisting women are one of the recurring episodes in the Tale of Genji which prompts Kimi Komashaku to conclude that the tale is the manifesto of a marriage denial (48). Not only the fact that the story ends with refusals of marriage, but also the fact that none of those heroines who appear in earlier sections of the tale in relationships with Genji, become ultimately happy, suggests the existence of a dark current under the superficial flamboyance. Komashaku claims that the creation of a perfect hero, Genji, who is praised by everybody, emphasises the misery of his women regardless of their rank (53). She also suggests that the critique of men's behaviour is often made by minor and elderly female characters, such as a mother of a miserable heroine, and this functions to allow the main heroine's escape from the blame of being unfeminine.

In the section of the Tale of Genji which describes Kaoru and Niou's unfulfilled affairs with three sisters, the motifs of substitution and rape reappear. Ukifune is pursued both by Kaoru and Niou. But the situation is unflattering as Kaoru wants her as a substitute for the dead Oigimi, and as for Niou, he only desires her as a consort not as a wife. Raped by Niou, Ukifune takes refuge in a monk's hut and becomes a nun, refusing both men. Sisterhood is again brought into focus here. After the rape, Ukifune's concern is with the feeling of Nakanokimi, who is the wife of Niou. The last setting of the tale, as well as Ukifune's last resort, is the place where

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<sup>37</sup> One more remarkable issue around Tamakazura is her association with sisterhood. The word *tamakazura* (jewelled garland) appears as an emblem of sisterhood. Since sisterhood is, as Field puts it, "a special kind of otherness in its implicit exclusion of men" (93), it is again a symbol of the rejection of men.

a number of nuns live together and enjoy a sense of sisterhood, while at the same time, the name of the place, Ono, is a reminder of its connection with the famous woman poet of an earlier period, Ono-no-Komachi, as if this ending suggests sisterhood as an alternative to marriage.

### The Narrative Strategy of the Tale of Genji

So far we have seen the “mediation tactics” employed by heroines, and by the author, Murasaki Shikibu herself. Such tactics are grammatically, structurally, and thematically plural; the missing subject can render ambiguous the distance between characters as well as between characters and the reader; the use of honorifics can mitigate harsh content; the use of the *waka* poetry and letters leave room for the reader’s speculation; the minor characters and the ghost figures blur the harshness of criticism. The culminating effect of these strategies is one of extreme ambiguity. These manifold preventative measures are made necessary in Heian Japan against accusations of self-assertiveness and unfemininity. However, such a necessity might not simply be a mode of the past. To some degree, even in today’s culture, East and West, such defences still seem to be required. Motifs such as spirit-possession, monsters, ghosts, and grotesque bodies are commonly found. Arguably, in Western culture, they might now be used in a more positive sense, to reveal what has been concealed, and to make what has been implicit explicit. However in Japanese literature, such motifs might still be necessary as a way of preempting criticism, in order not to be dismissed, or ignored. If not so intense as in the Heian period, Japanese culture might still require as indirect a means of expression as possible. Since direct criticism is generally abhorred and rejected, one way to effectively convey a critical perspective on society might be for Japanese women to employ the kind of tactics used by Murasaki Shikibu, Perhaps that is the

reason why so many Japanese women writers, as well as Western writers, write of monsters, ghosts, and boundary figures: they might be able to transmit what the usual silent heroines cannot. At first Japanese and English writings might look totally different, but, analysing ways in which both employ a variety of grotesqueries as mediators, it becomes apparent that the differences are those of degree rather than of kind.

Notes on *Waka*

The *waka* in those days were mostly 31-syllable poems with a speech-act function in which a sender tries to influence a recipient. It is a complex of poetic images and techniques such as *“kakekotoba*, or pivot words that function on several levels with several meanings; *engo*, or word associations that call up shared cultural images and meanings; *honkadori*, or the incorporation of the words or situation of a well-known poem into the meaning of the poem at hand” (Miyake, “The Narrative Triad” 79). With such devices, the *waka* requires the reader to “engage in ‘completing’ the meaning of the text” (Miyake, *Ibid.* 79). One example from the Tale of Genji: it is a *waka* poem, sung by the hero, Genji himself, dedicated to a cold lover of his:

Hahakigi no kokoro wo shirade

Sonohara no michi ni ayanaku madoinuru kana.

“I wonder lost in the Sonohara moorlands,

For I did not know the deceiving ways of the broom tree.” (S 48)

First of all, it is based upon another *waka* poem by Sakanoé Korenori in Shinkokinshu 997:

O broom tree of Fuseya in Sonohara,

You seem to be there, and yet I cannot find you. (S 48)

The translator, Seidensticker, puts a note as follows: “The ‘broom tree’ of Sonohara in the province of Shinano disappeared or changed shape when one approached. *Fuseya* means ‘hut’; hence the hut of the lady’s answering poem”(S 48). If the reader of the poem does not know the myth of *Hahakigi*, “the broom tree,” he/she does not see this Sakanoé’s poem as the one to reproach a heartless lover. And if he/she is not familiar with Sakanoé’s original poem, he/she must wonder why on earth an irrelevant place, Sonohara, comes into Genji’s poem.

Secondly, while Seidensticker’s translation cannot but help to make the subject

clear, Genji's poem does not mention the subject. If I try to convert each Japanese word into a corresponding English one, though it does not make sense, his poem becomes like this:

Not know the heart of the broom tree,

Wonder lost into a path among the Sonohara moorlands.

In order to read this as Seidensticker does, the reader has to assume the subject as Genji, who portrays himself as a rejected lover. In this way, the *waka*, whose reference to previous poems draws the reader back further and further in time, requires the reader's interplay. Moreover, he/she does not have to read it as Seidensticker does. You can put whoever you like as the subject of the poem.

Another example: It is a poem sung by Prince Hyobu after the former emperor died:

Kage hiromi tanomishi Matsu ya kareniken

Shitaba chiriyuku toshi no kure kana.

"Withered the pine whose branches gave us shelter?

Now at the end of the year its needles fall." (S 192)

Again Seidensticker puts "us" in order to make sense. But the original poem does not include any such word. If literally read, it becomes like this:

Has the pine tree, whose big shade being relied upon, withered?

The needles at its bottom is falling at the end of the year.

The reader has no clue what this poem is about, unless he/she knows the pine tree is regarded as a sacred tree in Japan and therefore refers to the late emperor. Then it makes clear that "the needles at its bottom" means here the people who used to work under the emperor, such as ladies-in-waiting, or servants. Only when he/she can guess as far as this, he/she knows it is a poem, grieving over a dissolving faction of the former emperor, without a direct mention of the holy Emperor himself.

## Chapter 2:

### The Grotesque Body in Gothic

#### Gothic: Power Struggle

In Western literature, Gothic is particularly filled with the image of the grotesque: the ghost, monster, decaying body, unnatural body, etc., are used for the effects of ambiguity and a sense of the uncanny. Contemporary culture is a new Gothic period as well; we are now witnessing the revival of Gothic in art, literature, and films.

According to David Punter, it was in the late eighteenth century, concurrent with the Age of Reason, that Western culture saw the efflorescence of the original Gothic fiction, though “the term itself challenges history: it enters us upon a terrain on which we might have to ask, who were the Goth?” (1).<sup>1</sup> In fact, Punter’s question of origin here is of importance. The emergence of the Gothic, as Maggie Kilgour points out, can be read “as a sign of the resurrection of the need for the sacred and transcendent in a modern enlightened secular world which denies the existence of supernatural forces, or as the rebellion of the imagination against the tyranny of reason” (3).<sup>2</sup> But I would suggest, rather, that the increasing tendency towards reason calls for the resistance of non-reason, since power functions in the interdependency of binary opposition. The inexplicable has never been killed off, therefore it does not “resurrect” itself either: it simply surfaces. And the style of Gothic fiction might give women, who are allotted the place of the inexplicable in power-relations, the chance for speaking out. It is, therefore, not surprising that many women took up the Gothic style of narrative at that time, and that they still do

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<sup>1</sup> David Punter, Gothic Pathologies: The Text, The Body and The Law (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Maggie Kilgour, The Rise of the Gothic Novel (London: Routledge, 1995).

now. During the Age of Reason the belief that everything can and should be explained with reason and scientific proof intensified, but still the attempt at explaining the origin of life kept failing, and always some questions were left unanswered, remaining in the realm of myth.

The high regard for reason in Western culture is obvious in the Oedipus myth as we have seen in Chapter 1. Reason, the ultimate form of transcendent mind, is the thing to which the patriarchal subject aspires. The subject desires to become a God, immortal and powerful. Against such will is opposed nature symbolised in the body and which confines the human individual to mortality and death. Western mythology has allotted this body to the female, as Eve lures him out of Godly existence in Eden. Given the strong connection of her reproductive function with nature's inexplicable power, the female body comes to mean something to be repressed and controlled. The vital task for the male subject in patriarchy is to take control over woman and successfully repress the body so that woman becomes contradictorily essential. She may be able to satisfy his illusion of mastery and power, but she may also reveal the precariousness and limitation of his rule; she, hence, becomes both the object of desire and horror.

This horror coming from the female body is depicted in the monstrous figure in myth. It is the hindrance in the way of the hero's ruling of the world; it torments the hero with the unreasonable. Though he temporarily displaces the monster by the power of reason, the victory is illusory; the monster would always come back to confront him with this fact.

This horrible proof of human limitation and self-contradiction is at the basis of Gothic, where mythic figures, often non-human and always inexplicable, keep returning from the burial ground, from the grave where "Man" believes he had laid them to rest. Gothic fiction is a battlefield, as it were, between reason and mythic horror, the former being attributed to male characters, and the latter to female.

More explicitly put, it is a battlefield between the masculine subject and the female "Other." The latter cannot be described as "the female subject," for it is only a site of nothingness, which the masculine economy constructs for women to safeguard its own political and social interests. In this battlefield, the former tries with reasonable and scientific explanation to ward off, to cut off, to bury, and in short, to make the latter manageable, while the latter keeps coming back to confront the former with its contradiction and limitations.

### The Body in Frankenstein

As we have seen in the previous section, Oedipus proclaims his victory when the Sphinx lets him believe that she is killed. However, what appears to be his victory is only temporary, and Oedipus knows that and blinds himself. And the same can be said of the seeming victory of human (masculine) reason over superhuman (female) mystery. He strives to keep it within the grave, to repress the body, which is a reminder of his own contradiction, limitation, and powerlessness. And yet, that horror, that unknown, attracts him strangely, just as a horror movie attracts addicted viewers, and as is shown in "Victor Frankenstein's addiction to his scientific researches and experiments" (Punter 8). If power operates in the interdependency between the subject and the Other, as Foucault suggests, the subject always needs to repeat acts of oppression and to see his mastery reflected, to assure him of his legitimacy. For the power-relation is a construction, neither natural nor inherent, and it is necessary to produce this power structure repeatedly in order to maintain it. The strange horror/desire formation comes from this interdependency. However, this attraction turns out to be a revealing moment of the precariousness of the power structure, as in Frankenstein.

In Frankenstein, the site of this attraction/horror is the body. As Punter says, "Gothic is therefore all about supersession, about the will to transcend, and



about the fate of the body as we strive for a fantasy of total control, or better, total exemption - from the rule of law" (17). Here of course, the body is the female body, which power allots as the inexplicable. The mystery of life and death, which the female body is defined to represent through relation of power, therefore, never fails to cause both attraction and horror. We want it explained, while at the same time, we want it to remain unexplained, as the final explanation might be fatally horrible, as in the case of Frankenstein. Therefore, the battle is harsh, and the chances are even.

Punter adduces the idea of the law and the legal case by way of explaining the relation between reason and its battle with what is not explained reasonably:

the law is the imposition of certainty, the rhetorical summation of the absence, or the loss, of doubt; which means in turn that the law is a purified abstract whole, perfected according to the process of taboo, which can find no purchase on the doubled, creviced, folded world of the real; by which it in turn is destined to be haunted. The law is thus there to will away the body; where the law is, bodies cannot exist or plead (3).

However minutely scientific research take us into the secret of life and death and to the fact of the body, we cannot get to the core of the secret, we cannot obtain what we want. The "case" is left unheard, or rather, the hearing is postponed. In fact, Punter takes Frankenstein as a typically Gothic text, not only since it is about the body, but because it deals with what is beyond the law. It is about the "Man" who believed in the ultimate power of science, which is one of the patriarchal discourses of reason. It is about the "Man" who believes that he can go beyond the Law, but discovers that the result is too horrible to handle. Victor (aptly named as a man claiming victory) averts his eyes from what he has created: the reality of his victory is illusory, he is disappointed, disillusioned, and horrified. And that body pursues him

in order to condemn him, from one place to another, to make its “case” heard: a very feminist project, indeed.

Freud defines the uncanny as “in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (“The Uncanny” 241).<sup>3</sup> He continues, “an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed” (249). What Victor Frankenstein experiences is, I think, precisely such an uncanny experience. It is an experience which expresses the infantile fear of powerlessness, the fear of losing control, the fear of the knowledge of his own creative incompetence which he has been trying to repress, and which, as if driven by some mysterious force, he happens to substantiate. The monster, with its ugliness and death, confronts Victor with the reality that he cannot go beyond the law, that he cannot but ultimately fail. The horror for Frankenstein is, not the monster itself, but the fact that he cannot be the one in control.

Using the terminology of Foucault or Butler, the moments of a Freudian sense of uncanniness are those in which “the radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female ‘Other’ suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory” (Butler, Gender Trouble vii). They are the moments when the seeming masculine victory over the inexplicable female fails and the illusion of mastery is shattered. The reaction of the masculine subject is the same: a refusal to look; Oedipus blinds himself; Frankenstein averts his eyes and escapes the ultimate confrontation. Mary Shelley finally forces him to confront the monster, however, and the illusory ruling is overthrown. The self-appointed master dies and the monster also disappears, since the monster is a

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<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’” [1919], The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 17, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953). 217-56.

creation of the master. In the interdependent relation, the death of one must entail the death of the other.

Frankenstein is about the power struggle between the masculine subject and the female Other as much as E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" is.<sup>4</sup> Though Freud, by way of explanation of the uncanny, refers to the motif of the fear of losing sight in the Oedipus Myth and also in "The Sandman" and maintains that it is a substitute for the fear of castration, I would modify his biologically biased theory, and suggest that it is not simply because the eye is "so precious an organ" (Freud, *Ibid* 231) that we fear so much losing it, but more because of the power we derive from the act of seeing. As is obvious in the often voyeuristic representation of women in popular culture, to see means to control, and to have power. The symbolic meaning of power over the uncanny (and, therefore, over women) is attached to the eye, and it is a natural consequence that "Man" fears losing his sight. When Victor Frankenstein substantiates the monster, he gives it eyes, the power to see, the power to control, even though Frankenstein longs to retain this power for himself.

As the disillusionment experienced by Victor Frankenstein clearly suggests, it is this perpetual postponement of the fulfilment of desire that the masculine subject really wants. For, as Lacan argues, "desire is not a relation to an object, but a

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<sup>4</sup> See E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman," The Golden Pot and Other Tales [1815], trans. and ed. Ritchie Robertson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992). 85-118. It is interesting to see how Nathanael falls for Olympia, the automaton, when he feels he cannot affect or control Clara, his acknowledged fiancée. Following the formula of desire, he prevents his disappointment by removing his desire onto another object. And silent Olympia is a perfect site for him to accommodate his desire. Thus, in his poem, he rids Clara of her eyes and leaves death in their place, and instead, he gives, in his imagination, a life and the power of the gaze to Olympia. The horror he encounters at the sight of Olympia's vacant eye sockets seems to be, for Nathanael, more than bearable.

relation to a LACK,”<sup>5</sup> and is always “desire for something else” (Lacan 167).<sup>6</sup> The masculine subject depends on the sustenance of his desire by continual deferral, as it were, because its fulfilment would entail that he faces the “lack,” a horrible catharsis, a total disappointment. In order to maintain the illusory mastery, he needs repetitious performances to prove his mastery, such as is seen in the creation of the monster in Frankenstein, though the confrontation with the real body has to be avoided at any cost, unless he wants to end up like Victor Frankenstein.

Here I find an opportunity for subversion, for taking advantage of the weakness of patriarchal power-relations. To make its case heard, the female “Other” needs to confront the masculine subject with her real body, not the fabricated manageable one but the powerfully cathartic one, and to reveal his dependency on her and the illegitimacy of mastery. When the confrontation is successfully done, the fabricated power-relation is overthrown, and woman should be freed from “Otherness.” Without expelling woman further into the fabricated “Otherness” by exaggerating her “original” femininity or maternity, Gothic modes somehow allow the female “Other” to manoeuvre for subversion behind the scenes and within cultural power-relations. It might be the move Butler calls “a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself” (Gender Trouble 93). Gothic modes are the site of power reification. As on Victor’s operating table, it can either create another affirmation of the victorious mastery on the side of the masculine subject, or alternatively, it can create the perfect opportunity for subversion. Perhaps, major “original” Gothic fiction by male writers work in the first way. But

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<sup>5</sup> See Dylan Evans, An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis (London: New York: Routledge, 1996), 37. Emphasis original. According to Evans, “the most important point to emerge from Lacan’s phrase is that desire is a social product” (39), which is quite a different stance from that of Freud.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Lacan, Écrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977).

Mary Shelley seems to have used it in reverse, as do more and more women writers of contemporary Gothic fiction now.

### Gothic in the Tale of Genji

Indeed, if Gothic is dealing with the law, the haunting, the haunted, the body, and that desire which is never to be fulfilled and therefore is doomed to haunt and be haunted both psychically and textually, then The Tale of Genji can be described as an intensely Gothic work. It features motifs, such as ghosts, possession, and “foreign bodies” (Punter 44). Such motifs recur throughout and continue to haunt Japanese novels, especially those produced during the last three decades.

In fact, the historical condition in which the Tale of Genji and the “original” Gothic fiction came into being is, in a way, similar. The latter appeared during the philosophical triumph of rationalism, when the absolute value of science was eulogised, while the Tale of Genji was produced around the time when Chinese laws, governmental and religious, both of which were based on hierarchy and male dominance, were introduced, and the whole system of society was turning into something quite different from what had previously seemed to be inherently Japanese. Both were similarly produced during periods when people had a strong belief in both logic and the logos, which tended to exclude what could not be understood with reason, what could not be expressed in words, and what could not be incorporated into the logical system of law: the body, especially that of women, bringer of life, and therefore related to the unknown horror, the secret of death and life. The law we are talking of here is “that which stands between the human and the beast, that which provides the single ‘bounding line’” “which will contain the world of order and consign the rest of experience to the dark places and the wilderness”: in short, “the law as physical and discursive limit” (Punter 44). Paradoxically, however, it is the law itself which creates monsters even as it strives to

ward them off, because “what the law cannot permit is the exceptional body; before the law, therefore, there cannot be monsters” (Punter 45).

When Lady Rokujo’s spirit floats away from her body, it manifests what she cannot express in her bodily existence, or rather, bodily confinement, that is, her hidden, repressed, inexpressible emotion towards Genji. It allows her to speak outside the limits of the customary constraints between man and woman and to break off the rules, the laws, recently imposed by the Chinese system, by Confucianism, and Buddhism. Before the imposition of those laws, perhaps, her spirit would not have had to float away.

Thus, the spirit-possession, which is typically a Gothic motif, functions in the Tale of Genji as a site in which the female “Other” can make her “case” heard which would otherwise remain unheard, but it is still done within the terms of power. It serves Lady Rokujo not only as a possible ground of subversion, but also as a mitigator or a mediator, which makes a problematically brittle bridge between two realms, wide apart, for the bridge is the only way to connect what is real in her with Genji. Similarly the tale itself has something hidden under the surface of its rigid text, something that cannot be manifested in an overt manner, something that you can glimpse only if you peep through its manifold screens.

In spite of, or because of, this mitigation/mediation/screen, however, subversion is not automatically promised, as in the case of “original” Gothic fiction. If the performance successfully functions to reveal the masculine subject’s precarious and fabricated authority, it leads to the total collapse of the binary power opposition. However, if the female “Other” does not pursue the masculine subject fully, as the monster in Frankenstein does, it ends up trapping herself in an enforced power structure. In such a case, those binary oppositions may be intensified and an even wider gap left, a space, a void, a site of desire, that is never to be filled, and is therefore, doomed to haunt and to be haunted.

Like the Tale of Genji, many Gothic fictions are quite similarly doomed to haunt. And literally, the Tale of Genji is full of sites to host such haunting ghosts, such as the poetic letters, screens, and phrases without specific subject (devices which imply what it is not, what is behind, beyond, and before it, inter-textuality exceeding any one locatable origin). Gothic fiction, similarly, has its ruins, castles, convents, and underground vaults, that connect our world with the surreal, subterranean one or the world before, though its origin is also forever lost (Punter 1). In each case, such devices build a frail bridge over the abyss between the worlds of reason and convention and those of the irrational and the abject. The bridge that is built in the Tale of Genji is built again in Gothic texts such as The Italian by Ann Radcliffe, or the contemporary Gothic novel, The Infernal Desire Machine of Doctor Hoffman by Angela Carter. It is a bridge which connects both worlds, even as it ends up keeping them apart.

While the two realms opposed in the Tale of Genji are those of reason and the uncanny, that opposition may also be seen as the equivalent of masculine hierarchy and what H. Richard Okada calls “feminine communality”, or as that of Chinese order and Japanese ambiguity. Just as Lady Rokujo has to keep on haunting (the hearing of the “case” being postponed), the Tale of Genji itself becomes a *haunting figure* through the history of Japanese literature: again and again analysed, alluded to, and reproduced in various forms. Even if the Tale of Genji fails to subvert the power-relation which condemns woman as the female “Other,” contemporary critics and writers are now pursuing the same goal even more intensely. The hidden and the repressed thus find ways to erupt in contemporary literature. The victory won by reason in the “original” Gothic does not seem to last either, since the revival of Gothic in contemporary Western culture is traversed by a totally different vector from the “original” one. Contemporary Gothic is an account of war described from the opposite side, this time from the side of the adversary of reason. While order is

restored at the end of the “original” Gothic novels, in the contemporary Gothic, “order” is left disrupted or displaced by some alternative.

### Immanent Terror of Death

When we look at *the body in Gothic fiction*, its close relation with life and death is obvious. However, in order to extend this idea of the body into the argument involving the analysis of Japanese literature, a further scrutiny is necessary. As Punter aptly argues, the issue of the body requires us to enter into the realm of myth and religion, and these realms are quite different in the West and in the East. He maintains that *the body in Western Gothic* has “the most immediate connection” “with the Christian myth and the suffering body of Christ on the cross” (50). In fact, we can find in Frankenstein, for example, the theme of resurrection and plenty of images of the suffering body:

*Frankenstein* is about, first, the cannibalisation of the body, the work of the charnel house, and thus about the threat of decay and of what happens after decay (50).

Here, the body is connected immediately with death and decay and later with resurrection. However, it is not the case in Eastern culture and this is apparent if one compares, for example, burial customs in the West and in Japan. In the West, the dead body has traditionally been buried under the ground, and has taken its course of decay. It takes ages for a body to be completely decomposed, and therefore, the body keeps its living form for a certain amount of time. Even after the flesh around the body has dissolved, the bone maintains its form and order. Thus the border between the dead body and the live body is hard to decide, both chronologically and formally. The process of the living turning into the dead body is a protracted one.

Such burial customs are expressive of and bound up with the deepest aspects



of the human psyche and therefore relevant to the issues at hand here. Firstly, rites of burial provide the ground of Western resurrection myths. However, since the boundary between the dead and the living body is blurred, the hope that the body once dead might come back from the grave is strangely sustained. We can find another example in Greek myth, in which we are told that the deceased might return from Hades, if it is entreated hard enough. But at what point do you say that the body is too dead to be recovered? Thus the decaying body becomes a symbol of something between death and life. Paradoxically, it produces both hope and horror. It is the site of the perpetual postponement of ultimate death, which is the perfect place to accommodate human desire. The body of Christ is the instance in which the resurrection succeeds, but the body of the monster in Frankenstein is the one which goes horribly wrong. In other words, Western culture separates the process of the body into three phases: safely alive, safely dead, and something in-between. However, the borderline is not very clear.

The awakening scene of the monster in Frankenstein shows the horror around this blurred borderline. The description of the monster is that of a dying man or a corpse. It has "the dull yellow eye," "a convulsive motion," "shriveled complexion and straight black lips" (58). The horror comes from the fact that a corpse is alive. It is a symbol and a reminder of Frankenstein's powerlessness, the fact that he is not the controller. And as we have seen, the eyes here are the signifier of that ultimate power, for when Victor Frankenstein sees the eyes of the monster fixed on him, he can do nothing but attempt to escape in order to avoid facing his total defeat.

The monster belongs to the living when it has strong bodily sensations, and can be "tormented by hunger and thirst"(92), but belongs to the dead when it longs to avoid light and hide in the dark shade, as the buried. The living corpse, such as the monster here, or Dracula, is an emblem of the horror surrounding the blurred boundary between life and death.

A contemporary example of women's Gothic is Muriel Spark's novella, The Hothouse by the East River [1973].<sup>7</sup> It typically shows this Gothic system of haunting. Almost all the characters in this story turn out to be ghosts, who, with their full bodies, carry on their lives replete with the trivial matters of the everyday, even though in reality they have been killed by a bomb during the war. Their unfulfilled desires make them haunt, or rather, prevent them from going away. They cling to life for decades after their death. Their bodies are somewhere between death and life, therefore, not quite dead enough, but not quite human enough, and thus, like Dante's shades, "casting a shadow in the wrong direction" (15). They are not fully dead nor fully alive. However, they seem more alive than any of the "real" living characters in the story. They fight energetically with each other, accuse each other of insanity, visit psychiatrists, eat, buy things, and even raise families. They have their dreams, their trust, and a faith which they bring from the past days of their "real" life during the war. In fact, they are full of life and energy. They defiantly try to ignore the fact they are dead. "My life's in danger" cries Paul, the main character (62). In a comical instance, Lady Xavier hatches numerous eggs of silk-worms on her bosom (45), in a scene which reminds us of the corpse of the nun covered with worms in Matthew Lewis' The Monk [1796],<sup>8</sup> but in a much more comically alive form.

It can be said that precisely because they are not actually alive, and because their desire is never to be fulfilled, they are acting desperately in an attempt to materialise such existential desire. It is the formula of desire. The commonly expressed nostalgia for the long gone days comes from the impossibility of their retrieval. As long as we feed that insatiable longing for the past, it looks more lively,

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<sup>7</sup> Muriel Spark, The Hothouse by the East River [1973] (London: Penguin, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Gregory Lewis, The Monk: a romance [1796], ed. Howard Anderson (London: Oxford UP, 1973).

more real, and more beautiful to us, just as it does to the characters of The Hothouse by the East River. Spark makes it apparent in this story that the scenery of affluent technologised New York city looks more dead, surrounded with colourless, tasteless, and lifeless buildings and machines.

It is this body I talked of in relation to Western myth, especially the Christian one, which can be the site of hope and desire, against all odds. The body, neither fully dead nor fully alive, like that of Christ, by maintenance of its form for a while, accommodates desire. It can be the site for us to feed our insatiable desire, and our impossible beautiful dream. It can be a perfect site for resurrection as in the Christian myth. It fosters man's fantasy of ultimate control over life and death. And thus the dead body becomes another site of desire, or impossible fantasy, as Elisabeth Bronfen extensively shows: the corpse can accommodate desire, and the Western culture more or less has made the dead body of woman in particular an object of gaze and an object of artistic exploitation.<sup>9</sup>

### Clean Death

However, if this story had been Japanese, its account of life and death would have been completely different. In Japanese culture, at least in the Heian period onward, the body is understood not to maintain its structure after death, as a fact and not simply as a perception. The dead body is regarded immediately as nothing but an inanimate substance to be burnt away, while its spirit is now safely detached from the corpse and preparing to enter the better world. Death and the corpse are not connected so intimately as in the West.

In the Tale of Genji, for example, the mother of the late Kiritsubo, looking down at the dead body of her daughter, says, "With her before me, I cannot persuade

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<sup>9</sup> See Bronfen's Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993).

myself that she is dead. At the sight of her ashes I can perhaps accept what has happened" (S 6). We might see here the reason why death-masks or artistic expressions of dead bodies are rarely found in Japan, unlike in the West. Dead bodies, for Japanese people, are something incomprehensible. They do not belong. They seem as if they are a slough of a snake or a shell of a cicada.

This is probably strongly connected to the burial custom which already prevailed in Heian Japan: that of cremation. The soon-to-be-burnt corpse cannot have time to decay, and the state between death and life is not long lasting. The phase of the decaying body is much shorter than that in an internment culture. The human being is either safely alive with a living body or safely dead without a body. Moreover, after cremation the body is not recognisable as a human being, no longer identifiable. The body after its death goes straight into a mass of deathness, as it were. It enters into a metaphysical world of death, which has nothing to do with the reality of the body. Japanese people, therefore, have no concept of a "dead body," as such, and do not usually fear the decaying body. Imageries associated with death do not depict decomposition or rotting, but rather white ashes or smoke. Death is sad, indeed, but not a source of horror to the degree that it is in the West. It is rather longed for, because it is regarded as a liberation from a world full of misery.

This may be both a cause of the expression of a purified image of death, even some sort of closeness and yearning toward death, that is found in Japanese literature. We can find examples again in the Tale of Genji, at the scene of Kiritsubo's funeral:

But there must be an end to weeping, and orders were given for the funeral. If only she could rise to the heavens with the smoke from the pyre, said the mother between her sobs (S 6).

Here the smoke of the cremation is seen as a proof of liberation, and Kiritsubo's mother wants to join her daughter, escaping out of the body, out of this sad world.

In Japanese, there is a phrase “the floating world” to describe the world in which you currently live, the phenomenal world. It has the same sound as the phrase “the sad world,” and it implies that, however sad it may be, this life is a temporary one, and after death you can enter the better world. This idea might sound similar to that of Christianity. However, to be resurrected in Christianity you have to wait for a long time, and go through a horrible decaying and then purifying process. But in Japanese thought, death means an immediate liberation from the current bodily confinement. Death and life are thus closely situated, within a few hours distance, as it were. In fact, the body does not matter so much as in Western culture, since it is believed to be a temporal home of the soul, which transmigrates.

And yet, in spite of, or rather because of, the proximity of death and life, what is conditionally needed is a ritual, a ceremony, a cremation, in which death is declared. Therefore, everybody can tell when the alive turns into the dead. Here again, we can find the characteristic Japanese orientation towards mitigation and mediation. To make what is horrible not horrible, there must be a ceremony, rightly performed. It is like the screen between men and women in the Heian period. It safely separates the two worlds, while providing them with a means for certain intimacy.

### Frightening Death: Body of Horror

What if the ceremony is not correctly performed? This reintroduces the idea of the decaying body, prevalent in the West, but exceptional in Japan. When it happens, it does cause horror, as in Western culture. From the Japanese point of view, such a death is a condition of not being dead enough, because the body has not gone through the rightly performed ceremony to make the death safe enough to handle. The murdered, for example, whose corpse was abandoned in the middle of nowhere, or a soldier killed in a battlefield whose body was never recovered and

therefore was not properly cremated, or even the ordinarily deceased but whose family have not performed a proper funeral ceremony is contained within the category of the "horrible death." Unlike the "normal" death, this horrible death takes a similar course to the Western idea of death. It hovers somewhere between life and death for some time, and becomes the site of haunting. We can find many folklore tales, in which a spirit of the victim of such a horrible death appears to make the claim for a ceremony to be performed properly.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the fear of this kind of misfortune happening, that is, the fear of becoming improperly dead, is still strong among today's Japanese people, though it is not the same as the fear of death itself. Even in everyday conversation, people talk about their worry that their children should carry out a proper funeral for them and take care of their tomb. It is a matter of great importance for them, since it determines their destiny after death, whether to be a holy Buddha, or to be a horrible haunting spirit.

In Japanese literature, the soul of the rightly dead, even when it comes back to the world for some reason, appears in a pure clean shape, often without a bodily form at all. In a fiction called Fui-no-Koe [1968] (Unexpected Voice),<sup>11</sup> written by Taeko Kono, for instance, the ghost of the heroine's father appears to the heroine, Ukiko, when she needs help. He does not do anything except smile at her, as if to

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<sup>10</sup> One example is a tale handed down at the Gyogan Temple in Kyoto. A girl, Fumi, comes from a rural village leaving her parents in order to work as a nursemaid at the house of a pawnbroker. Diligent and simple as she is, she carries his child on her back and walks around the neighbourhood and comes to pray at the nearby Gyogan Temple everyday. The pawnbroker is a follower of an opposing religion, and forbids her to go to the temple. But one winter's day, his child starts singing the song of prayer at the Gyogan Temple, letting her master know of her disobedience. He gets angry and puts her into a shed naked. Next morning, he finds her dead, and buries her corpse in the ground without carrying out a funeral, telling her parents that she has eloped, for fear of a bad reputation. But one day, both of her parents have a dream, in which Fumi tells them the truth, and begs them to perform a ceremony for her. They do as she has asked, and since then, the temple holds a ceremony to console her soul every year.

<sup>11</sup> Taeko Kono, Fui-no-Koe (Tokyo:Kodansha, 1968).

give her affirmation. On the other hand, the soul of the wrongly dead comes in the form of a frightening disfigured body, often without legs.

The site of this horrible ghost is not situated along the usual path connecting life and death. Rather it is situated in a sideway. Once lost in this sideway, the soul cannot reach the normal destination, unless someone else performs a ritual for him. This process is lyrically depicted in a story, called "Moonlight Shadow" [1988], written by one of the popular contemporary woman writers in Japan, Banana Yoshimoto.<sup>12</sup> In this short story, everyday, the heroine ritually goes up to a certain bridge over a big river after losing her lover in a car accident. Three times there, she sees an apparition of him over the bridge, but does not make any conversation. During the third encounter, she waves him good-bye as his apparition disappears, knowing that he will appear no more and that her mourning must end. It describes clearly the process of a necessary ceremony, performed for the sake of the dead. In this case, for her lover to enter into a safe world on "the other side of the river," which is another Japanese phrase to mean the better world after death, the heroine has to perform a certain ritual. If she failed to perform it, her lover would be exiled from "the other side of the river" and be forced to come back again and again.

### Horror of the Female Body

As we have seen, the body, hovering between life and death, offers Westerners the opportunity to indulge themselves in the impossible hope for a reversal of the course of time, and it becomes the site which accommodates the myth of resurrection in Western culture. However, the reality of horrible decay is always the other side of the coin of such hope. And woman's body, with its sexuality and its reproductive capacity, with its ambiguity in relation to life and death, always threatens men. It

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<sup>12</sup> Banana Yoshimoto, "Moonlight Shadow" in *Kitchen* (Tokyo: Fukutake, 1988).

seems to be offering men a key to the secret of life and hope, while at the same time, it seems to be luring men to a horrible death and decay. This ambivalence toward women pervades the genre of Gothic.

It is manifested in what happens to Ambrosio in Matthew Lewis' The Monk. He is fatally attracted to Matilda, whose beautiful face reminds him of the image of St Mary. However, after sexually consummating the relationship with her, he finds himself driven into further sinful deeds and condemns Matilda as a temptress. What occurs here is the projection of his guilty conscience onto Matilda. It is similar to Freud's hypothesis of the origin of the totemic group and its taboo. He maintains the primal myth in the beginning of the totemic culture, in which the original Oedipal crime of patricide was carried out. Young sons killed their powerful father together, to enjoy his women. However, their guilt and remorse forbids them to do what they have intended. They make women taboo, and worship the father in the form of totem, thus starting the patriarchal law.<sup>13</sup> Whether or not this myth is literally or historically true is not my concern here. But Freud's analysis of neuroses also offers a theory that this projection of one's own guilty conscience onto somebody else makes that somebody else responsible for the undesired misfortune. The horror a neurotic sees in one person is nothing more than a reflection of his own guilt.

Western culture has dealt with this ambivalence toward the female body through the mechanism of projective identification which reduces the female body to an object of gaze and exploitation. Just as Ambrosio in The Monk tries to do away with his guilty conscience by projecting it upon Matilda, Western culture attempts to do away with the horror of death by treating its reminder, the female body, as an object. Manipulation and exploitation of the female body brings about the illusion of ultimate control over life and death. The female body, in this way, serves men as a

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<sup>13</sup> See Sigmund Freud's Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics [1913], The Standard Edition, Vol. 13.



bulwark against the horror of death. Here is another reason why the female body may be perceived to be the site of insatiable desire.

Ambivalence towards the woman's body is, therefore, deeply rooted in Western culture, and deeply connected with death. It is desirable, and horrible at the same time. It offers the key to the secret of life, by producing the illusion of ultimate control. However, it forces men to face their limitation, weakness, and guilt, by its sexuality and its ability to give life. The enigma can never be men's. The sexuality of the female body becomes a threat to men. Desire for woman therefore easily turns into abhorrence, as clearly described in Gothic novels.

#### White Death, Black Death and the Female Body in Japan

As the concept of death in Japan is quite different from that in the West, we might suppose Japanese culture has a different attitude toward women's bodies. However, the female body is still related to the horror of death, in an uncannily similar way to Western culture. As I mentioned above, in Japanese culture there are two fundamental types in perception of death. The one is a safe and holy death, which can, perhaps, be called a "white death." It is a death to be longed for, which has gone through a proper ceremony/ritual/cremation, and has now been declared to all safely dead. This kind of death would rarely cause a haunting. While Japanese culture shows a greater acceptance of such a clean "white death," the horrible decaying body of the improper, abnormal "black death," however, is even more threatening, precisely because it is exceptional. "Black death" is, having gone through no death-declarative ceremony, cursed and doomed to come back to this miserable world again and again. It is this "black death," not the "white death," that is related more closely to woman's body. Put differently: in Western culture, the body of women signifies both the desirable and the horrible. But in Japanese culture the ratio is less even. In Japan it signifies more the horrible than the desirable, and

the world “on the other side of the river” is seldom related to woman.

Yet, in Japanese culture this is because of the influence of Buddhism and Confucianism, rather than because of a perception of the inherently strong connection of woman to the secret of life and death, as is the case in Western culture. Buddhism defines proper death as “becoming Buddha.” Woman can become Buddha only after she is reborn as man, since in Buddhism, woman is more cursed than man, because of her lust and excessive attachment to this “floating world,” in short, because of her sexuality. Woman’s death, therefore, is not a “normal” death to be wished for, but rather close to an “improper” death. After a proper religious life, she is allowed to be reborn as a man, and then she can be a Buddha. Thus nuns and monks in Buddhism are not equivalent. The rank of a Buddhist monk is much higher than that of a nun.

Interestingly, the ritual/ceremony to make death a safe “white death” in order to ward off the horror of death is performed by male monks, while it is a female medium who takes charge of contacting the dead of a “black death,” often the dead of a horrible death, or the haunting spirit. As a bulwark between this world and a “white death” there stands a man, who has a key to holiness. On the other hand, a bulwark standing between this world and a “black death” is a woman. She has nothing to do with holiness and is cursed after all, because whichever way she goes, what awaits her is a misery. It is either a misery in this world or a misery in hell. She serves men, therefore, as a safe site for the projection of their dread and, at the same time, as a substitute body for its expression. She serves them to keep men safely away from having to deal with evilness directly at the entrance of hell. By making women take care of all the evil spirits, men can claim they have nothing to do with those sinful objects.

Exceptionally, there are some women, who are regarded as holy and can serve Gods or Buddha, but they are from the start exempt from the “normal” curse on

women's body, since they are either virgins, or the nuns who renounce the world, both of whom are sexually unavailable to men, because they do not threaten men with their sexuality, with their enigma of life and death.

Lady Rokujo in The Tale of Genji is, typically, related to this "black death," and to the curse on the sexuality of women. She is between a horrible death and a miserable life. Noteworthy is a contrast made between Lady Rokujo and her daughter, who is a Vestal Virgin at Ise, one of the most worshipped Shinto temples. While the mother is doomed to haunt, because of her extreme attachment to the earthly and because of her sexuality, the daughter is exempt from such a curse "typical" for women and is allowed to be related to "white death" because of her virginity. In the tale, this discriminatory and contradictory treatment of women is ironically highlighted by the close relationship between Lady Rokujo and her daughter.

Such a misogynistic/patriarchal idea is not inherently Japanese, as we have seen before, but was imposed upon Japanese culture and Japanese psyche around the period before that of the Heian. Before then, women were more related to holiness, as those who not only have access to the horrible secret of death, but also to the fascinating bright secret of life. Woman was the sun in Japanese myth. The Goddess of the sun, Amaterasu, was the head of all gods and goddesses.

This suggests why the literature produced during the Heian period has the resistant tendencies discussed in the last section. If Gothic is a battlefield between reason and the inexplicable, in Heian literature the battle is being fought between the newly imposed patriarchal system and an inherent feminine communality.

### The Female Body and Fathers in Psychoanalysis

When Lady Rokujo's spirit floats out of her body as early as in the tenth century, it is surely the case that something inexplicable or uncontrollable and linked

with women is erupting. Woman is a producer of life and therefore of death as well, as is made explicit in the case of the *femme fatale* in Gothic. Woman's body symbolises what is beyond the limits of the law, what is uncontrollable and thus becomes a site of attraction and abhorrence. David Punter explains the mechanism of masochism and sadism:

the maternal body is an emblem for all vulnerability, for the animal as much as for the human, and thus in the animal layers of the psyche. It is in our dealings with this fantasised maternal body that the formations of sadism and masochism appear, in projected and introjected torture of the mother, which is bound back into the circle "of fear and desire" by the inseparability of this body from all our hopes of nurture and thus of having a "hearing," a receptacle for our point of view (Punter 14-5).

It is not a coincidence that Gothic fiction is both populated with, and produced by women. In Gothic, as in the Tale of Genji, death, desire, and women are inseparable. The way the hero of the tale, Genji, wonders about, looking for a perfect woman, having one woman after another, has qualities in common with the way those adolescent heroes in Gothic fiction pursue their objects of romantic love. They are looking for the object of desire, but the fulfilment of desire is always deferred and postponed, sometimes by others' diabolical artifice as in the case of The Italian, or by death as in the case of Yugao in the Tale of Genji, or by trickery as in Carter's The Infernal Desire Machine of Doctor Hoffman [1972]. Perhaps what is different in the last, contemporary example is its more self-reflexive quality which is typical of much contemporary Gothic and foregrounds the essential quality in desire as the emptiness of its own perpetual deferral.

In fact, contemporary Gothic, both in the East and West, seems to reflect a shared preoccupation with issues central to psychoanalysis (and, in particular, to the

relations between law and desire), but in a mirror-inversion, with Gothic standing on the shore of desire and psychoanalysis on that of the law. From Freud on, psychoanalysts have tried to persuade us that the uncanny is only the unfamiliar. Dreams are translated, and mental illness is given a causal origin, an explanation. What had been seen as inexplicable can now be made safely explicable with the power of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis also represents one of the most significant cultural attempts at reading woman, and her body. Psychoanalysts have discussed and desired femininity, from the first, as a means of warding off the “horror” which psychoanalysis itself opens before us.

But the self-contradiction within psychoanalysis might be that, while it exposes the process by which the-Name-of-the-Father or the Superego works to repress the real, psychoanalysis itself imposes its own totalitarian version of the Name-of-the-Father, a new even more powerful superego, and literally has its family-tree filled with authoritative Fathers, such as Freud, Jung and Lacan. Such fathers preside fiercely over their own legacies, making it impossible for later devotees to carry out psychoanalytic work without the sanction of their institutional authority. However, by so explicitly naming its foundation in reason, psychoanalysis offers itself up as a very visible target for attack.

Therefore, although psychoanalysis has a powerful hold on the contemporary psyche, its grip may not be as imperative as it appears. From early on in Freud’s own case histories, it is apparent that there is always something not translatable, something which rejects explanation, something which remains, as in Dora’s case.<sup>14</sup> In this case, the girl patient of Freud, called Dora, went through lengthy treatment and analysis of her hysterical symptoms by Freud himself, but before the illness was

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<sup>14</sup> See Sigmund Freud’s Three Essays on Theory of Sexuality, The Standard Edition, Vol. 7. 123-245.

fully “cured,” she called off the treatment herself, refusing to continue the analysis. This was much to Freud’s frustration, who believed in the possibility of a cure for her illness, if he could have completed her analysis. However, where is the end? What is the end? Who decides when it ends? What is the cure? Is the analysis performed for Dora or for Freud? Is the analysis not simply Freud’s own attempt to ward off the horror of the uncanny, to turn it into what is explicable? Dora is, indeed, one of the first figures of resistance, who defiantly refused to be read as a text. What Dora’s case leaves unsaid and unsolved, and the residue of Freud’s own frustration with an unattained goal, have together produced a site of haunting. This, in fact, occurs later, with feminists’ reformulation of Dora’s case.<sup>15</sup>

As Dora’s case typically shows, psychoanalysis is another set of powerful laws which have helped to trigger the modern and contemporary efflorescence of Gothic fiction, which is, like Dora herself, more powerfully equipped than earlier Gothic, to deal with and resist those repressing laws.

Most of earlier Gothic fictions end with order, temporarily disrupted by the uncanny, now safely restored, putting the uncanny away by connecting it with devils or the diabolic (woman) (as in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*) who get their deserved punishment and conveniently disappear. These fictions succeed again in repressing the hidden abject: heroes marry heroines, the stories inevitably end with the phrase “and then they lived happily ever after.” The powerful law wins after all.

However, what happens to desire when it is fulfilled if its very survival is dependent upon non-fulfilment? What happens to romantic love after marriage? In the Age of Psychoanalysis, just as Dora resisted being analysed, resisted being explained, done away with by the laws of psychoanalysis, so self-conscious contemporary literature also deals with these very questions. Here, the prospect of

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<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane’s *In Dora’s Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

the law's victory is significantly reduced. Certainly this is the view taken by Gilbert and Gubar's analysis. In new Gothic, order is not restored but left disrupted, the story after marriage is being revealed and so the illusion of romantic love can only be shattered. The madwoman in Jane Eyre<sup>16</sup> [1847] resists being done away with; she reappears as a full woman with her own life and voice. The patriarchal order, the law of the Father is left disrupted, never to be restored, just as it is now impossible to read *Jane Eyre* without taking account of the Bertha who appears in Gilbert and Gubar's version of the novel or in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea [1966]. Contemporary Gothic writers such as Angela Carter, following the example of psychoanalytically informed critics such as Gilbert and Gubar, self-consciously explore the triad of death, desire, and woman - more explicitly than the earlier Gothic writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The same is true of contemporary Japanese women writers. The efflorescence of Japanese women's writing today may be witness to an eruption of the repressed, the hidden, what was before. The residue of the time when woman was holy may have begun to resurface, triggered, perhaps, by Western feminism, with its psychoanalytical weapon.

Contemporary women writers, in the West and in the East, are converging. Both self-consciously explore how women and the body, non-reason and death are connected, so that woman is perceived as the site of fascination and the abject at the same time. By doing so, their project, if so it may be called, might be to excavate what is before/beyond the law.

#### Mitigator against Horror/ Reflector of Desire

As is the case of "original" Gothic, desire is one of the keywords in contemporary Gothic. I would like to remind you that, while mediums in the Tale of

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<sup>16</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre (1847), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996).

Genji serve literally as the means of mediation, they are, at the same time, a guard, who mitigates the horror. The masculine subject can avoid confronting the horror, but by letting a medium deal with it, he can, at the same time, maintain a contact with it that is also desirable. The horror is displaced onto the female medium, and is made into a safe thing with which man can deal.

The same procedure occurs in the case of sadism and masochism (Punter 14). Feminine sexuality, represented by the female body, provokes desire and fear for something incomprehensible and uncontrollable. Therefore, in a perverse twist of desire, the sadist derives the pleasure of (illusory) ultimate power from torturing and punishing the feminine body so that it may be displaced into forms easy to handle. In sadism, it is onto a woman's body that the horror is projected; in masochism, it is the femininity in himself which is the place of the introjected horror. By torturing and punishing female bodies, he can enjoy the illusion of controlling what is incomprehensible, what is horrible, and what is uncontrollable: the pleasure of omnipotence. It can be said that what this masculine subject imposes upon women and their bodies, and more generally, the feminine sexuality in both sexes, is their fear of it, as well as their desire for it. The body of woman is constructed and perceived according to men's fears/desires. What men see in women's bodies is a mere reflection of their own desire/fear. This shows the paradoxical dependency of man upon woman in the current power-relation, which, through signifying economy, constructs the gender-hierarchy as its operating site. Judith Butler rightly suggests that "bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender" (Gender Trouble 8), which means it is power itself that has produced the "female body" which signifies the lack, the "Other," the uncontrollable.

Punter indicates that a similar formula is found in pornography, where desire appears in a coarse form of bodily manipulation:



The scene of pornography is repetition, interchangeability, the reduction of the body to a series of divisible but repetitive parts, differentiated from each other only by the crudest of arithmetical measurements: a means of bringing under control that which cannot be controlled, and it should not be underestimated that the body which is being brought under control here, evidenced in the bodies of those who are socially weak (most typically the bodies of women) is in fact an emblem for the weakness of the body of the masturbator himself, which seeks through endless repetition to discover a bulwark against dissolution (210).

Since the body of woman, though not the real body but what power defines as the "female body," confronts man with its limitation, weakness, and thus reminds him of his own unavoidable death, decay, and dissolution, he, by abusing it, indulges himself with his fantasy of imaginary control of his limitation, his weakness.

Such varied sites as burial ceremonies, pornography, theatrical transvestism, and all sorts of sex industries suggest similar desires. It is this transference of the horror, the displacement of the uncontrollable onto something manageable, safe because it is contained (e.g., in the monetary exchange, in the case of sex industries), and made dismissable.

#### Repression/Sublimation/Displacement

Freud acknowledges the process that I have described above as necessary for all civilisation. When he speaks of it, he specifically points to perversion as its target of suppression/sublimation; perversion as the instance of desire running wild, uncontrolled, irrational, unreasonable. It is, according to the formulation of Freud, incompatible with the demand of civilisation and with the sexual difference which is the central principle of social organisation. Gender-crossing is prohibited when

sexual activity has to be heterosexual<sup>17</sup> and aimed at the reproduction necessary for a society to sustain itself. Homosexuals stand outside of this conception. Though Freud's assumption of the universality of this process should be criticised, his emphasis upon the prohibition of homosexuality is indicative. Freud maintains that male homosexuals especially are a threat to the social order, since, as Luce Irigaray puts it, "once the penis itself becomes merely a means to pleasure, pleasure among men, *the phallus loses its power*" (192-3).<sup>18</sup> However, what is dreaded is not really homosexuality, as Irigaray succinctly contends when she says "the exchanges upon which patriarchal societies are based takes place exclusively among men" and that "all economic organisation is homosexual" (171). Irigaray seems to think the real threat of male homosexuality lies in the fact that "it openly interprets the law according to which society operates and in so doing threatens it" (Dollimore 250).<sup>19</sup> Again patriarchal power tries desperately to avoid confrontation with what it has repressed. Moments which lay bare its constructedness are what patriarchy is afraid of. I would rather suggest that what is really threatening for a society is "feminine" sexuality in man and "masculine" sexuality in woman. Society assigns "masculine" sexuality to men, and "feminine" sexuality to women, and power operates through their hierarchalisation. The division has to be clear-cut, and everyday it has to be, and is, performed and repeated as a site of the operation of the power. The transgression of this artificial division suggests that the power is not powerful enough after all, and its legitimacy is thrown into doubt. It can reveal that the uncontrollable, unassailable, and inextinguishable sexuality cannot be divided, after

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents [1930], The Standard Edition, vol. 21. 33-4.

<sup>18</sup> Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991).

all, according to the division which society artificially creates. Such a revealing moment can be so fatal to the power structure, that it wants a safe division of sexuality to keep its order; it needs male sexuality in man, female sexuality in woman; it does not appreciate, bluntly speaking, a man behaving like a woman or vice versa, since it only brings about confusion and disorder, and ultimately it can reveal the performative nature of gender without any of the ontological status which is claimed by patriarchy. Judith Butler, in her analysis of the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and stylisation of butch/femme identities, mentions, "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency" (Gender Trouble 137).<sup>20</sup>

Jonathan Dollimore quotes Laura Levine as writing that "there is a fear that men dressing as women will lead to an erosion of masculinity itself" (252), which is the case if "masculinity" is understood as constructed. What needs to be frantically repressed then would be this instability of identity (sexual or otherwise). This might explain why homophobia is not only directed against male homosexuals but female, too (unlike Irigaray's analysis).

As Dollimore shows, it also suggests that theatrical displays of transvestism in many cultures are a form of sublimation or containment of this unstable sexuality, the leashing of its wild desire to transgress the rigid socially defined borderline of gender. However, it also reveals that, in a patriarchal society, the notion of a man turning into a woman is more dreaded than vice versa, hence the fact that most theatrical transvestism is that of a man dressing like a woman.

As I have argued before, the illusory control over a "dreadful" feminine

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<sup>20</sup> I realise the danger of citing theorists who are sometimes opposed to each other, in an attempt to support one's argument and those theorists I cite such as Gilbert and Gubar, Butler, Irigaray, etc, more often than not, make contradictory arguments (Butler, particularly, in her different books). However, trying to make a pragmatic argument, I draw useful ideas from them unless the contradiction is obviously serious.

sexuality is carried out in the form of displacing it onto the body of woman, containing it within the female body. If a man shows off feminine sexuality within himself by cross-dressing, this reveals that the control is unsuccessful, and the illusion on which society depends is shattered. In the case of woman's cross-dressing, however, it can be dismissed easily as an attempt to behave like her superior, an ambitious attempt to take over power. Woman's cross-dressing may even support the masculine society's sense of superiority, and work to reassure men of their control over women. Contrary to this, man's cross-dressing is perceived as degrading, a transgression which is so damaging to society that it must be repressed, or safely contained in a licensed theatrical performance.

### Woman as Pervert

Only when the dominant power assigns feminine sexuality to woman does her body become its indicator. Her reproductive bodily function now faces man with its ability to give birth and a reminder to him of his own repressed and deathly feminine sexuality. As Freud puts it: "society does not wish to be reminded of this precarious portion of its foundations" (Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis 48).<sup>21</sup> The fear of a dysfunctional death drive is successfully displaced onto woman, who is to be punished, while this seems less extreme than in the perversions of sadism/masochism. She has to be punished, as an obvious target who carries feminine sexuality in her very form, though, in fact, the obvious bodily feature is a "consequence of a system of sexuality in which the female body is required to assume maternity as the essence of its self" (Gender Trouble 92). The taboo of the menstruating woman, or woman in childbirth, is an example. The construction of the division of gender through patriarchal power then gives rise to the meaning of the female body. When the law

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<sup>21</sup> Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, The Pelican Freud Library, Vol.1, ed., Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

constructs the masculine subject, it also produces the feminine, which “is never a mark of the subject” but rather “the signification of lack” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 27).

Misogyny and marginalisation of woman are thus symptomatic of the weakness and impossibility of a masculinist society which underpins all separations of the feminine and the masculine. By marginalising woman, a masculinist society can feel safeguarded against a “fatal” feminine sexuality. Its illusion is that it has nothing to do with such dangerous femininity, and that it is only caused by woman who must therefore be excluded. A masculine subject can now freely hate feminine sexuality, which is supposedly exiled into the female body. Woman becomes an “absolute other” who must be contained and controlled safely.

But such an illusion cannot last, and needs constant and repeated maintenance, as the persistence of misogyny suggests. What society refuses to admit is woman’s “sameness,” not her “otherness.” There is a fundamental fear of the proximity to subversion. In making what is proximate into an absolute other, a society is desperately trying to protect itself. Dollimore summarises it:

“the woman was once (and may still be) feared in a way in which the homosexual now is --- feared, that is, not so much, or only, because of a radical otherness, as because of an inferior resemblance presupposing a certain proximity” (253).

Now woman is thus strangely transformed into the hateful, horrible, and destructive Other, even though the purpose of the society is to contain her, and to turn her into something manageable. Contradictorily, she is now a pervert, sinful Eve, who can bring not only Adam’s fall from the garden of Eden, but also a catastrophic destruction to a whole society. As Dollimore succinctly suggests, the perverted subject is the desiring woman, as in the case of Desdemona in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, who subverts the society’s norm of a woman as an object (156). She is now a site of perversion, where the instability of sexuality/identity becomes manifest, and where a

patriarchal society might collapse.

### Gender-crossing

It is indeed interesting to find gender-crossing theatrical traditions, such as *Kabuki* and *Noh* in a masculinist society like Japan, where the division between the two sexes is more strictly policed than in the West. It is probable that Japanese society needs such a contained form of gender-crossing in order to maintain its impossible division. The gender-crossing performances carried out by male actors might serve as a repetitious maintenance of the illusion of the otherness of women. To spectators, they display the idea that society wants to impose on women, the idea of the ideal "Other." It seems fundamental for any masculinist society to marginalise, displace, or sublimate "femininity" through formal processes such as art, literature, or theatrical performance, in which women are branded as an "other," "sexual object," or "object of desire." It is quite interesting now to see how this process operates in Japanese society, where the patriarchal law is out in force more vigorously, perhaps because of its urgent need to stabilise an artificial legitimacy introduced much later than in Western societies. *It may be the case that the unconscious Japanese perception of the proximity of the "Other," drives the need to try harder to marginalise and contain it.*

Predictably, in Japanese society, homophobia is still at work in full force, far more powerfully than in the more liberated Western cultures. The homosexual rarely comes out, and on the surface the number of homosexuals appear to be extremely low. Parallel to this, of course, is the notorious sex industry in Japan, those violent and sexually overridden comic books for adults, and those controversies over child-prostitution or illegal sex that Japanese men became implicated in (more often abroad than in their own country).

Cross-dressing might have begun to be accepted, but behavioural

transgression is still less acceptable. Women feel the pressure from the society to act in a feminine way, and the required model behaviour would be to wear high-heeled shoes, to have their hands immaculately manicured, be fully made-up, and talk in a very high-pitched voice. The majority of the jobs available to women are lower status, no more than secretarial, and it is expected that women will quit their jobs once married. Things are beginning to change, but very slowly.

One must keep in mind that the over-feminine attitude of Japanese women is not always a matter of their own choice. As the hostesses of a bar might be considered in the simplified role-playing, women in Japan are acting according to the requirements imposed by Japanese society. They put on an over-feminine attitude in order to reduce the excessive anxiety of their culture towards their (female) sexuality, by showing an easily controllable femininity on the surface. It is an obvious form of repetitious performance of gender hierarchy, which the society needs in order to be assured of its legitimacy. Probably unconsciously, those women, by unwittingly conforming to the unwritten law, contribute to the reproduction and stabilisation of the current gender-formation. Often Japanese women living outside their own country are found to act in a very different way. They do not find the same pressure to be so "feminine," to wear make-up, and may speak in a low voice, freed as they are from the social requirements of their own country.

It is unlikely to be a coincidence that Japan has a very formalised style of transvestite cultural products, the world-famous *Kabuki* and *Noh* theatre. Traditionally, they have been, and still are, performed exclusively by males. Both safely realise the disturbing desire to transgress, while at the same time revealing the hidden (male-) homosexual economy of Japanese society. The theatre of *Noh* and *Kabuki*, under the stylised cover of their expensive ceremonial costumes and masks, plays with the notion of an instability of sexuality and identity without doing any real harm to society. Just as in carnival, this cross-dressing on stage serves to release

some of the repressed quality in a safe, controlled way. And how strictly controlled it has been! The prestige and secret enjoyment of gender-crossing is only permitted to men. Control of it was so total that the female version of *Kabuki* was even banned by the Japanese government. Society allows men to cross-dress, but does not allow women to do so. A woman still cannot be a *Kabuki* performer. Tradition protects perversion against confusion.

As if reflecting the stronger repression which Japanese women have to suffer, there is a counter version of theatrical female cross-dressing. Such theatrical attempts are rare around the world, and it again suggests how repressive Japanese society is. Indeed, while “authentic” *Kabuki* is generally acknowledged as a refined art and gathers an audience of males and females, the female theatrical effort of a similar kind suffers from criticism that it is less artistic. One of the most famous of such theatre companies is Takarazuka Kageki, which puts on musicals, performed solely by female performers. Unlike *Kabuki*, most of the audience are women, while men do not seem interested in it, and ignore it. Is it because the spectacle of women acting like men is too disturbing for men? It might be. Or perhaps, men are not capable of accepting the existence of desiring women. They ignore it as if they do not see them, so that they can be dismissed. There may be a necessity for Japanese men to ward off (their own) disturbing femininity as far as possible.

### Foucault and Containment Theory

For a patriarchal society, the marginalisation of woman is an easy way to displace the male dread of uncontrollable sexuality and its reminder of death. Yet, however hard they try, the centre/margin formation is already disrupted, or in the process of perpetual disruption.

According to Dollimore, though they hold quite an opposite view of sexuality, Freud and Foucault have one notion in common, that is, perversion is at the centre of



culture. Freud sees the infantile sexuality as bisexual, which is “developed” into “normal” hetero-sexuality through the Oedipal complex in which the child finds its proper social/sexual positioning while repressing the inappropriate. This process is fundamental for a society to function, though the repressed comes back, and perversion is ineliminable. On the other hand, contrary to the Freudian idea of the naturalness of heterosexuality and its universal psycho-sexual development, Foucault does not see perversion as something within a society that has to be repressed, but something a society actively produces, as a vehicle of power, “a discursive construct which power works through” (Dollimore 83):

The implantation of perversions is an instrument-effect: it is through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that the relations of power to sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct... Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another (Foucault 48).<sup>22</sup>

Foucault maintains that modern industrial societies have brought stronger repression of sexuality, which has only led to the explosion of unorthodox sexualities. Whichever the case is, on the account of the centrality of perversion, they agree.

However, Foucault’s idea is problematic. If perversion is a construct of power, resistance to power may also be a programmed and controlled activity by the power. However much it appears subversive, it seems it can never achieve its goal.

But this pessimistic idea is dismissed by Dollimore. He quotes Foucault:

“discourse [produced in the opposition between power and resistance] can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance,

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<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction (London: Penguin, 1979).

a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposite strategy. Discourse transmits and produced power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (qtd Dollimore 225).

I suppose that this sort of discourse is what many contemporary feminist writers are aiming at. By discourse, who is at the margin can be at centre, and vice versa. And in so doing, they tend to treat perversity or instability of sexual identity as its subject in particular. I will look at some of the examples in writings by Japanese writers, but firstly, let us move on to Angela Carter, who is a powerful advocate of such an attempt.

### Chapter 3:

#### Angela Carter and the Protean Body

##### 1) Angela Carter on Japan

###### How to be a Woman

Angela Carter plays not only with the female body as a site of displacement of man's fear/desire, but also with the notion of instability of identity and sexuality, and treats (cross-)dressing and theatrical dressing as (potentially) fundamentally subversive of power-relations. It seems more than appropriate to look at her work here, since her connection with Japan is something of personal importance to her and of significance in her writings. It is also noteworthy, I believe, that her treatment of these issues mentioned above was much more radicalised after her stay in Japan.

In 1968, Carter won the Somerset Maugham Award for her third novel, Several Perceptions. With the Award money in hand, she visited and then lived in Japan from 1969 to 1972. It seems she first lived with her Japanese lover and then alone. She writes in Nothing Sacred [1982], "In 1969, I was given some money to run away with, and did so" (28).<sup>1</sup> With her acute sensitivity and powers of perception, Carter seems to have grasped the essence of what I have been elaborating thus far, which she, then, sublimated into her now famously acclaimed novels. Perhaps because she was an outsider, Carter was able to see through the mist of so-called cultural difference to the very power-struggle unfolding in Japanese society, that the insider may be too involved to be able to see. The influence of Japan on Carter introduced a new slant on many feminist and postmodern issues which

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<sup>1</sup> Angela Carter, Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings (London, Virago, 1982). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with NS in front of the page number.

pervade her writings, and have been taken up in debates among Western critics.<sup>2</sup> Now that her novels are fashionably popular in Japan, their feminist influence is affecting Japanese culture in return.

Her experience in Japan was a somewhat magnified version of her sense of existence in her own country: a sense of intense gender division and of herself as “the absolute other.” In a short story, “A Souvenir of Japan,” she writes:

I had never been so absolutely the mysterious other. I had become a kind of phoenix, a fabulous beast; I was an outlandish jewel. He found me, I think, inexpressibly exotic. But I often felt like a female impersonator (Fireworks 7).<sup>3</sup>

This partly arose from her status as a foreigner, since, at the time of her stay, a foreigner was somewhat more unusual than it would be today. She found herself turned into an object of the gaze, half-feared, half-fascinating. Around her were “voices murmuring the word: “Gaijin, gaijin, gaijin” (foreigner), in pure, repressed surprise” (NS 33).

But it is also fundamentally a woman’s experience in Japan, as Carter herself says, “In Japan I learnt what it is to be a woman and became radicalised” (NS 28). As is mentioned before, woman in Japan has to assume the role of ideal “feminine Other” in order to be accepted, and man has to repress his own “femininity” so much so that he has little choice but to act as other men do. His need for male comradeship is huge. Compared to Western society, people in Japan tend to

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<sup>2</sup> She produced four essays during her stay in Japan, and a essay on her next visit to Japan in 1974, all of which are included in Nothing Sacred. And Susan Rubin Suleiman reveals in her essay “The Fate of the Surrealist Imagination in the Society of the Spectacle,” in Lorna Sage ed., Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter (London: Virago, 1994), that Carter also wrote The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman in Japan. A collection of short stories, Fireworks [1974, revised 1987] contains three stories set in Japan, and all were written between 1970 to 1973 and seem to be inspired by her stay in Japan.

<sup>3</sup> Angela Carter, Fireworks [1974] (London, Virago, 1988).

congregate with those of the same sex. This experience of “how to be a woman” is described in one of her essays, “Poor Butterfly,” as an exaggerated, over-simplified and even caricaturised male-female relation:

It would be easy to construct a blueprint for an ideal hostess. Indeed, if the Japanese economy ever needs a boost, Sony might contemplate putting them into mass production. The blueprint would provide for: a large pair of breasts, with which to comfort and delight the clients; one dexterous, well-manicured hand for pouring their drinks, lighting their cigarettes and popping forkfuls of food into their mouths; a concealed tape-recording of cheerful laughter, to sustain the illusion that the girls themselves are having a good time; and a single, enormous, very sensitive ear for the clients to talk at.

Japan must surely be the only country in the world where a man will gladly pay out large sums of good money to get a woman to listen to him. Possibly slaves do not make good listeners. However, the hostess - the computerised playmate - may conceivably be an illustration of the fact that Japan is just the same as everywhere else, only more so; perhaps she is indeed the universal male notion of the perfect woman (NS 46-7).

In this passage, she succinctly compares the status of hostess, an ideal woman for a man, with that of an automaton, reminding us of Hoffmann’s “The Sandman.” As in Hoffmann’s story, the displacement of male desire and fear occurs in an obvious way in this hostess-client relation. Surely male clients pay a lot of money in order to secure their power of control, and to ward off a threatening female sexuality through the disguise of monetary exchange. Or rather, they are pathetically driven to create “the perfect woman” who can match their notion of the “Other,” even if she costs large sums of money, since she is required to boost confidence in a sense of masculinity

which is just as precariously held. This hostess-client relation can be called a perfect relation from the point of view of power, since “both the subject and the Other are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy” (Butler, Gender Trouble 9). He is only repeating in explicit terms what power does implicitly. As Carter suggests, the process of displacement can be found everywhere in the world, but it is more obvious in Japan, a society which seems so frantically to be trying to secure the division of sexuality under a threat of proximity probably more powerful than in any other culture, the society in which a man willingly pays a large sum of money to nurse his fantasy.

In any patriarchal society, a woman is more or less allocated a role as the impersonator of manageable femininity, the sort of femininity that a society can safely handle/control/contain in a monetary exchange, so as not to threaten the foundation of patriarchal society. However, in Japan, where the crossing of sexuality, especially feminine sexuality in a man, is still heavily repressed, the degree of control is more intense, and she is turned into an “absolute other,” who can be paid off and dismissed.

It is more interesting when we consider what Japanese men say of this habit of going to bars in an exclusively male-only group (they never go to such hostess bars accompanied by a woman). They call it “*Tsukiai*,” meaning “socialising.” Since it is a male dominant society, they have to cultivate comradeship or good working relationships with other male colleagues (women are excluded from the category of colleagues). There is no need to “socialise” with women. They are the Other and marginalised, only allowed to take part in the social economy as a purchased (therefore, not personally challenging) entertainment tool. What really matters for men is more to do with the protection and reinforcement of their male sexuality than with the fulfilment of their desire. Even when they pay a large sum of money at a bar to fulfil their fantasy, it is not a fantasy of sexual desire, but a fantasy of

masculine dominating power. Maybe the need for such ritualistic reinforcement of male sexual identity is necessary for survival in a repressive patriarchal society whose sexual mores are not inherently Japanese, as I have argued, and in which male gender roles are therefore extraordinarily problematic. Carter poignantly writes in an essay, in which she analyses the violence and banality in Japanese comic books, “a culture that prefers to keep its women at home is extremely hard on the men” (Ibid. 43). What she also refers to here is the Japanese equivalent of the English word “wife,” “*Kanai*” or “*Okusan*.” Both of them literally mean “the one at home” or “the one in the interior.” This might be another example of how hard Japanese men try to keep women out of their society...

### Doubly Other

As some of the instances in the previous section show, what Carter experienced in Japan was a comprehension of her own body as a site onto which others transfer their desire/fear: her body as something not entirely under her control, a disparity of body and mind, and a fragmentation of identity. Presumably, Carter must have had the same kind of experience in her own culture even before coming to Japan, but it seems it struck her most forcibly when she actually started living in Japan since her sense of otherness was doubly intensified by her status as a foreigner. She writes of Tokyo in a short story, “Flesh and the Mirror”:

this city presents the foreigner with a mode of life that seems to him to have the enigmatic transparency, the indecipherable clarity, of dream. The stranger, the foreigner, thinks he is in control; but he has been precipitated into somebody else’s dream (Fireworks 62).

In that story, the heroine, after being disappointed by the absence of her Japanese lover, falls into the arms of a perfect stranger. They make love in a room at a hotel, which has a mirror on the ceiling. She describes the moment of revelation when she

sets her eyes on the reflection:

The magic mirror presented me with a hitherto unconsidered notion of myself as I. Without any intention of mine, I had been defined by the action reflected in the mirror.... Women and mirrors are in complicity with one another to evade the action I/she performs that she/I cannot watch, the action with which I break out of the mirror, with which I assume my appearance. But this mirror refused to conspire with me; it was like the first mirror I'd ever seen. It reflected the embrace beneath it without the least guile. All it showed was inevitable. But I myself could never have dreamed it.... The fancy-dress disguise I'd put on to suit the city had betrayed me to a room and a bed and a modification of myself that had no business at all in my life, not in the life I had watched myself performing (Ibid 64-5).

Described here is an experience of the division between the body and self-identity. The mirror successfully reveals the body, with "the fancy-dress disguise" on it, now transformed into something unknown to its owner, transformed according to another's desires or requirements. A mirror is another of Carter's objects of fascination. As suggested by its function in this short story, a mirror can reveal something beyond one's perception. Something real. We momentarily seem to see ourselves as others see us, as if through their eyes. The mirror shows the appalling division between what is on the surface and what is beyond, or at the back of it. However, by offering a glimpse of such irreconcilable division, the mirror contradictorily manages to connect those two sides. It can, therefore, serve as an entrance into a new, completely different order, or disorder.

#### Japanese Tattoo: Art on Skin, or Skin Turned into Art

Within the same passage I quoted from "Flesh and the Mirror" in the last



section, Angela Carter makes acutely manifest the role of costume, of disguise/mask/dress in the transformation of identity. Costume conceals what is behind, while at the same time, it can change that into something different. Costume not only protects what is underneath, but sometimes works on it to transform or even subvert. Here it becomes apparent that identity is not solid, that it is liable to transformation, it is interchangeable and never fixed. This notion appears in her novels repeatedly in various refined forms as we shall see later, but Carter must have extensively pondered it, when she encountered the art of tattooing in Japan.

The delicacy and contradictory nature of tattoo is what Carter perceives when she writes, in an essay called "People as Pictures," "*Irezumi* is tattooing in *toto*. It transforms its victim into a genre masterpiece" (NS 33). She perceives its similarity to a rite of passage, since it requires the victim to suffer pain. It marks one's entry into a (male) society, where one needs to act as a masculine agent. However, *Irezumi* somehow turns the wearer into an object, while providing him with a passport to be a subject, a member of the clan. Carter suggests this contradiction: "He is visually superb; he exudes the weird glamour of masochism; and he carries upon his flesh an immutable indication of caste. Bizarre beauties blossom in the programmed interstices of repression" (NS 33).

It is a peculiar rite of passage in the mafia society, where sexuality (especially "feminine" sexuality in man) is severely repressed. As we have seen, a man is required to be masculine and strong, with no trace of femininity whatsoever. Cross-dressing is not acceptable, apart from in a ceremonial occasion. Nevertheless, the badge of *Irezumi* to mark his entry to the patriarchal society, therefore to mark his repression of "femininity," has certainly a "feminine" quality in it, as its typical designs of flowers or children or butterflies unwittingly reveal. It is a "feminine" screen for the masculine subject, behind which he can conceal his "femininity" thus



securing his status as an active agent.

*Irezumi* is, therefore, a kind of protective clothing, especially in a severely masculine society. The external outfit does not entirely protect you, for in Japan there are many occasions for revelation of the naked skin. Until quite recently, it has been customary to take a bath at a public bathing house, because, except for those with extreme wealth, people did not have baths at home. *Irezumi* can cover the naked body even if you take off your clothes.

When one considers the Japanese concept of the naked body, the importance of this protection might become even clearer. The naked body seems to have a different connotation from that in the West. Nakedness means an exposure of weakness within to the society without, and the naked body is the semiotic equivalent of “unprotectedness,” “destitution,” or “fragility.” Carter also perceives this when she says “traditionally, the Japanese have always felt a lack of interest, verging on repugnance, at the naked human body” (NS 35). In fact, there is a revealing Japanese phrase “Hadaka-no-tsukiai,” literally meaning “socialising in nakedness,” which can be translated into something like “intimate comradeship.” (Note that this phrase is only applicable to male-to-male relationships.)

Therefore, going naked puts a man into a dangerous situation, where his weakness is revealed. If he goes naked, it has to be among people with whom he can feel safe. By going naked together, they can build an intimate brotherhood of a sort. Perhaps the fair and smooth skin of most Japanese men intensifies their sense of proximity to the female body, and threatens them with their own femininity, with the possible confusion of their sexual identities.

Coincidentally, Carter quotes Lady Murasaki when she mentions the abhorrence of nakedness among Japanese people:

Lady Murasaki, the eleventh-century novelist, wrote with a shudder of distaste: “Unforgettably horrible is the sight of the naked body. It

really does not have the slightest charm" (NS 35).

This suggests a cultural tradition quite different from that of the West, where the nude has always been the central figure in art, and a naked woman the focal point of the male gaze. John Berger points to differences in the treatment of naked woman between the European and non-European traditions. He says that, in the European tradition, even when the central figure of a painting is a naked woman, the real protagonist is not her, but "the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man" (54), and that "[the] picture is made to appeal to his sexuality.<sup>4</sup> It has nothing to do with her sexuality" (55). On the other hand, in non-European traditions, "nakedness is never supine in this way" (53). He goes on to say that, in other traditions, even when the theme is sexual, it usually shows two people and "the woman as active as the man" (53). However, I would argue that Japanese culture cannot be included in what he claims to be "non-European traditions." While in Europe a picture of a nude woman serves for "sexual provocation" (54), in Japan until recently, the repression of sexuality was so total that "sexual provocation" by nudity was beyond comprehension. Carter supports this by her analysis: "Even the erotic actors in the pictorial sex-instruction manuals of the Edo era rarely doff their kimono" (NS 35).

It seems that a man's fear of female sexuality is too great for him to appreciate the nudity of a woman. His own naked body might be, as we have seen, enough of a threat for him. In such a culture, the image of the naked woman is nothing but horrible. Berger makes an interesting additional commentary:

the convention of not painting the hair on a woman's body helps towards the same end. Hair is associated with sexual power, with passion. The woman's sexual passion needs to be minimalized so that the spectator may feel that he has the monopoly of such passion (55).

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<sup>4</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin, 1972).

If that is the case in Europe, in Japan, not only the hair but also the naked body of a woman needs to be erased from the picture, in order not to threaten man's monopoly. It seems the degree of repression of sexuality is much greater in Japan than Europe.

Japanese tattooing, *Irezumi*, may serve the required purpose of protecting a man from the threat originating from nakedness. Carter perceives the role of *Irezumi* as a protection:

Now, a man who has been comprehensively tattooed ... can hardly be said to be naked, for he may never remove this most intimate and gaily coloured of garments. Stark he may be, but always decent, and therefore never ashamed. He will never look helplessly, defencelessly, indelicately, nude. This factor may or may not be important in the psychological bases of *irezumi* which provides the potentially perhaps menacing human form with an absolute disguise (NS 35-6).

It protects the wearer with a proof of comradeship with other men, thus securing his place in patriarchal society, as well as assuring him of his masculine identity. Male sexuality is written on the body. As Carter points out, traditionally, tattoos have been worn by manual labourers "almost as an occupational badge" (NS 33), but nowadays in Japan they tend to remain among gangsters and underworld figures, where violence and physical power mean a great deal and you need to be a powerful masculine figure in order to survive. The lengthy process involved in being tattooed also adds the "elements of an initiation rite" (NS 34) to it. In exchange for pain, for punishing the hidden feminine sexuality in themselves, the tattooed man obtains comradeship and a passport to the ruling membership of this patriarchal society.

I would also like to suggest the possibility that *Irezumi* might offer some sort of sublimated form of gender-crossing to men. In the exchange of pain, the tattoo wearer is turned into an art object. He obtains a safe protection for his skin which stands between the world and the inside of himself, now allowing him to enjoy the

status of object of the gaze, without fear of being invaded in his male sexuality or accidentally revealing his femininity (though that “femininity” - which lets you enjoy the passivity of being looked at - is a mere construct of male fantasy). As in *Kabuki* theatre or *Noh* theatre, on the skin of the *Irezumi* wearer occurs the same kind of gender-crossing in formalised/sublimated/contained form. Since this experience is “protected” and manifold, he can safely enjoy the masochistic pleasure. And when considering that *Irezumi* is still performed among the extremely macho patriarchal *Yakuza* society with its severe repression of femininity in men, then *Irezumi* seems to offer some kind of compensation. Convincingly, the typical design for *Irezumi* is not always stereotypically masculine. Its design varies and sometimes it consists of scary dragons or lions or such like so as to boast the masculinity of the wearer, but the popular and more traditional designs often consist of very colourfully decorated flowers and beautiful objects such as butterflies, snowflakes, or a child and a carp, which are artistically laid out on the human body. It seems to me significantly contradictory that the tattoo which should shield the wearer from feminine sexuality actually exhibits the very representation of femininity that society assigns to woman.

#### Mirror and Tattoo: Disparity or Convergence?

Both the tattoo and the mirror, in this way, have a quality in common, a quality similar to that of the screen/mitigation/mediation in the Japanese woman’s literary tradition. It safely protects what is behind, while allowing this to communicate with the other side. It can reveal what is hidden and repressed, but at the same time, it serves as the very division of the two worlds. It is this somewhat contradictory quality inherent in the tattoo and the mirror on which Carter so thoroughly speculates in many of her writings.

She seems to have been interested in the instability of sexuality and slippage of identity which occurs in front of the mirror or when putting on a dress or tattoo

even before her stay in Japan. However, it was apparently after her experience in Japan that she developed this notion further and radicalised it. Before her visit to Japan, the characters in her novels retain some sense of a core self, as it were, even while negotiating crises of identity. However after Japan, that is, from The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (which she wrote in Japan) on, the transformation of their identities is pushed further, and is more drastic. Characters literally metamorphose into different beings, or the other sex. To make this comparison conveniently clear, let us firstly see the fiction written before her visit to Japan.

## 2) Realism in Carter Before the Japan Experience

### The Magic Toyshop

A mirror stands between this world and its reflection, and supposedly tells the person, who is looking at it, how he/she looks in the eyes of others though in a reverse image. It connects one person to the world, but at the same time it never tells you how you really look, thus separating you from the world forever.

The short story mentioned above, "Flesh and the Mirror," clearly shows this betrayal through a mirror which the heroine has naively supposed to be in complicity with her own desires and to confirm her own sense of subjectivity. On the contrary, the mirror-image becomes a motif for the impossibility of the female subject in Japanese society, and allows the protagonist to glimpse her shocking status as an object: an object, the "Other," that society imposes upon her body, and which she is helpless to control. The mirror provokes a crisis of identity.

That is also exactly what happens to Melanie in The Magic Toyshop [1967]<sup>5</sup>, though the subversion is yet to be completed in this novel. When she allows herself

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<sup>5</sup> Angela Carter, The Magic Toyshop [1967] (London: Virago, 1981). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with MT in front of the page number.

to slip into her mother's wedding dress, to play with her identity-slippage into that of her mother's, Melanie's fall begins. Laura Mulvey, in her analysis of the film version of this novel, succinctly claims that "Melanie's narcissistic over-involvement with her image is her fault and her downfall. It is her fascination with her mirror-image that seduces her into wearing her mother's wedding dress" ("Cinema Magic" 234).<sup>6</sup> To add to this commentary, I would say that it is Melanie's naïve belief that she can have ultimate control of her identity, and can freely play with her mother's identity, which contributes to her fall. However, it turns out that the dominant power is more manipulative. The mirror does not just reflect Melanie, but defines her regardless of her will, by robbing her of her own identity and reducing her to the status of an object. She now becomes "the subject of the sentence written on the mirror" (*Fireworks* 65). Her identity, which she has regarded as her own, is now mixed with her mother's, and she stains the wedding dress with blood, as if reliving the rite of passage her mother went through when she got married. The identity crisis is precipitated when her mother dies in an accident, robbing Melanie and her brother of their family and home, and also of the place where the mother's identity should return. With her identity lost, Melanie is now left under the patriarchal dominance of Uncle Philip, who denies her subjectivity and turns her into his tool/object. Suggestively there is no mirror in Uncle Philip's house. With no mirror to connect the two binary oppositions of subject and Other, Melanie has now lost even the illusory control which she used to enjoy in front of the mirror. What she has got instead is "the plausible distortion of the witch-ball" (*MT* 169). She can now only see herself as the Other, an image distorted according to Uncle Philip's desire.

The wedding dress here plays a significant role as well. As the heroine in the short story, "Flesh and the Mirror," laments: "The fancy-dress disguise I'd put on ...

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<sup>6</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Cinema Magic and the Old Monsters: Angela Carter's Cinema," *Flesh and Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994).

had betrayed me to a room and a bed and a modification of myself that had no business at all in my life, not in the life I had watched myself performing" (Fireworks 65). The wedding dress Melanie wears seems to incur similar consequences. It is as though the identity of her mother, which is attached to the dress, finds its way into Melanie, when she puts it on. It is not that you dress according to what you are, but you become how you dress. This notion is worth consideration in terms of cross-dressing. Ibsen's A Doll's House exhibits a similar scene, in which a revelation is brought to Nora, after donning the tarantella costume. She discovers that her husband is a hypocrite, and suddenly realises that she has simply been a convenient object for him. As if she acquires a power from the tarantella, she finds the strength to defy and leave him.

Recently, I happened to see a TV program, in which a boy aged 16 or 17, dressed in ordinary young boy's clothes, talked and acted quite arrogantly and aggressively towards his mother. His mother was obviously upset about his attitude towards her. However, this program went on to show a videotape of the same show sometime ago in which the same boy appeared in girl's clothes, claiming that he wanted to become a woman against his parents' approval, and asking for their permission. What is striking is that the way he behaved towards his mother was completely different in the two shows. When he was in girl's clothes, he talked in a very gentle soft voice, and looked at his mother's eyes imploringly all the time. But in boy's clothes, he was loud and abusive, turning a deaf ear to his mother. She complained that he now did not help her to wash up as he used to. The issues are complex and involve questions about gender and performance, but the story seems to exemplify that what you wear does affect how you behave. The dress defines the wearer. Not the other way round, though it may seem so.

In The Magic Toyshop, the identity transformation is not so absolute. Melanie certainly experiences an identity crisis, but does not turn into a different



being, and retains what we may think of as a “core” self. What changes is her surroundings, and in this respect, it is fundamentally different from the novels written after Carter’s stay in Japan. However, in this novel, as if showing Carter’s already acute sense in this matter, the instability of the relationship between subject and object is further explored in yet other forms: one is that between puppet and puppetmaster and another is that between animate and inanimate being. Uncle Philip has “a fetishistic obsession with his marionettes” (Mulvey, “Cinema Magic” 234), of which he takes great care, dresses them lavishly, and when he sets up a show, they move as if they are real. He is the one in control, he is the god, the great patriarch. The title of the show “GRAND PERFORMANCE · FLOWER’S PUPPET MICROCOSM” (MT 126) reveals the situation in which Melanie, Jonathan, Victoria, Aunt Margaret, Finn, and Francie find themselves. While the marionettes become uncannily animated in Uncle Philip’s theatre, the real human beings are being manipulated as if they were inanimate objects, the handy tools for Uncle Philip. Here the status of inanimate doll and animate human being is subverted.

The loss of the voice of Aunt Margaret is suggestive in that she turns into an inanimate doll. Melanie is also forced to become one of his marionettes, when she is told to play Leda raped by a big swan manipulated by Uncle Philip. This puppet-show revolves around the kind of notion of containment which I discussed earlier. In the puppet show, Uncle Philip can safely enjoy the rape of a small girl (pederasty), in the disguise of a swan. What he really wants to materialise is a situation in which he has total control over a weak feminine sexuality, by asserting his strong male sexuality through the violence of rape, but all in the safe economy of theatrical play. Does it not remind you of the hostess-client relationship in the bars of Japan? But there is a twist here. Melanie is not the kind of girl he wants, or formally speaking, he wants his swan, to rape:

“You’re well built, for fifteen.” His voice was flat and dead.

“Nearly sixteen.”

“It’s all that free milk and orange juice that does it. Do you have your periods?”

“Yes,” she said, too shocked to do more than whisper.

He grunted, displeased.

“I wanted my Leda to be a little girl. Your tits are too big” (MT 143).

A menstruating girl with “big tits” presents too much feminine sexuality, and is thus too threatening for him, who “can’t abide a woman in trousers” (MT 62) and who likes “silent women” (MT 63). What Uncle Philip wants is a totally controllable selfless doll, with no hint of sexuality at all.

The red hair of Finn, Francie and Aunt Margaret *seems to imply a similar* sort of uncontrollable sexuality as of fire. And Uncle Philip plots every trick to contain it. He makes Aunt Margaret wear a collar, which allows her to “hardly move her head” (MT 112) and to eat “only with the utmost difficulty” (MT 113). She is required to wear a plain grey dress, and tie her hair in a knot. He also attempts to make Finn into his disciple. And when Finn resists containment, Uncle Philip uses force. All his effort is to keep the horrible sexuality at bay, which he cannot deal with, and which he is most likely afraid of.

However this does not mean that this fiery quality in them dies away. It shows through:

The light shining through her roughly heaped haycock of hair made it blaze so you might have thought you could warm your hands at it (MT 40).

And Finn’s resistance to Uncle Philip is not over either. When he finds that he and Melanie are in a trap framed by Uncle Philip, he refuses to conform:

“Suddenly I saw it all, when we were lying there. He’s pulled our strings as if we were his puppets, and there I was, all ready to touch

you up just as he wanted. He told me to rehearse Leda and the swan with you. Somewhere private. Like in your room, he said. Go up and rehearse a rape with Melanie in your bedroom. Christ. He wanted me to do you and he set the scene.... I'm not going to do what he wants even if I do fancy you" (MT 152).

It is hidden, waiting to erupt, which it occasionally does, as when the three secretly enjoy music and dance together, and on such occasions, Aunt Margaret, suggestively enough, lets her hair loose like "a burning bush" (MT 50).

Uncontrollable female sexuality seems to be what is most dreadful to Uncle Philip. It is what disrupts Uncle Philip's patriarchal microcosm; it falls into pieces when he finds Francie and Aunt Margaret in each other's arms. Their relationship might be seen as incestuous; its significance, however, is in its transgressive force, the force that Dollimore calls "perverse dynamics." The incestuous love is outside the law of patriarchal society, and that which the society must repress/contain/sublimate in order to protect its foundation. The uncontrollable, unassimilated, irrational desire that it embodies poses the greatest danger to social order. It seems almost an inevitable conclusion then that his patriarchal universe collapses in a red flame, burnt away in a red hot uncontrollable fire of the red trio. The illusory order exemplified in the puppet-theatre turns out to be quite frail in the face of the unleashed energy of sexuality. Now Uncle Philip is no longer the god, since "her aunt was a goddess of fire; her eyes burned and her hair flickered about her" (MT 197).

### Several Perceptions

Carter's third novel, Several Perceptions<sup>7</sup> [1968] also deals with, amongst

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<sup>7</sup> Angela Carter, Several Perceptions [1968](London: Virago, 1995). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with SP in front of the page number.

other issues, the instability of reality and of identity and also the displacement of desire/horror, though it is also not as “radicalised” as the later works.

After his girlfriend Charlotte leaves him, the protagonist, Joseph, experiences a slippage in his sense of reality and his sense of self, “now and then glimpsing immense cracks in the structure of the real world” (SP 3). He withdraws into “his” reality, in which he typically transforms Charlotte into a devil incarnate: “a Gothic mask, huge eyeballs hooded with lids of stone, cheekbones sharp as steel, lips of treacherous vampire redness and a wet red mouth which was a mantrap of ivory fangs. Witch woman. Incubus. Haunter of battlefields after the carnage in the image of a crow” (SP 15). He calls “a Mickey Mouse alarm clock with a loud, shrill, nagging tick” (SP 16) “Charlotte.” This is rather an obvious demonstration of the way in which women are allotted the place of evil in the original Gothic. Carter makes it apparent by way of his dreams, that what Joseph transfers onto the image of Charlotte is his own cruelty, and his own fear of death:

It was spring and he was walking in a formal garden. Tulips and children’s heads were arranged like apples on a shelf in a store, in neat rows. The tulips swayed and the children smiled with red mouths. Innocent sunlight shone on everything. Along came a man in heavy boots and trampled down the flowerbed, both tulips and children; juicy stalks and fragile bones went snap. Blood and sap spurted on all sides. Joseph flung himself on the man and tried to choke him or gouge out his eyes but his hands made no impression for his body was, in the dream, insubstantial as smoke. When the last child’s head was irrevocably smashed, the murderer turned his face to Joseph and Joseph realized he was looking at his own face. Then he woke up and broke his mirror so it would never tell the truth again, if it had ever told the truth before (SP 3).

He has created in his imagination an object for conscious hate, though what he really hates and fears might be himself. He breaks the mirror, which can tell this truth, and decisively lives in his fabricated world.

The mirror here is again portrayed as that which is capable of revealing the truth. This novel seems to presuppose that there is still a core self, hidden but recoverable. Carter's perception, however, becomes more subtle in later works, and, as in the short story "Flesh and the Mirror", the mirror can only show you the definition which others impose on you, and which has nothing to do with "truth" nor with the *sine absolute* of identity. The truth is nowhere to be found. The one looking at the mirror is a performing self, and what a mirror can offer is a transformation into an utterly different being.

Charlotte, in this novel, is a typical example of the Gothic attempt to deal with unknown, mysterious, feminine sexuality. When she is with Joseph in reality, he enjoys imaginary control over her (or her sexuality) by "bizarre and ingenious methods of sexual intercourse" (SP 4) which in fact "humiliate" (SP 28) her. As in the case of Gothic fiction, Charlotte here embodies the enigma of life and death, and becomes for a man the origin of dreadful death. As in sadistic practice, a man is able to obtain a temporary sense of victory against death by torturing and conquering a woman's body, and that is what Joseph does to Charlotte. In a retrospective moment, Joseph describes such a feeling that Charlotte's body induces in him as a "kind of memento mori, reminders everyone was slowly dying everywhere" (SP 113). To this comment, Mrs Boulder, the mother of Joseph's friend, says, "you just used her as a punch bag, trying to get rid of the chip on your shoulder" (SP 113). This conversation rather clumsily manifests the displacement of the fear of death onto the body of woman.

When Charlotte leaves him, Joseph loses his capacity to deal with the unknown, the mysterious, and the uncontrollable. He no longer has a site on which

to displace his fear. Therefore, the horrible image of her as a Gothic monster, man-eater, death-bringer, is necessarily created in his imagination. The horrible thing which has escaped from his control and exploitation (though it was illusory from the beginning) becomes even more horrible now that it is free. Like Matilda in The Monk, once she is out of hand, uncontrollable feminine sexuality is transformed in man's imagination into something horrible, and disgusting. Something that has to be punished.

Joseph's attempt at controlling death and life is pursued in various ways. He works at a hospital, where he daily cleans the dying and lays out the dead. "His own acts of patience and gentleness with the old men in their extremity" (SP 7) is one of his attempts at playing God. Also his seemingly tender care for his cat, Snow White, reveals similar impulses. Ironically named Snow White, she too is exploited through her sexuality, when she has "two litters of kittens a year" (SP 17) which Joseph sells to a pet shop once they are weaned. Though diverse kinds of behaviour, they are all in fact attempts at controlling life and death, of acting as God.

Even Joseph's committing suicide is one such attempt. The act is less a killing of himself than a controlling of his own death. It is a desperate act of retaliation against Charlotte, who has escaped his controlling hand and become a fearful monster. By committing suicide, he can retrieve the death-inflicting power from the monster Charlotte. He can again be his own God. What he says a moment before the act is revealing; "You bitch," he said to Charlotte's photograph. "Little do you know I've got the upper hand at last!" (SP 19).

While Joseph's attempt at controlling the horrible feminine sexuality is in the form of sadism, that is, torturing and humiliating a woman's body, the form of masochism is found in Anne Blossom's behaviour. She is a woman who has so totally repressed her femininity that she has become hysterically lame (it later turns

out to have been psychologically induced). She creates lameness as a punishment of giving herself away. Motherhood, into which she is precipitated by an unfaithful “bloke,” only brings misery. In this male-dominated society, all she can do now is to protect herself by repressing her femininity.

Both Joseph and Anne Blossom live in their fabricated world, which in the course of the story, starts to loosen its hold. The dissolution of their fabricated world is mainly triggered by their mutual effect on each other. To Joseph, the fragile feminine sexuality he sees in Anne Blossom changes his view of Charlotte, and to Anne, the maternal care Joseph requires makes her reconsider. However, even though this novel ends in an amicable and happy atmosphere, there remains some ambiguity. This story’s presupposition of the hidden, repressed truth somewhere does not seem convincing. Anne certainly is freed from her “hysterical paralysis,” when Kay, Joseph’s friend, orders her to run, “in a firm enough voice.” Is it not another control over her? Is it just the case of another repression taken the place of the former one? This novel, however, does not pursue this ambivalence any further.

### Heroes and Villains

Heroes and Villains<sup>8</sup> was published in 1969 and set in an imaginary post-disaster era. In this novel, several types of displacement are explored. First of all, there is the opposition of the Professors and the Barbarians. From the Professors’ point of view, it is an opposition of culture and nature, civilisation and savage, order and disorder, heroes and villains. In short, the Professors are the masculine subject, and the Barbarians, the “Other.”

All the fears among the Professors are displaced onto the Barbarians. For the Professors, the men of reason, whose profession is to promulgate and control

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<sup>8</sup> Angela Carter, Heroes and Villains (London: Penguin, 1969). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with HV in front of the page number.

knowledge, the unknown is the most fearful. While the society of the Professors is protected by guarded walls, all the more because of its limitation, it is perpetually threatened by what is beyond the walls, symbolised in “the surrounding forest which, in certain stormy lights of late August, seemed to encroach on and menace the community though, most of the time, the villagers conspired to ignore it” (HV 1).

The heroine, Marianne, is a daughter of a Professor of History, the possessor of the knowledge of the past, who regards himself and fellow professors as “the only ones left who could resurrect the gone world in the gentle shape, and try to keep destruction outside, this time” (HV 8). The community is a patriarchal society with soldiers protecting their power, symbolised by a white phallic tower in which the professor lives, and by his clock which he winds every morning. Though the community is clean and orderly, and seemingly self-contained, there are always possibilities of disruption within and without.

The outer cause of disruption is occasional attacks by the Barbarians, painted and clad like typical savages. However, Carter plays with the notion of displacement and indicates the possibility that the Barbarians might merely exist as the site of this displacement. They might be created according to the Professors' fears. The professors' fear of the unknown savage gives life to the Barbarians. Jewel, the prince of the Barbarians, in response to Marianne's question, explains the purpose of the way they do their hair and paint their faces, “It makes us more frightening” (HV 24). They act as savages, because the Professors expect them to. That the Barbarians are, in fact, perhaps what Foucault calls “a discursive construct which power works through” (101) is an anxiety Jewel himself has when he says “Sometimes I dream I am an invention of the Professors; they project their fears outside on us so they won't stay in the villages, infecting them, and so, you understand, they can try to live peacefully there” (HV 82).

However hard they may try, there are still causes of disruption in the



Professors' community, the orderly society where every member has his/her function to fulfil. Sometimes it is a repressed Worker gone mad, or an old man who no longer has a function in this society, writing on the wall "I AM AN OLD MAN AND I WANT THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT NOW" (HV 9). As a typical civilisation, its fear of death is so great that it is severely repressed. *The Professors' community* is repressed to the extent that there is no liveliness, and discipline contradictorily makes the community "like a grave" (HV 15). At other times, spiteful, discontented women, who are typically repressed and allotted domestic work in this patriarchal society, sometimes run away with the Barbarians when they attack the village, or at other times go mad as in the case of the old nurse of Marianne. She killed her father with an axe and poisoned herself with some chemical used for household chores, as if in silent accusation. However such disruptors are dismissed when the Professors say they are only "maladjusted" (HV 15). Marianne, the spiteful discontented heroine of this novel, is kidnapped out of the community by Jewel, but she can clearly see that she is dismissed in the same way.

What Marianne finds outside the power of the Professors is ironically another power structure. Though it is the Professors who impose on the Barbarians the status of the savage, the Barbarians, in return, unwittingly internalise the notion of savageness and put themselves into a mould made by the Professors. In this story, the mould is made by the ex-Professor, Dr Donally, who pledges vengeance upon the community from which he has been expelled. Dr Donally recreates Jewel into the sign of the "Other" according to his (ex-Professor's) idea of Otherness.

The way in which Dr Donally makes use of dress, face-painting, and tattoo is another example that suggests Carter's fascination with their transforming power. He makes the whole tribe into "the Other" of the Professors' imagination, in order to try to make the tribe acquire a mysterious strength against the latter. Tattooing is one of the processes of transforming Jewel. Thus begins the fall of Jewel. As Butler

succinctly suggests, if one chooses to remain as the “Other,” it is never possible to subvert the system, but one is condemned to remain forever as the “Other,” because the “Other” only reflects the power’s wishful image, and therefore belongs to the power system (Gender Trouble 79).<sup>9</sup> The interdependency of the power and the “Other” reveals itself. To achieve the utmost “Otherness,” it is necessary for Dr Donally to make use of the power, that is, to make Jewel marry Marianne, a daughter of a Professor. The marriage scene is especially Gothic. Jewel in a red robe and Marianne in an old yellowed wedding dress with pearls, make an impressive couple. It is not a ceremony for their benefit but for that of the community. It is to impress the members of the community with Jewel’s special power as a chosen conqueror, since, by marrying and uniting with an enemy, Jewel represents the ultimate conqueror, and additional power derived from the enemy is supposed to be introjected by Jewel. It is obvious that Dr Donally uses the Professors as the origin of power.

No matter whether Jewel has had power of his own, his power after he assumes the role of the “Other” designed by Dr Donally is an artificial one. And this power, like the power of the patriarchal Professors’ society, needs to be guarded heavily by discipline. It is revealed, when Jewel punishes his brother, Precious, on account of letting the enemy through while eating honey, that he is merely an agent of the power. Jewel becomes “mechanical” (HV 113), only an agent of the law. He later says to Precious, “It’s not my fault” (HV 113): it is not, since it is not himself that controls him.

Unlike the characters in her later novels, Jewel here does not seem to be able to materialise the quality which his fabricated self assumes. As I have shown, Jewel is made into an agent of a power but not the power itself, because he remains the “Other.” His autonomy and authenticity is lost. He is only an art of the skin, an

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<sup>9</sup> Butler insists that it is self-defeating to rely on the very stability and reproduction of the paternal law, if the law is sought to be displaced.

object, a creation of Dr Donally:

“I am trying to invent him as I go along but I am experiencing certain difficulties,” complained Donally. “He won’t keep still long enough.

Creation from the void is more difficult than it would seem” (HV 94).

As Donally reckons, Jewel is only an art on the skin without a body, fragile and perishable. Nor is he real, as Marianne perceives:

He threw a soup tureen at her; it missed, of course, since neither it nor he were real.... He ... silently approached her during the butchery hour and daubed her face with his bloody hands, an action she construed immediately and immediately despised, as if he were helplessly trying to prove his autonomy to her when she knew all the time he vanished like a phantom at daybreak, or earlier, at the moment when her body ceased to define his outlines (HV 89).

He might only be protecting the tattooed skin of the tribe itself, without any autonomy of his own. Jewel himself recognises that he is only an agent for Donally, when he says, “I think he’d like to flay me and hang me up on the wall, I think he’d really like that. He might even make me up into a ceremonial robe and wear me on special occasions” (HV 86).

Marianne’s role in this novel is rather ambiguous. Although she is a narrator, she does not take up the site of transformation, or subversion herself. It is Jewel, who becomes the site of conflict between Marianne and Donally; the former is defiant of the power structure, the latter is eager to create one. If Donally tries to create a flawless ideal power structure, between ultimate power and the convenient “Other,” Marianne does not fit in his scheme. Although she comes from the Professors’ community, she does not really belong to the power. However, she is not to be moulded into the idealised contained “Other” either. What happens on the body of Jewel, then, is remarkable. Marianne starts to effect her power on him, the

power derived from an uncontrollable feminine sexuality which cannot be quite contained and consequently Donally starts to lose his grip on Jewel. By making love and becoming pregnant, she somehow starts filling his unreal body. The defeat of Donally is made apparent when Jewel refuses to be called by Donally by his name, rejecting Donally's definition. However, when Marianne takes more power than Donally in his tribe, ironically, Jewel loses the ground of his existence, because he is Donally's agent. To be the powerful "Other", Jewel needs Donally. The power and the "Other" are mutually dependent, as Foucault claims.

When Jewel cannot go beyond his role as a protective skin, the end of the novel becomes inevitable. Jewel cannot assume power without Donally. When Donally is killed, Jewel has to die, too. The transformation of the body into an object is so complete that Jewel is now heavily dependent on Dr Donally for his existence. It demonstrates the danger of assuming the notion of "otherness" which in itself presupposes the dominant order. He is a picture to be yearned for, but not to be had. It is reflected in Marianne's bitter comment:

"What I'd like best would be to keep you in preserving fluid in a huge jar on the mantelpiece of my peaceful room, where I could look at you and imagine you. And that's the best place for you, you walking masterpiece of art.... You, you're nothing but the furious invention of my virgin nights" (HV 137).

The disruption and resistance which Marianne embodies nearly succeed in transforming Jewel. However, Jewel's transformation, as we have seen, falls short of full completion. He turns back to Donally, and he makes the gesture against the Evil Eye to Marianne, since she is the enemy of the power which Donally embodies and whose agent Jewel is. The disruptive power of feminine sexuality has not yet fully developed in this novel, and we have to wait a little longer for it to blossom.

Love: Tragedy of a Woman Who seeks to be the Subject

In her fifth novel, Love<sup>10</sup>, published in 1971, the issue of the body as a site of displacement and manipulation of power at the scene of love is further pursued. If Jewel in Heroes and Villains is the one who is a picture of “otherness” utilised for the existing social order, Annabel in Love at the beginning of the novel is a real “Other,” who refuses to be such a picture, hence out of the society/other dichotomy. While Jewel provides a site of displacement for the society to turn the horrible into something manageable, Annabel refuses to even become such a space. While Jewel is an indispensable “other” in relation to the society, Annabel is outside such an opposition. The order and this picture of otherness are interdependent, supporting each other, but Annabel is in no relation to the society. And by estranging herself from the power operation, she condemns herself even further into that “otherness” which society can then ignore. It is a self-defeating effort to recourse to the “otherness” of femininity, and inevitably Annabel ends up killing herself.

The first half of the tragedy of Annabel is that, although it is impossible for her to maintain such a “body-less” status while at the same time to be a working agent in it, she makes an attempt at that nonetheless (for the sake of love perhaps) and, as a matter of course, fails. In order to survive in this homo-social society, she should have been a manageable other, the reflector of male desire, an object, a body.

When she fails, what Annabel does in the latter half of the novel is to search for autonomy, subjectivity and a self with which to invert the system. However, her mistake is that she simply reverses the place of a subject and object, and the power structure of the order remains intact. What she does not change is the system itself. The subject she takes up is “a masculine subject of desire” (Butler, Gender Trouble vii), which still requires the body of a woman as a site of displacement of its fear, and

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<sup>10</sup> Angela Carter, Love [1971] (London: Vintage, 1997).

therefore, Annabel with her female body is trapped in an impasse. Even though she successfully takes up the state of a subject, her body betrays her into that of an object.

It is the tragedy of the woman who cannot conform to society, rejecting object identification and claiming to be a subject, but who is quite mistaken in choosing this way to achieve her goal. It is not enough for a woman to invert the subject/object opposition. Within the gender system of this order, there cannot be such a thing as love between two equal parties, unless one believes in the illusion in which she diligently assumes the expected role while pretending that both are fulfilling their desire using the objectified body of the other. This is depressing. No wonder Carter discarded the realistic narrative after this novel, assuming that the realistic method cannot push beyond the current social system. Carter wrote this novel in 1969,<sup>11</sup> that is when she “stopped being married” (qtd O’Day 46)<sup>12</sup> and set off for Japan. This is the novel written around the time she started the adventure, and consequently it marks a significant transition in her professional life as well as private one.

As if revealing the fabricated basis of this society, the infrastructure of this novel is deliberately precarious from the beginning. Events are gathered collage-like and achronologically with no coherent explanation offered. (The re-ordering of the story is given in the middle of the novel, where the entry of the institution suggests a reason for events.) The status of the half-brothers, Lee and Buzz Collins, is also insecure, since they are in the middle of the period of social change at the end of the sixties, uncertain of their place in an increasingly mobile society. Their fathers are only vaguely remembered as beings who have scarcely provided them with a place in history. In order to survive in this uncertain world, they change their names, as if

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<sup>11</sup> See Sue Roe’s “The Disorder of Love: Angela Carter’s Surrealist Collage,” Flesh and the Mirror, ed. Lorna Sage, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Marc O’Day, “Mutability is Having a Field Day’: The Sixties Aura of Angela Carter’s Bristol Trilogy,” Flesh and the Mirror, ed. Lorna Sage. 24-59.

making a new myth of their past and as if trying to make a clean break from their mother who is perceived as a threat. However, the fact that their mother has gone mad always hovers at the back of their consciousness, threatening to disrupt their fragilely created ground, their uneasily fabricated legitimacy. It might be suggestively interesting when you compare these brothers' situation to that of Japanese society with its fabricated history and its imported lawful Father and its repressed, but ever threatening, Mother.

Even though this society maims every single member by repressing what it cannot control (such as sexuality and death), its maiming effect on the individual is particularly emphasised with Lee and Buzz, since they lack a secure social position. While society holds itself together by creating a story, history and myth, the Collins brothers do not have such a concrete narrative to provide their passport into society. Against the threat of dissolution, Lee and Buzz protect each other in a homosexually tinged relationship, a typically male solution in this society. Irigaray points out that "all economic organization is homosexual" (171), though this sexuality is heavily repressed and the relationship looks only homo-social.

The lawful, institutional teacher Lee and the outlaw brother Buzz, who is a picture of "otherness" in this story, look at first sight as though opposed to each other, but they are not. As Donally and Jewel in Heroes and Villains, they are interdependent, using the other's presence as a secure footing. They both desperately try to exist within the social order, or rather, try to make a miniature society of their own, with two of them making an imaginary whole. Together, they make one perfect member of society. The detachment from society gained through their relationship to each other effectively postpones their need to face their individual precariousness. Carter explains, "Their mother's madness, their orphaned state, their aunt's politics and their arbitrary identity formed in both a savage detachment for they found such detachment necessary to maintain their

precarious autonomy" (Love 11). The one gives the other a sense of origin, a *raison d'être*, and some sense of authority. By sticking together, and therefore by replicating a microcosmic version of the power, they protect themselves from perishing at the hands of a powerful society. "[T]hey stayed together because they were alone in a world with which both felt themselves subtly at variance" (Love 11). However this imaginary secure bond in their homo-social relationship requires repression of overt sexual feelings, which are transferred onto a woman: the common enemy to the brothers. She is the substitute upon whom they can project the hatred they feel toward their own weakness. Because woman is a fearful object, she must be made small, objectified, so that she can be easily handled and easily dismissed.

Buzz, who has "the classic male fear of the *vagina dentata*" (O'Day 53) uses pornography for this purpose. Pornography, the formula in which the body is reduced to interchangeable parts, as Punter describes, "is in fact an emblem for the weakness of the body of the masturbator himself, which seeks through endless repetition to discover a bulwark against dissolution" (Punter 210). His weapon is a camera, which he uses to turn people into immobile harmless objects, open to manipulation.

Similarly Lee uses a woman as a bulwark against dissolution. A woman must be a reflector who can assure him that he is the proper (male) member of the society. She has to be a faithful mirror. And as in the examples discussed before, he masquerades himself, this time, with a dazzling smile:

As a very early age, Lee discovered the manipulative power of his various smiles and soon learned to utilize them in order to smooth his passage through life for he liked to have an easy time of it; that was what he called being happy. He selected a tentative and encouraging smile; it clicked into position so smoothly you would have sworn he wore his heart upon his face (Love 19).



He plays with appearances, while believing the manipulating hand of the puppet-show belongs to him, as in the case of an *Irezumi*-wearer or a transvestite.

For Lee, a woman has to have a significance only in relation to himself if she is to serve him. In the case of the wife of his philosophy tutor, it is an imaginary transgressive power deriving from “coupling with the wife of a man who taught him ethics” (Love 18) and also the pleasure of undermining the image of an ideal middle class marriage. He separates the appearance and the nature, believing he handles them both well. For Lee, the wife of the tutor is a pure object of sexual fulfilment, and he, assuming she considers him the same way, “was sure he was irrelevant to her and their experience appeared to cross over one another’s in a perfectly abstract manner with no recognition of each other’s individual natures” (Love 18). He could not understand, therefore, why she got upset when she found out he was not faithful to her. He “was deeply offended and demanded, shocked: ‘Here, how can you possibly find sex degrading?’” (Love 22). There is deep division between both sexes. For him, sex and affection are far apart. But not for this woman who does not even have a name. She is unimportant to Lee. Not a human being; just an object.

When she confronts Lee with her accusation, he is actually being faced with a crack in his rigidly separated world order, but he does not recognise it as such. It appears to him fully only later, when Annabel comes along.

Annabel is not like any other women he has met before. Unlike the Collins brothers who create their own story to make themselves related to the world, she does not have a story, nor want one. She does not see coherences among things, no past, no future. For Annabel, there is no secret truth lurking behind appearances, as she sees “only appearances” (Love 36). She takes “too subjective a view” (Love 3) to allow for others’ intentions. She changes “the appearance of the real world” (Love 3) according to her senses, and does not reflect others’ desire but her own. That she falls into a relationship with Lee and Buzz is fatal for such a woman who, until then,

has “not suspected that everyday, sensuous human practice might shape the real world” (Love 4).

In return, she proves fatal for both of the Collins brothers. Her real “otherness” disrupts the brothers’ imaginary whole union with each other, revealing the fake “otherness” of Buzz, and exposing the formerly repressed disruptive homosexual drive between them, which is also tinged with sadism/masochism.

Annabel is, from the beginning, not an ideal object of desire for Lee who wants a woman to reflect his masculinity, though the inevitability of Lee loving Annabel is simply a consequence of the law of desire. Annabel is the ultimate “Other” who Lee and Buzz are driven to desire/fear, and her ultimate “otherness” is to disrupt their protecting unit.

When they first meet, she “covered her face with her hands so he could not watch her anymore” (Love 15). With Annabel, Lee does not see an image of himself as an attractive male with a perfect smile, but is forced to see that his rigidly created dichotomous order is flawed, as Annabel resists the function of the mirror in his narcissistic desire. She refuses to be reduced to an object such as the wife of the philosophy tutor, serving the brothers to ease their fear; she has not learned the socially required code of behaviour as the manageable other. She refuses to be such a site of transference. Actually she does not even have a body on to which Lee can transfer his desire/fear. She thinks of herself not as a body “but more as a pair of disembodied eyes” (Love 30). She is a seeing subject, not an object. She remains the fearful and enigmatic “Other,” and Lee is at a loss:

Looking in the mirror, he saw the face of a stranger to any of them with features which had been filtered through his wife’s eyes and subjected to so many modifications in the process that it was no longer his own (Love 26).

A proper object, proper only in terms of masculine desire, must reflect the desired

narcissistic image of the gazer. But the images Annabel produces confuse Lee more than ever:

She began a series of pictures of him.... Over the years, she drew and painted him again and again in so many different disguises that at last he had to go to another woman to find out the true likeness of his face (Love 25).

As an ambiguous member of society, he desperately needs a woman's body as a bulwark against fear, which can bolster his authority and power. But Annabel does not provide such a body. She is useless as a body for Lee, though he can still love Annabel, as affection and sex, feeling and body, are differentiated in Lee's perception.

The problem for Annabel lies precisely in this body-less-ness. She chooses to be a ghost, ignoring her real body, up until the middle of the novel, when she attempts the second suicide. Until then, she remains those "disembodied eyes": an observer. She cannot understand what love is, because it cannot be seen, and all she can see is "only appearances." While living with Lee, she learns that people (and especially Lee) believe in love but, in stark contrast to Lee, *she can understand it only* in relation to the superficial images of the pornographic photographs which Buzz gives to her:

A glum, painted young woman, the principal actress (torso and legs sheathed in black leather, sex exposed) eyed the camera indifferently as though it were no business of hers she was blocked at every orifice.... Annabel, comforted and reassured by these indifferent arrangements of bizarre intersecting lines, became convinced they told a true story. For herself, all she wanted in life was a bland, white, motionless face like that of the photographic whore so she could live a quiet life behind it, because she was so often terrified when the pictures around her began to move, as she thought, of their own accord and she could not

control them.

So these photographs were cards in her private tarot pack and signified love (Love 4).

What she needs from Lee is that fixed and controlled appearance of “love” which, she expects, to protect her from the menacing images surrounding her. However, what Lee sees in her is different. As always, he makes up a story, a romance:

The longer he stared into her eyes, the greater grew his confusion until, at last, with both relief and fear, he saw her newly magic outline were those of a thing that needed to be loved. He thought: “Oh, God, I should have recognized her sooner.” ... But, even if they now acknowledged the state of love, their lovemaking was still permeated by unease for she understood the play of surfaces only superficially.... The nature of the dazzlement was dimly apprehended, not known (Love 24).

Lee, here also, claims that there is a difference between the nature and the appearance, even though Annabel sees no such division. Their expectations are not congruent. The easiest solution for a woman, as the hostesses in the bar in “Poor Butterfly” recognise, is to put on the mask of the ideal woman to satisfy the male customers’ desire. But Annabel refuses to be such an object. What she wants is control: “She bemusedly resented his privacy since she felt privacy was her exclusive property and nobody else had much right to it” (Love 33). She is the one who calmly controls what is around her. She does not have to have a body, in that case. Seeing eyes are enough.

However, she is forced to realise they are not enough to get what she wants, when Lee, who “had to go to another woman,” makes love to Carolyn in front of her. The way Annabel behaves is totally beyond Lee’s expectation, and he grows vengeful. Once in a game of chess, Lee took her queen and Annabel hit him. As a punishment

for the wayward girl, he beat her. But again her reaction was unforeseen. She showed “a strangely joyous face to him” and he perceived himself as “a despicable object” (Love 40). The affair with Carolyn partly comes as his revenge, because Annabel does not act according to the code, and Carolyn does. She is an easily manageable other, whom he can reduce to a stranger at his will by saying “I don’t know you at all, do I?” (Love 48). After he discovers Annabel’s suicide attempt, he makes love in confusion to Carolyn again, “which was, in the strictest sense, gratuitous. Because she was female, naked and available, he fucked her...” (Love 50). The revenge has a certain effect upon Annabel, but quite different from what one would expect. He makes a show of it in order to hurt her love. Certainly she gets hurt but less than expected, because the act puts Lee beyond her control, “lost to her in a secret, ultimate privacy” (Love 44). Her body-less ghost-like state of “seeing eyes” betrays her. When Annabel sees the contorted face of Carolyn “not bland and impassive like that of the whore in the photograph” (Love 44), she realises that she is missing something. In an exaggeration of this recognition, she puts the ring of Buzz on her forefinger, and says, “Now I’m invisible” (Love 44). It is the realisation of her marginal status that hurts her.

As an explanation of the motive behind her second attempt at suicide, Carter writes:

If she felt relief and even pleasure each time she herself evaded real contact with him, knowing the magic castle of herself remained unstormed, she thought perhaps he kept the key to the castle, anyway, and one day he might turn against it and rebel. But when she saw rebellion in action, she was forced to desperate measures to disarm him for she might, possibly, perhaps, hopefully, be able by these means to turn an event that threatened to disrupt her self-centred structure into a fruitful extension of it (Love 45).

The novel is divided in two parts, that is, before and after Annabel's second suicide attempt, between what is a brief psychoanalysis of the characters, and a "scientific" explanation provided for her disorder. It is a retelling of the story so far, with a head and a tail, cause and effect. An attempt at ordering the disorder is made and Annabel is pronounced mad. Now that she is officially someone to be taken care of, and loved, she is trivialised, pitified and marginalised. A typical treatment of the unknown and incomprehensible is for the forces of social order to construct a recognisable label as "mad" or "sick," thus safely removing the disruptive being into a hospital or prison so as not to disturb the rest of the society.

While Lee's formerly rigidly differentiated world suffers from total disruption, a drastic change occurs to Annabel, too, in the middle of the novel. After she finds that she cannot "incorporate this manifestation of his absolute otherness anywhere into her mythology, which was an entirely egocentric universe" (Love 44-5), she makes up her mind to discard her status of body-less "seeing eyes," and to take up a body, resolving "to be visible all the time" (Love 61). She decides not to be marginalised any longer, and instead, using her body, she starts a new adventure to discover the way to incorporate the otherness in the act of love, as Carolyn demonstrates in front of her. This move has an instant outcome, so it seems to her, as if her controlling power starts working straight away, when she sees "him drawn towards her whether he willed or not, as if she were a magnetic stone" (Love 61).

However, this turns out to be a step further towards a tragedy for Annabel. Though she takes up a body, it does not mean she takes up the status of an object of desire. Before the hospitalisation, Annabel uses her eyes and paintings as an expression. Now she uses her body and action as her new tools. She still wants the status of a subject who controls its surroundings. What she does then is to invert the system. She becomes the subject and reduces Lee to the object. The order is turned upside down. She tries to become part of the dominant order to play the

same game as the Collins brothers, though the game is incompatible with her femaleness. Her body, then, puts Annabel in a pitfall.

Lee, obeying the command of the order, "the moral imperative, to love her" (Love 62), tries to cut his dependence on Buzz, with whom he had previously made a defensive union against fear by trying to form a new interdependent relationship with Annabel. The move is doomed, however, because it is impossible to make a bulwark against fear in cooperation with the source of it.

No longer is the world run by the former order to which Lee used to belong. It is Annabel who is the authority now. Even time flows according to her, and Lee's alarm clock is put into a bin (Love 72). She destroys the former order, and builds a new one, though, ironically, this order is only an inverted version of the old one, with its deficiencies and all. Now this new order needs to repress the incomprehensible, the unreasonable and the unknown, because they are too threatening.

Annabel persuades Lee to tattoo her name on his chest, so that she can assure herself he is hers. It is simply her way of signing her belongings, or better still, her way of giving love a concrete and manageable form. All she wants is fixed images around her, and, in order not to be confused by ever elusive love, she wants their love to have a solid visible form as well. At the beginning, this new order seems to be working successfully for Annabel, since the world around her grows harmless by and by:

The world unshelled itself or she unshelled the world and she found, beneath the crust of spiked armour, a kernel of plasticine limply begging to be rendered into forms. As she grew more confident this was so, she drew a final picture of Lee as a unicorn whose horn had been amputated.... She guessed the institution of a new order of things in which she was an active force rather than an object as the mercy of every wind that blew; no longer bewitched, she became

herself a witch (Love 77).

She is now in control of appearances, stealing Lee's dazzling smile and masquerading, all of which are old techniques used in the former order. She now uses the power of vision, as Lee used to do. She even doubts if Lee exists at all when she is not beside him "to project her idea of him upon him" (Love 79), as strong as she is sure that he is "her creature" (Love 80).

When Buzz comes back with malign intention to disrupt this newly made order, she is careless with Lee's feeling, because he is her object with which she can do whatever she will. Lee is forced to witness the repetition of actions where one cheats on the other in front of him/her, though this time, the subject and the object are exchanged. The order is, indeed, inverted. For Annabel, Buzz is now her object, which she believes she can control at her will now that she is omnipotent. She believes she can control all her surroundings.

However Carter shows that this inversion of power is by no means to be welcomed by feminists. Ironically, the structure, though inverted, retains its drawbacks as well, one of which is that, in such an opposition between a subject and an object, they are inseparably interdependent. Annabel, who has reduced Lee and Buzz to her objects, cannot now, more than ever, do away with them. They become the indispensable other who is "negative but essential" (Love 85) for Annabel. She needs them to assure her of her own omnipotence.

Firstly Buzz disappoints her. During the course of love making with Buzz, Annabel is confronted by "a fissure of tiny cracks in her scrupulous imaginary edifice" and becomes "uneasy" (Love 92). Contrary to her expectation, Buzz is acting on his own accord, quite irrelevant to her desire, from a motive which has hardly anything to do with her, that of avenging his brother, Lee. She is "confronted with great divergence between her desires and her actuality" (Love 94). Her erotic desire to incorporate love using her body is not fulfilled. For despite her conviction that she is



omnipotent and wielding subjective power, Buzz treats her as an object as he has always done. For him, Annabel is still object, just like his mother had been.<sup>13</sup>

However, she is not prepared to tolerate this behaviour now that she believes she is the centre of the world, controlling all the surroundings. Out of desperation, she attempts to put the clock back by making love with Lee, but it only proves to be another disappointment as it is “a mutual rape” in which she is afraid “he might take her too far, would take her to a place where she might lose herself.” She asks Lee to stop it, saying “I was mistaken when I wanted it” (Love 97), but she is refused. During this act Annabel suddenly realises that she, after all, is an object; a common object of desire/fear for the Collins brothers. She feels “confounded” (Love 102) and bitterly says, “Then Buzz could have made it properly with me if you had been there” (Love 99) and Lee also recognises the homosexual attachment to Buzz at last:

the circumstances and the residual traces of his brother on the nameless girl's body had given him a peculiar satisfaction.... [I]t had never entered his head for years, not until now, when it seemed he would never again sleep with his wife without his brother's invisible company (Love 98).

It is her body that betrays her. She builds an impossible expectation around her body, and is disappointed to find that it only reduces her to an object. The body is beyond her imaginary omnipotent control. If the body of a woman is to be repressed for the order to function, so it is for Annabel's inverted version of the order. Her own body is a cause of disruption.

Annabel's final and successful attempt at suicide is this procedure of repression of the body, which is necessary to such a stereotypical order. It is an

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<sup>13</sup> See Carter, Love, 94. “His mother who assured her small, dark son with the infernal conviction of the insane that he was the fruit of all the evil in the world had given him many fears about the physicality of women; all the nightmares that had ever visited him rushed back into his head at once and he flinched back from Annabel's mouth, which numbed him.”

attempt at erasure of her body: the total repression of it.

In preparation for this final act, she elaborately manipulates her appearance, changing the colour of her hair, and making up splendidly. She is “no longer vulnerable flesh and blood” but “inflexible material” or “her own, omnipotent white queen” (Love 104). She clings to her subjective power, aiming at total control over her body. Everything that threatens her autonomy, including her body and Lee, must now go.

It is a tragedy. A tragedy of the woman who makes an attempt at becoming a subject, in a system which is hostile to the body of a woman.

Throughout the sixties, the influence of R.D.Laing upon notions of “the divided self” was repeated in the literature of the time, that is, “the notion that insanity is not an abandonment of the real but a potentially intelligible attempt to achieve ontological security through the expression of a self fragmented by the pressures and violences of a competitive and exploitative society” (Waugh 6).<sup>14</sup> This story of Annabel can be read as such an attempt by a “mad” female. In fact, when Laing brings up the notion of the unembodied self, Annabel is brought forth:

the individual experiences his self as being more or less divorced or detached from his body. *The body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual's own being.* Instead of being the core of his true self, the body is felt as the core of a *false self*, which a detached, disembodied, “inner”, “true” self looks on at with tenderness, amusement, or hatred as the case may be (Laing 69).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Patricia Waugh, Harvest of the Sixties: English Literature and its Background 1960 to 1990 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> R. D. Laing, The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness [1960] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

His notion of true self/false self was later criticised as a product of hierarchical binary thought, and you could say that Annabel demonstrates the limit of Laingian theory. Even though her body-less state is her “true” self, she cannot live in that state. And the “false” self she appropriated to come to terms with society also betrays her, because of its gender implications. Gender makes the matter of the body more complicated than Laing seems to presume. Unless the binary opposition of the subject/Other, the true self/false self collapses, there is no place to live for Annabel, since in her own mythicised world are “the sun and the moon in the sky at the same time” (Love 1), and she herself is “the helpless pivot of the entire universe as if sun, moon, stars and all the hosts of the sky span round upon herself, their volitionless axle” (Love 3). Annabel is a “mad” woman, who cannot live as a masculine subject, nor be contained as the “Other.”

In the Afterword, which was added in 1987, Carter tells what happens to the rest of the characters in the novel which is “Annabel’s coffin” (Love 114). It is an ironic sequel, with its realism exaggerated, in which the limitation of the current system of society is stated where heterosexual love cannot exist happily. She writes:

the essence of naturalist fiction is plausibility; in order to create the willing suspension of disbelief, the writer is forced to allot his or her characters lives that are the most plausible, not the most like life, which, since it is not the product of the human imagination, holds infinite surprises (Love 116).

In this sequel, Buzz is described as carrying on with his embodiment of the image of “otherness” by changing his name again to “Buzzz” and putting on the very quality of “The Masque of the Red Death” (Love 117). Lee, on the other hand, is married to Rosie, an activist of the women’s movement. In his marriage, he also carries on with his warfare, in which he and his wife struggle vainly to obtain the condition of being full subjects. Each one has expectations of the other, but they are incompatible, and

never to be fulfilled within the current order, unless the order itself is radically transformed. This Afterword seems to demonstrate the limitation of an overtly realistic narrative. It may also be an attempt at putting “the sun and moon in the sky at the same time,” for, by adding a realistic documentary touch, it can prevent the story from being regarded as a pure fiction, thus collapsing the fiction/reality dichotomy. Anyway, it marks the end of Carter’s realism era. After this novel, she resolutely moves on to pursue possibilities beyond realistic narrative.

### 3) Carter, the Fantasist

Those four novels we looked at in the previous section clearly show the development of Carter into a fantasist. In this section, I will examine the stories produced during and after her stay in Japan. They mark a strong contrast to the previous fiction, suggesting that Carter came to regard the fantastic mode as the best mode in which to develop subversive narrative strategies as a woman writer. In the first two stories, Carter still struggles with normative binary oppositions and the reductionist trap prepared by the power-relations bound up with the contamination of an inauthentic “Otherness.” However, after this initial phase of writing, Carter begins to produce positive female characters through the development of feminist-postmodernist narrative strategies.

#### The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman<sup>16</sup> was published in 1972, and Angela Carter has said that she wrote it in Japan. She discards realistic narrative altogether in this novel, and extensively explores the formula of desire in a fantastic form pursuing the possibility of transcending the restrictions of realism.

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<sup>16</sup> Angela Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman [1972] (London: Penguin, 1983). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with DH in front of the page number.

There are many Japanese influences apparent in this story, including those of The Tale of Genji.

It is a very Gothic story, employing typically Gothic images and characters throughout. Carter takes advantage of the way in which the “original” Gothic fiction explores the women’s position in society, i.e. that of the fabricated “Other.” Woman in Gothic fiction signifies the mysterious, the uncanny, and the bad: that which has to be contained and controlled by the reason of the male subject. Its gross conceptualisation of woman as the “Other” exposes the artifice contrived by patriarchal power, that is, the fact that this “Other” is none other than a constructed notion, created by power, and to be controlled through power-relations. The “Other” is created to be repressed, since, in this pseudo-struggle between power and the “Other” (which can never fail to end with the victory of the power), the power actually functions to take control. Gothic fiction is, in a way, a model example showing how the power-relations function in the world. It exaggerates and oversimplifies this imposed categorisation of woman as the “Other” to such an extent that its constructedness is exposed.

On the other hand, as we have seen in previous chapters, Gothic motifs, settings such as castles with hidden rooms, haunted mansions, labyrinths, or imageries of ghosts, magic, and possession, which are created so as to accommodate female uncanniness, can also be appropriated by the feminine as strategies for escaping containment. What cannot be contained within the construction of the “Other” reveals itself through Gothic motifs. Such strategies can offer possibilities beyond normative power-relations.

Carter is drawn to the merits of the Gothic mode of narrative, with its fantastic tendency and its analysis of the forms of power-struggle between the masculine subject and the female “Other.”

In this highly playful version of contemporary Gothic fantasy, as in the

“original” Gothic fiction, the lawful identity of the male subject is threatened by the “Other” and oscillates between the law and desire. However, in the end, the “Other” turns out to be nothing more than a construction, a reversed version of the totalitarian power, a mirror image of power itself.

However, let us first look at Desiderio’s picaresque style of travel. The male subject in this novel, Desiderio, is caught up in a classic battle which has been fought since Oedipus. In this instance, it is between the “Minister of Determination,” a typical advocate of reason, and “Doctor Hoffman” who is “waging a massive campaign against human reason itself” (DH 11). Interestingly enough, mirrors are used again as the material which triggers identity transformation. And just as there is no mirror in the house of the masculinist Uncle Philip in *The Magic Toyshop*, the Minister, too, sends “the Determination Police” to break all the mirrors, to stabilise identity and “to keep what was outside, out, and what was inside, in” (DH 12). In contradiction to the Minister, however, Doctor Hoffman makes the most of the mirror. He uses mirrors to project his fabulous visionary trickery, to confound reason altogether.

Since Doctor Hoffman presents himself as the “Other,” Desiderio shows more interest in Doctor Hoffman than in the Minister. It can be said to be a typical reaction by the masculine subject in this power-relation. While the Minister signifies law, security, and order, Doctor Hoffman signifies that which is outside of the law. He promises freedom from the law, and Desiderio feels the seductive pull. It is in this classic region of attraction to the forbidden where horror/desire comes into being.

So starts Desiderio’s pursuit of Doctor Hoffman and Albertina, his daughter, through Gothic landscapes: perfect fictional settings for the power-struggle between patriarchy and the female “Other.” The formation of desire makes abjection and fascination inseparable. Therefore, when the city is in a state of siege, and when

Desiderio is dispatched as an assassin of Doctor Hoffman, his pilgrimage as an attempt to repress what is outside the law is actually simply the other side of the coin of the pursuit of his desire for Albertina. Carter shows the two sides of the "Other" in the two characters, the horrible Doctor Hoffman, and the desirable Albertina, though, of course, in being the daughter of Doctor Hoffman, she is also a relative of the horror.

And it is one of the merits of fantasy, that Carter makes explicit the fact that, by changing her identity all the time, Albertina is only a reflection of Desiderio's desire. Like Albertina, the illusions, mirages, and phantoms produced from the machines of Doctor Hoffman, are also extracted from human desire, in every possible form, as we later find out from the delegate of Doctor Hoffman, the peep-show proprietor.

We have seen in Gothic tales that the woman's body is strongly connected with what is the opposite of reason, with the abject, horror, and the unknown. According to Freud, it is the nature of the human psyche that, though one tries to negate what is outside the law, it never fails to return, and it often comes back in the form of dreams. Carter amusingly takes up this theory to examine how the female body is denied within patriarchy. Albertina makes her first appearance as a transparent skeleton (DH 25), and then as a black swan in Desiderio's dream (DH 31), showing that her actual female body is irrelevant in the creation of desire. Albertina takes whatever form Desiderio fancies. And since he fancies something extraordinary, she becomes such. For Desiderio, Albertina signifies something outside the law, the incomprehensible, "a language of signs which utterly bemused [him] because [he] could not read them" (DH 25). It is not that woman's body induces horror/desire, but that desire writes a certain meaning on her body.

The scene of her appearance in his dream as a black swan is a caricatured version of Freud's theory of the Primal Scene, which supposedly exhibits the

horror/desire toward sexuality. In his dream, Desiderio is “shuddered with dread” (DH 30) at the sight of the black swan, which seems to be alive and dead both at the same time:

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of unknown; I was afraid. I had been afraid when I was a child, when I would lie awake at night and hear my mother panting and grunting like a tiger in the darkness beyond the curtain and I thought she had changed into a beast. Now I was even more afraid than I had been then (DH 30).

This fear is then materialised as Albertina, the black swan. Though it is a swan, it is also obviously a woman with threatening sexuality, as she is in the “original” Gothic tales. It flexes “its neck like a snake about to strike” (DH 30), and Desiderio knows that she is a swan but “also a woman for there issued from her throat a thrilling, erotic contralto” (DH 31). This desirable, but horrible female creature, is then named. The name is written on “a golden collar around her throbbing throat, and on the collar was engraved the single word: ALBERTINA” (DH 31).

Since Albertina is a mere receptacle of the fear/desire of Desiderio, it is as a matter of course that she transforms her shape perpetually, according to his need. And since Desiderio envisions her as the “Other” in order to keep his masculine subject intact, the fulfilment of desire cannot, and must not, happen. For obtaining the object of desire sets up the masculine subject with a fatal encounter with that catastrophic moment I mentioned before, in which the illusory status of his autonomy is exposed.

So, Desiderio’s pilgrimage is a pursuit of his horror/desire, though achieving the goal can result in nothing but disillusionment, and that’s what happens to him. This period of travel is the happiest time for him as it offers him the perpetual postponement of the fulfilment of desire.



As I have mentioned previously, Gothic tales, with their exaggerated binary structure of “man=reason/woman=unreason,” offer the moment of revelation. Like the function of the mirror often used by Carter, it reflects the structure of society, and offers a glimpse of possible subversion. Such an instance occurs in the second chapter, “The Mansion of Midnight,” when Desiderio encounters a typical Gothic heroine, Mary Anne. She represents a romanticised image of a trapped daughter. She is a fairy tale heroine to be saved by the prince, Desiderio. She also reminds us of Aoi, Genji’s first wife, in The Tale of Genji. As I have discussed before, Aoi, as Mary Anne, can only express her emotion in the possessed state. The spirit possession serves her by allowing her to become unusually seductive and also allowing her to vocalise her repressed anger and accusation against Genji. In the case of Mary Anne, too, what has been repressed and can then be released during her somnambulism is her sexuality and her desire. And as in a typical Gothic tale, this woman’s sexuality turns out to be the downfall and trap for the male subject, Desiderio. But this novel exposes the selfish imposition of male desire and the tendency for blame then to be projected onto the female body. After he makes love to the unconscious, innocent Mary Anne who wears “a white calico nightgown such as convent school girls wear” (DH 55) in her somnambulism, the implication of rape is brutally brought to light by the samples of the peep-show proprietor, an agent of Doctor Hoffman:

The awakened girl, in all her youthful loveliness, still clasped in the arms of a lover from whom all the flesh had fallen. He was a grinning skeleton. In one set of phalanges he carried a scythe and with the other pulled out and squeezed a ripe breast from the girl’s bodice while his bony knees nudged apart her thighs. The emblem read: DEATH AND THE MAIDEN (DH 60).

It confronts Desiderio with the fact that his act is a violation of Mary Anne's autonomy. It is carried out without her consent, therefore a rape. The show also exposes the violent manipulation of woman in fairy tales, such as "Sleeping Beauty," in which a victimised heroine is saved by the kiss of a prince, though she only moves from one physical subjugation to another. This chapter works as a mirror, as mentioned before, to reflect and reveal the social structure, and as if to support it, the mirror motif appears several times. Desiderio, the morning after the love making, talks with Mary Anne, who sits in front of a dressing table. He writes of "the disquieting" effect in talking with "a person in a mirror" (DH 57). But as if to show the norm in the power relation, that the male subject needs only a reflection of his desire on a woman's body, Desiderio tells us, "I do not know if, for a moment, I saw another person glance briefly out of her eyes for I was not looking at her in the mirror, only myself (DH 57).

The river people in the third chapter are also such a reflection of Desiderio's desire. He is saved by one of the river people, whose face is "almost the face I had seen so recently in Mary Anne's mirror" (DH 66). They are Desiderio's invention, as it were. They seem to be a transferred realisation of Desiderio's longing for the lost maternal body. Their language is not fully developed; it is primitive, and "a kind of singing" (DH 70), the sort of language we might link with the notion of semiotic. Their society is ruled by superstition, a logic "which owe[s] little or nothing to the world outside" (DH 70), and they have no written history, their language consists only of "a simple past and a continuous present" without "further temporal shading" (DH 71). They live therefore "with a complex, hesitant but absolute immediacy" (DH 71). They are Desiderio's image of "Otherness." They seem to Desiderio to be living in a state before the paternal law.

However, as always, desire and horror come in tandem. As if materialising

Desiderio's hidden fear of the pre-law mother, the river people, especially their women, gradually assume an uncanny guise. Their motherly attitude comes along with the "same, stereotyped way, like benign automata, so what with that and their musical box speech, it [is] quite possible to feel they [are] not fully human" (DH 73). Though he has "the strongest sense of home-coming" (DH 76) and acquires a new name, he becomes "less sure of [himself] among the river people." After all, they are the "Other" who has to be repressed to set up the masculine subject. He cannot become one of the river people, as long as he sees them as the "Other," as long as he clings to his status as the masculine subject. When he is confronted with an intensified female sexuality, especially that of Mama (appropriately named) in a tribe whose women have elongated clitorises, he begins to "feel like a love slave" (DH 85). He starts to fear that he might be losing his autonomy, and that what he has to protect is his masculine subjectivity.

It is interesting to note that Carter employs a lot of Japanese customs in describing the river people. The chains made of "hundreds of little birds folded out of paper" (DH 74) are indeed still being made in Japan as a wishful cure for the sick. The "split-toed socks" and "a short, immaculate, white starched apron which had armholes and tied at the back of both neck and waist" (DH 72) have almost certainly originated from the Japanese equivalent. The way girls behave when addressed directly, that is, "hiding their mouths with their hands in a pretty pretence of being too intimidated to reply" (DH 76) is also a convention of Japanese society. Carter might have sensed a hidden maternal surge in Japanese society too repressed to be noticed on the surface. Or she might be suggesting the strong fear of women in Japanese culture.

Moreover, Nao-Kurai's eldest daughter, to whom Desiderio is engaged to be married, is called Aoi, which is the same name as Genji's first wife. As in the Tale of Genji, the obliging bride-to-be, Aoi, turns out to be a threatening figure in the end,

designated to kill Desiderio on the wedding night so the whole tribe may consume him. But might Carter not be suggesting that it is their repressed and hidden feminine sexuality which threatens the masculine subject? Or the implication might rather be that a woman is constructed as a frightening figure as a result of repression. In fact, the novel goes on to suggest that Desiderio realises that Mama and Aoi are “the old flesh and the young flesh which [are], in some sense, interchangeable” (DH 91) and Aoi is nothing but “a programmed puppet” (DH 92), suggesting that their horror does not originate from themselves, but from the law of the tribe.

I think Carter makes it clear here that Desiderio’s longing to return to the maternal body, and his desire for the “Other,” only lead to the expression of an ontological fear of losing his identity altogether. Indeed, he creates the “Other” in order to protect his own self intact, and there is no way he can “return” to the maternal body. In fact, this structure is fictionalised when Desiderio finds out that Aoi is about to kill him so the whole tribe can eat him. In the power-relation in which Desiderio is implicated, Mother has no alternative but to be desirable and horrible at the same time.

The chapters in this novel comprise a structure like that of Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels, in which the male protagonist visits different places and find in each one of them a satiric new perspective. In fact, the allusion is explicitly made when Desiderio finds this story as a textbook for Nao-Kurai. Just as Gulliver is offered a new perspective on society, and its cultural conventions, so is Desiderio. What comes to light is the precariousness of the dominant power’s autonomy and mastership. The fabricated “Other” confronts him with her over-exaggerated fictitiousness, thus revealing that there remains something quite uncontained and uncontainable within the allotted status of the “Other.”

In the fourth chapter, an even more drastic change of perspective occurs to

Desiderio. He finds himself travelling with the peep show proprietor as his nephew, among other fair members. In this close encounter with a delegate of Doctor Hoffman, he first finds a crack in his expectations of Doctor Hoffman. As I mentioned before, he is strangely attracted to Doctor Hoffman as a figure representing the ultimately powerful "Other" beyond the law. However, to Desiderio's disillusionment, Doctor Hoffman's theory is not the all-inclusive, multiple, infinite one, but rather a simple, selective, exclusive one. Showing the set of samples, the peep show proprietor explains:

"They are symbolic constituents of representations of the basic constituents of the universe. If they are properly arranged, all the possible situations in the world and every possible mutation of those situations can be represented" (DH 96).

Desiderio's response to this explanation, "Like the Minister's computer bank?" (DH 96) is so apt as to reveal the fundamental structure of the dominant power and the fabricated "Other." The "Other" is only a construction of power which allows transference of its fear onto it: they can only be a mirror-image of each other. It is a matter of course that Doctor Hoffman's samples are similar to the Minister's computer bank.

In this chapter, the relation of visual images and time, in particular, is the focus. All of the members of the travelling fair have an unusual visual appearance, which makes Desiderio feel out of place: visual images perform all kinds of tricks. And it is mentioned that, because the travelling fair sets up exactly the same fair everywhere in the world, it "acknowledge[s] no geographical location or temporal situation" (DH 98). Another important analysis is that, thanks to the invention of cinematography, visual images can even store time, "for it offers us nothing less than the present tense experience of time irrefutably past" (DH 102). It seems a modern day triumph over time. People now can enjoy a sense of control over the past,

present and the future. Actually, the implication here goes further that cinematography or visual trickery can manipulate human perception and stimulate desire. It is an abuse of, and violence to the human heart that these technological devices make possible. Doctor Hoffman is the most overt abuser of this technique, though consumer society, everywhere in the world, uses the same techniques to rouse desire in people. Visual illusions are used as a form of violent brainwashing, in manipulation of desire. When the acrobat brothers rape Desiderio, the implication of violence in the abuse of image control is made more than clear. Desiderio is surrounded by "so many mirrors" and by "now eighteen and sometimes twenty-seven and at one time, thirty-six brilliant eyes" (DH 116). As we have seen, eyes are the symbol of power, and Desiderio is overpowered and raped. The manipulation of vision here is clearly described as a totalitarian, coercive method, intrinsic to patriarchal power.

It is significant that Mendoza, Doctor Hoffman's former colleague, remarks, "Lumière was not the father of the cinema; it was Sergeant Bertrand, the violator of graves" (DH 102). The cinema offers power, an illusory mastery over death and the fulfilment of its ultimate desire. In fact, when the dead are revived in the cinema, the distinction between the dead and the living is blurred. Such confusion, induced by cinematography, however, might only intensify the fear of death in people. Even though the film might be able to revive the image of the dead, the dead are the dead in reality, and the exaltation caused by the film image might only fortify the sense of loss of the bereaved. Though cinematography enables humans to enjoy an illusory control over death, in fact death is made to have an even more powerful and immediate influence on the living, and its threat does not decrease. It is, therefore, ironic, that while Doctor Hoffman, on the one hand, uses visual trickery to rule the world, as if he is controlling life and death, on the other hand, in fact, he is actually a man grieving over his wife's death, which he cannot quite accept. The similarities

between Doctor Hoffman and the Minister are again exposed. Both are working within the power-relation and neither can accept death as the real other. Doctor Hoffman frantically tries to bring death under control using the trick of visual images, and as for the Minister, his goal is the ultimate control over the uncontrollable.

The fifth and sixth chapter, consequently, introduce the existence of the uncontrollable to us. An earthquake destroys the peep-show samples, and produces the rampant images that are not controlled by Doctor Hoffman. The dominant figure in these two chapters, the Count, is another Gothic figure. He is an extremist and though he is one of the masculine subjects in this power-relation, since his self-obsession is so intense, Doctor Hoffman cannot exert his power over him. He is an exaggerated caricature of the masculine subject, as seen in Gothic tales, such as Lewis's The Monk. Doctor Hoffman and the Count are in fact very similar, though whereas Doctor Hoffman wants control in the outside world, the Count looks inside, for he is interested in nobody but himself. His desire is to "negate the world" (DH 123). While Doctor Hoffman tries to manipulate the "Other" in the world, the Count grapples with the "Other" in himself: the female "Other" in himself. He desires total autonomy as a masculine subject, which must include control over his own life and death, the secret to which the feminine unknown seems to hold the key. Any other external influence, including the one from the female "Other" in himself, is detestable to him. For him, there is no God, because he is God. He is the master of all.

Ironically then, he is totally dependent on the slave, Lafleur. As in the Hegelian Master-Slave narrative, in order to maintain his mastership, the Count needs Lafleur to be his slave. When he cries "Watch me! Watch me!" (DH 125) during the act of sadistically humiliating Lafleur, his dependence on the others is exposed. He needs to be seen and therefore, paradoxically, gives the watcher an immense power over himself. Because it is the female "Other" that he wants to

control ultimately, the Count cannot help becoming a sadist and a masochist at the same time. Though he enjoys the sense of mastership in torturing another's body, the sense is not perfect, as he knows the female "Other" remains in his body, too. Therefore, he is driven to travel the world on and on, "only to discover hitherto unknown methods of treating flesh" (DH 126). And this "Otherness" of the flesh is nothing but an idea created by the Count himself. He sees himself, or rather wants to see himself, as the ultimate masculine subject, i.e. the phallus. He does not want to be part of humanity, but wants to be the name of the Father, the God. "The House of Anonymity" in this chapter exemplifies this situation, where he wears a costume which "grossly emphasise[s] our manhoods while utterly denying our humanity" (DH 130). The prostitutes in the house are also reduced "to the undifferentiated essence of the idea of the female." (DH 132) And the house is, predictably, full of mirrors, which reflect the surrounding things but not the Count and Desiderio, because they are now transformed into the phallus, the idea of maleness, which is not human at all.

When the Count transfers his idea of the uncontrollable onto his body, the ultimate control can mean nothing but his own death; especially if this is a death which can inflict pain on him, as he feels "no pain" (DH 147) originally. The same frustration which originates in his unfulfilled desire and which causes him to travel on, brings the bloodthirsty characters into being, since his desire for the ultimate control of the body can never be fulfilled until he dies. The Count first creates the Pirates of Death as his adversaries who can control the flesh better than he can and therefore are preventing him from enjoying full autonomy. When the tempest destroys them, he then invents the Cannibal Chief. The Count greets him as follows: "You are my only destination.... You altered my compass so that it would point only to you, my hypocritical shadow, my double, my brother" (DH 159). The Cannibal Chief represents the one in total control of the body, the flesh. And as the



Count regards him as his shadow, the violent death is nothing but a joyous moment of ultimate control over his body. And while the Count is boiled up, in a forbidden enjoyment, he begins "to laugh with joy - pure joy" and exclaims "I am in pain! I've learned to name my pain!" (DH 163). Now he gains total control over his body, and gets rid of the female "Other" in himself. He finally succeeds in diminishing his body altogether in order to be the idea of phallus. The irony is that he has to die to fulfil his desire, for the phallus is the constructed notion in the power-relation, and no real man can live up to it, just as no real woman can be reduced to the "Other."

The seventh chapter, "Lost in Nebulous Time," features the society of centaurs, which is myth-ridden, though their myth is, of course, different from the myths in human society. It certainly gives Desiderio a new perspective, to the extent of making him question himself thus:

For the first time, led like a child by the great bay whose form was so much nobler than mine and whose sense of the coherence of his universe was so inflexible, my own conviction that I was a man named Desiderio, born in a certain city, the child of a certain mother, lover of a certain woman, began to waver. If I was a man, what was a man? (DH 189)

It is a moment of identity crisis for Desiderio. And when he realises that the rape of Albertina by the centaurs might have been induced from his own desire, he begins to recognise the unavoidable end of this travel. Since his desire for Albertina, the possession of her body, means also the control of her body, her "Otherness," the total fulfilment of desire cannot be realised by anything but killing her:

[I]f we were the victims of unleashed, unknown desires, then die we must, for as long as those desired existed, we would finish by killing one another (DH 191).

But we later find out that it is an impossible dilemma, because he has to kill Albertina anyway, regardless of whether he chooses to fulfil his desire or not.

The last chapter, the Castle, is where the said catastrophic moment of revelation takes place. Though Doctor Hoffman projects himself as the fabulous "Other," as someone beyond the limitation of the law, he merely uses the notion of the "Other" in order to take control in the current power-relation because, after all, he is not the real Other.

Desiderio's expectation is doomed to be disillusioned, because what Doctor Hoffman promises is only the picture of "Otherness," which is a fabricated adversary of power, but nonetheless has the same structure and same totalitarian quality as power itself.

In this chapter, the deliberate manipulation of female "Otherness" by Doctor Hoffman so as to rouse desire is finally exposed. He depicts his castle in one of the peep-show samples as if coming to it is returning to Mother's womb:

Exhibit One: I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

The legs of a woman, raised and open as if ready to admit a lover, formed a curvilinear triumphal arch.... The dark red and purple crenellations surrounding the vagina acted as a frame for a perfectly round hole through which the viewer glimpsed the moist, luxuriant landscape of the interior.... It seemed that winter and rough winds would never touch there bright, oblivious regions or ripple the surface of the lucid river which wound a tranquil course down the central valley. The eye of the beholder followed the course of this river upwards towards the source and so it saw, for the first time, after some moments of delighted looking, the misty battlements of a castle (DH 44).

However, when he finally arrives at the castle of Doctor Hoffman by “cross[ing] a chasm in the earth by a wooden bridge so fragile we must walk and so narrow we could only go one at a time” (DH 196), he finds it is a very masculine, ordinary structure with artificially female covers:

Beyond the bridge was a little green grove about four acres in area, surrounded on all sides by crags in which the transmitters were lodged. It was a sweet, female kernel nestling in the core of the virile, thrusting rock (DH 196).

The castle itself turns out to be a disillusionment. It is “not really a castle, only a country house built after the style of a castle,” and Desiderio wonders, “I do not know what I had been expecting · but certainly never this tranquillity, this domestic peace, for were we not in the house of the magician himself?” (DH 197). At the house of the “Other,” everything is disappointingly “safe,” “ordered,” and “secure” (DH 197).

Doctor Hoffman himself also turns out to be “so quiet, so grey, so calm” with “a voice of perfect, restrained reason” (DH 199) who keeps “the embalmed corpse of his dead wife” (DH 198), clutching her hand, just like Freud might have done to his patient. He reveals himself as a mere scientist of a sort who tries to ward off the horror of death by his logic, and who examines the brain of Mendoza to find the structural difference (DH 209). As we have seen, he uses the cinematography technique to revive the dead, and to confuse the vision, but he might be doing so in an attempt to gain control over death. And this yearning for control is exactly the same as that of the Minister. Though what Desiderio has *expected in Doctor Hoffman* is the opposite of the Minister, what he actually finds in the castle is the double image of the Minister, a father figure.

The similarity of Doctor Hoffman and the Minister is suggested from the beginning. The Minister was once “the Minister of Trade” and made business boom (DH 15), while Doctor Hoffman employs visionary images and tricks to manipulate

human desire, the technique commonly used in advertisement in our consumer society. The Minister pictures Doctor Hoffman as “a crazed genius, a megalomaniac who wanted absolute power and would go to extreme lengths to grasp it” but Desiderio sees the Minister as “a Faust who cannot find a friendly devil,” as he himself is in fact “tainted with a little envy for the very power the Doctor abused with such insouciance, the power to subvert the world”(DH 28). By defeating Doctor Hoffman, the Minister can enjoy the power which Doctor Hoffman has enjoyed. Desiderio says “I felt as if I was watching a film in which the Minister was the hero and the unseen Doctor certainly the villain” (DH 25), but in fact, they are so similar, that “the roles are interchangeable” (DH 39).

When Desiderio reaches the castle of Doctor Hoffman, this similarity becomes undeniable. Their similarity is asserted, with both of them working within the power structure, being the reflection of each other, using the totalitarian scheme. The Minister’s computer-centre is described by Albertina as an “electronic harem” (DH 37) in which he tries to contain and label everything and make it safe. However, at the end of the novel, we are told that Doctor Hoffman’s “desire generators” (DH 213) are nothing more than that, where “a hundred of best-matched lovers in the world” are kept like slaves to produce desire. He might not have repressed desire, but “he penned desire in a cage and said: “Look! I have liberated desire!” (DH 208). Desiderio condemns Doctor Hoffman as “a hypocrite” (DH 208). If the Minister’s Determination Police are masculine, violent, and orderly, so is the Doctor’s military, which is regulated hierarchically and calls Albertina “Generalissimo Hoffman” (DH 192). It becomes apparent that both are the mirror-image of each other, and function within the law. This war is not being fought between power and the Other, but between power and the fabricated “Other.” The consequence of the power-struggle between them is nothing but a fortification of the power structure. This war offers the power the operating ground. Desiderio’s “disillusionment [is]

profound" (DH 201) when he notices that Doctor Hoffman "might know the nature of the inexhaustible plus, but, all the same, he was a totalitarian" (DH 207).

Though disillusioned by Doctor Hoffman, Desiderio projects yet more expectation and desire onto Albertina. He mentions that there is "no resemblance whatsoever between the old man and his daughter." But he inevitably starts doubting that her fabulous image might also be an illusion which he projects on her when Albertina also begins to exhibit her status as Doctor Hoffman's daughter entitled to inherit his kingdom. She presents herself to Desiderio within the Hoffman's hierarchical order. Now she stops being mysterious but becomes a figure exerting the power, with "her ownership tone of voice" and "in her soldier's uniform" (DH 197). At her father's house, she stops reflecting Desiderio's desire, and immediately, Desiderio is disillusioned:

I felt an inexplicable indifference towards her. Perhaps because she was now yet another she and this she was the absolute antithesis of my black swan and my bouquet of burning bone; she was a crisp, antiseptic soldier to whom other ranks deferred. I began to feel perfidious, for I had no respect for rank (DH 193).

Sensing the difference between his Albertina and her Albertina, he has to kill Albertina. If their consummation takes place, his disillusionment might become final. Therefore, the actual body of Albertina presents Desiderio an ultimate desire and an ultimate horror as well. The horror is that of disillusionment, incurred by the difference between what he imposes on her body and what is reality. It is that catastrophic moment, in which the artificiality of the power structure might be revealed and collapse. Man may conquer the constructed "Other," but never the real Other. And the secret of life and death is in the hands of that real Other, which the masculine subject will never be able to obtain.

Killing her is the only way out here, according to the system of desire, since what he needs is a perpetual postponement of the fulfilment of desire. By killing her, Desiderio can paradoxically sustain his desire for her in the form of mourning, because he is in love with the Albertina his desire has created, her real body does not actually matter. It is his reflection in the mirror that he wants to keep. Therefore, typically “in a white-tiled hall of mirrors” (DH 217) Desiderio kills Albertina. And immediately he feels “the uneasy sense of perfect freedom” (DH 217), since he is no longer threatened by the real body of Albertina, which may shatter his illusion. Indeed, this repeats what one of the peep-show samples, “THE ETERNAL VISTAS OF LOVE” (DH 45), has shown us. In the sample, he could see his own eyes “very greatly magnified by the lenses of the machine” which “reflected the false eyes before [him]” “while these reflections again reflected those reflections” (DH 45). It is “a model of eternal regression,” and when Desiderio kills Albertina, he chooses that instead of the real her. It mocks the notion of romantic love, another myth that permeates the cultures of the West and those of the contemporary East as well. The myth, which ends with the lovers’ marriage, never tells what happens after the fulfilment of desire, which can be nothing else but disillusionment. Rochester in *Jane Eyre* confines his wife, Bertha, branding her as a mad woman, a kind of monster figure. Bobbo’s wife, Ruth, in Fay Weldon’s novel, *The Life and Loves of a She Devil* [1983], has to turn into a “she-devil” when a new lover, Mary Fisher, comes along, though Bobbo is doomed to be disillusioned by Mary Fisher as well.

In this story, Desiderio’s travel looks as if it will end with a victory for reason, just like many of the “original” Gothic tales do. However, a significant difference is that Desiderio’s disappointment is extensively described in the novel. Though he brings the Minister a victory by killing Doctor Hoffman, the only sense he gets is a sense of regret, because the victory of reason is a negation of what can be outside/beyond the law, which supports a fantasy of the superhuman power of “Man.”

When Desiderio kills Doctor Hoffman (hope-man), he kills his hope, too. Moreover, Desiderio knows that this victory is not the real victory over the Other, but merely a fake one, for the "Other" itself was the fake. Though he thought he was pursuing something fabulous, extraordinary, and beyond the limit of the law, Doctor Hoffman turned out to be another totalitarian figure. Even if he had chosen to let Doctor Hoffman win, it would not have led to his obtaining the fabulous secret of life and death and he would be still trapped within the law. His sense of anticlimax is profound. The war was only a performance of the power which seeks to reiterate its mastership. He feels everything was a cheap show pretending to be a grand battle.

Carter also reveals that, in this power-relation, the ultimate victory of reason is an impossibility, since power and the fabricated "Other" are in the master-slave relation, being interdependent. Before the travel, Desiderio wanted "for everything to stop." He wanted to diminish this perpetual power struggle between the two, and choose one, but the desired masculine "I," the hero Desiderio, the desired one, turns out to be not desirable, after all. He realises the need for the fantastic "Other" and the need to live in the limbo between power and the "Other." While every masculine subject in this power relation is seeking to repress the "Other" and gain control, Desiderio demonstrates the disappointing result. It is as if Carter is sarcastically asking, "You have wanted this ultimate victory, and now you have got it. Is it what you want? Is it?" In fact, this disappointment of his is quite important, because it clearly reveals the fabricated legitimacy of patriarchal power, and its restricting, limiting nature, which also suggests the existence of something beyond it.

Besides, even if he could repress the constructed "Other" completely, as this story hypothesises, it does not mean he diminishes the real Other. And indeed, the real Other lives on in a place beyond the reach of his power. As the eyes signify this power, it is when he closes his eyes, that "unbidden, she comes" (DH 221). This last sentence explicitly shows us that the uncontrollable, unconquerable, real Albertina is

coming back. The victory of reason is only another illusion after all.

### The Passion of New Eve

The Passion of New Eve (1977)<sup>17</sup> also plays with this formation of desire in a fantastic narrative mode. In The Infernal Desire Machine of Doctor Hoffman, Desiderio kills Albertina and Doctor Hoffman; thus negating the “Other” altogether and, voluntarily or not, chooses the side of reason, only to find himself utterly disillusioned by the result. But in The Passion of New Eve, the protagonist has no alternative but to be driven onto the side of the “Other.” It is the hypothetical story of “what if Desiderio had chosen the side of Doctor Hoffman.” The selected extremity here is that of the female “Other,” though it is a created picture of “Otherness” in opposition to the masculine subject, and which is a masculine fabrication nonetheless.

The Passion of New Eve was published in 1977, and Carter goes far beyond the limitations of realistic narrative. The fantastic settings of this novel allow the author to pursue the possibility of a subversion of the current power relation. The reader is taken on a journey of transformation and “enlightenment” along with the protagonist, Evelyn/Eve, who comes from Europe to America, where the power struggle between the masculine subject and the “Other” has been taking place. He is, at first, just a naïve, unenlightened ordinary male, whose ultimate heroine is Tristessa, a Hollywood actress. Being a typical masculine subject, Evelyn uncritically follows the patriarchal scheme of repression and marginalisation of the female body and brutally dumps his girlfriend, Leilah, after her unwilling abortion. He is then trapped by the resistance group, “The Women”(PNE 11), and subjected to a surgical transformation into an enlightened woman, New Eve.

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<sup>17</sup> Angela Carter, The Passion of New Eve [1977] (London: Virago, 1982). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with PNE in front of the page number.



It is a funny, cynical, and powerful feminist story, in which a manipulative male character, who used to maltreat women as if it were a male privilege, is castrated and turned into the male idea of a perfect desirable woman, and undertake the woman's experience in the patriarchal society. It seems a kind of "an eye for an eye" story. However, this story contains far more issues than a simple revenge story.

For instance, at the headquarters of "the Women," Beulah, where Evelyn's transformation takes place, we can see the fictionalisation of the issues currently debated within Feminism, namely, the advocacy of maternity, or of the state before culture, or the myth of the almighty Goddess. What if you can really discard the weakness of the female body and transform into something stronger? What if you can free yourself from the oppressive patriarchal history? What happens when a man turns into a woman? What is the semiotic mother like? *Theoretical* suggestions of a bright future by deconstructionist feminists is ironically turned into a fiction here, and the likely result of such an extremist, separatist pursuit of "Otherness" is, I think, not shown as a favourable one.

First of all, although "The Women" (whose mission is to shatter the masculine power system and exploit maleness as men do femaleness) is a powerful resistance group in the era described in this story, i.e. at the end of the world in America, it is by no means a group uniting all the dissatisfied "Others." There are various "Others" ranged against current power, and even though gender is undoubtedly an important constituent of one's identity, there are many other axes which intersect with those inscribed on gender, as Bordo suggests. As if to show this feminist conflict, in Carter's America, there are other "Others" besides "The Women," such as "Blacks, Mexis, Reds, Militant Lesbians, Rampant Gays, etc etc etc" (PNE 161), that also claim legitimacy, power, and domination. Though they all are against the power, their points of view are "inescapably 'centric' in one way or another" according to their "social, political, and personal interests" (Bordo 140) and as a result, the world is in

chaos. "The Women" here is trivialised as just another totalising, ethnocentric organisation, and the dream of the woman's world is suggested as a mere fantasy.

The underworld of Beulah is, indeed, an ironic version of woman's "ideal" world. It is not a society free from the current power regime. On the contrary, the binary opposition of masculine/feminine remains intact; this woman's world is only a reversed version of the patriarchy, in which women's mission is to repress the masculine. It is a fabricated matriarchal society, with military training ground, and surgical operation room. It is a phallic society and they even have a phallic symbol, a truncated column, instead of a genuinely alternative female symbol. The structure of the power, how it works, remains just the same as in the patriarchal society.

Gender opposition and hostility is apparent, when Mother, the leader of "The Women," calls herself "the Great Parricide," and "Grand Emasculator" (PNE 49). Ironically, Mother, who "has made herself into an incarnated deity" and "the abstraction of a natural principle," a self-made mythic mother figure with four nipples, is nothing but a scientist, a surgeon, the profession traditionally associated with masculine reason. And she looks nothing but a monster. Her monstrous figure and the fact that she is not the "natural" maternal Goddess but a surgically created one seems to mock the concept of "original" matriarchy. This Mother is not someone to whom you can return to find peace and integrity as some feminists may dream. She is a creation of such a longing, but the longing itself is a creation of the power. Evelyn says, "when I saw her, I know I had come home; yet a desolating strangeness overwhelmed me, for I know I could not stay there" (PNE 58). As Susan Bordo says, "If the body is a metaphor for our locatedness in space and time and thus for the finitude of human perception and knowledge, then the postmodern body is no body at all" (145). Her body is a good example of such a grotesque postmodern body which has no place to fit into space and time.

Contrary to the notion of "original" matriarchy, the artificiality of Beulah is

exaggerated. Everything in it has “a curiously artificial quality, though nothing seemed unreal, far from it.” Beulah is “a triumph of science and hardly anything about it is natural, as if magic, there, masquerades as surgery in order to gain credence in a secular age” (PNE 49). It is a fabricated women’s society, in which myth, religion, art, in short, all forms of expression are used to fortify their value system. The reversed Oedipus myth is one of such examples, used in Beulah in a lecture to educate Evelyn who is about to be transformed into a woman:

“Oedipus wanted to live backwards. He had a sensible desire to murder his father, who dragged him from the womb in complicity with historicity. His father wanted to send little Oedipus forward on a phallic projectory (onwards and upwards!); his father taught him to live in the future, which isn’t living at all, and to turn his back on the timeless eternity of interiority.

But Oedipus botched the job. In complicity with phallogentricity, he concludes his trajectory a blind old man, wandering by the seashore in a search for reconciliation.

But Mother won’t botch the job.

Man lives in historicity; his phallic projectory takes him onwards and upwards - but to where? Where but to the barren sea of infertility, the craters of the moon!

Journey back, journey backwards to the source!” (PNE 53).

This is a discourse of the “Other.” Every logic is a reversed version of the “original” male one, feminised, and on that point, it is heavily and fatally dependent on the “original.” When Mother launches the plan “to make a start on the feminisation of Father Time” (PNE 67), her scheme is doomed, since it rigidly keeps the binary thought system that is created by the masculine subject, and thus only serves to fortify the current power relation.

The notion of a woman's world, which is created in opposition to the patriarchal one, is clearly criticised in this novel. However, in a devious way, it also works as a criticism of the patriarchal society in which we live today, since, by describing Beulah, it grossly magnifies the way patriarchal power functions. The function of the "original" Oedipus myth, as a consolidating medium of patriarchy, is revealed as we have seen above. Not only the Oedipus myth, but also all kinds of media are employed to form the people's mind-set in favour of the system. Brainwashing occurs everyday, and the process is a bit too grossly exaggerated but is accurately labelled as "psycho-surgery" (PNE 68) in this novel. For instance, they show the newly operated Eve the Hollywood films featuring Tristessa that functions as "a new set of nursery tales" as if to mould her:

I don't know if the movies were selected on purpose, as part of the ritual attrition of my change in ontological status: this is what you've made of women! And now you yourself become what you've made... Certainly the films that spun out a thread of illusory reality before my dazed eyes showed me all the pain of womanhood" (PNE 71).

"Psycho-surgery" consists of video-tape sequences, one of which is "reproductions of ... every single *Virgin and Child that had ever been painted in the entire history of Western European Art ... accompanied by a sound track composed of the gurgling of babies and the murmuring of contented mothers*" (PNE 72). Others are "cats with kittens, vixens with cubs, the mother whale with her offspring, ocelots, elephants, wallabies, all tumbling and suckling and watchfully tending furred things, feathered things, flippered things..." and "a variety of non-phallic imagery such as sea-anemones opening and closing; caves, with streams issuing from them; roses, opening to admit a bee; the sea, the moon" (PNE 72). They are all to cultivate Eve's "maternal feeling." Sophia, Mother's assistant, who later turns out to be Leilah, reads Eve "accounts of barbarous customs such as female circumcision," "relation of

the horrors my old sex had perpetrated on my new one" (PNE 73). Evelyn gradually turns into a woman in this way, with a "maternal instinct" and "hatred towards men" showing how one's identity is created and moulded into a type.

Though exaggerated, this episode shows the way in which identity is constructed by society. Our identity is created and maintained by a repetitious inscription. Every moment of our life, we are surrounded by certain images and absorb certain ideas, which maintain our identity. Though identity is generally thought to be something fixed, in fact it is not. Identity is performance, as Judith Butler claims. In *Beulah*, the women inscribe a new identity to Eve with different sets of images. The novel, in this way, demonstrates how identity can be erased and overwritten.

Not only identity, but the body itself, is presented in this story as something fabricated. In this era of cosmetic surgery and sex change, it is already happening, though our perception still tends to regard the body as natural, while the mind is cultural. This binary opposition of nature versus culture is another myth to be shattered by Carter. Not only the body of Eve or Mother, but all other bodies in this consumer society are grotesquely fabricated according to the consumer's desire. As we have seen previously, in a patriarchal society, a woman embodies the horror, and her body is sold as the image of an easily controllable victim. The masculine subject can secure his illusory mastership by purchasing the easily controllable female body. However, the illusion can be shattered, when the "Other" resists and returns his gaze.

To avoid such a confrontation with the "Other," the power, I suppose, is destined to become dependent on a monetary exchange system. In an economic transaction, the masculine subject becomes doubly protected from the danger, since he has a consumer's right to victimise and objectify a woman. By the monetary mechanism, dangerous desire is under pseudo control as in the Hostess Bar in Japan described by Carter in "Poor Butterfly." The dependency of the masculine subject on

the "Other" is so great that he has actually to buy the confirmation from the "Other." According to this logic, a Hollywood actress is a perfect body which suits the masculine subject's desire to commodify woman's body. She never returns the gaze, nor confronts him with her "real" body, never brings the fatal moment that reveals the precariousness of his mastery. He can freely project whatever desire he has onto that actress's body.

Tristessa is such a perfect "Other" to suit the need of the masculine subject. She can give him the satisfaction that he is the master, the controlling hand, the punisher, by embodying a woman's suffering. Her "speciality had been suffering. Suffering was her vocation" and "the spectacle of Tristessa's suffering always aroused in me" (PNE 8).

Carter cynically reveals the reality of this fabricated, purchased male satisfaction, by showing the practicality of this consumer's society, where the object of desire is naturally fabricated to suit the majority's need. When Evelyn receives a photograph of Tristessa in return for his fan letter, it shows not the suffering woman of Evelyn's desire, but a healthy girl "in trousers and sweater, swinging, of all things, a golf club" (PNE 7):

There had been a baleful vogue for romanticism in the late forties; when it flickered out, health and efficiency became the motto.... MGM's publicity department sent me this photograph to show Tristessa was only human, a girl like any other girl, since they had lost confidence in the mythology they had created for her (PNE 7).

If this is rather a widely recognised phenomena, Carter takes the notion of the constructed "Other" even further, when she reveals that not only the image which Tristessa sells, but also her actual body, is a fabrication. She is, in fact, a man, a transvestite! No wonder Tristessa is a perfect woman. Though a real woman may often be uncontainable in this mould of the "Other," prepared by the masculine power,

Tristessa, on the contrary, is a perfect "Other," because she is fabricated according to her/his own male desire. She/he is "the grand abstraction of desire" who has "no function in this world except as an idea of himself; no ontological status, only an iconographic one" (PNE 129).

When we consider the difference between Leilah and Tristessa, the contrast is striking. If a woman represents what is desirable and what is fearful, Tristessa, being a male creation, a fabricated perfect "Other," signifies only the desirable, and never confronts the male subject with fearful power. On the other hand, Leilah is a real impregnable woman, who has both qualities at the same time. We may be able to presume that Leilah's typically feminine attitude at the beginning of the story is purposefully created to arouse the desire of Evelyn. The enigmatic image of the "Other" is presented when she moves "sucking at her candy and singing an indecipherable lyric in a dazed, almost incoherent way in that very high, very childlike voice" (PNE 20). She is described as lawless, "unnatural," and "irresponsible" (PNE 27), reminding Evelyn of "the succubus, the devils in female form who come by night to seduce the saints," and scaring the masculine subject, Evelyn. A power struggle in sadistic form occurs on Leilah's body, as the unrepressible erupts and confronts Evelyn with desire/horror. It scares him and lures him at the same time, and the fear of losing control makes him punish her.

It is interesting that this transference of one's desire onto a body almost always occurs in front of the mirror. The difference between Leilah's mirror and Tristessa's is that the former is "cracked" (PNE 27) and the latter is not. As we have seen, Carter uses mirror and masquerade in many of her stories as a symbolic site of transformation. In The Magic Toyshop, for instance, Melanie loses her identity to her mother's when she puts on her wedding dress in front of the mirror. Later, in

Uncle Philip's house, she has no mirror but "a witch-ball" which reflects only a distorted image of Melanie as his object. In Leilah's case, the crack on the mirror seems to suggest that the reflection of her on the mirror might not be "real." She makes up in front of this mirror, showing the process of transformation:

The reflected Leilah had a concrete form and, although this form was perfectly tangible, we all knew, all three of us in the room, it was another Leilah. Leilah invoked this formal other with a gravity and ritual that recalled witchcraft; she brought into being a Leilah who lived only in the not-world of the mirror and then became her own reflection (PNE 28).

As is described here, there is something left disembodied about Leilah. And this redundancy, or sense of the uncontained, might be the cause of male desire and fear for a woman. The animal furs in the wardrobe of Leilah also threaten Evelyn with the suggestion of her uncontrollable nature. The cracked mirror and fur imply that Leilah cannot be a pure reflection of male desire, even though she presents herself as one, as she seems to "abandon her self in the mirror, to abandon her self to the mirror, and allow[s] herself to function only as a fiction of the erotic dream into which the mirror cast me" (PNE 30). This sense of fiction only increases the doubt in the masculine subject of the credibility of the reflection on the mirror, which seems "to have split apart under the strain of supporting her world" (PNE 30). Typically, Leilah brings Evelyn that fatal moment of revelation to shatter the illusion of authority, of the fact that there is something uncontrollable about her. The fatal moment occurs when Leilah gets pregnant and then returns from her abortion soaked in blood, as if to accuse Evelyn. Unlike the controllable Tristessa, Leilah signifies a fearful real "Other" who has "her world" which contains a dangerous secret, a fatal scheme which may possibly subvert the power relation.

Leilah's dirty, disorganised room is in contrast with Tristessa's house of glass



which is “perfectly transparent” (PNE 110), reflecting all and hiding nothing behind. Also, Tristessa’s mirrored dressing-room is a quintessential image of this house. It features “a perfect mirror” and “the relics of forty years of travesty” (PNE 130). It is a great irony that the mirror reflects the undistorted truest reflections of Tristessa’s fake body and witnesses the transformation of the transvestite. This house of perfect mirrors is perfectly symmetrical but has no life in it, unlike Leilah’s. Inside Tristessa’s house, both Tristessa and her collection of waxworks are “immortal” but “dead,” since Tristessa can exist only as a fabricated image in the cinema or a reflection in her perfect mirror. She has no real existence. She exists only to be seen, but not to see. And her eyes move “like the eyes of the blind move,” so that Evelyn “could not imagine how she saw the world, what connections she made between looking and seeing” (PNE 121). In that sense she is not human at all. She is without “any notion of common humanity” (PNE 123). Her house is her “mausoleum”(PNE 112) where all is cold, quiet, and dead, though “neat” and “tidy” (PNE 111). They don’t threaten the masculine subject, as the impregnated body of Leilah does.

Just as the perfect “Other” is only a programmed fabrication and uninhabitable, neither does this house admit any living human beings. Attacked by Zero and his harem, its mechanisms cause it to revolve in order to get rid of them. The perfect “Other” is a programmed dead creature.

While Tristessa is a caricature of the fabricated “Other,” Zero, on the other hand, is a caricature of a typical masculine subject. He embodies the male fear of uncontrollable female sexuality. The fear is so great, that in his harem, Zero frantically tries to repress and control the “Other” by making it an object of desire. He does not allow actual “others” to use language (PNE 87), and regards them lower than his pigs. For him, women are not human, only men are human. Typically, the

mirror there is broken with “glass so freckled” that Eve can “hardly make out New Eve’s reflection in it for, in this mirror, she looked as if she were wearing an antique bridal veil” (PNE 94). As many mirrors in a patriarchal man’s house described by Carter, this mirror shows only the image distorted according to his desire. The transforming power of such a mirror is later proven, when Eve and Tristessa are made into man and wife in a marriage ceremony in which they wear Tristessa’s stage wardrobe.

Though his harem appears to be under his tight control on the surface, there is one thing that he cannot do anything about: his sterility. So his illusory control is not at all perfect, and this fact only increases his fear/desire. Tristessa serves as an ideal site of transference for this hatred, because she is the most perfect “Other.” It demonstrates the interdependency of power and the “Other”; the more afraid he is of her “Otherness,” the more powerful she becomes for him. Insofar as Zero fears her, Tristessa acquires more power, to the point of absurdity, that he believes she has performed “a spiritual vasectomy on him” (PNE 92). And he also believes that she is “a dyke,” who cannot be controlled by his usual method of control, i.e. by turning the woman into a sex slave. His hatred towards homosexuals is typical of patriarchal society, as I have pointed out before. The reaction of Zero and his harem when they find out that Tristessa is not a biological female is hilarious. They apparently boast of the “authenticity” of their sexuality, but in fact, their behaviour is nothing but animalistic. It seriously confronts us with the question: What is an authentic woman, or a real human? If a stable sexual identity means Zero and his harem, who wants to have that?

However stable it looks, such identity “traditionally” constructed in this patriarchal power relation is heavily criticised. But the postmodern body of Tristessa or New Eve as described, is not favourable either. Tristessa is “dead” and lost, has no place in this world. And Eve does not have a place to live either:

The abyss on which her eyes open, ah! it is the abyss of myself, of emptiness, of inward void. I, she, we are outside history. We are beings without a history, we are mysteriously twinned by our synthetic life (PNE 125).

From the beginning when Mother tries to create Eve into their symbol, that of an “entirely self sufficient” Virgin Mary (PNE 77), the dependence of her scheme on the patriarchal power is revealed by the use of the myth and religion created in the existing power system. Insofar as she uses the formula made by patriarchy, she cannot get away from its influence. Also, Mother’s army is just like the Barbarians in Heroes and Villains, in which Dr Donally tries to transform Jewel into the symbol of “Otherness.” The result of such an attempt is doomed, as Jewel proves, since it only derives power from the current one. It presupposes the patriarchal society as the ground of existence. At most, it can produce constant warfare with the power, and that is what happens to Mother and her troops in this story. It is ironic that Eve later meets an army similar to Mother’s, the Children’s Crusade, whose leader is convinced he is Jesus Christ. He believes in God and America, loves Coca-Cola, and aims to restore the order of the consumer society. Both armies are extremely similar in structure, their leader using Christian myth, and the admiration of the members for the head mimics that of religious devotion. But their purposes, on the surface, are completely opposite. The Mother’s army is in the service of the “Other” while the Children’s Crusade is for the power “to restore the law and order” (PNE 157).

Rosi Braidotti poignantly sums up the two reasons of Mother’s failure, which are the typical pitfalls in the postmodern era:

One of the most significant pre-conditions for these re-locations [of postmodernity for cultural practice] is relinquishing both the phantasy of multiple re-embodiments and the fatal attraction of nostalgia. The nostalgic longing for an allegedly better past is a hasty and

unintelligent response to the challenges of our age. It is not only culturally ineffective - in so far as it relates to the conditions of its own historicity by negating them; it is also a short-cut through their complexity (521).<sup>18</sup>

While Mother's creation of the self-sufficient Eve is a euphoric fantasy nurtured by the notion of possibility in hi-tech cyber era, her organisation of "The Women" clearly shows the longing for the lost maternal body.

Mother's failure is stated and recognised in the novel by Leilah, or Lilith:

"History overtook myth," she said. "And rendered it obsolete. Mother tried to take history into her own hands but it was too slippery for her to hold. Time has a way of running away with itself, though she set all the symbols to work; she constructed a perfect archetype" (PNE 173).

However, the ending of the novel is more optimistic than that of Heroes and Villains. Eve goes back to see Mother, who, by then, lives in seclusion. Significantly, she finds nobody there but a mirror, whose "*glass was broken, cracked right across many times so it reflected nothing, was a bewilderment of splinters and I could not see myself nor any portion of myself in it*" (PNE 181). Now Eve loses Mother as a place to return to. But after all, as Nicole Ward Jouve writes, "You cannot ever access mother's body" and "Mother's body can be lost" (157),<sup>19</sup> since it is a fabrication of the masculine subject and uninhabitable.

Carter is, I think, by no means against woman's resistance. After all, the created Eve chooses to remain a woman, refusing to get his genitals back. Now that she sees herself not as the reflection of the desire of the masculine subject, nor as an

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<sup>18</sup> Rosi Braidotti, "Cyberfeminism with a Difference," Feminisms, eds. Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997). 520-529.

<sup>19</sup> Nicole Ward Jouve, "Mother is a Figure of Speech..." Flesh and the Mirror. ed. Lorna Sage, 136-170.

antithesis of it, her mirror does not reflect. Eve's monologue, "The destination of all journeys is their beginning" (PNE 186), is pregnant indeed. When she, alone, sets out for a journey into the ocean to find "the place of birth" of her child (PNE 191) there is a sense of hope and love, even the freedom of the one who is no longer trapped in a binary system of power and "otherness." Perhaps, even though a radical transformation of the body starts in opposition to the current power, and is therefore heavily dependent on it, Carter suggests that it can open up possibilities of freeing the body from such dependence. After all, identity is a construction and fluid. If assuming one identity is "not a given condition but a continuous effort" (PNE 63), there can be an effort in an alternative direction. And the story of New Eve may be seen as such an effort to prove that "a change in the appearance will restructure the essence" (PNE 68) as Sophia, or Leilah, or Lilith, assures. Judith Butler claims:

The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effect ... then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible (Gender Trouble 145).

The Passion of New Eve might be one of such "practices of repetitive signifying," while New Eve is what Braidotti means by "embodied subjectivity" which is "a paradox that rests simultaneously on the historical decline of mind/body distinctions and the proliferation of discourses about the body" that can prove "that we are situated subjects, capable of performing sets of (inter)actions which are discontinuous in space and time" (Braidotti 523). The amazing thing is that such theorisations of identity as performance emerge only in the 1980s, while Carter writes this novel before 1977. Carter's insight clearly makes her prefigure feminist theorisations. It is especially interesting that whereas such analytic and discursive modes of feminism

can only describe and dissect gender as performance, Carter as theatrical novelist can revel in actually putting on the show.

### Nights at the Circus

Published in 1984, Nights at the Circus<sup>20</sup> is a further powerful and playful investigation into the concept of identity as that which can be erased and overwritten. And the marked difference of this novel from the preceding ones is the power of the heroine's will, which turns her disadvantage as the "Other" into an advantage by theatrical emphasis. It is a triumphant Carterian somersault, a magical taking over of the authenticity and authorship of her existence, which have been denied to her heroines in previous novels.

The narrative is begun viewed through the eyes of the male protagonist, Jack Walser, an American journalist, whose profession lets him "see all but believe nothing" (NC 10). He sees himself as a person who can tell the difference between fact and fiction. He boasts of his total control of the borderline, and sees Fevvers, a Cockney bird-woman, an *aerialiste* with plumage on her back, as one of the "Great Humbugs of the World" (NC 11). Here you can see a similar kind of opposition found in The Infernal Desire Machine of Doctor Hoffman, i.e., that of the Minister and Doctor Hoffman. In that novel, the Minister symbolises reason, the institution, and order, while the Doctor attempts at destroying them with his illusion-techniques. Similarly here, Walser tries to pin down fact, reality, onto paper, while Fevvers explodes the definitions he gives her. You can say that she is an adversary of Jack Walser. She attempts to destroy his sense of the world, his distinction between fact and fiction, by presenting the alternatives that confuse the borderline of the two. Walser is a rationalist, while Fevvers is an imposter, a story-teller, an author! If

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<sup>20</sup> Angela Carter, Nights at the Circus [1984] (London: Vintage, 1994). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with NC in front of the page number.

Walsler can be called a modernist who claims he can tell high art from low, and believes in his version of reality, Fevvers is a postmodernist who claims no such distinction. However, we should note that there is a fundamental difference between Doctor Hoffman and Fevvers, as Doctor Hoffman turns out to be another totalising masculinist, while Fevvers does not. Doctor Hoffman aims at power which is a mere reversal of the Minister's, but the power of Fevvers is not such an exclusive and totalising one. Unlike Doctor Hoffman's illusion technique which only deconstructs, Fevvers's narration is a positive force which creates. It is the force of the fantasist, which leaves the ending open.

The opposition of Walsler and Fevvers also represents the significant implication of written and spoken language. Walsler, as a journalist, exemplifies the inclinations of written language. They are that of a limiting compartmentalisation, that of eliminating other possibilities, in short, that of institutionalisation by way of indirect distribution of empirical knowledge. On the other hand, the oral/visual narration of Fevvers refuses to be pinned down. It is ever-changing, and it offers the audience the direct experience. Judgement is left to be made by the audience. Again, unlike Doctor Hoffman, Fevvers leaves other possibilities undiminished.

I would say that Carter has developed the fantastic characters in her fiction along with the course of her career. Up until this novel, the female fantasist figures (contradictorily including Doctor Hoffman) are trapped in the binary power system, and end up creating only a reversal of the current power relations. As we have seen in previous sections, such an approach is less than effective in subverting the power, as it has a negative effect by fortifying it. Carter has, so far, shown that too much emphasis on the "otherness" may lead to further exclusion and marginalisation, but Fevvers in this novel is the first major character who succeeds in subversion from within, without excluding herself as the Other. She embodies the concept claimed by Judith Butler, that "it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a

subversion of identity becomes possible" (Gender Trouble 145).

By the hand of Fevvers, the identity of the man of reason, Walser, is, indeed, subverted. Like Evelyn in The Passion of New Eve, Walser is subjected to a series of events while travelling with a circus, a typical site of blurring identity as we have seen in the analysis of The Infernal Desire Machine of Doctor Hoffman. Through the course of events, as if in an enlightenment, he is robbed of his former identity as a journalist. First, in an attempt at finding the "truth" about Fevvers, he takes on a disguise as a clown, but then he injures his arms, which leaves him without his real profession as a journalist. But his second identity as a clown is also lost when he suffers from amnesia. At the end of the novel, his identity is totally newly constructed by the narration of Fevvers, overwriting on his former ones. He is entangled in the mesh of a fiction, and now his personal history is a fiction, as is that of Fevvers. Well, since any identity is fiction after all, what is the point in asking whether Fevvers is a fact or a fiction?

In fact, it is a story about story-telling. It is about the process of story-making. And the major issue here is the blurred boundary between fact and fiction. Fevvers, as a story-teller, offers Walser and the reader a story studded with mock-historic and scientific proofs. She also confuses us with impossibilities, starting with the wings on her back. In that sense, this can be categorised as the kind of metafiction popular among postmodern writers. Fevvers is certainly a postmodernist, in the sense Linda Hutcheon describes it: "Postmodernism deliberately confuses the notion that history's problem is verification, while fiction's is veracity" (112).<sup>21</sup> Fevvers shows that "both history and fiction are cultural sign systems, ideological constructions whose ideology includes their appearance of being autonomous and self-contained" (Hutcheon 112). The description made by Hutcheon

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<sup>21</sup> Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (London: Routledge, 1988).



of historiographic metafiction is acutely appropriate with this novel, too:

Historiographic metafiction ... is overtly and resolutely historical - though, admittedly, in an ironic and problematic way that acknowledges that history is not the transparent record of any sure "truth" (128-9).

However, though Fevvers deliberately confuses the boundary, it does not mean she reduces the whole story to such a fantasy as to be easily dismissed, as Baudrillard laments in his essay, "The Precession of Simulacra," with the postmodern condition of "simulacrisation," "the final destruction of meaning" (Hutcheon 223).<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, she is the most vivid, lively, and powerful character Carter has ever created, with a down-to-earth attitude and cockney vulgarity. It is hard to forget such a foul-mouthed, money-grabbing, but lavishly generous woman as Fevvers. Hutcheon contests the notion claimed by Baudrillard by saying that "[Postmodernism] does not pretend to operate outside that [capitalist] system, for it knows it cannot; it therefore overtly acknowledges its complicity, only to work covertly to subvert the system's values from within" (224). Postmodern techniques certainly remind us of Fevvers' positive authorship. She is a postmodern fantasist, whose usage of parody and mimicry of scientific and historic discourses only serves to reveal their constructedness. Her parody questions "the assumptions beneath both modernist aesthetic autonomy and unproblematic realist reference" (Hutcheon 225).

In fact, Fevvers exaggerates her authorship so much as if to defy the notion of "the death of the Author" which prevails in contemporary literary discourse. Nancy Miller contemplates that, when Roland Barthes claims "the death of the author," it

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<sup>22</sup> Hutcheon explains Baudrillard's concept of "simulacra" as below: "mass media has neutralized reality for us and it has done so in stages: first reflecting, then masking reality, and then masking the absence of reality, and finally, bearing no relation to reality at all. This is simulacrum, the final destruction of meaning" (223).

assumes the male, “anthologised and institutionalised” author (Nancy Miller 194),<sup>23</sup> and, at the same time, the undifferentiated reader “without history, biography, psychology” (Barthes 129).<sup>24</sup> However, as Nancy Miller reckons, “The removal of the author has not so much made room for a revision of the concept of authorship as it has, through a variety of rhetorical moves, repressed and inhibited discussion of any writing identity in favour of the (new) monolith of anonymous textuality” (195). Miller continues;

I want none the less to make a distinction between the asymmetrical demands generated by different writing identities - male and female, or perhaps more usefully, hegemonic and marginal. It is inarguable that the destabilisation of the paternal - patriarchal, really - authority of authorship (Milton’s, for example) brought about through deconstruction has been an enabling move for feminist critics. But it does not address the problem of his “bogey” at the level of subjectivity formation. The effect of his identity and authority on a female writing identity remains another matter and calls for other critical strategies (195).

Her analysis accurately points to the “structurally important differences” (197) that the female author has towards the concept of identity, as she has been excluded from the universal position Barthes presupposes when he argues the death of the author. And the story-maker, Fevvers, and Carter behind her, also playfully fools the notion. By loudly publicising their existence as writing subjects, they both launch on the great humbug’s project to fool Walser as well as the reader. It is what N. Miller describes as “the female authorial project as the scene of perhaps a different staging

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<sup>23</sup> Nancy K. Miller, “Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader,” *Authorship: From Pluto to the Postmodern: A Reader*, ed. Seán Burke (Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 1995). 193-211.

<sup>24</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Authorship*, ed. Seán Burke, 125-30.

of the drama of the writing subject" (198). Using postmodern strategies such as mimicry and parody, it works within the structure, while at the same time, it boldly takes over the whole situation, and rewrites the story differently with the power of fiction.

Without a doubt, *Fevvers* is a fascinating creation of Carter. Carter must have an obsession about birds, as bird-like women often appear in her stories. One example is Aunt Maggie in *The Magic Toyshop*. However, while Aunt Margaret is a caged bird who can only fly at the end of the story, *Fevvers* is freely and uninhibitedly flying around the world from the beginning. If other women who previously appear in her novels are, more or less, forced into an object status by the masculine subject, *Fevvers* is not. She creates herself as such, and by doing so, she takes control of the whole process. She makes herself into an object, but she does not allow herself to be manipulated. The control is always firmly in her own greedy hand. She is always something in between. She is between fact and fiction, object and subject, human and animal, human and mythic figure, human and art...

Taking the opposition of object and subject, she is, as a child of consumer society, a commodity. However, as I mentioned before, she is not commodified by others, but she makes herself into a brand, using publicity, to make money. By selling her image, she creates the phenomenon "Fevvermania" (NC 8). There are "Fevvers' garter, stockings, fans, cigars, shaving soap... She even lent it to a brand of baking powder; if you added a spoonful of the stuff, up in the air went your sponge cake, just as she did" (NC 8). In fact, in consumer society, what matters is one's image, not whether or not one is real.

As a Hollywood actress might be, she is an object "that is intended to be seen, not handled. Look! Hands off!" (NC 15). The power to see is induced by *Fevvers*' own technique, so the power to see is no longer with the seer. Besides, she does not mould herself into a desirable woman from men's point of view, like the Japanese

hostesses in "Poor Butterfly" or New Eve in The Passion of New Eve or Jewel in The Heroes and the Villains, or even Melanie in The Magic Toyshop. Instead, she creates something outrageous, something beyond one's imagination. She turns herself into an art, which has a similar formation to the tattooing motif that frequently appears in Carter's fiction. By making herself a spectacle, she uses the power of gaze for herself, as it were. Fevvers sets up a stage for herself, and by theatrically staging her object-ness she, contradictorily, becomes a powerful subject. She is a self-created cyborg, which Donna Haraway posits as a symbolic figure that enables us to overcome the binary power system:

Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world. Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden (151).

Fevvers certainly does not expect her father to save her, as she does not have one! And as to the symbolic Father Time figure which she claims she has inherited from Ma Nelson, she uses it in a trickery to fool Walser. She runs the time not according to the time he tells, but according to her will, and she mockingly cherishes the "authenticity" of Father Time:

It was a figure of Father Time with a scythe in one hand and a skull in the other above a face on which the hands stood always at either midnight or noon, the minute hand and the hour hand folded perpetually together as if in prayer, for Ma Nelson said the clock in her reception room must show the dead centre of the day or night, the shadowless hour, the hour of vision and revelation, the still hour in the centre of the storm of time (NC 29).

And it is this Father Time that Fevvers displaces, when she first tries her flight: "I climbed up and stood where Father Time had stood" (NC 29). While pretending to invest so much significance in his authenticity, in fact, Fevvers positions herself in his place, and sets up the new order. From then on, she controls time, manipulating his authenticity; she tells the history; and that is what she does when she lets Big Ben strike midnight again and again, while interviewed by Walser. In her Big Ben trick, it is suggested that there is always another possibility in perception, another order which can be more authentic than the current one. When she does it, she uses the current order to mock it, and she carries the sword in the fashion of a Winged Victory, as in the mockery of paternal phallic order, as if to embody the alternative order.

With Fevvers, as with a cyborg in a sci-fi film, there is a play upon the fine borderline between reality and artificiality. She produces only the exact amount of miracle, which is just enough to suspend the audience's disbelief, but not so much to condemn her to an anomaly. Walser himself contemplates:

he was astonished to discover that it was the limitations of her act in themselves that made him briefly contemplate the unimaginable - that is, the absolute suspension of disbelief.

For, 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? (NC 17).

He still clings to the rational notion of humanness, asking if Fevvers has a belly button, which she could not have if she was really hatched from an egg as she claims. However, of course, he cannot see it, in a stage illusion. Theatrical techniques which induce illusion and deceive perceptions are repeatedly employed, Fevvers's bottle blonde hair being the obvious one.

In fact, by all the things she does and is, Fevvers suggests an alternative

possibility and plurality, the profound difference of appearance and what is behind it. Ma Nelson's whores are "all suffragists" (NC 38) who create "a wholly female world" (NC 38). They consciously sell "the *simulacra*" (NC 39) because of their "economic necessity" (NC 39). And Fevvers tells of her "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?" (NC 39). She is by no means a passive object to be seen, but an active one, who claims to be seen, in the way she presents herself. She deceives. Her voice seems to come "behind the canvas screen, voice of a fake medium at a seance" (NC 43). The use of screen is found in the Tale of Genji, as we have seen before. As in the Japanese tale, screens are what women often use to hide their destructive intentions, to conceal their cards. Screens simultaneously divide and connect what is behind and what is before, by suggesting there is something more. A simple glance at the screen cannot arrive at any conclusions. Also, as in many Japanese tales, mediums are often described by Carter. A medium is featured as someone who stands on an ambiguous borderline, though the medium might be a fake, and you never know which side of the line is a fiction and which a fact. Perhaps, this medium of Carter exists only to confuse both, as that might be the most effective blow to the current power-system.

From the beginning, the novel is full of tricks and trickery, all involving a blurring of the boundary between two categories, formerly supposed to be separate: a feminist strategy, as the real name of Fevvers, Sophia, might reveal. (Is not Sophia also the name of the daughter of the Mother in The Passion of New Eve and does it not mean wisdom in Greek?) The most obvious blurring of boundaries is that of human beings and animals. While Fevvers embodies this ambiguity of the boundary, so do many other characters in this novel. Typical are the characters in Madame Schreck's house. When Fevvers launches into its narrative, Walser's notion of

normal humanness receives further bombardments, since those in her house are all in some way or other abnormal, but Fevvers asks, “what is ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural,’ sir?” (NC 61). She even provides Walser with scientific evidence of the existence of Toussaint, a mouth-less man, thus reminding us that scientific discourse is another kind of fiction. If Fevvers’ narrative is fiction, then science is nothing less. The boundary between human beings and monsters, fairies, animals, is shattered, while the distinction between dream and wakefulness is also blurred in the case of Sleeping Beauty.

This reminds us, again, of Haraway’s Cyborg theory in which she claims as simply mythic the idea of clear boundary between animal and human or nature and culture:

The purpose of the sciences of function is to produce both understanding of meaning and predictive means of control... Sciences also act as legitimating meta-language that produce homologies between social and symbolic systems. That is acutely true for the sciences of the body and the body politics. In a strict sense, science is our myth.... It is not an accident of nature that our social and evolutionary knowledge of animals, hominids, and ourselves has been developed in functionalist and capitalist economic terms (42).<sup>25</sup>

In her book, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, Haraway shows how scientific discourse justifies the sexual inequality in production and reproduction. She writes;

That union [of the political and physiological] has been a major source of ancient and modern justifications of domination, especially of domination based on differences seen as natural, given, inescapable, and therefore moral (8).

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<sup>25</sup> Dona Haraway, Simian, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (London, Free Association Books, 1991).

It is not simply that Fevvers' play with the notion of scientific proof is so Harawayan, but also it seems more than a coincidence that Haraway draws our attention to the scientists' manipulation of "natural proof" in taking samples only from certain species of apes as the human ancestor, in order to explain and justify certain kinds of human behaviour: similarly there are a number of apes and chimps in Fevvers' circus, which, being more human than their keeper, ironically called the Ape-Man, outwit the human beings. Apparently, in Fevvers' world, the domination of nature by human beings does not hold. The binary division of Nature=animal/Culture=human being is twisted and turned to Nature=human being/Culture=animal.

The feminist project of Fevvers to blur such distinctions is highlighted when she introduces us to Mr Rosencreutz, whose first name is, suggestively enough, Christian. He is an extremely phallic figure, afraid of disintegration, of blurred boundaries, of getting old, and of dying. As a typical masculine subject (who might appear in any of the Gothic tales we have referred to), he blames woman for this horror, and sees her as an "absence, or atrocious hole, or dreadful chasm, the Abyss, Down Below, the vortex that sucks everything dreadfully down, down, down where Terror rules..." (NC 77). He has a gold medallion which features "the penis, represented by itself, aspires upwards, represented by the wings, but is dragged downwards, represented by the twining stem, by the female part, represented by the rose" (NC 77). He is so afraid of losing his masculine subjectivity that he firmly believes that "by uniting his body with that of Azrael, the Angel of Death, on the threshold of the spring, he would cheat death itself and live forever" (NC 79).

As we have seen, horror and desire come in tandem. Mr Rosencreutz calls for Fevvers, since she is "Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states, being on the borderline of species" and "Lady of the hub of the celestial wheel, creature half of earth and half of air, virgin and whore, reconciler of fundament and firmament,



reconciler of opposing states through the mediation of your ambivalent body, reconciler of the grand opposites of death and life" (NC 81). And what he tries to do is yet again a typical solution of the masculine subject in this patriarchal culture: use and abuse of female body. The attempt fails, of course, since Fevvers is armed, unlike the heroines in Gothic fiction. Fevvers does not let herself be manipulated. It is she who has the upper hand.

The mirrors are often symbolically used by Carter as the place where such confusion, a transition of one identity into another, the slippage of one condition into something quite different, occur. We can find this again when, during the interview in front of Fevvers's mirror, Walser "felt the strangest sensation, as if these eyes of the *aerialiste* were a pair of sets of Chinese boxes, as if each one opened into a world into a world into a world, an infinite plurality of worlds" (NC 30). It is the beginning of the dissolution of Walser's previously seemingly fixed identity. When he checked his watch after the interview, "it had stopped short precisely at midnight" (NC 90). Just like Alice of *Alice in Wonderland*, Walser says to himself "curiouser and curiouser" (NC 90).

The second part of the novel, "Petersburg," is set in the circus led by an impresario, Colonel Kearney and his pig, Sybil, who can foretell the future. Here again, the ambiguity is markedly described in various ways. St Petersburg itself is a city "that does not exist any more" (NC 96) "built of hubris, imagination and desire..." (NC 97). Sybil, the pig, is also seriously stepping over the boundary between animal and human being. And here in the circus, Walser loses his former identity, when he wears make-up as a clown.

In fact, the whole circus is presented as a site where the former boundary, limitation, and categorisation are reduced to meaninglessness. It is constructed to "house permanent displays of the triumphs of man's will over gravity and over

rationality" (NC 105). It is a place of contradiction, of coexistence of opposites, where beautifully dressed ladies enjoy the luxury of the foyer, while the smell of the dung and piss of beasts permeate, and where monkeys behaves like human beings, while human beings act like animals:

What 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 in which we all are broken. O! of wonder; O! of grief (NC 107).

Fevvers is a perfectly symbolic woman in such a circus.

Such a circus is the ideal place for Walser's loss and confusion of identity to start. He breaks his arm in an unlikely heroic gesture trying to save Mignon, an abused wife of the Ape-Man: an act which deprives him of his occupation as a journalist. It makes him into a real clown, instead of just a disguise. On top of that, he falls in love. He loses his subjectivity, his autonomy and control.

Being a clown posits a double identity crisis to Walser, since the make-up of the clown condemns him to a real clownhood. It quintessentially embodies the contradiction of the circus, since he is the object of laughter, yet "also he is the *subject* of laughter. For what we are, we have *chosen* to be." "We are the whores of mirth, for, like a whore, we know what we are; we know we are mere hirelings hard at work and yet those who hire us see us as beings perpetually at play." However, the pseudo-liberty of this choice of identity betrays him and suggests that identity might be made and then fixed, contrary to some feminists' expectation. Identity is not fluid in the sense that it can be changeable purely by free will. The master clown, Buffo,

tells us:

my face eclipses me. I have become this face which is not mine, and yet I chose it freely.... But, once the choice is made, I am condemned, therefore, to be "Buffo" in perpetuity.... [A]m 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" (NC 122).

Faces of the clowns are those "that wait in the mirrors of unknown dressing-rooms" (NC 122). Unlike Fevvers, who can play with the changeable notion of identity, and always plays with the borderline discourse, the clowns have only to stick to their painted face, one identity which they inflicted on themselves by free will. They might be a caricature of a masculine subject in this society, whose dance cannot be anything but a "dance of disintegration; and of regression; celebration of the primal slime" (NC 124) in which they juggle with several phalluses.

What is presented here is the ambiguous nature of masquerade: you can put on masks or costumes and turn into a different person, but that identity, in return, can trap you into a perpetual complicity from which you cannot free yourself. Walser is trapped in such a state of identity crisis, in which he loses his former self as journalist, and is condemned to be a real clown, whose face is not his.

However, just when the reader starts to feel uncertain and anxious about the whole issue of identity, there comes a twist. As the trick is played by Fevvers, the increasing volume of her narrative voice brings the reader back to his or her senses, as it were. Her real-ness returns the reader from deconstructionist meaninglessness to down-to-earth positivism. In other words, along with his loss of identity as a journalist, the narrative of the novel itself is taken over by Fevvers and the story begins to be told through Fevvers' voice. Until then, the reader can somehow

separate the credulity of the story reported by Walser and the one told by Fevvers. But now that Walser does not report, and is reduced to the reported, the reader is driven deeper inside the fiction fabricated by Fevvers (or Carter). Walser becomes a character in her fiction.

The third part of the novel, "Syberia," is thus told in the voice of Fevvers. It is interesting that Lizzie warns her, saying "you have been acting more and more *like* yourself" (NC 197). Fevvers has to remain contradictory, and cannot afford one fixed identity, if she wants to be a symbolic woman:

"You never existed before. There's nobody to say what you should do or how to do it. You are Year One. You haven't any history and there are no expectations of you except the ones you yourself creates" (NC 198).

The catastrophic ending of the circus show in St Petersburg sees the danger of Fevvers almost turned into an objet d'art by the Grand Duke, another phallic figure. Though it might be another fabrication of Fevvers, nonetheless, when she flees from him, she chooses to be the subject, the story-teller. She retains her power to manipulate the vision, to deceive. As long as she, the object to be seen, can distort the power of the seer, the power is in her hand.

As I said before, this contradictory quality in the act of seeing is repeatedly manifested in this novel. The power-relation between the subject and the object of the gaze is shown to be easily overturned. Fevvers' manipulation of her image is one such example. Another one is told in one of the stories in the third part: that of the House of Correction. It is a private asylum, in the form of Bentham's Panopticon, set up by the Countess P. It is a machine designed to promote penitence, in which the female criminals are under the perpetual survey of the Countess. They are put

in a cell surrounding the hub with a window open only onto that hub where the Countess rotates to stare at the criminals all the time. She plays the eye of God. However, the Countess is as much a slave than her criminals are, as she is also trapped without exit in the House. And she is utterly dependent on the criminals, since the Countess is trying to use them to obtain her salvation. She is no master, in fact, as in the Hegelian master-slave narrative, she is a slave of her criminals. It is she who goes round and round to survey all her criminals, none of whom show repentance as yet.

On the other hand, her slaves, those criminals, invent ways of communicating with the guards, and love and affection grows without being noticed by the Countess. They use the most ingenious communication without language, using their female flow and such like, contrasting the patriarchal repressive attitude of the Countess. Their female way is victorious at last, when they turn towards the Countess “in one great, united look of accusation” (NC 218). The master-slave relationship collapses when the slave returns the gaze. And that is what happens here.

Those female criminals then mark a sharp contrast to the “brotherhood of free men” (NC 229) who later appear in this tale naively believing that by imploring the Queen of England, they can restore their former status and return to their home. They live in the past, and collapse and weep when their hope is gone, and are then swept away by a whirlwind together with those clowns lamenting the madness of Buffo. But the female criminals set off to build the utopia on their own! They have got the power, the power of those who can return the gaze.

The victims of the dominant power transform themselves into a new power. This structure can be seen in the tale of Mignon, as well. She has been abused by a series of violent and manipulative men. She used to sing “her foreign song without meaning, without feeling, as if the song shone through her, as though she were glass” (NC 134), but after she finds love with the Princess of Abyssinia, she becomes the

master of the song and controls it “with her new-found soul, so the song was utterly transformed and yet its essence did not change, in the same way a familiar face changes yet stays the same when it is freshly visited by love” (NC 247). Here again, the love between women is described as the source of power, while her former oppressors reveal their weakness.

By now, as you might realise, the narrative is completely out of the control of Walser, and is in the firm hands of Fevvers who uses it as feminist propaganda. Walser, on the other hand, loses his memory when the trains are blasted by the free men in their bid to abduct Fevvers, as she tells the reader. “Like the landscape, he was a perfect blank” (NC 222). He is a blank canvas on which Fevvers is free to write his tale.

The Shaman, who picks up the wandering Walser in the wood, and believes he is a Shaman apprentice, is another ambiguous figure in the novel. Yet, he is, in a way, similar to Fevvers, because he does not differentiate what is real and what is a dream. His tribe lives in a shared “common dream” (NC 253), which “should rather be called an ‘idea’ than a ‘dream,’ since it constituted their entire sense of lived reality, which impinged on *real* reality only inadvertently” (NC 253). The difference is that the Shaman creates a “foolproof” “closed system,” while Fevvers perpetually opens up further possibilities. She thus saves Walser, by breaking the Shaman’s closed circuit. She does that yet again by manipulating the vision. She spreads her wings and lets them believe she is real.

The phrase repeated again and again in the story, “Seeing is believing” (NC 83), captures Fevvers’ technique. She deceives people’s vision and lets them believe she is real. Contradictorily, by presenting herself as an impossible object, she makes her existence possible. She creates herself. It is the power that slaves can seize

when they return the gaze of the master.

In the scene of her confrontation with the Shaman and Walser, this power shift between master and slave is well captured:

Fevvers felt that shivering sensation which always visited her when mages, wizards, impresarios came to take away her singularity as though it were their own invention, as though they believed she depended on their imaginations in order to be herself. She felt herself turning, willy-nilly, from a woman into an idea.... For one moment, just one moment, Fevvers suffered the worst crisis of her life: "Am I fact? Or am I fiction? Am I what I know I am? Or am I what he thinks I am?" (NC 289-90).

What she describes here is a funny turning of the tables. While the dependency of the master upon the slave has been displayed in the story again and again, what matters here is the dependency of the gazed upon the gazer. It is Fevvers' version of the tale, since she manipulates the power of the gaze from the other way round.

If she cannot have the reaction she hopes for, Fevvers is turned into a real object, without any autonomy of her own. A mere slave, who has to be dependent on the master. But she avoids this crisis yet again through theatrical performance: "then her plumage - yes! it did! - her plumage rippled in the wind of wonder, their expelled breaths. Ooooooh!" (NC 290). Through her own will, she converts herself into an object to be seen, thus upturning the power-relation, and thus takes control. Now she finds "the eyes fixed upon her with astonishment, with awe, the eyes that told her who she was" (NC 290).

She creates, fabricating herself by visionary trickery and story-telling. She is a real impresario, a master of cinematography, a show-manager, a stage-master. She puts on the show for herself and for others. She creates the mirrors, on which she projects whatever image she wants to see! She can create the tigers waltzing,

and then return them to the mirror again. At the end of the story, Walsler, now her lover, "contemplated, as in a mirror, the self he was so busily reconstructing" (NC 293). That self might not be the same as the one he had before. But who cares? Identity is a repetitious performance, and can be erased and overwritten. We are presented with a more positive sense of agency than in any other novels by Carter, when Fevvers confidently declares:

"We told you no other lies nor in any way strayed from the honest truth. Believe it or not, all that I had 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!" (NC 292).

That question does not matter, now that she has the power. It is a story-teller's power, Carter's power. In fact, Fevvers is a kind of surrogate for Carter more than any other character of hers has been. If you tell the story, if you fabricate your identity, if you perform differently, you can fool the subject who tries to make you into an object. If you create the mirror by yourself, you are no longer trapped in a reflection which is created by others' desire. Then the control is in your hands, and it does not limit yourself. It is ever-changing, expanding, and exploding. Echoed among the laughter of Fevvers, "Gawd, I fooled you!" (NC 294), at the end of the story, you can surely hear Carter is laughing, too.



## Chapter 4:

## The Grotesque Body in Consumer Society

## The Grotesque Engendered

Everywhere, in art, film, and literature, we are now witnessing a flourishing of the grotesque in contemporary culture. Though the grotesque has long been a popular theme in art and literature (as the ghost figure in The Tale of Genji demonstrates) from the early twentieth century on, modern culture experiences its pervasive influence, the New Gothic being one example. This may have much to do with the permeation of consumerism, since in a consumer society, the grotesque body, particularly that associated with fat or various excess, is more intensely abjected. Uniformity is a feature both of mass-products but as an aspect of the concept of beauty itself which the mass-media has brought to every corner of the world by way of the artificial icons created in Hollywood. The result is that, along with the objectification of the female body, this cultural norm has become extremely narrow in range. Consequently, more and more female bodies are regarded as abnormal or grotesque.

The grotesque is in relation to the concept of boundary, and to the blurring of distinctions such as those between nature and culture, human and animal, animal and plant, and man and woman. Originally, it described an ornamental art style, the incoherent combination of human/animal, animal/plant, animate/inanimate, etc, that stirs the feeling of uneasiness in the spectator. It has always been, in Wolfgang Kayser's word, "an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world" (188),<sup>1</sup> used in order to control fears by converting them into forms of ornamentation. That attempt at control the fear does not always succeed, since it inevitably exhibits

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque: In Art and Literature, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1963).

the limits of human power. And in my observation, contemporary art focuses more on this effect of revelation rather than the control and subjection of uneasiness. Mary Russo analyses ways in which the grotesque appears in a moment captured by many contemporary woman writers, and calls them “depth and surface models of the body” (6).<sup>2</sup> Her phrase concisely summarises the ambiguous and multiple meanings which the term “grotesque” carries: she points out that the grotesque not only plays with the surface of the body, but presupposes the deeper interior, the cave, “the grotto-escape,” which is “low, hidden, earthly, dark, material, immanent, visceral,” and which implies “the cavernous anatomical female body” (1). A dark cave on earth evokes an unreasonable fear in any human being as if it is hiding some horrible beast or a terrifying bottomless pitfall into red hot magma. It tends to evoke anxiety that something terrible will happen if a wrong step is taken. Similarly the female body seems to stir such unreasonable fears. With this phrase, Russo at once describes the revelation of both the social reduction of the female body to a superficial *objet d’art* and its mythical association with dark forces. These apparently contradictory attributes seem to serve as a clue for many writers to fracture the system of oppression.

It seems that the human body, both male and female, has been a site of such anxiety. In Western as well as Eastern philosophy, the human body to a certain degree signifies nature which resists the insatiable desire of the human mind to conquer bodily weakness and to defy death. Contrary to human wishes, the body is weak, uncontrollable, and perishable. Nature, now materialised as the body, has to be conquered and oppressed by the human mind. Kim Chernin points out that the dualism of body/mind pervades the West through Christian and Greek philosophical ideas: “the struggle to dominate the body is endemic to this culture, and may well

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Russo, The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity (New York: Routledge, 1994).

characterise patriarchal culture altogether" (56).<sup>3</sup> It is not, however, only Western philosophy which regards the human body as despicably weak, but so also does some Eastern philosophy, as Chernin herself suggests:

Buddhist thought, which undertakes to reconcile so many of the opposites we take for granted, fails in this effort so far as the body is concerned. Although the sacred art in the Buddhist tradition idealises the body, much of the training of the Buddhist monk reveals precisely the opposite attitude. In his book on Buddhism, Edward Conze returns frequently to this idea. "Again and again," he writes, the monk "is taught to view this material body as repulsive disgusting, the most offensive" (58).<sup>4</sup>

With such an antagonistic view towards the human body as a cultural backdrop, symptomatic of patriarchal cultures, the grotesque has been historically attributed more to the female than to the male body. The female body, because of its rather mysterious, and not quite controllable, menstrual cycle and pregnancy, has been regarded as being more closely connected to nature, symbolised as something to be tamed, trivialised, conquered and repressed. As early as in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex claimed that patriarchy constitutionally adopts as attitude of hatred towards woman's body, because when man aspires to the absolute everlasting Spirit, regarding woman as the Other, "he finds himself shut up in a body of limited powers, in a place and time he never chose, where he was not called for, useless, cumbersome, absurd" (177). This makes him blame Woman-Mother who gave him birth. It may be no wonder, in such a context, that woman is considered more vile and sinful than her opposite sex. In Christianity, woman is only holy

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<sup>3</sup> Kim Chernin, Womansize: The Tyranny of Slenderness (London: Women's Press, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Cited phrase is from Edward Conze, Buddhism: Its Essence and Development (Oxford: Cassirer, 1951).

when she can conceive without actual sexual intercourse, thus without succumbing to her desire. Otherwise she is a temptress Eve, who traps a man into the fall from Eden. In Buddhism, she cannot be saved unless she reincarnates as a man first, while a man has a chance to become Buddha straight after his death. But he also has a desperate need for woman, since "she is the wished-for intermediary between nature, the stranger to man, and the fellow being who is too closely identical. She opposes him with neither the hostile silence of nature nor the hard requirement of a reciprocal relation" (172). This contradiction inherent in the culture, the desire/horror of the female body, is reflected in the angel/monster dichotomy, which Gilbert and Gubar extensively analyse.<sup>5</sup>

This makes a clear contrast with the Japanese Shintoist concepts, which manifest no such hatred and conflict towards the human body, hence towards the female body.<sup>6</sup> Nature is not set against mind, but is viewed as a source of mystic power and life, vital to any farming society. Unlike the divided Western Goddesses, Goddesses in Japanese myth are both sexual and benevolent at the same time: typical of them is Amaterasu, the Goddess of the sun. According to Yoshida and Hurukawa, having a female chief in myth is very rare in the world, and it is also remarkable that she lacks the violent characteristics of a typical important deity in Western myths:

The primal Gods in other myths, without exception, do not at all hesitate to destroy their enemies without mercy, to kill them in a brutal way. They punish those who have sinned in a unimaginably cruel way, even if the sinner is their fellow. Their merciless character is described in various brutal episodes, so as it to be exaggerated....

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<sup>5</sup> See Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 1 of this thesis, 21-32 and 44-47.

Contrary to the severe and merciless personality of the chief Gods in other myths, Amaterasu is thoroughly generous, and incredibly merciful (10-15).<sup>7</sup>

As Amaterasu herself symbolises, nature is not the object to be conquered or repressed, but something to be admired and to live in harmony with in order to obtain its generous harvest, which, as I have suggested, might originate from the basic principle of a farming culture. There seems to be no separation, as in the Western myths, of all benevolent cerebral Goddesses from all sexual and malicious Goddesses. Unlike Western malicious Goddesses, Japanese Goddesses do not kill their own children. The dualism of nature/mind is not an inherent principle of this religion. It is interesting to speculate that if this religion had sustained its original significance in Japanese culture, there might be fewer body pathologies in contemporary Japan. However, since Japanese Goddesses were marginalised and eliminated from the dominant cultural terrain as early as the eighth century, Japanese culture now exhibits the same pathological dualisms as the West.

In both cultures, the female body has signified the object to be obtained and conquered by artistry and imagination, whose mission within the patriarchal establishment is to make humankind the master of nature, prosperous and death-defying. Hence, Gilbert and Gubar argue that Western literature has set up the mould of silent and docile "angel" and of outspoken and angry "monster" which both lead to the silencing of woman's voice and subjectivity. The ideal "angel" and the grotesque "monster" are thus engendered.

The area of the "grotesque" is greatly expanded in consumer society. With the progress of technology, improved hygiene, development of the mass-media and

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<sup>7</sup> Atsuhiko Yoshida and Noriko Hurokawa, *Nihon-no-Shinwa Densetsu* (Japanese Myth and Legends) (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1996).

mass-production, the limit of "normality" has considerably narrowed. The cosmetics industry, plastic surgery, dieting obsession, gym-crazes, only contribute to this tendency, which seems to aim at a particular kind of beauty and which the majority of human beings do not naturally possess. It creates an obsession with size and shape to an unprecedented degree.

Paradoxically, this obsession with a particular body allowed new kinds of grotesque body to come into being: the body of the anorexic and bulimic. Women who suffer from bulimia or anorexia nervosa are those who are obsessed with reducing their size to an extreme, and eating disorders are not only a clinical issue but also carry philosophical implications and have interested literary writers. The grotesque characters in contemporary novels lay bare the impossible dichotomy, by fluctuating along the boundary between "angel" and grotesque "monster." Such fluctuation is a manoeuvre to kill both images which confine and debilitate woman's creativity<sup>8</sup>, a manoeuvre to break free from the myths of woman, which have so widely prevailed that they affect the way women conceive themselves. It is a difficult struggle, since patriarchal praise for "angelic woman" is very captivating for a woman herself. Therefore she tends to overlook the repressive function of such woman-worship, of icons such as "Virgin Mary," for example, even though such body-less "angels" have no reference to the actual feminine body.

An unmistakable sense of hatred toward their own female body, "a bitter

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<sup>8</sup> Gilbert and Gubar claim in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that these stereotypes "have been so ubiquitous throughout literature by men that they have also pervaded women's writing to such an extent that few women have definitively 'killed' either figure"(17) even though neither of the images really capture the sense of womanhood as woman herself feels it. They, therefore, suggest that, in order to write, to be creative, women "must kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been 'killed' into art" while they also "must kill the angel's necessary opposite and double, the 'monster' in the house, whose Medusa-face also kills female creativity" (17). They say "a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated for her" (17). Angel and monster are the two sides of the same coin. They are forever separated, and unless both of them are destroyed and assimilated, woman cannot obtain the power to express herself.

contempt for the feminine nature of [their] own body” (Chernin 18) is a symptom of contemporary eating disorder: the very symptom of the disharmonious system of patriarchal thought. It probably originates from the traditional alienation of the body from mind and the subsequent trivialisation of the body. By taking this societal control over the body to an extreme, the anorexic and bulimic unwittingly reveal the malady of their society. By denying natural desire and hunger, and the natural growth into a fully curved female figure, they symptomatically try to put mind over body. In the case of the anorexic, “in transcending the hunger pangs they [are] winning in an area of the struggle with their apparently independently developing bodies. They [are] attempting to gain control over their shapes and their physical needs. They [feel] their power in their ability to ignore their hunger” (Orbach, *Fat is a Feminist Issue* 125).<sup>9</sup> For them, food and female sexuality and femininity are extremely closely connected. In their minds, taking food according to natural hunger would produce an ugly female body, a fear which is a precise reflection of the societal fear of feminine sexuality. Hence hunger is denied. The ultimate goal of such an attempt can only be death (Chernin 51). They “all [recede] from the physical world” (Chernin 53). Death is the mind’s ultimate victory over the body.

Susie Orbach also suggests that compulsive eating centres around the issue of self-assertion:

“[Compulsive eaters] eat away the bad feelings and focus the negative feelings on the food rather than addressing the difficult issue of assertion (FiFI 50).”

According to Orbach, the profound cause of various eating disorders might come from the fact that obsession with food and the body has become “a permitted form of

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<sup>9</sup> Susie Orbach, *Fat is a Feminist Issue: The Anti-diet Guide for Women + Fat is a Feminist Issue II* [1978 and 1982] (London: Arrow Books, 1998). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with FiFI in front of the page number.

self-expression and self-involvement" (Hunger Strike 3)<sup>10</sup> for women. "Food is the medium through which women are addressed; in turn, food has become the language of women's response" (HS 3). In contemporary society where "[a] woman's body becomes the subject of scrutiny, the recipient of enormous amounts of attention, and the vehicle for the expression of a wide range of statement" (HS 3), it seems unsurprising that the size of women drastically fluctuates from decade to decade, just as societal expectations of desirable femininity likewise fluctuate. Kim Chernin comments on this phenomenon:

we know that during the 1920s, women were binding their breasts and bobbing their hair and hoping to look like boys; and we remember that in 1960 Marilyn Monroe, when she made the film *Some Like It Hot*, was still permitted to be as large as a woman as in a drawing by Modersohn-Becker. We who fell in love with her then, yearned as growing girls to look like her, seeing this film now, and the size of the woman who was our heroine, must marvel at what has happened to our very perception of beauty. For Monroe, if she were alive now, and still as grand and voluptuous as she was then, would today no doubt be considered fat (88-9).

Society's attempt at controlling the female body is most clearly visible in such coercive fashion trends. Trying to conform to the social norm, women have sometimes inflated and other times reduced their physical shape. As the "Other," and the object, women are, in Jean Baker Miller's words, allotted the role of supporter, helper, second-class citizen. They are required not to insist on their desire, their feeling, but to cater for the others' (men's) feeling and desire. However, the anorexic and bulimic protest against such requirements, pushing themselves to

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<sup>10</sup> Susie Orbach, Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor for Our Age, 2nd Edition (London: Penguin, 1993). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with HS in front of the page number.



the extreme end of the requirement. By estranging the normal relationship to food, they indeed manage to expose social control over the female body.

Chernin also notices a very interesting fact that the occurrence of the feminist movement in the sixties in the West coincided with the spread of the clinical problem of bulimia and anorexia nervosa and the appearance of diet groups (99). This may justify Naomi Wolf saying "We are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement: the beauty myth" (10).<sup>11</sup> The beauty myth, the myth of its universality and objectivity, its relation with sexuality and fertility, which inevitably leads to the "fact" that "only beautiful women can become happy," debilitates contemporary women who have achieved more success in legal, intellectual, and material world than in former times. Being beautiful becomes almost a primal imperative for women. The reason why this beauty myth becomes so oppressive for women is, Wolf suggests, "because the ideology of beauty is the last one remaining of the old feminine ideologies that still has the power to control those women whom second wave feminism would have otherwise made relatively uncontrollable" (10-11).

Though Chernin maintains that the feminist movement and the occurrence of bulimia and anorexia are "two divergent movements, one of which is a movement toward feminine power, the other a retreat from it, supported by the fashion industries, which share a fear of women's power" (99), I think both reflect an antagonistic attitude toward the dominant system of oppression. If in the former, a woman verbally and politically sought for recovery of the control of woman's identity, in the latter, silently and privately, she refused to conform to the social norm. They are, in my opinion, aspects of the same movement, because while some women engaged themselves in the Feminist Movement in the sixties, other women might

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<sup>11</sup> Naomi Wolf, The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women (New York: Morrow, 1991).

have become obsessed with food as an alternative way of making a statement. In the case of the anorexic, “They [are] attempting to gain control over their shapes and their physical needs. They [feel] their power in their ability to ignore their hunger” (Orbach, FiFI 125). Therefore, they are both an attempt at self-assertion against the existing social norm.

Considering society’s pressure to treat the body as something trivial and petty, the forming of the diet-group or workshop can be regarded as a political move, as Chernin insists (101), because it brings forth what used to be repressed as “private” into a “public” sphere, which the anorexic and the bulimic might be attempting to do in their silence.

The grotesque figures in contemporary works are the deviations from the norm which Donna Haraway puts into three terms “simians, cyborgs, and women,” all of which are “odd boundary creatures” (2). This might sound negative, but, just as Haraway sets up the imagery of cyborgs to suggest “a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (181), the contemporary manoeuvre of using the grotesque as a literary theme seems more on the side of “invoking” rather than “subduing” the mysterious quality in order to destabilise the dualisms themselves. The Female grotesque body can threaten the system by revealing its precariousness and illegitimacy; it indicates there is something lurking behind the social order, something not quite contained. While original Gothic tales might have explored the horror originating from female sexuality (which normally ends with the conquest of the horror and the restoration of order), contemporary women writers, however, succinctly use the same motif to the opposite end, that is, to subvert the institutionalising system. The benefit of using the grotesque figure is demonstrated in The Tale of Genji in which the protagonist’s fear is transferred onto a female character who turns into a ghost, typically a grotesque figure. It is through her mouth that criticism against the protagonist is

addressed, which might otherwise be impossible, since criticising the superior was regarded as inappropriate. The motif of the ghost is made most of here as a medium through which the female character can pour out her heart. Similarly, by invoking the “uncanny” feeling, the contemporary grotesque creates a situation in which our concept of the world as fixed and well-controlled can be disturbed and its legitimacy thrown into doubt.

Many of these manoeuvres are found both in English and Japanese literature. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Angela Carter fantastically demonstrates the possibility of the grotesque body in her novels, the most obvious example of which might be Nights at the Circus. She induces the mysterious power from the “boundary creature,” Fevvers, and creates a positively fantastic narrative. Apart from Carter, there are many more writers dealing with this bodily boundary in the West and the East. Their treatment and narrative style may differ, but the effect they evoke can be similar. Let us first look at some writers, whose approach might be considered to be more orthodox, and closer to classic realism, than others.

### The Edible Woman

It was also in the sixties that Margaret Atwood wrote The Edible Woman.<sup>12</sup> Identification with food is critical for Marian in this story, as it reveals the uncanny similarity of the female body and food in consumer society. Both are beautifully packaged and displayed to attract attention and to be consumed. With both of them, any deformity, abnormality, and excess are detested. It is when this grotesque truth becomes clear to Marian, that she becomes able to break free and overcome her eating disorder.

Up to a certain phase of the story, the heroine, Marian MacAlpin, is described

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret Atwood, The Edible Woman [1969] (London: Virago, 1980). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with EW in front of the page number.

as similar to the majority of today's women who are unconscious of their own sense of alienation from the social norm. Because the norm is so pervasive, however, they are unaware of the effort that is required to be in conformity with it. Marian is such a "normal" woman, who is expecting to get married to her boyfriend, Peter. However, by internalising the view of society, she gradually develops disgust for the female body. But what is at issue for Atwood is the question of the definition of "normality." The other "normal" women around her seem hopeless to her: Clara, for instance, had used to be "everyone's ideal of translucent perfume-advertisement femininity," but falls into pregnancies one after another, soon after the marriage. She never finished her degree, and has now "subsided into a grim but inert fatalism." Marian can only feel "a wave of embarrassed pity" towards her (EW 36). On the other hand, her anti-marriage flatmate, Ainsley, undermines the feminist attitude by succumbing quickly to societal pressure, claiming that the father of her child should marry her for the child's sake, even though she has calculatingly tricked him into being a father to the child. There is a paucity of alternative role-models, which *makes marriage for* Marian seem not only inevitable but "natural." This is the case even though the image of Clara is pitiful and far from desirable.

This story adroitly lays open Marian's conflict over the issue of marriage, even though she is not conscious of it herself. Like an anorexic, Marian is typically alienated from her own feelings and any clear self-conscious assertion of them is inconceivable:

I wanted Peter to turn and talk to me, I wanted to hear his normal voice, but he wouldn't.... After a while I noticed with mild curiosity that a large drop of something wet had materialized on the table near my hand. I poked it with my finger and smudged it around a little before I realized with horror that it was a tear. I must be crying then!  
(EW 70)

The apocalyptic plot of this novel is that her body, neglected and ignored so far, finally starts to assert itself. She is gripped with several physical symptoms which she herself cannot grasp on the level of consciousness; she finds herself running away from Peter: "After the first minute I was surprised to find my feet moving, wondering how they had begun, but I didn't stop" (EW 72). Her body's attempt at resistance is silenced by the patriarchal power, when Peter trivialises her attempt by saying, "you're just rejecting your femininity" (EW 80), and by proposing to her. The repressive function of the institution of marriage is laid bare, when Marian convinces herself that she had "probably wanted to marry Peter all along" (EW 84). After this failure, her body proceeds to take the resistance even further: it becomes anorexic. The scene of that moment reveals for the first time the equivalence of commodity and woman. She realises that "[l]ately he had been watching her more and more" (EW 149) and that "he was sizing her up as he would a new camera, trying to find the central complex of wheels and tiny mechanisms, the possible weak points, the kind of future performances to be expected: the springs of the machine" (EW 150). Watching Peter eat the steak, which is "a violent action" (EW 150), she "suddenly [sees] it as a hunk of muscle. Blood red. Part of a real cow that once moved and ate and was killed, knocked on the head as it stood in a queue like someone waiting for a streetcar" (EW 151).

Now that she cannot take food for granted as something to be consumed, but sees it as the victim of manipulation, she can no longer view the female body as "normal." This sense of things penetrates the undercover system of manipulation of the female body, which is cut, shaped, trimmed, dyed, dressed and decorated to be palatable for man's consumption. A dead body of an animal looks to Marian to be the same as a woman's body:

What peculiar creatures they were; and the continual flux between the outside and inside, taking things in, giving them out, chewing, words,

potato-chips, burps, grease, hair, babies, milk, excrement, cookies, vomit, coffee, tomato-juice, blood, tea, sweat, liquor, tears, and garbage...(EW 167).

What is described here is the total alienation of her body in general from her sense of herself, which is so total that it makes her finally realise how her body is alienated from mind, how her body and her femininity are trivialised and controlled. Now it becomes possible for her to connect the violent act of eating with the male-female relationship: the food in the supermarket is prettily packaged, while the killing or modification for the sake of human consumption is disguised; women are also prettily clothed and they are put up in the market of male-desire.

In fact, consumer society as a whole is taken up here as a responsible factor in the furthering of the body/mind division. In Late Capitalism, consuming is regarded as a virtue and the system of mass-production and mass-consumption is established. Strangely enough, in the course of production, the actual process of production is reduced to a removed concept, hidden and distanced from the view of consumers. The producer is removed to the country-side or the third world. The messy slaughter is carried out somewhere else by somebody else. Cities are the place for consuming, but not for killing and producing. Away from the actual killing of cows, oxen, birds, sheep, and pigs, consumers can enjoy the sin-free beef, chicken, mutton, and pork, without feeling guilty. What the consumers receive is a cleanly packaged, and fancifully labelled "food," which no longer belongs to any "animal." It is transformed into a different merchandise that has nothing to do with a living thing on earth. Products other than food are also produced in a similar sort of way, in which the dirty, disgusting, exploitative part of the process is distanced and covered. Consumers do not have to witness, nor to think about, the miserable working conditions of the underpaid factory workers in the third world.

The reality of woman's body is similarly sterilised in the consumer society.

Through mass media, particular parts and qualities of a woman's body are merchandised among people as desirable, and in turn become a sign of desirability, beauty, social status, and luxury. Such a body does not encompass the redundant, messy parts of femininity, which are nicely covered, separated from the body, and repressed. While the beautiful desirable parts of femininity acquire sublime meaning, the hatred and abhorrence towards what are then perceived as the "messy" aspects are intensified.

The model bodies (it does not matter what kind of personality they possess) are trim, slim, tidy, clean and without excessive hair or fat. However, real women grow bodyhair, put on weight, become wrinkled, may sometimes be constipated or menstruate: all completely other to the publicised image of femininity. It seems then a matter of course that many women feel distressed about this "messy" bit of their existence, sometimes to the extent that it creates the desire for flight from femininity altogether. The clean, slim, hairless body of the model, though actually an image fabricated with the help of computer treatment and photographic technique, is far distant from the real body of the female adult. This unreal image is what seems to trigger anorexia as an attempt to obtain the pre-pubertal girl's body. Hatred of the "messy" part of femininity, in other words, the reality of female sexuality, is deeply internalised in women in consumer society.

This hatred is recognisable in Marian. She has an internalised abhorrence towards the messy business of woman's sexuality. Unconsciously, she hates the mature body of the female, and yearns to obtain the pre-pubertal body:

Marian's mind grasped at the word "immature", turning it over like a curious pebble found on a beach. It suggested an unripe ear of corn, and other things of a vegetable or fruitlike nature. You were green and then you ripened: became mature. Dresses for the mature figure. In other words, fat (EW 166).

The mature, curvy, fatty figure of woman is for Marian something to be abhorred:

She examined the women's bodies with interests, critically, as though she had never seen them before.... But now she could see the roll of fat pushed up across Mrs. Gundridge's back by the top of her corset, the ham-like bulge of thigh, the creases round the neck, the large porous cheeks; the blotch of varicose veins glimpsed at the back of one plump crossed leg, the way her jowls jellied when she chewed, her sweater a woolly teacosy over those rounded shoulders; and the others too, bumpy permanents and dune-like contours of breast and waist and hip; their fluidity sustained somewhere within by bones, without by a carapace of clothing and makeup (EW 167).

The woman's body that Marian describes here is the natural female body, which not only lives and consumes, but also brings lives, nurtures, and produces excess. The dread and abhorrence towards such a complicated body might be a typical product of consumer ideology, in which the final beautiful product is the only thing that matters, and in which the unsightly process and aftermath has to be covered-up and repressed.

Atwood introduces a mythic figure in order to heal Marian's split body and mind. It is this figure, Duncan, who makes her discover her own need. He is not such a stereotypical male saviour of the princess, who, after all, reduces her as his "Other." It is inventive of Atwood to create a character as sexless and removed from the desirable standard as Duncan. He has no money, he is messy, he is untidy. In other words, he is the opposite of the advertised notion of male sexuality. It makes the involvement with him "safe," since it does not force Marian back to the repressive system of patriarchy. Without any hierarchical power-struggle, Marian can accept her attraction to Duncan, and can come to terms with her feminine sexual body.

The final reconciliation of her body and mind is represented in a symbolic act



of subverting the relation between the consumer and the consumed. By baking a cake and eating it and by forcing Peter to eat it, Mary reclaims the status as a subject which she had lost in the hierarchy of the male-female relationship. In this action, she asserts herself not as the Other, but as an equal human being who requires reciprocity:

“You’ve been trying to destroy me, haven’t you,” she said. “You’ve been trying to assimilate me. But I’ve made you a substitute, something you’ll like much better. This is what you really wanted all along, isn’t it?” (EW 271).

After finally becoming able to assert what she feels, her hunger comes back to her. She regains control, and the dualism of body/mind is reconciled. When Ainsley exclaims, “You’re rejecting your femininity!” (272), Marian can laugh it off, as she knows she is not acting according to any imposed notion of femininity, but according to her own resumed desire. It is that critical but voluntary step taken by the woman herself, which is required to improve the situation. As Jean Baker Miller suggests:

Women are the people who have the need and motivation to make major changes in their way of living. As they initiate the changes required to meet their own needs they will create the stimulus for a thoroughgoing overhaul of the entire society (57).<sup>13</sup>

In the case of Marian, the entire society is not changed after her symbolic act, and Peter is alarmed and their marriage is called off. However, her alienation from the body is over, and some progress made, however tiny, in the overall effort to “initiate the changes.”

### The Dawn That Never Comes To the Bulimic

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<sup>13</sup> Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Boston: Beacon, 1986).

The Japanese counterpart of The Edible Woman might be the novel by Yuko Matsumoto, Kyoshokusho-no-Akenai-Yoake (The Dawn That Never Comes To the Bulimic).<sup>14</sup> Reflecting the late arrival of Feminism in Japan, this novel appeared in 1988.

The story is narrated by the heroine, Tokiko Sawada. It takes the form of a confession of her Bulimic eating habit. She tells the readers what goes through her acutely self-conscious mind, as she subjects herself to counselling. The conflict, of which she is shown to be aware, is between external expectations and her own inner sense of reality. The particular difference is that, while the conflict in The Edible Woman is mainly expressed in the heroine's relationship with men, in this Japanese novel, it is in her relationship with her mother. The story unfolds from the heroine's recollection of the scene, in which a new-born baby is being put into a lukewarm bath. It reminds her of a day when feeling and mind were not separated. Tokiko asks, "Why the body and the soul can so relax when soaked in a lukewarm water? Is it because it reminds each cell of the body of the forty-weeks-long amniotic fluid days?" (Dawn 5). Actually soaking herself in a lukewarm water, Tokiko ponders:

Once out of the water, I cannot stay naked. To live in the society, I need to put on, firstly, clothes, and then, something much heavier than clothes: the rules written or unwritten, the ordinary behaviour, the commonsense, the manner, and so on and so forth.... As long as I am here, I have to do nothing. Nothing can bother me. Nothing can hurt me.... I do not want to have been born (Dawn 9).

The mother-daughter relationship is a typical issue troubling compulsive eaters, the anorexic, and the bulimic, according to Susie Orbach. She analyses the eating

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<sup>14</sup> Yuko Matsumoto, Kyoshokusho-no-Akenai Yoake [1988] (The Dawn That Never Comes to the Bulimic) (Tokyo: Shueisha, 1991). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with Dawn in front of the page number. Matsumoto was born in 1963, took BA in International Politics. She won the Subaru Literary Award with this novel, and continues writing novels as well as translating English stories.

disorder as “a symbolic rejection of the limitations of women’s role, an adaptation that many women use in the burdensome attempts to pursue their individual lives within the proscriptions of their social function” (FiFI 28-9). And the first person who is seen to exhibit the very “limitations of women’s role” is their mother, the anti-role-model:

It is a complex and ironic process, for women are prepared for this life of inequality by other women who themselves suffer its limitations - their mothers. The feminist perspective reveals that compulsive eating is, in fact, an expression of the complex relationships between mothers and daughters.... [T]he world the mother must present to her daughter is one of unequal relationships, between parent and child, authority and powerlessness, man and woman. The child is exposed to the world of power relationships by a unit that itself produces and reproduces perhaps the most fundamental of these inequalities. Within the family, an inferior sense of self is instilled into little girls (FiFI 28-9).

The heroine is typically troubled in such a relationship which is “bound to be difficult in a patriarchal society because it demands that the already oppressed mothers become the teachers, preparers and enforcers of the oppression that society will visit on their daughters” (FiFI 33)

In fact, it seems that the heroine Tokiko is deeply troubled by the mother-daughter relationship. She tells us the feeling she has for her mother who left her when she was a one-year-old, while she describes her obsession with food and the fluctuation of her weight:

From time to time, when my real mother passes in my mind, she always scrapes the inside wall of my heart and leaves ugly scabs or bruises that never fade away. Nonetheless I cannot help but thinking

of my mother. But at that time, as if to cut away such longings, I was determined to bid farewell to anything maternal and to separate from my mother. I was ambitious to be a woman who is not like my mother, or, no, to be me without womanly nastiness and unpleasantness.... But for the time being, the only means for its realisation was to be thin anyway (Dawn 64-5).

Her denial is not only of her mother, but also of all the things she embodies, including her womanliness. Denying that basic element of herself, Tokiko is fighting a battle she can never win. Bottling up her feelings, and avoiding facing the real issue, she typically finds comfort and protection in food and fat. She goes on to tell how she falls in love with a new boy once she got so anorexically thin. And how she eats compulsively when she breaks up with him and becomes bulimic, puts on so much weight, and withdraws from society. But because she avoids facing her mother, the problem will never be solved. While she seeks medical help, she wonders, "What is she doing now? Is she thinking of me, as I am thinking of her? If I tell her about this, would she come to see me?" (Dawn 15). Tokiko tells us that her mother left her and then married someone new. It is, Tokiko insists, "the longing for my lost mother, and the hatred for my disappeared mother" which torments her. She analyses the origin of her troubled relationship with men in a deep-rooted anxiety, because she feels she was not loved by her mother.

The mother-daughter relationship asserts itself as the story's main theme, when the novel ends with a short additional episode, which reveals that the story told so far is a fiction, written by Tokiko herself. The mother of Tokiko, we are told, did leave her but came back to stay in her marriage. In this final episode, Tokiko's real mother reads what her daughter has written secretly, and accuses Tokiko by saying she came back without divorcing her husband "only for Tokiko" (Dawn 162). To this accusation, Tokiko shouts, "Don't say 'Only for Tokiko, only for Tokiko'! What are

you living for? Don't you have a life of your own? I have hated you like that. You were deplorable. Hateful. Yes, I have hated you so much!" (Dawn 163). This potentially revealing articulation of her hatred towards the female fate, however, does not go beyond the body of her actual mother. Though the heroine acknowledges the concealed yearnings for her mother, for the reconciliation with her, and with femininity itself, none of these are realised by the end of the novel. The acknowledgement of contradictory feelings towards her mother does not seem to take Tokiko anywhere. Misunderstood and accused by her mother, she bitterly confides that she has not intended her mother to read her fiction, though at the same time she has wanted her to read it: "Both are paradoxically true" (Dawn 168).

The framework of the novel insists that the mother-daughter relationship is the main issue, but there are also many more direct allusions to the male-female relationship in the story. As we have seen before, in a society where gender-division is still strictly guarded by the authority of behavioural codes, women writers might need to employ such tactics in order to avoid unnecessary censorship. In this novel, for instance, the framework of mother-daughter conflict allows the author to address something else, without causing the real alarm which Marian causes Peter. It is a similar technique to that employed by Lady Murasaki in The Tale of Genji, that is, the heroine does not directly challenge injustice, but chooses to do it in an indirect and devious way. When she shouts at her mother, Tokiko does not blame her mother for leaving her, but for her limitations as a woman. She hates her mother, because she could not follow her desire "only for Tokiko." The weight of society's expectations of maternal responsibility in women creates despair in Tokiko, and it makes her flinch from growing into a full feminine body.

What Tokiko reveals in the course of (fictional) counselling is the way in which she has been acting out the other's expectation, "searching for the way to speak in a pleasing manner" (Dawn 18). Patriarchal society's imposition of femininity requires

her to remain innocent, i.e., without her own desire. However, Tokiko is a very consciously desiring woman, who loves the food-hall of a department store, and has two-timed her lovers. But at the same time, she is made to feel sinful because of her pursuit of those desires. She addresses society's attempts to control human desire:

What does it mean to eat?... The instinctive hunger itself is not something to be ashamed of, but somehow, any instinct, for food, sex, or sleep, is tinged with a shameful impression. It is strange to be sure. Though instinct is there because it is necessary for life to carry on, it is suddenly degraded when it involves pleasure. Is it because of such images that I feel contempt for myself for indulging the desire for food? (Dawn 92).

Not only the desire for food, but sexuality too is discovered by Tokiko to be heavily repressed. She recollects an illustrated human anatomy which she saw in her childhood: "there was no vagina in that illustration" (Dawn 34). The repression of female sexuality in society is betrayed here. She wonders, "considering that no boy is unaware of his own penis, what is the significance of the fact that girls are until a certain age unaware of their own real body?" (Dawn 35).

Unfortunately this heroine, while she fails to find reconciliation with her mother and to accept her femininity as it is, also cannot get away from her obsession with weight by the end of the story, even though she recognises that what she desires is simply a created notion of beauty, slenderness, which has nothing to do with health. In the conversation with her feminist friend, Noriko, she asserts that she wants to be thin by her own will and regardless of men's preference. However, when she loses her lovers, she feels that she has lost them because she is filthy, self-centred and sinful. This typical societal control of desire drives her into a punitive view of her own femininity. What she has really wanted is to be asexual, to return to the state where she is not woman (Dawn 153). Her first menstruation is nothing but a painful

memory for her. Yet these limitations of womanhood which she has internalised from her own mother are definitely what she does not want for herself. However, unlike Marian in The Edible Woman, she cannot take up an assertive attitude. The hatred towards her own femininity, and perhaps the severity of societal control of it in Japanese culture, does not make liberation easy for Tokiko. She remains bulimic, while she cannot integrate her feminine body and mind. She hides behind the fat, protected against any accusation from society of being selfish and sinful. She remains the victim of patriarchal manipulation of female desire.

### Lady Oracle

A further novel by Atwood, Lady Oracle<sup>15</sup>, deals more directly with the issue of self-assertion in the obsession with the body and the same kind of tormenting mother-daughter relationship as The Dawn that Never Comes to the Bulimic. The problem described is the system of internalisation of reproach and accusation within womanhood, the way in which hatred of the female body seems to become a woman's issue separate from concerns about the other sex or society's objectification of women.

The difference is that in Lady Oracle the heroine in the end realises that what lies beneath this conflict is her relationship with her mother, and she starts to move towards a reconciliation with her mother as well as herself. As we have seen earlier, women's hatred towards their own bodies, expressed sometimes as hatred towards, and conflict with, their mothers, can never be resolved unless they are reconciled with femininity itself, both their own and their mother's.

While her mother embodies the societal control of the body and repression of desire, Joan is distanced from the real issue, since her urgent enemy appears to be not the real oppressor but her mother, who is herself oppressed enough to try to make

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<sup>15</sup> Margaret Atwood, Lady Oracle [1976] (London: Virago, 1982). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with LO in front of the page number.

her daughter more marketable in society by forcing her into a desirable, slim, trim figure. Susie Orbach describes how “the already oppressed mothers become the teachers, preparers and enforcers of the oppression that society will visit on their daughters” (FiFI 33). A tragic case, in fact, as this makes both mother and daughter miserable and unhappy. And neither knows why the other is so defiant. Through mutual recrimination, they miss the point.

Lady Oracle demonstrates how difficult it can be for a woman to confront the real issue of assertion. So powerful is the myth of what Beauvoir calls “the Eternal Feminine” that a woman is easily trapped in an impossible pursuit of it no matter how inappropriate it is for her in reality, and no matter how the obtaining of the ideal body does not guarantee a contented life. Joan in this novel, for instance, is basically presented as a conforming woman, obsessed with a pretty, tiny, and desirable body, and hating her ugly, fat, angry, frustrated, and uncontrollable body. And though she hates her mother who forces the societal judgement upon her daughter’s body, instead of facing her mother, she lets her body become fat. Her body becomes the language:

I ate to defy her, but I also ate from panic. Sometimes I was afraid I wasn’t really there, I was an accident; I’d heard her call me an accident. Did I want to become solid, solid as a stone so she wouldn’t be able to get rid of me? What had I done? Had I trapped my father, if he really was my father, had I ruined my mother’s life? I didn’t dare to ask (LO 78).

Her own body serves as the bulwark against the pressure from her mother to which she is subjected. Or rather, her fat becomes the surrogate issue which troubles Joan and her mother. The fat covers up the real problem, which is the impossible societal requirement for women to fit into a certain model. Fat here, therefore, is a means of escapism and protest. As the fat becomes the central issue,



she fails to tune with her mother's frustration and unhappiness. She ends up internalising the societal hatred against adult womanhood, regarding her mother as "a monster" (LO 67), always angry and unhappy. In this novel, Joan has to fight this miserable futile battle with her uncontrollable body as many women do in this society. Joan cannot see where the frustration (the sense that something is missing for her to be perfect and happy) really comes from. She cannot see because she believes that it originates from her fat body and her split sense of femininity therefore remains unresolved.

Just how difficult it is to face the real issue is shown when one layer between her and her real problem is removed: the author lets Joan finally succeed in reducing her weight, thus robbing her of the surrogate problem. But her frustration does not end. With the "angelic" body she has dreamed of, she does not find herself a contented "angel." As we have seen in The Edible Woman, that angelic woman is nothing but a male creation. Unless the woman breaks free from this fiction and reconciles with her own desire, she will never be able to obtain the integrity she desires.

Without the fat to distract her attention, Joan now has to face the identity problem. Who is she? What does she want? Clearly her slim body does not give her satisfaction. In an attempt to find the self which satisfies her, Joan ends up having several personae, none of which are fully "herself." She creates several narratives, writing Costume Gothic, and lets herself be trapped in them, but the narrative of "romantic love" evades the reality. Her failure comes from the fact that, each time, she creates a desirable woman from another person's point of view.

The most troublesome narrative is the myth of "romantic love," in which Joan herself is trapped, and which she propagates by writing her own version of it. Instead of providing women with integrity, this myth furthers her sense of self-alienation. It deepens her yearning for the impossible image, thus intensifying

the hatred of her current self. The narrative of a “romantic love” might be a drug, but it cannot heal the wound. Joan vaguely realises this, when she explains why she conceals that she is writing *Costume Gothics* from her husband, Arthur:

He wouldn't have understood. He wouldn't have been able to understand in the least the desire, the pure quintessential need of my readers for escape, a thing I myself understood only too well. Life had been hard on them and they had not fought back, they'd collapsed like soufflés in a high wind. Escape wasn't a luxury for them, it was a necessity. They had to get it somehow. And when they were too tired to invent escapes of their own, mine were available for them at the corner drugstore, neatly packaged like the other painkillers (LO 34).

Without asking the deeper meaning of the reason why they so desperately need escape, why she writes *Costume Gothics* to accommodate such needs, or why her mother's image keeps haunting her, Joan continues on her way until her split personalities are entirely out of her control.

Again, the author provides Joan with some help. She loses her surrogate enemy, her mother. This initiates the recovery of her authentic self because another layer between her and her problem is removed. After her mother's death, the lack of her mother's body makes it possible for Joan to search for her psyche, and finds “this evidence of her terrible anger” (LO 179) and for the first time Joan comes to sympathise with her mother:

I could almost see her doing it, her long fingers working with precise fury, excising the past, which had turned into the present and betrayed her, stranding her in this house, this plastic-shrouded tomb from which there was no exit. That was what she must have felt (LO 179-80).

She realises the misery of her mother as a woman:

She used to say that nobody appreciated her, and this was not paranoia. Nobody did appreciate her, even though she'd done the right thing, she had devoted her life to us, she had made her family her career as she had been told to do, and look at us: a sulky fat slob of a daughter and a husband who wouldn't talk to her (LO 178).

Her way to the acknowledgement of the complex problems surrounding women's life is slow but steady, and she recognises a strong need for escape within herself, of which she has been unconscious until that moment. She sees the importance of her other personae to serve that purpose:

As long as I could spend a certain amount of time each week as Louisa, I was all right, I was patient and forbearing, warm, a sympathetic listener. But if I was cut off, if I couldn't work at my current Costume Gothic, I would become mean and irritable, drink too much and start to cry (LO 213).

At the same time, she reckons her escape is simply imaginary, "only paper; paper castles, paper costumes, paper dolls, as inert and lifeless finally as those unsatisfactory blank-eyed dolls I'd dressed and undressed in my mother's house" (LO 216-7). Despite this, the myth of the "romantic love" is so influential that Joan still dreams of becoming the happy princess in a fairytale, who is clean, tidy, and beautiful, without any messy reality of the actual body. While such an imaginary angelic woman is an unattainable creation of patriarchy, many women pursue it and end up reproaching themselves that they are not good enough. Joan, too, blames herself:

And yet, as time went by, I began to feel something was missing. Perhaps, I thought, I had no soul; I just drifted around, singing vaguely, like the Little Mermaid in the Andersen fairytale. In order

to get a soul you had to suffer, you had to give something up; or was that to get legs and feet? I couldn't remember. She'd become a dancer, though, with no tongue. Then there was Moira Shearer, in "The Red Shoes." Neither of them had been able to please the handsome prince; both of them had died. I was doing fairly well by comparison. Their mistake had been to go public, whereas I did my dancing behind closed doors. It was safer, but...(LO 216).

Atwood here raises the question of the patriarchal use of fairytales as an ideological straitjacket. Girls are brought up learning the same lessons from these tales as Joan has learned, that those who want too much receive punishment in the end.

Atwood uses occult techniques to excavate Joan's emotion, which has been otherwise deeply repressed. Firstly, it was the ghost of her mother. She visits Joan, crying and unhappy. And then there is the automatic writing: when Joan tries this technique to enter into the subconscious, the outcome is the angry poem, Lady Oracle. She is so cut off from her deep anger and emotion, she cannot even recognise it as her own emotion (LO 237). When a TV interviewer commented upon it as an angry poem, she is astonished. On the conscious level, she is ever conforming and wants to maintain the image of a desirable, docile woman: "Oh, then you're not in Women's Lib."

"Well, no," I said. "I mean, I agree with some of their ideas, but...."

"Ms. Foster, would you say you are a happily married woman?"

"Oh yes," I said. "I've been married for years."

"Well, that's strange. Because I've read your book, and to me it seemed very angry. It seems like a very angry book. If I were your husband, I'm not sure I'd like it. What do you think about that?"

"It's not about my *marriage*," I said earnestly (LO 237).

In a way, this is the first encounter with her deeper emotion, which seems to strike a

balance with what she has written in *Costume Gothics*:

On re-reading, the book seemed quite peculiar. In fact, except for the diction, it seemed a lot like one of my standard *Costume Gothics*, but a Gothic gone wrong. It was upside-down somehow. There were the sufferings, the hero in the mask of a villain, the villain in the mask of a hero, the flights, the looming death, the sense of being imprisoned, but there was not happy ending, no true love. The recognition of this half-likeness made me uncomfortable. Perhaps I should have taken it to a psychiatrist instead of a publisher (LO 232).

The significance of the narrative of romantic tales such as her Gothic, charged with the myth of happy ending and romantic love, is finally thrown into doubt.

Atwood then demonstrates the positively ambiguous quality of Gothic narrative; it is not only used to intensify the dichotomy, but it can also be used to subvert it. The original Gothic may exhibit women as either the docile, silent, and controllable angel, or the horrible witch or monster who has to be killed off. It is true that this formulation has a negative influence upon the way women see themselves. But some women writers deliberately use this formation so as to exaggerate it and reveal, to the world, the impossibility of angelic women. Parodic intensification acts as a mouth indirectly to expose injustice, whereas the angelic woman has no voice, is not even allowed to speak. It is Lady Oracle, the angry woman, who lets out Joan's repressed anger.

As the incorporeal Duncan brings Marian to a sense of integral self, so this angry Lady Oracle brings Joan out of the fake life. Lady Oracle forces her to face her real problems and to discard false pretensions. Though that is difficult, Joan finally decides to follow her deepest feelings. She looks at a statue of Diana of Ephesus, a beautiful Western Goddess, and thinks:

Once I would have seen her as an image of myself, but not any more.

My ability to give was limited, I was not inexhaustible. I was not serene, not really. I wanted things, for myself (LO 253).

She successfully discards the myths of woman, recognising her incapacity to be an “angel” and accepting her own desire. After this it becomes finally possible for her to create her own narrative. Instead of the usual happy ending, Joan writes a reverse narrative, identifying herself with the evil wife of the hero. The system of oppression in the narrative of orthodox Gothic is laid bare:

If she'd only been a mistress instead of a wife, her life could have been spared; as it was, she has to die. In my books all wives were eventually either mad or dead, or both. But what had she ever done to deserve it? How could I sacrifice her for the sake of Charlotte? I was getting tired of Charlotte, with her intact virtue and her tidy ways (LO 319).

The change of her writing style coincides with her reconciliation with her mother. And though the end of this novel is not fully brilliant for Joan, now that she denounces her pretensions to be a good woman in order to dance her own dance (she cuts her feet as if to receive the punishment, LO 334-5), she is at least ready to face the real issue and to recognise that the grotesque body was never the problem in the first place.

Margaret Atwood reveals that the dichotomy of body and mind, or angel and monster is a pervasive motif in narrative. By self-consciously using myths and fairytales, she successfully reverses the discourse. In fact, this novel explores the versatility of Gothic motifs. The Gothic is itself a grotesque type of narrative, a boundary creature. Like any other grand narrative it can be used to fortify the current power-relation, but it can also function as a reverse discourse. Atwood draws on the power of strong narratives to empower her own heroine to break the confines of narrative “reality.”

Ningyohime-no-Kutsu (Shoes of Little Mermaid)

Ningyohime-no-Kutsu [1994](Shoes of Little Mermaid),<sup>16</sup> written by a Japanese woman writer, Hiiragi Nonaka, as the title suggests, deals with the potential havoc a fairytale can induce in the life of woman. It also shows how widely spread are Western fairytales in Japan, to the extent that they can fundamentally affect the Japanese woman's psyche. The narrative power of Western culture undeniably penetrates the culture.

This story is a little different from the three stories I have so far analysed. The heroine, Mariko, is not feminist-informed (unlike the other heroines) and is unconscious of the unfair treatment of woman in a male-dominated society. Reflecting the reality of the majority of young women in today's Japan, she enjoys the freedom which society seems to promise every man and woman, believing in equality. She does not initially show signs of the classic feminine hatred towards her body, because she has no experience of being disadvantaged by the body. On the contrary, she has been enjoying every advantage which the beautiful female body can bring. In Japanese society, where young and beautiful women are indulged solely for this fact, it is not surprising that women do not recognise inequalities until later when they are no longer young and beautiful. This is very much the case with Mariko, because she is a star ball-spinner in a circus, and enjoys great popularity. Mariko has never felt herself to be in an inferior position in society, and is unconscious of societal control over woman's bodies: it is this which leads to her tragedy. She fails to realise that the freedom and equality seemingly promised by society is not offered

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<sup>16</sup> Hiiragi Nonaka, Ningyohime-no-Kutsu (Shoes of Little Mermaid) (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1994). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with SLM in front of the page number. Nonaka was born in 1964, graduated from college with a low major, she lived in the US for three and a half years. She has won several literary awards in Japan and translated Jeanette Winterson's Written on the Body [1992].

to women without reserve. She believes blindly in the happy ending of fairytales, and she fails to take her maternal body into account until she gets pregnant.

Her love life might be described initially as similar to a young man's. Here, it is Mariko who treats men like food, having three lovers whom she calls A Lunch, B Lunch, and C Lunch (her dates with them have always been at lunch time, because she works at night in a circus). She loves each one of them equally, so she has no sense of guilt. She loves being in love, having been brought up to believe in the happy ending of fairytales (like Joan in Lady Oracle and many other women in contemporary culture). Love is, for her, something that makes her "float," and marriage means a happy ending. Pregnancy is not part of her plan.

This story demonstrates the different possible endings of the love story which society prepares for a man and for a woman, however they behave. It is the story of "after the happy ending," the disillusionment that marriage brought to a woman who naively believed in fairytales.

The balance of Mariko's life shifts when she becomes pregnant, and this is contrary to her expectation. If she were a man, she might have been able to continue the way she has been, but now that she is pregnant, she has to deal with her pregnant body. She is dismayed to find that her body betrays her innocent pursuit of love and pleasure. She feels this is the end of her happy days of full enjoyment that being in love with three men can offer. For her, it is as if her female body rebels against her will. It anchors her free will. She is frightened, because "the so-called 'new life' which is growing in her belly everyday is not at all like 'love'"(SLM 29). She says;

She felt as if she were betrayed. By love. By her lover. By her body.  
Why the new life makes the body heavy, though love makes it light,  
she brooded gloomily. She missed so much the atmosphere with no  
weight, which used to be around her.... Nevertheless, the "precious"



“life” coming out of “love” brought Mariko back down to earth (SLM 29-30).

She suddenly realises that she has a female body, which is subjected to various social limitations and expectations, that she is not as free as she thinks she is.

Until this stage, though, she might be able to ignore this disruption to her life and continue enjoying three lovers, by having an abortion. But a letter from a fan serves her as a wake-up call. The girl unwittingly compares Mariko to a Japanese sweet, which is beautifully packaged and the package has a particular device: the package contains the sweet in the way a balloon contains air, and if you prick the package with a needle, it instantly shrinks to reveal the content. Comparing Mariko to this sweet, a girl writes in a letter, that “I cannot help imagining that, if I prick around your thigh with a needle, the stocking would break, and the flesh of your leg would burst out” (SLM 41).

Mariko is horrified by this imagery presented in the letter. She visualises how her flesh might burst out and suddenly realises that she is getting old, and that her career as a star ball-spinner is not everlasting, that the day would come when her legs are no longer beautiful. For the first time in her life, perhaps, she sees herself as a dispensable commodity. Though she has, so far, been treating men like interchangeable commodities, like the food to enhance the “spice” of her life, in fact, it is Mariko who has really been a commodity all along. Before she is dispensed from the circus, she decides that it is time to end the career and walk away:

In this way, Mariko decided to walk again, drawing the curtain of her skirt, forever. Legs are for walking, she tried to convince herself. Wearing heeled shoes. Wearing down the heels. Even for the sake of it only. Her steps were light and heavy, unlike before. Since her pregnant body was getting heavier each day, love could no longer lift her heels, but the gravity-free weight did no longer put her feet down

to earth either. Only each step hurt. It was as if her foot was stung by a knife.

However, Mariko consoled herself, thinking that Little Mermaid put up with this pain. She desperately needs two legs, in order to pursue her love for the prince. Though it was so painful to walk by her own feet. I would walk, too, she resolutely made up her mind. Legs are for walking (SLM 45-46).

As we can see in this passage, the chilling revelation of her real status in society as a dispensable commodity, an entertainingly beautiful toy, however, does not register with Mariko. Instead, she avoids facing the issue by identifying herself with a heroine in a fairytale in which romantic love is presented as something worth a great deal of sacrifice, and marriage is the goal. Here, Mariko escapes from the pain she is feeling by believing in the definitive value of marriage and the “happily ever after,” promised in many fairytales. It serves as a painkiller for Mariko who has unexpectedly found the cruel way in which society treats women as if they are beautifully packaged sweets. As in Lady Oracle, fairy-tale marriage is regarded by many women as the route to happiness, a miraculous way-out of problems. As Joan in Lady Oracle demonstrates, however, this seemingly ideal solution is no solution at all: it is an escapism, and problems will not go away until they are faced squarely.

Without facing her problems, therefore, Mariko takes up marriage as an idealistically escapist solution. She does not know which lover is the father of the child, but randomly chooses Mr Suzuki, C Lunch, by elimination as the marriage partner. Because she is avoiding the real issue, she continues to feel discomfort and frustration, but cannot quite articulate it. When her chosen lover, Mr Suzuki, proposes to her by saying “It is the most natural thing, isn’t it?” Mariko, therefore, cannot help wondering about the definition of naturalness for her:

Natural? Is it natural? She wanted to ask around no matter whom.

The “nature” surrounding her now seemed utterly different from what she had believed to be “nature” until then. Mariko has been seeing “nature” in herself when she was in love and spending time with her lover.... Where has the “nature” gone which I had believed in?, she wondered. Shit, I am trapped. I am taken in by “woman’s nature” she tutted. I am fooled by the malice of “nature” (SLM 38).

Here, one of the problems that fairytales may bring to a woman is clearly stated. The “nature” which is prescribed to women in fairytales is very different from the “nature” outside of them. Just as the image of the young and beautiful woman in the commodity advertisement eliminates the messy reality of the woman’s body, the world of fairytales does not accommodate the real woman’s experience. They almost always end with happy marriage; birth or old age are not taken into account, as if they do not exist. But they do exist, and women have to be confronted by them unexpectedly. What happens then is that Mariko, out of the blue, experiences her changed body as really horrible. Until then, she sees her body from the society’s point of view, which separates woman’s bodies into two categories, one beautiful, one horrible. *Though those two qualities co-exist in any woman’s body, society allows us to ignore one, whilst cherishing the other.* It cripples a woman’s sight, making it impossible for her to have a whole perception of her own body. Therefore, Mariko, so far, sees only the beauty in her body. But suddenly, she finds the unknown quality, unknown “nature” in her body that is totally strange to her. Here, nature is presented as something which threatens society and culture. It is something that has to be tamed and controlled. Nature is “malicious” while society is “good.” And she finds that horrible “nature” in her body. It demonstrates how difficult society makes it for a woman to accept her own body as it is.

Marian in The Edible Woman also resorts to marriage as a solution to her frustration. Joan in Lady Oracle similarly copes with her problems by writing

Costume Gothic stories. Joan, at first, identifies with the heroine in the stories who is to marry a hero and to live “happily ever after.” By disguising the problems and numbing the sense by taking this kind of painkiller, the problems are simply exacerbated. Finally, in Marian’s case, her body refuses to take any of the food with which she secretly identifies herself. In Joan’s case, Lady Oracle, the angry woman, surfaces and lets Joan realise her deeply buried emotion, that of anger and frustration. In between, it is their neglected corporeality which comes to assert its existence and to force the heroines into acceptance of it.

It is Mariko’s misfortune that she neither has a Lady Oracle nor an anorexic body or any devices which might force her to listen to her body, to its corporeal claim. When confronted by the unexpected pregnancy, all she can do is to try to come to terms with it in the only way she has learnt from fairytales: she tries to find happiness in marriage. She is not a rebel, but essentially just an innocent naïve woman who only believes in a happy ending. She marries Mr Suzuki, expecting him to make her happy, though this does not in fact happen.

The strong hold of the myth of romantic love, and the poisonous effect of fairytales (as in Lady Oracle) are seen here as intensifying the heroine’s disillusionment. Her pain now “was no longer as sharp as a knife, but it was replaced by a blunt one that *gradually numbs your sense*” (SLM 76). She is aware of her ageing body, which makes a sharp contrast to her daughter’s young body. She is jealous of her daughter, who now monopolises her husband’s love and attention. She wants to ask her husband if he loves her, but daily life prevents this kind of communication. Her “husband” is no longer her “lover.”

With the sense of loss, the inevitable course Mariko takes is that she meets one of her former lovers, the one she calls B lunch, who is a married cake-shop owner. Here again, she deliberately uses her appetite for food as an excuse to satisfy her sexual frustration. However, this infatuation does not last. She gets pregnant

again, and the scared lover walks away. As a married woman, she does not have the freedom of choice which she used to have as a single woman. Now she has nothing but an insatiable longing.

Joan in Lady Oracle follows a similar path to Mariko, marrying, having affairs, and resorting to gothic tales, all as a way of coping. However, Joan has Lady Oracle to force her to acknowledge her deepest emotions and desires, and she thus successfully manages to change her perception of body and mind, which, in turn, affects her attitude to Gothic tales. Seeing the ideological narrative lurking behind the Gothic tale, Joan, then, starts writing a new tale, a narrative from a different perspective.

However, without the intervention of a Lady Oracle, Mariko cannot break free from the confining spell of fairytales. Broken hearted, Mariko still clings to a longing for romance, a childhood dream, a happy ending without any pain. She buys a bagful of glass marbles for her daughter, which remind her of her childhood. On the way home, she carelessly swallows one marble after another as if to ease the pain much in the manner of a compulsive binge eater. At one point, she drops some of them, and falls on them. The novel ends with a scene in which Mariko puts up with the intense pain in her belly, while she still licks a marble in her mouth hoping... What is she hoping? Her hope is never to be fulfilled. The last line is, "For ever and ever, she has to wait. She herself has known it long ago" (SLM 174).

#### The Limitation of Realistic Narrative

Ningyohime-no-Kutsu is, indeed, a sad story of a naïve girl who, because of her strong expectations of a fairy-tale love and marriage, is inevitably disillusioned. It shares a number of features with English novels of the nineteenth century. The heroines of such novels as Tess in Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Maggie in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, Catherine in Emily Brontë's Wurthing

Heights, all die, as if being punished for their unconforming way of life. Mariko is not consciously resisting the social norm, but she is nonetheless unconventional enough to treat men as a commodity. She unwittingly defies the social formula, and the sad ending of the novel suggests she receives due punishment from society.

Perhaps it is the shared narrative convention of this novel and earlier English novels of the nineteenth century, which determines the nature of their ending. A strictly realistic mode of narrative usually encloses the heroine firmly within a social norm, repeated in the narrative closure itself. Even when these heroines struggle to break free from such restriction, narrative relentlessly closes down on them. Atwood however develops narrative techniques which allow her heroines to slip into a world which is not in thrall to realism. In Lady Oracle, for instance, the occult technique of automatic writing is used to allow Joan to excavate the emotion which her split perception had never revealed to herself before. Without this technique, it would have been impossible for Joan, the conforming woman, to let out her hidden anger. Similarly, it is the mysterious and non-realistic character, Duncan, who forces Marian to see the incongruity in her life which she has so far been denying. Duncan serves in the novel as a guide figure into Marian's innermost emotion. Neither Lady Oracle nor Duncan can be described as realistic figures. They are closer to mythical figures. Atwood, in particular, skilfully combines mythic with realistic narrative, so that the heroines are provided with the insight and power to overcome the social restrictions of the actual. Ningyohime-no-Kutsu is a third person narrative, but is narrated solely through Mariko's perspective. On the other hand, the narrative of The Edible Woman switches from the first person narrative in Part One, to the third person in Part Two, and then back to the first person in Part Three. During the course of these narrative shifts, the perspectives which are not quite Marian's are allowed to slip in so that Marian in Part One and Marian in Part Three can be presented as very different in her self-perception. The narrative changes as the

mythic figure, Duncan, allows Marian to move beyond her consciousness, and then they make her transformation possible. No longer trapped within the confining ideology of society, she becomes aware that she is capable of refusing victimhood. Her split concept of body and mind would have remained split unless she had been offered alternative perspectives. Mariko has no such alternatives and remains solely within her own consciousness.

This seems to suggest the difficulty experienced by writers working within the frame of realism. Considering those nineteenth-century English novels, it does seem almost impossible for characters to break completely free from the current power structure and ideology, and a tragic ending awaits those who attempt to challenge its norms. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth points out “the self-confirming nature of systems in general” (77)<sup>17</sup> of the realistic narrative convention. Even when there is a particular teller in a realistic novel, in the form of first- or third-person narrator, that narrator merely reflects the consensus, “collective awareness, a matter not so much of public conscience as of public consciousness” (54). To assume credibility, the realistic narrative constitutionally aspires to being as “objective” as possible, which means it assumes as many viewpoints as possible. The locality and particularity of the narrator therefore diminishes to the point where “the narrator is ‘nobody’” (65). The realism convention, at its foundation, shares a faith with all humanism, the faith that there is a unity achievable in the final system, and that the “truth” can be recovered if the tale is told from every possible viewpoint. In Ermarth’s words, “the perspective administered by the realistic narrator reflects most fully the potential of consciousness for continuous extension of power” (85). Within such a narrative formula, the achievable unity cannot be but within the system, and the cyclic system goes on:

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<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1983).

On the one hand the realistic consensus produces and supports the existence of an objective world; consensus literally “objectifies” the aspects of what, *by means of this very process*, can be identified as an autonomous reality. What is so, *is* so, because many different viewpoints *agree* that it is so. A stable, invariant world is there (at least to human perception) - solid, as in itself it really is - *because* everybody agrees that it is so (77).

This narrative formula is indeed not very accommodating for any writer who wants to surpass the current system of the world within his/her writing, since the power of narrative in realistic fiction is nothing but the power derived from the current power structure. Even a first-person narrator cannot quite go beyond that, though, as Ermarth suggests, autobiographical narrations such as Moll Flanders or Jane Eyre may rarely succeed in exerting an unsettling effect (89).

In fact, autobiographical writings are traditionally a major literary genre in Japanese literature, though the narrative may differ between first- and third-person, or the two often diverge as a result of the characteristics of Japanese language, which allow the omission of the subject in a sentence, and which provide the opportunity for the third-person narrative to turn readily into the first-person narrative. Perhaps the reason why this narrative form has been exploited by more female writers than male counterparts in Japan may lie in this very “unsettling effect” of the narrative (though it has been dismissed as a “womanly” “lower” form of literature by the “authorities” who highly regard objectivity).

Similarly, in Ningyohime-no-Kutsu, the third-person narrative often transforms into the first-person narrative, which closely describes Mariko. However, if the narrative sets its footing firmly on realistic narrative, “differences between first- and third-person tellers do not appreciably alter the effect of disembodiment” (Ermarth 88). The narrative in such cases merely excavates the lost memory, which



fortifies the consensus of the society, and the particularities and corporeality of the experience is to be absorbed in the general experience, as Mariko demonstrates at the end of the novel by remembering what she has been supposed to do all the time.

Atwood locates one of the reasons for the inability to change in the tenacity of the Western view of a split body and mind which informs Western myths, religions, and various narrative forms. Atwood self-consciously uses these myths and fairytales, but successfully turns their significance around. She draws on the strong cultural power of such narratives, in order to give extra power to her heroines so they may break the confines of the real in which they find themselves positioned.

Feminist writers have excavated those challenging stories, myths, historic events from all around the world, which had lain buried or been reinterpreted in order to support dominant gender ideologies. The effect of their new availability has been to provide new and imaginative alternative perspectives for writers, encouraging them to break from the mode of realism. Perhaps it is in part because feminist thinking is not so developed in Japan as in the West which contributes to this tendency for realist narrative to dominate in Japanese contemporary literature.

Muriel Spark's The Public Image<sup>18</sup> offers another possible exit from this confinement. Like Atwood, Spark too manipulates the power of traditional narrative form, but she insists from the start on the aesthetic status of such "stories" and distances herself from them.

The cerebral character, Annabel, in this novel is similar to Mariko, in the sense that she too is beautiful, enjoying all the advantages of a beautiful young woman as an actress, whilst unaware of the extent to which she is exploited by the film industry as a consumer "good." When threatened with destruction by the malicious narratives, she uses her own narrative sense to create a story, an

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<sup>18</sup> Muriel Spark, The Public Image [1968] (London: Penguin, 1970). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with PI in front of the page number.

alternative tale in which to situate herself as a character.

Annabel is an actress, earning money for herself and her unemployed husband, Frederick. Frederick, though jealous of his wife's acting job, decides that she must be stupid to do such unworthy roles, while Annabel passively "always agree[s] with him" (PI 10). At first, she is content with whatever people think she is, because she has her own "confidence" which originates from her sense of not being a self but a container for the fantasies of others - the belief that "she did not need to be clever, she only had to exist; she did not need to perform, she only had to be there in front of the cameras" (PI 11). Secure in this belief, she does not require a "self," continues her job, and allows the public to build an image around her. She then thinks she is in control of the public image, but in fact, she is so thoroughly woven into it that she later finds herself trapped in the image - it has become her "self."

The revelatory moment comes to Annabel when her husband, out of hatred and jealousy of her, commits suicide, leaving letters behind with fabricated stories intended to shatter Annabel's image of being the perfect "Tiger-Lady." Frederick, by forcing his own script on her, tries to write her off. From that moment, Annabel realises that everybody around her has only been using and exploiting her. For them, Annabel exists only as the public image. If that image is shattered, Annabel is useless. She would not exist for them. She is in fact, "a beautiful shell, like something washed up on the sea-shore, a collector's item, perfectly formed, a pearly shell - but empty, devoid of the life it once held" (PI 92), as described by her husband in his suicide note.

Threatened by the realisation that she can really be written off, Annabel starts to write her story to counteract her husband's malicious script. If everyone creates a narrative, why not she? She refuses to be victimised. Instead, she decides to use others, victimise others, by her own narrative.

After successfully counteracting her husband's malice, by insisting on his

insanity, Annabel, however, also refuses to live according to the script written for herself. Written by consumer fantasies of others, it is a fake shell, “devoid of life.” Annabel, at the end of the novel, literally, writes herself off and leaves everything behind, clutching only her baby, saying “I want to be free like my baby” (PI 123). For her, perhaps, the baby represents existence before all narratives build the fake shell around it. Now that she breaks herself free from the public image created for her, she senses that she is starting a new life, a new story which is created for her by herself. The sensation is like being pregnant again, being “conscious also of the baby in a sense weightlessly and perpetually within her, as an empty shell contains, by its very structure, the echo and harking image of former and former seas” (PI 125). The pregnancy and the baby here represent a positive source for Annabel, a sense of depth and resonance, unlike Mariko’s experience in *Ningyohime-no-Kutsu*. The difference seems to come from Annabel’s realisation that she is trapped in many layers of fabricated narratives, a realisation hidden from Mariko. By realising she is woven into the narratives, Annabel can break free from them by starting to write her own narrative, but can avoid the agony of skimming language games (the postmodern condition) because of the strong corporeal sense which she has acquired. Mariko, however, remains blind to what kind of narratives entrap her, and she therefore cannot move beyond or rewrite them. The pregnancy and the baby only confuse her, because her sense of herself is split between body and mind. Her corporeal body, abjected in society, becomes abject for her, too.

The narrative form as suggested throughout this chapter, indeed, plays a significant role in our perception of ourselves and daily life. Classic realism, in its rigid form, cannot provide the characters with positive alternatives because of its presupposition of an authoritative perspective grounding the narrative and of linearity, a supposedly causal relation between things. As we have seen in the

section on Angela Carter, realistic novels are inevitably haunted by the kinds of alternative possibility they might offer. Possibilities are limited and compromised for the sake of verisimilitude. Non-realist forms used by postmodern, metafictional writers and fantastic writers, can, however, by deliberately confusing time scales through laying bare the fictionality of the text, by revealing the inauthenticity of the teller, break free from such regulations. Atwood and Spark both demonstrate how much positive change such narrative techniques can bring to a basically realistic story.

If such is the case, it is natural that women writers have discovered empowering possibilities in writing non-realistic novels. The next chapter will examine some Japanese writers, some implemented by Western feminist theory who realise they can spread the wings of imagination far wider in fantastic modes than can in those realism. Such novels attempt to defy societal control over women's bodies and draw on fantastic narrative modes.

## Chapter 5:

## The Grotesque Body Taking Over

## Grotesque Woman in Defiance

The grotesque is an in-between concept; the grotesque that has been traditionally connected to the female body induces an uncanny feeling in human beings because it suggests the breaking down of the boundary which human beings set up in order to maintain their sense of themselves as the masters of the world. Why should this breaking of the boundary be so threatening? Though the boundary between nature and culture, human and animal, or man and woman is a constructed notion, “it is not enough to claim that human subjects are constructed,” as Judith Butler maintains (Bodies That Matter 18).<sup>1</sup> It is so threatening because these constructed boundaries are the very things that the human subject depends on for his/her existence as a subject. However, this rupture in the supposedly solid boundaries is inevitable, since “the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures” and, therefore, “these excluded sites come to bound the ‘human’ as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation” (Butler, Bodies 8). Butler lays bare how the binary systems operate on strict prohibitions and exclusions:

What is excluded from this binary is also *produced* by it in the mode of exclusion and has no separable or fully independent existence as an absolute outside. A constitutive or relative outside is, of course, composed of a set of exclusions that are nevertheless *internal* to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity. It emerges within the

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex” (New York: Routledge, 1993). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with Bodies in front of the page number.

system as incoherence, disruption, a threat to its own systematicity (Bodies 39).

The grotesque is precisely the thing which exhibits the rupture in the constructed boundaries, that the “outside” is not really outside, but somehow inside the system, seeking for a chance to disrupt it. Historically, art and literature have employed grotesque motifs in “an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world”(Kayser 188), and the grotesque can fluctuate from a state which favours the current power hierarchy through preservation of the division to a state in favour of its own destruction, working towards subversion. In traditional Gothic novels, for instance, the stress has been placed on “subduing” rather than “invoking.”

However, as I have so far argued, there have always been efforts, made predominantly by women, to lay emphasis on the latter. Perhaps those novels we have seen previously contribute to this “invoking,” and can therefore shed light on the incoherence and disruption inside the social system, which the system itself tries to conceal. All try to invoke a sphere that does not fit easy binarisms, and in so doing, make visible the exclusions and prohibitions which the system forces on human subjects. But the novels whose settings are basically realistic have their limitation as to the degree and intensity of such fluctuation. The grotesque novels in this section allow for destruction and subversion. They are fine examples of Mary Russo’s “depth and surface models of the body” that produce “the spectacular category of female grotesque which Cronenberg and Ottinger name respectively ‘mutant woman’ and ‘freak’” (6). They do not stop at just shedding light, but, by deliberately exaggerating the way that the female body has been connected to the grotesque historically, they all play with the notion of mimesis. Luce Irigaray argues:

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself -- inasmuch as she is on

the side of the “perceptible,” of “matter” -- to “ideas,” in particular, to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make “visible,” by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover up of a possible operation of the feminine in language (76).<sup>2</sup>

Such play, which Butler calls a “reverse mime” (52), “merely mimes that very act of displacement, displacing the displacement, showing that origin to be an ‘effect’ of a certain ruse of phallogocentric power” (*Bodies* 45). It mimes the way in which the female body is conveniently abjected in this society as the grotesque in a more obvious, unsubtle, and exaggerated manner, since “the hyperbolic conformity to the command can reveal the hyperbolic status of the norm itself, indeed, can become the cultural sign by which that cultural imperative might become legible” (*Bodies* 237). The women writers examined here seem to construct such reverse discourses, so that the grotesque comes under more attention and scrutiny, including its relation to “normal” femininity. These novels are inhabited by Harawayan “boundary creatures”: the hyperbolic expression and flaunting of the system of the grotesque.

### Puffball

This novel, written by Fay Weldon in 1980,<sup>3</sup> is a good example of reverse mime, manipulating the motif of the grotesque female body for the sake of disrupting oppressive binarisms. By exploiting and exaggerating the mode of story-telling which has typically been labelled as “womanly,” that means, claustrophobic, domestic,

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<sup>2</sup> Luce Irigaray, “The Power of Discourse” in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Chatherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: New York, 1985), *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977). Cited by Butler (*Bodies* 47).

<sup>3</sup> Fay Weldon, *Puffball* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with PB in front of the page number.

and narrow fictional worlds revolving only around love, relationships, and children, Weldon tactfully inserts the grotesque so as to break up the boundary between man/woman, human/inhuman, body/soul, and nature/culture. In particular, the story's major concern is to reverse the hierarchical relation of mind over body. And stylistically, this novel hovers somewhere between the realistic and the fantastic.

At first, it looks as if the binarisms have stayed in place in the ordinary life of a happy and ordinary enough couple of Liffey and Richard who are strictly separated not only in their family roles but also in the act of sex as well; Richard being the active one, Liffey the passive. The hierarchy of power-relations seems stable. Nature, which is symbolised in Liffey's body, seems to be well under control in the form of contraceptive pills. However, from the beginning of the story, the cracks in the fine and safe boundaries are evident. *Behind the polite relationship between Richard and Liffey, there lies frustration, worry, desire, that is not fully acknowledged by either side.*

As the story proceeds, the cracks start to widen. The boundary between inside/outside, self/other, body/mind is the first to collapse. Weldon skilfully constitutes the novels from many focal points, Liffey, Richard, their neighbour Mabs, her husband Tucker, and so on and so forth. The most inventive focaliser lies inside the body. The omniscient narration not only freely vocalises the characters' inarticulated voices, but also describes their bodies' internal operation, and verbalizes nature's intention. This inside view reveals that it has its own rule to which the body succumbs to control, and that the mind is often affected by the body, not the other way round, to the extent that the characters' intentions are only created by chemical influences from the body. The hierarchy of mind over body is subverted in this novel. For instance, the temporary control granted by the pill takes its toll on Liffey in a manner of bodily discomfort as well as her foul mood, as if nature would not succumb so readily to Liffey's intervention:



[H]er baffled body responded by retaining fluid in its cells, and this made her from time to time more lethargic, irritable and depressed than otherwise would have been the case. Her toes and fingers were puffy. Her wedding ring would not come off, and her shoes hurt.... Was Liffey's resentment of Richard a matter of pressure in her brain caused by undue retention of fluid, or in fact the result of his behaviour? Liffey naturally assumed it was the latter. It is not pleasant for a young woman to believe that her behaviour is dictated by her chemistry, and that her wrongs lie in herself, and not in others' bad behaviour (PB 12).

The relation between the will of a human being and nature is supposed to be the one between the controller and the controlled in our society. However, in this story, nature, in the form of body, is actually overriding the human will, and taking control.

The cracks are made to get bigger and bigger by the time of the arrival of mysterious new neighbours, Mabs and Tucker at Cadbury Farm. Though they seem at first an ordinary country couple, who are a little jealous of the city-bred couple, Liffey and Richard, it is gradually revealed that Mabs performs a kind of black magic. This character, Mabs, is a classic grotesque figure, a witch, a psychic, with an unreasonable malicious hold over Liffey and she exerts a black power which seems to be derived from Glastonbury Tor, a supposedly spiritual place that attracts UFOs. As the evil woman figures in traditional Gothic tales, Mabs is driven by bodily desire (to be pregnant, in her case) and seduces a male character into destruction (with the power of her drink, in her case).

In this story, old Gothic formulae are used: Richard, a good-intentioned man though weak before sexual temptations from "bad" women; Liffey, a good obedient woman, who falls under the evil power and is to be destroyed; Mabs, a bad witch, who is going to be controlled by male authority in the end. Liffey is an angel figure, while

Mabs a monster. In many Gothic tales, an angelic figure is tragically killed off from the story by the evil power of the monster. However, Weldon adds some arrangements here so that the angel cannot be so "angelic," i.e., be the ideally silent other to be killed off from the story. Likewise, the monster is not fully monstrous. Because Mabs's grotesqueness is so hyperbolically laid out, the effect is almost comic instead of terrifying. For instance, the relation between the grotesque and the body is exaggerated to the extent that it is absurd. The device, such as used in traditional Gothic, which induces terror, is exposed as the one which makes the connection between a monstrous woman's malice and her bodily desire. In the case of Mabs, she hates Liffey because Liffey becomes pregnant instead of Mabs, though Mabs craves to be pregnant herself, even though she has five children already:

Mabs, pregnant, felt the fury of her unconscious passions allayed, and could be almost happy. And, so, pregnant, became ordinary, like anyone else, and used her hands to cook, and clean, and sew, and soothe, and not as psychic conductors.

Mabs knew, too, that there are only so many babies to go round, and that if Liffey was pregnant, she would not be.

Mabs thought all these things, and since she could not voice them, then forget them; she knew only that she liked Liffey even less than before, and that the answer to her dislike was not to keep out of Liffey's way. No (PB 120).

This malice, neither mysterious, nor unreasonable, and therefore, not terrifying, is reduced to "womanly" nonsense created in frustration. Here, the terror Mabs can stir is significantly reduced, because almost all her evilness is reasonably explained. I said "almost" because it is not a clear-cut explanation, and there remains inexplicable qualities. It seems she can really exert black magic after all. And this ambiguity is what makes this story a fine "reverse-mime." It evokes the mysterious

feeling in the reader, though it is not the kind which makes him/her flinch back from the source, but which interests and intrigues.

The angelic woman, Liffey, is not a clear-cut angel either, not the sort you can find in Gothic stories. To be sure, in the beginning of the story, she internalises society's abjection of the female body, and she herself has an inexplicable disgust for the maternal body, which is symbolised by puffballs in this story: "the matter was that the smooth round swelling of the fungus made Liffey think of a belly swollen by pregnancy" (PB 16). She has the socially constructed binarisms internalised in herself that categorically connect men with mind and good, and women with body and evil. In a way, like the characters in Atwood's novels, she has a similarly split sense of femininity. For her, there is the angelic girl, with no actual "messy" body, who is always beautiful and slim, and there is the monstrous woman, with an actual body, ugly and undesirable. Even though she accepts Richard's wish to have a baby, at the bottom of her heart, she wants to remain a girl, not a mother, which is the ideal image which society imposes on women. When Liffey and Richard find two Puffballs, one is white, the other is brown, Richard describes the brown one as "a brain in some laboratory jar," and she identifies the white one with herself: "Him and me, thought Liffey, trembling as if aware that the invisible bird of disaster, flying by, had glanced with its wings" (PB 16). When Liffey, as if to reduce both sexes to the essential roles imposed by society, offers a pairing: her "tummy"/his brain (PB 18), coarse binarisms created by society are revealed.

Just as the monstrosity of Mabs is reduced, so is the angelic quality of Liffey. The very quality, which was idealised and praised in traditional Gothic tales, is rather trivialised and criticised, and she is often described as a "fool" (PB 40). Also, Liffey does not remain angelic. She starts to realise sexual desires within herself and even desires Tucker instead of Richard. Then she starts hearing the voice of the baby in her, as with the Virgin Mary, or some crazy witch; Liffey transforms into a

boundary woman, between the angel and the monster. She starts re-claiming nature, which she used to despise and was desperate to control, and which has been solely attributed to Mabs before. Once this has happened, the inexplicable terror of Mabs decreases, because Liffey now does not see nature as abject, horror, or monstrosity:

Mabs knew everything about Liffey except what she could not know -- that Liffey's baby had spoken to her; settled clear and bright inside her and promised that everything would be all right. That Liffey, now, had powers of her own: that Mabs could no longer have Nature all her own way: that forces worked for Liffey too, not just Mabs (PB 132).

Weldon, using Gothic formulae and stereotypes, manages to *disrupt the binarisms*. She does this not by completely destroying the mysterious power derived from nature, but by turning its ambiguity from negative to positive.

The breaking down of binarisms is also sought from another direction. Though traditionally nature is associated with the female body, this story shows that the male body is also nature's territory, even though the male mind would resist the idea (as Richard's does). His action is decided less by rational mind than by bodily needs and chemical reactions. Nature, not his mind, controls him. Richard, after a row with Liffey, confides to Bella, to whom he is sexually attracted, that he blames Liffey for the cold feeling in his heart:

'Something's lost,' he persisted. 'Call it what you like. I'm a very simple person, Bella.'

Simple, he said. Physical, of course, was what he meant. Able to give and take pleasure, and in particular sexual pleasure. Difficult, now, not to take a marked sexual interest in Bella; she, clothed and cosy on his bed, and he, naked in it, and only the thickness of a quilt between them. Or if not a sexual interest, certainly a feeling that the

natural, ordinary thing to do was to take her in his arms so that their conversation could continue on its real level, which was without word.... These feelings, more to do with a proper sense of what present circumstances required than anything more permanent, Richard interpreted both as evidence of his loss of love for Liffey, and desire for Bella, and the one reinforced the other (PB 51).

Every time his physically-stirred desire makes him commit adultery, Richard tries to explain it to himself by rationalising it, that is, by letting himself believe that his mind makes him do that, not that he succumbs to his body, as the episode of his first drunken affair with his secretary demonstrates. The fallaciousness of this effort is laid bare:

'I think,' said Richard, blindly, 'I would be doing you a kindness in saving you from suburbia and a life of proper propriety.'

And in a room at the Strand Palace Hotel, after lunch, for her sake rather than his, or so it appeared to him, he did not so much as save her from these things, as make them intolerable to her for ever.

By five o'clock both were back in the office: Miss Martin was pale and stunned and at her typewriter, and he was trying to catch up with his work. Neither could quite believe that it had happened, and Richard certainly wished that it had not (PB 104).

And as with male characters in traditional Gothic novels, when he fails to explain his wayward actions rationally, he blames women:

Richard would do things with Bella as he believed debased the pair of them.

'No such thing as a perversion,' Bella would say, 'so long as both enjoy it.'

But Richard knew that she was wrong: that in dragging the

spirituality of love down into the mist of excitement through disgust, he did them both a wrong. He would never do such things to Liffey. She was his wife. But he had to do them with someone, or be half alive.

All Bella's doing, thought Richard. Bella's fault (PB 107).

The narrative sinks into further chaos, when Richard, in a similar manner, falls into one sexual relationship after another, every one of which is rationalised within himself.

In fact, both men and women are described in this novel as equally vulnerable to physical drives; both succumb to the sexual desire created by Mabs's drink, and both try to explain it away that their mind made them take the action they took, not mere physical desire. Perhaps, though, this need for rationalisation for male characters is described as more intense than for female ones.

The story resolves, after a climactic confrontation, into an old-fashioned happy ending: Liffey gives birth against all odds and defying Mabs's malicious magic; Mabs knows from the baby's look that he is not Tucker's as she has suspected, and becomes happy again being pregnant; Richard comes back to Liffey. However, it is not the kind of ending that traditional Gothic novels offer, i.e., the restoration of the former balance of power-relations, and the re-declaration of human beings as master of the world. On the contrary, there remains an uncanny feeling in this novel. Nature asserts its power over human beings; the human effort to rationalise and overcome physical vulnerability is vitally found wanting. This sense of ambiguity about the human relation to nature might be the kind of grotesque-ness that a reverse discourse can invoke.

### The Life and Loves of a She Devil

Another novel by the same author takes a further step into a much more

radical attempt at creating a reverse discourse, manipulating the socially imposed binarism of the “angel” and the “monster.” Both sides of this dichotomy are to be revealed as interchangeable in The Life and Loves of a She Devil.<sup>4</sup> Both are the moulds fabricated by relations of power in order to subdue the uncanniness of the female body and bring it under control. Women are neither “angelic” nor “monstrous” by nature. Either they are forced to be, or, as Ruth and Mary Fisher in this novel, they choose to be, one or the other. Though society requires us to regard the “angel” as ideal, and the “monster” as detestable, what emerges from Weldon’s writing is that both images are equally confining, and that it is impossible for any woman to fit herself perfectly into either of them. But if you have to choose one, the story suggests, the “monster” is far more empowering than the “angel.”

The story shows that these two moulds seem to be the only options available to a woman in patriarchal society if she wants to be acknowledged. Otherwise, she is reduced to being invisible, and therefore ignored. Though which “image” you aspire to is a matter of choice, the majority unwittingly aim to assume the angelic mantle, as Ruth in the beginning of the story, believing that the status of “angel” allows her to obtain what she wants. The mask of “angel” works as kind of a pass into the world, since “a woman hardly has means for sounding her own heart” (Beauvoir 288); her body is alien to herself, as she internalises the view from without, the male view which regards her as the other. For a person with such an ambiguous sense of self, the image of the Eternal Feminine to hand is a conveniently available option to her, since, to be subjected and oppressed is better than to be dismissed and killed. The image is, in a very passive way, empowering and may offer to women an irresistible invitation:

[L]ike all the oppressed, woman deliberately dissembles her objective

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<sup>4</sup> Fay Weldon, The Life and Loves of a She Devil (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with SD in front of the page number.

actuality; the slave, the servant, the indigent, all who depend upon the caprices of a master, have learned to turn towards him a changeless smile or an enigmatic impassivity; their real sentiments, their actual behaviour, are carefully hidden. And moreover woman is taught from adolescence to lie to men, to scheme, to be wily. In speaking to them she wears an artificial expression on her face; she is cautious, hypocritical, play-acting (Beauvoir 288).

And yet, the mould of “angel” to which women are supposed to aspire is, in reality, more rigid and confining than empowering. And moreover, it is not as widely available as they believe; there are strict requirements to qualify as an “angel.” Since the prevalence of universal notions of beauty, such requirements have become more and more strict and the acceptable range has become increasingly narrow in consumer society. Ruth, though striving to be an ideal “angel,” does not qualify because her appearance does not fulfil the required norm of beauty. She is too tall, too ugly, too wide, too fat, too grotesque, to be desirable. The story starts with the cruel ending that awaits such a woman. Her handsome husband keeps her as a housewife and a caretaker of their two children, thus making her dependent on him and powerless at home as well as in the world, while he enjoys a series of the kind of amorous adventures open to a powerful and rich man. And when she begins to grumble, he dumps her. For him, Ruth is not a “woman,” she is nothing. A proper “woman” in a patriarchal culture is an object of desire, a mirror that reflects an ideal image of the male subject as a powerful man, a subject, a ruler, a master. As we have seen previously, a patriarchal system requires a woman to be such an “Other.” She is required to maintain the illusory control of the male subject over the female object, and as the object, she has to be able to satisfy male fantasy. Since Ruth fails to do that, she does not qualify as a proper “woman” and her husband,



Bobbo, deserts her.

Many women in the modern world, probably mostly from fear of being outcast, try to fit themselves to the required norm of “angel” with the help of dieting, make-up, dress, and sometimes plastic surgery. Though the mould of an “angel” is not really cut out for any real woman, because it is a fantasy, real women blindly aim to achieve this image without complaint, so afraid are they of being labelled “monster.” What they do is to try harder to satisfy the norm, while the incongruity between the body’s natural condition and the cultural norm often finds expression in modern illnesses such as anorexia or bulimia, as Atwood’s heroines demonstrate.

However, even when she forcefully fits herself into the mould and acquires a man, an angel’s future is not so heavenly. The place she secures temporarily is simply that of “Other” in a patriarchal world and certainly this does not confer upon her the same status as that of the masculine subject. On the contrary, the “Other” is only “to be seen,” not “to see,” which is a status of “lack” in Lacanian terms. It is a place as a voiceless, docile angel. She cannot actively make things happen, and her apparent victory is only ever temporary. As a system, desire is only maintained so long as its fulfilment is postponed. So she cannot help eventually losing the heavenly quality she used to have, falling down to earth. Once obtained, angels lose their holiness, their power to attract, are transformed into nothing, voiceless nothings, conveniently shoved inside the private house; their place is lost altogether from the public world. If the monster is to be confined in the attic of a gothic mansion, regarded as a mad, incomprehensible, angry witch, so is a fallen angel at home. Hence, Ruth, jealous and miserable, recites “the Litany of the Good Wife”(29) constituted of many “Must”s. The angels and the monsters are the other sides of the same coin, but it was covered up, since the power-relations of patriarchy create an intense abjection on the side of “monster.” In the case of Ruth in this story, she finds herself as this “nothing.” While Ruth merely exists as Bobbo’s children’s mother and

a caretaker, he has an “angelic” mistress, Mary Fisher, a beautiful, petite woman. He eventually dumps his wife.

Weldon makes it clear that this angel, Mary Fisher, is not at all “angelic” by nature. She is probably one of the women who are neither angel nor monster, but who put themselves in the angel’s mould in order to obtain a better hand in the world. She does what all women in this society more or less do, only she does it a little more hyperbolically. There is a twist, however. It is significant that Weldon makes Mary Fisher an author of popular love romances. Surely, as an author, Mary Fisher takes the power of creation into her own hands. But, instead of defying the Creation Myth which enslaves and subjugates women to men, Mary Fisher, as Joan in *Lady Oracle*, fortifies it by mass-producing love romances, and helps to perpetuate the angel-monster dichotomy; the myth of romantic love, like other grand narratives of patriarchal culture, contributes to the “willing” dependence of women on men; the rosy love and marriage and the happy ending, tempt women readers into blind pursuit of the “angelic” image as an ideal. Mary Fisher, as an author, is, therefore, in complicity with the patriarchal system. Mary Fisher attempts to establish her authority by propagating the patriarchal idea. While she creates a fictional world which makes her readers believe in romantic love, she also creates herself in the guise of the fictional “angelic” image. She becomes her own creature. Calculating the effect, she deliberately abuses the notion, getting what she wants to the best of her ability. She takes care not to bring any qualities of the “housewife” into her situation, which includes getting rid of her mother and not having a child of her own. Though craving independence and power, she never presents herself as too independent, so as not to scare off the man, Bobbo, whom she wants. She says “what he want[s] to hear”(SD 41), pretending to be helpless in order to boost his illusory mastery. Living in a most unlikely dwelling, “High Tower,” she creates an image of

an unearthly princess waiting to be saved. She attempts to sustain a life as the desirable "Other," without relapsing into nothingness. She is disguised as an "angel," concealing her predatory intention.

However, the effort of Mary Fisher is, in its structure, self-undermining. The Creation Myth and the myth of romantic love are designed to make women dependent upon men. Mary Fisher, by incorporating herself into the myths, lets them rob her of her power. Patriarchal narratives have stronger powers than the "angelic" Mary Fisher can handle. She starts believing in romantic love herself, which makes her vulnerable to abuse from the system. To a certain extent, she incurs and colludes with her own downfall.

Ruth is another kind of author. She also creates herself into what she was not. But, contrary to Mary Fisher, she chooses to be a "monster" and to take up an antagonistic relation to the system. However, this does not mean that Ruth does not manipulate the construction of the patriarchal system to her own ends. On the contrary, she, like Mary Fisher, deliberately takes on the image the system provides; when Bobbo calls her "a she-devil," Ruth decides to become one, manipulating the notion he attributes to her. When skilfully appropriated, this "monster" image, unlike the "angel" image attempted by Mary Fisher, is more empowering than not. While the "angel" image which Mary Fisher constructs for herself works to weaken and trap, the "monster" image of Ruth only serves to strengthen her. The limitation of the "angel" image, with its inevitable fall from heaven, are seen clearly by Ruth, as she says, "A man cannot be expected to be faithful to a wonderful mother and a good wife -- such concepts lack the compulsion of the erotic"(11). Giving up a useless, powerless, angelic norm, Ruth chooses to be the other possibility, and leave this Eden (isn't their house in Eden Grove?) to become a "monster." This decision is drastic, but empowering:

So. I see. I thought I was a good wife tried temporarily and understandably beyond endurance, but no. He says I am a she devil.

I expect he is right. In fact, since he does so well in the world and I do so badly, I really must assume he is right. I am a she devil.

But this is wonderful! This is exhilarating! If you are a she devil the mind clears at once. The spirits rise. There is no shame, no guilt, no dreary striving to be good. There is only, in the end, what you *want*.

And I can take what I want. I am a she devil! (SD 49).

Here, a reverse mime is very clearly activated. Ruth, once liberating herself from the norm, assumes at once a threatening mythical power of disruption, because “Nothing is impossible, not for she devils” (SD 50). She positively incorporates the disruptive power of the grotesque, the very earthly power that society associates with the female body:

In the end I sucked energy out of the earth. I went into the garden and turned the soil with a fork, and power moved into my toes and up my stubborn calves and rested in my she devil loins: an urge and an irritation (SD 56).

Defying the institutional rule of marriage, she sucks up energy from sex with various men. She is afraid of nothing, because she is the monster, a label of which most women are afraid. Her revenge is to strip Mary Fisher of her “angelic” mask, and let her take the course Ruth herself has taken: the angel’s fall from heaven to earth. Ruth reduces Mary to a wife-figure by making her take care of her children, Bobbo, and Mary’s own ageing mother. Now that Mary Fisher can no longer sustain the ultimately unattainable desirable image, and becomes a house-ridden wife, Bobbo predictably finds her undesirable and has affairs with other women. So easily is Mary Fisher reduced to a miserable undesirable woman, a fallen powerless “angel.”

What is most plainly laid bare via the destructive manoeuvre of the she-devil is the patriarchal system of female subordination: the myth of romantic love covers up the basic rule of the capitalist society where power is measured financially. When, in terms of love, a woman gets happily married to a man she loves, what happens financially is that she becomes subordinated to men. Capitalism suddenly takes over: hence the Litany of the Good Wife:

I must consent to the principle that those who earn most outside the home deserve most inside the home; for everyone's sake (SD 30).

Financial dependence robs wives of the power they might have enjoyed when single. Wives believe their housekeeping and child-rearing are worthy in the name of love. Financially, however, it does not count. The job of wives does not appear in the account book, therefore, their existence is invisible, their significance reduced. Hence the angel's fall. Ruth, the she-devil, abuses this system, by first robbing Bobbo of his financial and occupational power, and then by making Mary Fisher, blind in love, waste all her money in an attempt at his release. When Mary Fisher loses her fortune -- her significance for Bobbo, the typically capitalist accountant -- all is lost.

Now, Mary Fisher becomes Ruth, while Ruth, after a series of expensive cosmetic surgeries, becomes Mary Fisher. Remaking the Creation Myth, Ruth goes through a whole re-shaping of her body, eyes widened, nose reshaped, hips and breast reduced, jaw filed, teeth replaced, legs tucked, and so on. Her body is a grotesque body, but with money and its power, she makes it beautiful. Indeed, the boundary between the grotesque and the "not-grotesque" is disturbed here. Ruth exposes the system which turns the woman into the grotesque, and also the other way round: it is money that counts. If you have money, you have the power, and the monster can be the angel, since the angel and the monster are, in fact, interchangeable.

It is not a simple revenge story. Though Mary Fisher is surely described as

diabolically greedy, Weldon seems to suggest she is only an exaggerated version of a normal woman. Once you assume the mould of angel, your only option to obtain what you can is through manipulation of men. The myth of romantic love is so persuasive that Mary Fisher herself falls for it. Her pitfall is her belief in love. And as an "angel," the system conditions her not to defy love, to be forever trapped in it, thus accelerating her fall even further. Undoubtedly, from halfway through the story, Mary Fisher is described as a sorry figure, another victim of patriarchy, who turns into nothing, lack, while the men put the blame for all the misfortunes that happen to them upon her.

Nonetheless, this story never makes Mary Fisher into an idealised martyr, killed by the despicable devil. On the contrary, a sense of liberation and victory prevails, when Ruth, the she-devil, is no longer constrained by the notion of love. She frees herself from love by becoming "what is essentially unlovable" (SD 46), reverse-miming the words Bobbo has once told her. She is fully aware of the trap of romantic love:

Mary Fisher must renounce love, but cannot. And since she cannot, Mary Fisher must be like anyone else.... She cannot escape. She nearly did: almost, she became her own creation.

But I stopped her. I, the she devil, the creation of her lover, my husband (SD 117).

It suggests that, for women writers, there are two types of authorship: one perpetuating the patriarchal narrative, and the other defying it. Mary Fisher demonstrates that the former is merely a debilitating choice, because it undermines her authority, her independence, and her power. The narrative she propagates contradictorily denies her creativity. On the other hand, the latter type, reverse-mime is one example, can bring the creative power which Ruth uses. Unlike Mary Fisher, she can draw on such power by becoming her own creation. She

retains the subject status which is so easily lost to an “angel.” The power of money and a disbelief in romantic love enables her to keep the controlling power firmly to herself, while becoming an image of male fantasy, an object of desire and love. She merely manipulates the notion, without becoming the victim of it. The “monster” is an antithesis of the system, and therefore powerful, because she cannot be incorporated into patriarchal narratives, as Ruth shows when she defies many of the myths that have prevailed, the grand-narrative of science and religion:

‘Women don’t have lots of time,’ the dentist observed. ‘Unlike men.’

‘I mean to put the clock back,’ she said.

‘No one can do that.’

‘Anyone can do anything,’ she replied, ‘if they have the will and they have the money.’

‘We are as God made us,’ he protested.

‘That isn’t true,’ she said. ‘We are here in this world to improve upon His original idea. To create justice, truth and beauty where He so obviously and lamentably failed’ (SD 124).

Also, the monster utilise the dark sexual energy, unlike the angel. Ruth uses it fully to control men in power, her words become “the oracle of Hades, not Olympus; of hell, not heaven” (SD 164).

Mary Fisher and Ruth are both simply predators. While the former uses the “angel” mould, the latter goes for the “monster” one. Though these are the moulds that make woman into the “Other,” as two apparent options available to women, they serve in a way as the tools for a woman to get what she wants, because she, the object, can only do that via the male subject. Under such a system, obtaining a man becomes a major issue, hence the system makes a predator of every woman:

I can, I suppose, in the end, forgive Mary Fisher for many things. It

was in the name of love that she did what she did, before I brought her to the understanding of what love is .... I daresay I might have done the same myself, had I stood in her little Size 3 shoes (SD 192).

This story ends with the victory of Ruth, who now calls herself Miss Hunter. As a predator, does not a hunter more aggressively take advantage of concentrated attacks, while a fisher has to be content with whatever comes into the net? Of course, only a victory of limited range is available in the reverse discourse, as suggested in the ironic tone of the ending. As previously mentioned, neither "monster" nor "angel" can accommodate the real woman, and when Ruth chooses to be the "monster," first she has to mutilate her body; in order to attack the system, she needs first to enter inside the system. The alternative world which the she-devil creates and presents to us is clearly fictive, though the fictiveness of the current world has also become manifest.

### Sexing the Cherry

The Dog Woman cannot be left unmentioned as one of the most impressive grotesque characters in contemporary literature. This giant woman in Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Cherry<sup>5</sup> is a comic embodiment of male fears of horrible women; she is big, vile, dirty, ugly, strong enough to live alone, self-sufficient with the income she makes on dog races and dog fights; she does not hesitate to cut off a man's private parts; she is the woman who is as far as possible from the male idea of a desirable woman. "If the definition provided for this concept is contradicted by the behaviour of flesh-and-blood women, it is the latter who are wrong: we are told not that Femininity is a false entity, but that the women concerned are not feminine" (283), Simone de Beauvoir explains of the power of the Feminine Myth. However, at

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<sup>5</sup> Jeanette Winterson, Sexing the Cherry [1989] (London: Vintage, 1990). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with SC in front of the page number.



the end of the story, it becomes clear that this woman is also abundantly maternal, full of love for her adopted son, Jordan. If maternal generosity is part of the Feminine Myth, then the Dog Woman is definitely feminine. The impressive figure she cuts explodes the definition of femininity. So, what is feminine? The idea is disturbed and contested. This powerful narrative of the Dog Woman works as a reverse discourse, which defies the Feminine Myth.

In fact, the whole novel is about the re-thinking of, not only the Feminine Myth, but also the norm, the common belief, and the reality. Set in the seventeenth century, the time of the beheading of King Charles I, it is about the subversion of the existing order. While the story depicts the Civil War, the trial, the execution, and the plague afterwards, its narrative is a blend of the historic and the fantastic. And the history in this story is as important and as fake or as real as the fantasy: the hierarchy is also confused as the epigraph tells:

The Hopi, an Indian tribe, have a language as sophisticated as ours, but no tenses for past, present and future. The division does not exist. What does this say about time?

Matter, that thing the most solid and the well-known, which you are holding in your hands and which makes up your body, is now known to be mostly empty space. Empty space and points of light. What does this say about the reality of the world? (SC 8).

The story is interwoven by the narratives of the Dog Woman and that of Jordan, though neither of them are given priority in terms of a reality level; the Dog Woman's adventure is as fascinating and as outrageous as Jordan's journeys. Besides, the record of Jordan's journeys, for instance, is not the documentation of what happens to him, but of what might happen to him:

Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are journeys I wish to record.

Not the ones I made, but the ones I might have made, or perhaps did make in some other place or time (SC 9-10).

In this story, fact and fiction are regarded with the same respect. The statement of the Dog Woman also claims the similar legitimacy of fiction:

I sing of other times, when I was happy, though I know that there are figments of my mind and nowhere I have ever been. But does it matter if the place cannot be mapped as long as I can still describe it? (SC 14-5).

The banana episode also comically demonstrates the instability of the fact/fiction division: what is regarded as fact or commonsense may have been seen as a ridiculous lie. The episode depicts the moment when the English (including Jordan and his giant mother) first saw a banana:

Johnson shouted above the din as best as he could...

‘THIS IS NOT SOME UNFORTUNATE’S RAKE. IT IS THE FRUIT OF A TREE. IT IS TO BE PEELED AND EATEN.’

At this there was unanimous retching. There was no good woman could put that to her mouth, and for a man it was the practice of cannibals. We had not gone to church all these years and been washed in the blood of Jesus only to eat ourselves up the way the Heathen do (SC 12-3).

Fact and commonsense, it implies, are not changeless and universal. If the banana is a common food in Bermuda at that time, it could only be seen in England as some man’s private parts cut off. What makes a matter true and real is very much situational, as it solely depends upon a particular time and place.

Indeed, every episode in this novel defies the notion of normality, of commonsense, of reality, and of truth. The family who lives in the house without any floors, for instance, “ignores this ever-downward necessity and continues ever

upward, celebrating ceilings but denying floors" (SC 20-21). The prostitutes in a barred pen freely go into the stream underneath at night to be fished out by the nuns down the stream and come back in the morning (SC 30-31). The twelve dancing princesses also defy gravity, and fly out of their window to a silver city where everyone's occupation is to dance. They defy the happy ending of the fairy tale marriage, too, each one marrying a prince, then living happily ever after, but not with their husbands (SC 47-60).

When the Dog woman declares, "the earth is surely a manageable place made of blood and stone and entirely flat" (SC 23), the situationality of commonsense, and that of the hierarchy of religion and science is also revealed. Similarly the currently common practise of grafting, we are reminded, was at one time seen as abnormal; "there are many in the Church who condemn this practice as unnatural, holding that the Lord who made the world made its flora as he wished and in no other way" (SC 78). What is regarded as normal and right in one period may be abnormal and wrong in another. The novel questions notions of universal truth.

The most outrageous character in the novel, however, is the Dog Woman herself. Her "conventionality," her religiousness, her docility, her respect for the natural order and woman's modesty, are completely exploded by her own existence. Her size, to begin with, defies normality. She is heavier than an elephant, and says, "When Jordan was new I sat him on the palm of my hand the way I would a puppy, and I held him to my face and let him pick the fleas out of my scars" (SC 25). She declares, "I am gracious by nature" (SC 25), but when she is to be searched for a weight, she cries not to, and lifts her dress herself over her head, only that she is "wearing no underclothes in respect of the heat" (SC 25). She is a royalist and pious, but she is the murderer of her father. She also kills soldiers and hypocrites like a hero. Her actions counteract her belief that she is a "normal" woman, and reduces her loud protestations to comical nonsense.

Love is made a nonsense by the Dog Woman, as her experience of physical love is nothing but a disgusting one. Mostly men are scared off, because she is “too huge for love. No one, male or female, has ever dared to approach [her]. They are afraid to scale mountains” (SC 34). Even when she is eager to love, men only try to manipulate her and take pleasure. Because the size of the Dog Woman makes her incapable of physical love, the system of manipulation, the grotesqueness of the sexual act, are laid bare. The episode of the city which loses an entire population wiped out by love, except “a monk and a whore” (SC 75) (who then climb onto a bed to repopulate the city) only serves to fortify the sense that the act and the concept of love are incompatible.

It is also through the mouth of Jordan that the myth of love is cynically defied when he recollects his passions:

Not only was I chasing a dancer who, on the evidence of her sisters, was too old to move, I had in the past entangled myself in numerous affairs with women who would not, could not or did not love me. And did I love them? I thought so at the time, though now I have come to doubt it, seeing only that I loved myself through them (SC 73-4).

The love of Jordan, Fortunata, does not exist, and, therefore, is his true love. The reality of the body is, as science proves, after all, empty space and points of light. Whether she exists or not might be an irrelevant question: in order to love her, you only need to imagine her and believe in her. The body is irrelevant, and in any case, can decay, fall ill, and be beheaded.

The major beliefs that are contested in this novel are the ones concerning time and place. Repeatedly time’s linearity is proved to be a lie; you can be at many places simultaneously; “imagination” and “fact” are inextricable:

The inward life tells us that we are multiple not single, and that our one existence is really countless existences holding hands like those

cut-out paper dolls, but unlike the dolls never coming to an end. When we say, 'I have been here before,' perhaps we mean, 'I am here now,' but in another life, another time, doing something else. Our lives could be stacked together like plates on a waiter's hand. Only the top is showing, but the rest are there and by mistake we discover them (SC 90-91).

The story says that "artists and gurus are, in the language of science, superconductors" (SC 91), who can experience time not only as that of the clock, but as a "larger, all-encompassing dimension" (SC 91). By the hand of such an artist, Jeanette Winterson herself, the characters of the story seem to exist at other times as well. The narrative of Jordan and that of Nicholas Jordan (who dreams of becoming a hero reading the accounts of heroes in the contemporary world) begin to diverge, while the Dog Woman appears in the hallucination of a woman activist against river pollution. Their stories are told in parallel, while fantasies and myths are inserted there, too. When the characters start mixing, the division between fantastic narrative and realist narrative, between seventeenth century and twentieth century, are demolished.

Heroism is also questioned. Jordan, for instance, wants to become a hero; his ideal hero is Tradescant, royal herbalist, who "will flourish in any climate, pack his ships with precious things and be welcomed with full honours when the King is restored" (SC 79). But in fact, the Dog Woman is undoubtedly more heroic, killing soldiers and hypocrites. If only she were a man, her size could become a thing to boast of, not a handicap as she describes it. It reminds us of the biased gender attribution of the term, "hero." The term is only applied to men, while the term "heroine" is used for women. The contents of the terms are, however, completely different. The adventure of the Dog Woman, though, blows up such prejudice. She is definitely not a heroine, but a hero.

This break-down of the prejudice is empowering, as demonstrated in the woman activist; the heroic and mountainous “spirit” of the Dog Woman appears in contemporary London:

I had an *alter ego* who was huge and powerful, a woman whose only morality was her own and whose loyalties were fierce and few. She was my patron saint, the one I called on when I felt myself dwindling away through cracks in the floor or slowly fading in the street. Whenever I called on her I felt my muscles swell and laughter fill up my throat (SC 125).

Whether it is merely her fantasy or not, it is demonstrated that the power of the Dog Woman certainly passes on to her. Though it might be produced from the imagination, it works, and it is recognised by Nicholas Jordan. When he reads an article about her, he wonders:

Surely this woman was a hero? Heroes give up what’s comfortable in order to protect what they believe in or to live dangerously for the common good. She was doing that, so why was she being persecuted? (SC 138).

It is here that the idea of hero/heroine is turned upside down.

The power that the woman activist induces from her imagination, from the imaginary “Dog Woman,” is also the power which is conferred to the reader of this novel. It is up to you whether or not you use it for your own benefit. Fiction can sometimes be a more powerful creation than the real, the artist’s creation can go beyond the material order. The figure of this impressive and grotesque woman certainly shows such a power of reverse discourse.

#### Oyayubi P-no-Shugyo Jidai (The Apprenticeship of Big Toe P)

The abnormality or grotesqueness of the body certainly functions to reveal the

system in which “normality” is constructed and accepted as it is; such is the case with a Japanese novel by Rieko Matsuura, Oyayubi P-no-Shugyo Jidai (The Apprenticeship of Bog Toe P).<sup>6</sup> For instance, in Sexing the Cherry, the “abnormal” size and behaviour of the Dog Woman cast a doubt on the concept of “normal” femininity, and destroy the boundaries between various concepts such as hero/heroine, man/woman, love/sex, fact/ fiction, and mind/body. In The Apprenticeship of Big Toe P, the main issue at stake is sexuality and the patriarchal society’s making of penis into the phallus. In an otherwise realistic setting, this particular abnormality of a woman’s body makes it possible for a Japanese author to enquire into such a risky area.

The heroine, Kazumi, finds one day that her big toe has turned into a penis. This toe looks exactly like a penis, only a little bigger, which can become erect, climax, but not ejaculate. Kazumi tries to consider it as a mere physical abnormality not as a sexual organ, but those around her regard it as a male sexual organ, therefore they think it should be put into a female sexual organ regardless of Kazumi’s wish. The clash of views seems to originate in the patriarchal signification of penis as phallus: the symbol of manhood, power, dominance. This is demonstrated by Masao, Kazumi’s boyfriend, who is so threatened by the fact that Kazumi has also got a penis that he tries to slash it off. Though Kazumi claims that “this is the only part of me that has changed,” Masao cannot accept it and says “Have you wanted to be a man? ... You have been longing for a penis all this time in your heart, haven’t you?” (BTP 1:51). For him, what is at stake is the issue of control and dominance. Challenged, or so he thinks, in his superiority, he is now angry at Kazumi: a penis is nothing but a phallus for him. His subconscious belief that, because she is a woman, he as a man can

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<sup>6</sup> Rieko Matsuura, Oyayubi P-no-Shugyo Jidai [1993](The Apprenticeship of Big Toe P) (Tokyo: Kawaide, 1993). 2 vols. Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with BTP in front of the page number. Born in 1958, Rieko Matsuura is a writer with many awarded novels. This story won the 33<sup>rd</sup> Women’s Fiction Award in Japan. Many of her novels have occult or fantastic quality.

subject her, betrays itself. But now that Kazumi has a penis, a phallus, she is not the person he can subjugate and control. Though Kazumi claims she has not stopped being a woman, Masao cannot believe it (BTP 1:52), because, for him, no woman can, should, is allowed to, possess a phallus=the power. The strict power hierarchy in the “normal” relationship of a “normal” couple is laid bare here. This “normality” turns out to be a fragile construct, destroyed so easily by only one physical change.

Masao is a phallicist; for him, a phallus makes a man. In short, a phallus is prior to the making of a man, and every phallicist is, everyday, struggling to keep up with the phallus, the ultimate goal, the transcendent power. In this sense, they are comrades aiming at the same goal: the homo-social nature of any patriarchal culture as Luce Irigaray points out. Though he might be consciously homophobic, his inherent homo-social/ homo-sexual nature is betrayed, when he accuses his friend Haruhiko of stealing the girlfriend of another friend, Hatada:

“You are jealous of Hatada, aren’t you?”

“Why should I be?”

“Because it was not your woman but Hatada’s that I have stolen.”

He sounded triumphant. Then this time Masao froze (BTP 1:56).

The importance for Masao seems to be in the maintenance of his active membership in male society. His girlfriend matters only in terms of the high credit that she secures for him among his male friends. She is the Other, the reflector. The more she is desired, the higher is his status as her boyfriend among male society. In such a relationship, it is not a man and a woman who are in love, but a man and his male comrades. And they are so desperate to keep the phallus as a male property, to keep the power of control among men. It is demonstrated when, to the homophobic Masao, Kazumi asks:

“Which would you choose if you have to choose one, a woman or



homosexual man?"

"That's a difficult one." He considered silently again. "Maybe a homosexual, because, once being one myself, it would not matter to do it with another man."

It was an unexpected reply. "Why?"

"Because I keep a penis to begin with. Mentally I prefer men to women" (BTP 1:74).

His unconscious contempt for women makes Kazumi angry; she wonders: "He thinks his penis dirty, he hates other men, but he pushes his 'dirty thing' in a woman's mouth, and he mentally prefers man to woman. Isn't such a person abnormal, because his sense of perception is biased and his feeling is contradictory? I myself am not normal physically to be sure. But what is the meaning of being 'normal' and 'abnormal'?" (BTP 1:74).

Shunji is completely the opposite of Masao, with whom Kazumi becomes intimate next. The author creates Shunji as someone who has not experienced the "normalisation" of society, which perhaps makes many men phallicists. Shunji has taken a different path from "normal" people, being blind and orphaned. Much of what Kazumi believes to be "normal" is subverted by Shunji. For instance, for him, sex is merely an extension of intimacy, and therefore, is not limited to hetero-sexual relationships. Since he is no phallicist, penetration is not given too much importance either, and Kazumi's penis is not a threat for him. Though Kazumi feels comfortable with Shunji, she also feels terribly sad about his other relationships, because the exclusive relationship is not the "norm" for Shunji. Kazumi now has to face her own biased view of relationships.

Shunji's penis, as well as Kazumi's penis, is not a phallus, the symbol of power. He never actively initiates the sexual act, nor does Kazumi. The existence of the penis, the actual body organ does not substantiate the "normal" male character. On

the contrary, the story demonstrates that a woman can be “phallic” too, when Chisato, Shunji’s female cousin, “raped” Kazumi by using Kazumi’s penis when she is asleep (BTP 1:198-9). Similar to Masao, Chisato is homophobic. But while she says she hates to be in a lesbian relationship, she has no scruple about having sex with Kazumi’s penis (BTP 1:200). Chisato, defining the penis as “the signifier of manhood,” completely ignores the femaleness of other parts of Kazumi’s body, as Masao did. They only look at her penis, it is their only concern, their only interest. Chisato is also a phallicist.

After this episode, Kazumi has joined a kind of circus called Flower Show, which puts on special sex shows to exclusive clients. The members of the circus possess one or another “abnormality”: a woman with vagina dentate; a transsexual; those allergic to bodily fluids; Siamese twins with the one completely enclosed inside the other except for his penis. Their “abnormality” is, the novel tells, mostly only physical. When one of the male performers touches Kazumi’s penis, another asks:

“How can you, being a man, touch another man’s penis?”

“Because this is a woman’s.”

“Even if it is attached to a woman’s body, a penis is a symbol of man, isn’t it?”

“No, it isn’t. My penis is not fully functioning, but I am a man. A penis is no symbol” (BTP 2:88).

What is the difference between “normal” and “abnormal”? The audience for the pornographic shows seem much more “abnormal” if they are sexually stimulated by watching sado-masochistic and stereotypical plays. Among those people with “abnormal” and “grotesque” bodies, Kazumi’s prejudice gradually breaks down. She is attracted to a woman performer. At first, she resists the attraction, since hetero-sexuality has been the norm for her. However, she thinks: “Though the feelings for Shunji and for Eiko are different, it might be a matter of course, because

they are different and we met differently, became intimate also differently" (BTP 2:105-6). She stops excluding women as sexual partners, and at the same time, the importance of penetration as a sexual activity is diminished. But now that she decides to follow her instinctive sense, she realises how she has been dictated to by the general view of sex until then (BTP 2:123): whatever she has been doing with men was what she assumed were the "normal" things to do. Through the relationship with a woman, she starts to discover her own sexuality.

The lesbian relationship, however, is by no means given any superior status to any other relationship. Through the relationship with women, Kazumi not only learns to respect her own feelings regardless of the "norm" but also to respect other's desire. Accepting somebody's desire no longer means to be subjected to that person; with this realisation, she finally returns to Shunji, while Eiko goes back to her boyfriend. Though both men have transformed themselves enough to care for the desire of women by then, this return is not depicted as a happy ending, but rather a compromise, while Kazumi is still seeking the perfect way.

The novel is indeed a radical questioning of people's attitude towards sexuality. This kind of questioning might be impossible in an utterly realist setting, where, in Japan, homosexuality is still heavily repressed. The fantastic creation of a penis on a woman's big toe can make this story happen. In the afterword, the author says she lets the big toe P appear in the pretext of a clitoris, since "it is difficult to write about the clitoris because it has been ignored as if it isn't there in the history of literature." (BTP 2:332). This penis in the story indeed is a receptacle, and Kazumi hardly uses it to gain power over others, therefore, it does not come to signify the power and the phallus. Also she mentions, "I also had the desire to return the penis back to the original status, to the new born innocent organ that it must have been, from the somewhat notorious one it has become because of the phallicist." Perhaps, it is impossible to write the "unphallic penis" without the help of the fantastic.

The problem of this novel, I think, is that the questioning of “abnormality” and “normality” does not seem to go beyond the issue of sexuality. The otherwise “normal” heroine is uncritical concerning other matters, unlike the Dog Woman who managed to intrigue through a wider range of issues such as time/history, dream/fiction/truth, hero/heroine, etc. Perhaps, because Kazumi’s “abnormality” is limited to her one big toe, the problem she can tackle with it is also limited. The more grotesque and fantastic she had been, the wider the issues she might have been able to challenge.

#### Haha-no-Hattatsu (Mother’s Development)

Yoriko Shono’s Haha-no-Hattatsu (Mother’s Development)<sup>7</sup> is in this sense far more grotesque and fanstastic. It starts with a very realistic description of the heroine’s strained relationship with her mother, but soon slips into a fantastic narrative.

The novel is divided into three parts: “Mother’s Contraction”; “Mother’s Development”; “Mother’s Great Revolving Dance.” The first part, “Mother’s Contraction,” is narrated by the adolescent heroine, Yatsuno; it is about a very traumatic relationship with her mother who is, as Joan’s mother in Lady Oracle, antagonistic towards her daughter. In this case, the surrogate issue is not the slim body, but the choice of occupation. The mother is disappointed to be a woman, a mother, having been forced to quit her job because of her male rivals’ malice and despite her ambition. For her, the occupation of medical doctor seems to promise success and the equality with men, and she is so obsessed with the idea of making her daughter a female doctor, that she thinks “freedom would only come to female doctors

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<sup>7</sup> Yoriko Shono, Haha-no-Hattatsu [1996](Mother’s Development) (Tokyo: Kawaide, 1999). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with MD in front of the page number. Shono was born in 1956, also has won many literary awards. Her style is often very grotesque, and gothic, but comical touch is also a definite quality.

who also take care of the house and have husbands of high status" (MD 11). Yatsuno has become her mother's agent who fulfils an unsatisfied dream to defy woman's limitation.

When Yatsuno fails, her mother becomes spiteful. For her mother, all women except female medical doctors are despicable creatures who depend on others as if they are sex slaves. As Yatsuno feels that "Mother seems to hate my sex, too" (MD 11), femininity comes to signify for her mother something weak, foolish and dirty. This outrageous contempt of "mere woman" is of course the reverse of her deep disappointment in her life as a "mere woman." It is again the case Orbach describes that "the already oppressed mothers become the teachers, preparers and enforcers of the oppression that society will visit on their daughters" (FiFI 33). Tragically, by making the other the target of criticism, the mother and daughter both miss the point, and the insoluble conflict makes both miserable and unhappy. In the case of Yatsuno, by the time she has to take the entrance examination for university, she and her mother are both clinically depressed; while Yatsuno is in a condition of complete languor and unhappiness, her mother has sporadic fits of anger.

Then suddenly the narrative transforms into the fantastic. Before Yatsuno's eyes, her mother suddenly contracts to about seven centimetres. As this happens, Yatsuno raises her arm "like Frankenstein" and exclaims a particular phrase. The phrase is, as she realises, the one she has never used before, and the one she has learned from the translation of the Grimm's tales. She says, "Though I did it involuntarily, it feels like all my words have entered into a fictional world that moment" (MD 15). Psychoanalysis probably tells us that she tries to reduce her mother to unreal proportions because she cannot bear the pressure, though she claims the contraction of her mother is not her doing and is "very stressful." This contracted Mother changes her form according to Yatsuno's narration. Her character, her status, her name, even her sex changes, though "Mother is still

consistently Mother” “Though, of course, I myself doubt this deformed Mother is really truly Mother. I haven’t been able to understand the meaning of the term, Mother, since she started to contract” (MD 18).

Though she deforms her mother and moves her according to the tales she tells, it does not mean Yatsuno has denounced her mother: on the contrary, she clings to her mother so much that she keeps on describing her mother’s movement from fear “of losing my mother’s sight who is deformed in the extreme” (MD 19). In order to keep her mother, she keeps on telling tale after tale and thus keeps moving her mother on as a character. The tales she chooses are those of heroic adventures.

In fact, what Yatsuno is doing is to rescue her Mother from the confinement of existing “motherhood” or the “feminine myth.” Her mother is disappointed and unhappy because those myths have trapped her; she forces her daughter to live the opposite life because she wants her to oppose the myths. The hold of the myth on her mother is so strong that it totally controls her mother’s life.

Now, by reducing her mother into a male character with sometimes superhuman power, Yatsuno in a way allows her to break free from the social requirement, and live the kind of life her mother might have liked. In the tales Yatsuno tells, the motherly, womanly features are completely erased, and her mother is reconstructed as someone “active, and seems to be having fun with a trickster-like character.”

When the contracted Mother retorts to her, “Don’t you know how famous Mother is?” (MD 30), with the newspaper full of the old-fashioned jargon such as “Mother and Child,” Yatsuno finally presses her mother onto the computer screen, and reduces her size with a key until she becomes only a dot. The term disappears here, only the core existence of her mother remains.

The second part, “Mother’s Development,” starts with Yatsuno’s agitated phone-calls to relatives to tell of her mother’s death, and she suggests that she herself

has murdered her. In a continuation of the first part, the story begins as a realistic description of a morbid relationship between the mother and daughter; her mother clings to her all those years, and prevents her leaving home by injuring herself, while complaining of her dependence at the same and being malicious to her. Yatsuno is now forty-nine of age, and claims that she has never left home because of her mother. Her narrative appears mad and angry. She tells the reader that her mother had never wanted to have a daughter, nor to become a "Mother"; she hates finding anything sexual in her daughter which suggests that her fate is to become a mother. As a woman who has been deserted by her husband for a mistress, her mother might have hated everything "feminine," her fate, social requirements and expectations. Yatsuno suggests that she spares her mother any more sight of her daughter, who only reminds her of her "womanhood." If the story ended here, it would have been another tragic story of a mother and daughter. However, the story then tells us that even though Yatsuno has murdered her mother, she did not die:

After all, as it turns out, it was not a murder. To begin with, a murder usually means a destruction of something or a liberation from something (or so the author thinks.) But in Yatsuno's case, it was a reconstruction rather than a destruction, a progressive dissolution rather than a liberation, and a birth of a new mother transformed to rhizome rather than her murder (MD 64).

After the murder, the body of her mother commences an occult transformation. Yatsuno "happily communicates" with this new Mother who says "I am reorganising myself. I am doing this in order to be the Mother who is like a hero and destroy the fake Mother who the society calls the Mother" (MD 69). She goes on to reveal that she is going to "destroy the motherly Mother, supervise the catalogue of ideal Mother, and dismember all of the former Mother" (MD 69-70). This Mother, who reminds me of the Dog Woman, is, indeed, far from the image of "Mother": she is evil and

cannibalistic, who claims a human body as food saying “I would like a living body of a fool absorbed in playing Mother” (MD 70). She is no longer “the former Mother who maintains her daughter in order to kill her gradually” but an “independent” one, who “refuses to be called ‘Mother’ by a stranger, or be told to do this and that only on account that she is Mother” (MD 71). Yatsuno feeds her mother human bodies, and thinks that she “is going to become the first female Dr Frankenstein, and create her own mother” (MD 78). The creation of New Mother involves a kind of word play, in search of names and tales that suit her. The new names and tales have nothing to do with the old association of the term with the Female Myth, and, therefore, must be outrageously anti-motherly and uncommon. The more outrageous they are, the more the New Mother can proliferate. Some of the New Mothers that bear the trace of former “motherness” are carefully eliminated and destroyed. She creates fifty myths for the new Mothers, each one corresponds to a Japanese alphabet, and all myths are that of evil, murderous, cruel, anti-motherly Mother.

The final part of the tale is a more extensive attempt at creating the New Mothers; not only fifty mothers, but a whole dictionary of mothers, is created. These hundreds and thousands of mothers dance to the tune made by Yatsuno, and then they revolve all at once. Yatsuno realises that “it is the means to express Mother completely, while maintaining her wholeness, her materiality and textuality, her idea, her sensibility, her revolutionality, and her power” (MD 177). The ending of the story depicts Yatsuno being happy with the whole Mother(s) beside her.

Though this novel manages to challenge the myth of femininity and motherhood in a very original, unique way, there still remains a problem. Because this re-creation of the Mother happens in a private space at home between a mother and a daughter, it somehow becomes a claustrophobic fantasy, which is not extended to the public arena. The danger of its dismissal as a particular fantasy by a particular daughter about a particular mother does not disappear, though the



internalisation of the conflict among the womenfolk exactly reflects Japanese society. One thing is sure: the grotesque Mother in this story certainly destroys the myths of mother. Perhaps this is the starting point from which the author can venture into the public sphere since, as Gilbert and Gubar point out that, in order to write, to be creative, women “must kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been ‘killed’ into art” (17).

### The Tokyo Floating Monsters

Yorino Shoko’s other novel, Tokyo Yokai Fuyu [1998] (The Tokyo Floating Monsters),<sup>8</sup> is a step forward into the public arena, while maintaining mediating qualities of the fantasy form. As in the two Japanese novels analysed above, such mediation is still helpful in preventing outright antipathy to the work from society. It is especially so with feminist novels. The Tokyo Floating Monsters is also a feminist work, though its thesis does not sound too harsh to prevent invitation to male readers, since the feminist manifesto is voiced by one of the monsters in the novel. The fact that it is not supposed to have originated from the real, human, author, somehow mitigates the manifestation, while it is rightly conveyed to those who can decode the author’s invention.

This novel is comprised of seven short stories about monsters living in Tokyo. The narrator is a middle-aged female author who comes from the countryside and now lives alone in Tokyo: she is someone who overlaps with the author, Yoriko Shono. She calls herself Monster Yosome: “Right. Yosome is not human. She has decided to monster-ise herself while enjoying human rights. She is a monster in disguise, like those Christians during the oppression. Neither her look nor her life is different from human being’s, but her superhuman power is gradually developing” (TFM 54).

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<sup>8</sup> Yoriko Shono, Tokyo Yokai Fuyu (The Tokyo Floating Monsters) (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1998). Henceforth the citation from this text is indicated with TFM in front of the page number.

It is her invention to make herself immune to social criticism targeting unmarried spinsters. Discrimination against unmarried women is still relatively strong in Japan especially in rural areas. But the narrator writes: "Anywhere you live, irresponsible criticism attacks spinsters; don't you have worries for your future?; where are you from, do you have a man?; you are married, aren't you? Have you got any kids yet?; how can you stand such a poor, boring, repetitious life?" And to these criticisms, the monster, Yosome, can retort in her mind, "So what?" "I don't mind" "Because I am not afraid like you human beings" (TFM 54).

For a human being, especially a middle-aged female unpopular writer, societal censorship is very restricting. The narrator introduces one episode: while she was taking a shower, the phrase "Suijin, the God of water, is angry" comes into her mind without any association. Then the next day, when she is walking along a strange street, she comes across a shrine of Suijin being demolished. However, when she writes about this happening in an essay, she makes the order the other way round:

I wrote, "Because I had seen the demolished Shrine of Suijin, I felt as if the water coming out of shower was angry." I didn't want to be criticised that I was behaving like a psychic. But then, I might as well have described it as a mere coincidence.... I, without deep thinking, followed the grand narrative of "Science" (TFM 6).

Being labelled "mad" or "strange" by society is quite scary. But once you make yourself into a "monster," you can be free from such anxiety, as the She-devil in Fay Weldon's story so clearly demonstrates. Yosome, in this story, also manipulates the power of monsters:

Yosome is bigoted, and does not socialise with many.... Only Tokyo would allow her existence. She has lived here and become a monster. Reaching over thirty years of age, it gets harder even in Tokyo. She didn't know cities also have such rules. But, at least, if you are a

monster, you can be here.... When a woman comes to the city, and remains unmarried and childless, without relationship, without selling her body, with no guarantee for the lifetime job, and lives in Tokyo until around the age of forty, she turns into a monster. The species of the monster is called "Yosome." Once becoming Yosome, you are usually invisible. Sometimes you can even fly. That is carefree and fun. But when you are visible, you are terribly despised. If you happen to have loads of money, you might be able to stay invisible (TFM 58).

Clearly this is a criticism of social discrimination against unmarried middle-aged women, but somehow, it is comically mitigated. The narrator tells that she "chose to believe" this Yosome theory, which "gradually provided her with the power of the monster" and she "came to be able to ignore others' irresponsible criticism" (TFM 58). This narrator employs the same technique as others: by naming them the monsters, she can now attack the monsters. Because they are not human beings but monsters that she is criticising, it is not "bad" or "impolite" or "anti-social" of her.

One such target is the narrator's male editor, Kinashi, who is renamed as Sorabogen. This monster flies with many many murdered body parts of women around his body. The body parts are collected inconsistently according to his taste. They cover the real body of the monster, so that from the outside, this monster looks like "fake mothers," "wholesale mother types' auctioned in a slave market," or a "kind, adult woman who accepts the sexual likings of a man whom she does not particularly like" (TFM 106). When the narrator enters a tearoom with Kinashi, he says "all are women here": "When Kinashi elatedly mentioned 'all are women,' the heads of some women in the shop were torn off. After one second, they all returned, though" (TFM 117). Translating into "human" language, this editor regards women merely as the objects of his desire. His type of women are generous motherly women to whom he

can act as a naughty child, and he believes every woman should be such a type. Though he is a coward among the same sex, he becomes extremely arrogant among women and “treats them as if they were members of his own harem” (TFM 108). This editor somehow tries to reduce the narrator into the “mother” figure too, and his attitude disgusts the narrator: “I got goose-pimpled at Kinashi’s disposition; he looks down on the sex and he selfishly spares himself of filth, while defiling only women” (TFM 120). It is the system of patriarchy to reduce women to a despicable “Other” who traps men into sin, mortality and death, which is demonstrated emphatically in the original Gothic tales. Their grotesque tales are caricatures. For Yosome, however, it is not merely caricature, but the real thing that is still going on in contemporary Japan. Of all literary genres, only Gothic can express this violent reduction and manipulation of the female body by patriarchal culture; the use of monsters is indeed nothing other than appropriate.

The guise of the monster allows her to complain about literary censorship in Japanese culture:

In this country, women writers are somehow scorned. “They are stupid, they can only write autobiographical stories.’ ‘But they are exceptionally good at pornography, better than men’ and such like” (TFM 121).

Unless she has the guise of the monster, this kind of criticism might sound more negative to some readers. Her next criticism is more radical, it is upon a Japanese term, “Joryu,” which literally means a female style and defines everything done by woman. Women’s writing is called “Joryu” literature; the woman writer is called a “Joryu” author. Yosome is angry at an article in which her interview is distorted, and she is described as a “Joryu” author:

This term has been often used so far as if to say “female writers are different creature from male writers; they are lower; there is no need

to evaluate or treat them equally; they have only to describe their own sexual experiences with their unsophisticated vocabulary to please men; they should never try an experimental literature" (TFM 164).

The conflicts that feminist writers in Japan can face are described in the deadly fight with Monster Satoru (Satoru means "to read person's thoughts"): Yosome is tortured by him, as he says, "Goddess? You must be narcissistic"; "You say you don't like TV advertisements which look down on women, but they don't, it is you who are wrong, you criticise every trivial matter, you lonely forty-somethings take everything to be malice"; "Though you go on writing more and more and more, it is no use, and you die in vain" (TFM 172-3). Though she manages to kill this monster with the help of her companion monster, her self-doubt is not completely cleared:

You excuse yourself by saying "I am only a monster" when you are regarded as strange; you transform someone into a monster when he/she is too strange to deal with; you blame the monsters for all unbearable incidents; you avoid the conflicts of several realities; all these things comprise your "Tokyo" (TFM 212).

This description might expressively show the unstable and challenging situation of women writers in Japan. For them, the monsters or grotesque bodies serve both as a disguise and a mitigation, making it possible for them to express what has been repressed, while protecting them from the outright rejection or censorship, though, as Shono has demonstrated, there is also a danger of alienation generated by "monster-isation." However, this novel marks a significant point in contemporary Japanese literature, since the issue of alienation comes to be articulated so clearly at last. Undeniably, it is made possible by the use of the grotesque. Now that this novel boldly brings up the issues around the grotesque woman with the help of monsters, the problems for contemporary women, for contemporary women writers, are brought into the public arena of literature, freed from the confinement of the

“female only” private world, and brought out of the limited field of sexuality.

### Three Attempts to Retell the Fables

For the final material of my analysis, I have chosen three similar attempts to retell folktales by one English, and two Japanese writers. Reflecting their respective social conditions, even though they use the same materials, their narrative styles are markedly different. Yuko Matsumoto's Tsumibukai Hime-no-Otogibanashi [1996] (The Fairytales of Sinful Princesses),<sup>9</sup> for instance, is a collection of parodies of Western fairytales that are popular in Japan. Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber [1979]<sup>10</sup> is also a parodic collection of fairytales, and she shares some of the original stories with Matsumoto. However, their narratives produce two different reading experiences. Yumiko Kurahashi's two collections, Otona-no-tame-no-Zankoku Dowa [1984] (Brutal Fairytales for Adults)<sup>11</sup> and Kurahashi Yumiko-no-Kaiki Shohen [1985] (Kurahashi Yumiko's Horror Stories)<sup>12</sup>, share elements with Matsumoto and Carter's stories whilst negotiating in their own way with the particular conditions of Japanese society.

Matsumoto's collection is created so that readers are continuously made aware. She makes it clear that her tales are “parodies,” and that her intention is to bring the hidden cruelty and misogyny of the popularised version of the stories to light. The stories are consciously written to raise feminist awareness. For instance,

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<sup>9</sup> Yuko Matsumoto, Tsumibukai Hime-no-Otogibanashi (The Fairytales of Sinful Princesses) (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Angela Carter, The Bloody Chamber [1979] (London: Vintage, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Yumiko Kurahashi, Otona-no-tame-no-Zankoku Dowa [1984] (Brutal Fairytales for Adults) (Tokyo: Shincho, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Yumiko Kurahashi, Kurahashi Yumiko-no-Kaiki Shohen [1985] (Kurahashi Yumiko's Horror Stories) (Tokyo: Shincho, 1988). English translation of some of the tales from this collection is found in The Woman with the Flying Head and Other Stories by Kurahashi Yumiko. Trans. Atsuko Sakaki (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

in “Shirayukihime-no-Majo-Saiban” (The Witch Trial of Snow White),<sup>13</sup> the stepmother of Snow White is shown as a normal woman with stereotyped female wiles. She becomes jealous of her beautiful stepdaughter, and attempts to assassinate her, but not without a sense of guilt. She loves her stepdaughter, but Snow White’s beauty threatens her own favour with the King. However, Snow White is presented as a stupid girl with a simple mind. She fails to understand her stepmother’s complex feelings, and when brought to life again by the necrophilic prince, she puts her stepmother on trial as a witch and kills her. In the story, the sensitive nature of the Queen, as well as the dumbness and stupidity of Snow White, are emphasised, and the dichotomy of beautiful “angel” and angry, jealous and wily “monster” is made visible. The author’s sympathy is apparently with the “monster” Queen. Furthermore, at the end of the story, the cynical moral is drawn:

The moral: Woman must not ponder upon complicated matters. A wily woman like the Queen is to be punished. A stupid woman like Snow White is favoured by men and can become happy. A young woman must wait for a future husband at home, doing house-chores, as Snow White did at the dwarfs’ house. She should not go out. If she waits long enough, even after she died as Snow White did, the prince appears to marry her. A woman needs to be beautiful. She must not be proud of her beauty, though. She must be modest (60).

After each tale, a similar moral is drawn, following the examples of Aesop’s Fables. The parody of “Sleeping Beauty,” for instance, is followed by the moral: “An immaculate virgin oblivious to vice can become happy, loved by a respectable man. Woman’s pleasure lies only in her vagina, which must be awakened by man’s phallus. Until then she has to be asleep. If she arouses her clitoris or vagina on her own, she

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 3.

will be punished" (31). The episode which originates from "Bluebeard" has its moral: "Woman's curiosity is silly. It only leads to the destruction that Eve in Eden has invited on herself. It also tends to encourage sexual deviation in her. Woman's curiosity deserves the death penalty (though man's curiosity is praised since it means aspiration, adventurousness, and the spirit of inquiry). A wife who does not obey her husband is killed. The husband's word must be obeyed even when his command is to hide the corpse of the victims he has murdered. A disobedient wife is more evil than a killer husband" (140). Her satiric and cynical tales provide the reader with an enjoyable reading experience, but unlike Carter's tales, they do not wander much beyond the range of fairly direct critique of patriarchal narratives, and in a sense therefore can only provide a kind of reverse mirror image.

This is not to say that Matsumoto's narrative spoils the reader's enjoyment in any way. However, the intrusive voice of the author is always there to make the reader conscious of the original and the collection is more obviously tendentious and directly "political" than in Carter's stories. This is reminiscent of Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1969), in which she focuses on the system of domination lurking among patriarchal narratives, and criticises the prevalent narrative system which runs through the "great tradition" of literature. Her monumental work can be seen now as a necessary stage in feminist studies, but her sometimes reductive and biased treatment of male authors was widely criticised by feminist scholars.<sup>14</sup> Due to her inadequate concept of ideology and insufficient consideration of psychoanalysis, patriarchal narrative is seen by her to be more an individual choice than the result of complex ideologies which affect both conscious and unconscious human behaviour. And, as she only deals with male authors, her research results in a preoccupation

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, Toril Moi criticises her lack of recognition of women authors: "It is as if Millett wishes consciously or unconsciously to suppress the evidence of earlier antipatriarchal works, not least if her precursors were women" (25). Moi suggested that "Kate Millett's criticism, wholly preoccupied as it is with the abominable male, can give us no guidance on these matters [of how to read women's text]" (31).



with male presence. Consequently, the possibility and history of resistance by female writers is not adequately argued through. Similarly, Matsumoto's fairytales have this kind of circular quality. Unlike the original fairytales, of course, Matsumoto's stories do not provide the beautiful and "angelic" heroines with easy and happy endings. Defying the message behind the original fairytales, the "angelic" heroines are all doomed to miserable and unsatisfied lives in a more or less similar way to her angry "monstrous" adversaries. So, although "feminist," her stories can be seen to be still trapped in a patriarchal narrative framework, in that they fail to provide the reader with positive alternatives. The male and female worlds are left wide apart without any sign of possible reconciliation.

Matsumoto's mode of narrative is reflective of what might be seen as the current phase of Japanese society. Kate Millett's criticism of the patriarchal narrative system appeared in 1969 at an early stage in second wave feminism.<sup>15</sup> After Millett's offering, there followed a number of research efforts more focused on women's attempts at resistance.<sup>16</sup> Novels by women writers have been continuously re-discovered and re-evaluated since, producing an entire industry of feminist critical studies. Maybe Millett's controversial criticism was important in paving the way for a more complex and constructive body of feminist criticism, since her work drew attention to fundamental issues. Quite reasonably, the situation of today's Japanese literary society can be compared with that of the West in 1969. Matsumoto's attempt, though problematic, can be appreciated as a necessary step leading to the creation of more positive images. Nonetheless, the reductive nature of her critique may repel the male Japanese readership.

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<sup>15</sup> Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* [1970] (London: Virago, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> For instance, there are Germain Greer, Shulamith Firestone, Marxist feminist such as Michèle Barrett, and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

Contrary to Matsumoto's retelling effort, Carter's parodies often go beyond the "parodic" form to the extent that they develop into completely new narratives, and allow readers to rework the terms of the original. They may also appeal to a general readership. It seems that Carter's tales manage to free their heroines from the patriarchal narratives of the popularised version of fairytales and provide them with human desires and wills of their own, thus reconciling the dichotomy of "angel" and "monster." Compared to Matsumoto, as Sarah Gamble points out, Carter draws more on folklore as "an ideal tool for an author 'in the demythologising business,' because it is 'a much more straight forward set of devices for making real life more exciting and is much easier to infiltrate with other kinds of consciousness'" (130).<sup>17</sup> Gamble argues:

Originally transmitted orally, it was passed from teller to teller, all of whom freely modified it to suit the specific requirements of their audience. For Carter, this willingness to accommodate is what makes the fairytales indispensable (130).

Carter utilises to the full, the capacity of the fairytale to accommodate alternative meanings. She breaks the form that has been imposed on the written version of the fairytale by later editorship, and returns it to a free space. Unlike Matsumoto's tales which are all recounted in the third-person, for example, some of the tales in The Bloody Chamber are told by a first-person narrator. So the heroines very literally become subjects of their stories. Also, for instance, Carter strips her tales of moralistic directions, and seems to concentrate on their psychological effects, agreeing with Bruno Bettelheim when he insists that "the paramount importance of fairy tales for the growing individual resides in something other than teachings about correct ways of behaving in this world – such wisdom is plentifully supplied in

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<sup>17</sup> Sarah Gamble, Angela Carter: Writing from the Front Line (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997). Gamble cites Carter from "Notes from the Front Line," On Gender and Writing, ed. Michelene Wandor (London: Pandora Press, 1983). 69-71.

religion, myths, and fables. Fairy stories do not pretend to describe the world as it is, nor do they advise what one ought to do" (25).<sup>18</sup> Carter's heroines act according to desire. However, while Bettelheim suggests that the fairytale's effect is to bring the child's desire into a more manageable form through the reading experience, Carter seems to be aiming at the opposite effect. Bettelheim describes the effect of fairytales on the psyche of children as "therapeutic":

The fairy tale is therapeutic because the patient finds his *own* solutions, through contemplating what the story seems to imply about him and his inner conflicts at this moment in his life (25).

This seems to suggest that the effect of the fairytale is ultimately to contain the wild and unsociable desires of the child. He says that *the fairytale "projects the relief of all pressures and not only offers ways to solve problems but promises that a 'happy' solution will be found"* (36). Both good and evil characters help the child to identify his/her goodness and badness, the problems he/she encounters at every stage of his early life, and by externalising them he/she becomes better able to manage him/herself. The fantastic adventures of characters help the child to unleash and control his or her frustration:

After his most grandiose desires have thus been satisfied in fantasy, the child can be more at peace with his body as it is in reality. The fairy tale even projects this acceptance of reality for the child, because while extraordinary transfigurations in the hero's body occur as the story unfolds, he becomes a mere mortal again once the struggle is over (57).

Though Bettelheim insists that these effects are the same for both boys and girls, his use of the personal pronoun unwittingly reveals that the intended reader is the male child. No consideration from a feminist perspective appears in his analysis of the

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<sup>18</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* [1976] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

“happy solution” of the fairytale. The considerable difference in quality of such “solutions” for girls is not taken into account: when the hero’s return to reality may mean independence for the male but it signifies subjection for the heroine, to her father or her husband.

Working against Bettelheim’s analysis, Carter writes her fairytales largely for girls or women, aiming not at curbing subversive desires but at liberating desire from social containment. For instance, “The Tiger’s Bride” describes a daughter who was pawned by her father to the Beast. In Bettelheim’s analysis fairytales which feature an animal groom help the child to cope with the animalism of the sex act. In the name of true love and marriage, the heroine successfully transfers her infantile attachment from her father to her lover, and thus accepts the animalistic quality of sexual intercourse: “Only marriage made sex permissible, changed it from something animal-like into a bond sanctified by the sacrament of marriage” (283). The heroine’s “happy solution,” according to Bettelheim, is to enter into a new subordination with her father’s permission. However, unlike the typical obedient daughters found in the original fairytales, Carter’s heroine in this story is critical of her “profligate” father (52) and chooses to walk away from him at the end of the story. She coldly analyses her father: “Gambling is a sickness. My father said he loved me yet he staked his daughter on a hand of card”; “You must not think my father valued me at less than king’s ransom; but, at *no more* than a king’s ransom” (54). When she encounters the Beast, however, she does not lose her will or subjectivity. With her own will, she tries to negotiate with the Beast who is regarded initially as an inferior. The heroine of this tale initially acts according to the rigid hierarchy set up between human beings and animals or monsters that is characteristic of the original fairytales. However, the hierarchy is subverted when she gradually comes to compare the reciprocity of the Beast with the reckless and unfair treatment she has received from her father:

I was a young girl, a virgin, and therefore men denied me rationality just as they denied it to all those who were not exactly like themselves, in all their unreason. If I could see not one single soul in that wilderness of desolation all around me, then the six of us – mounts and riders, both – could boast amongst us not one soul, either, since all the best religions in the world state categorically that not beasts nor women were equipped with the flimsy, insubstantial things when the good Lord opened the gates of Eden and let Eve and her familiars tumble out (63).

She is thus able to acknowledge a superior quality in the Beast, the natural beauty in him, and is then able to accept the Beast's wish and shed her clothes to become a naked "natural" woman. Now that she is stripped of the confining woman's clothes provided by her father, she is released from patriarchal hierarchy. And when she is free to leave the Beast's palace, she refuses to go:

When I looked at the mirror again, my father had disappeared and all I saw was a pale, hollow-eyed girl whom I scarcely recognized. The valet asked politely when he should prepare the carriage, as if he did not doubt that I would leave with my booty at the first opportunity while my maid, whose face was no longer the spit of my own, continued bonnily to beam. I will dress her in my own clothes, wind her up, send her back to perform the part of my father's daughter (65).

Here she ceases to be her father's daughter, ceases to be a typical heroine of a fairytale. She is a mature woman with her own brain, desire, and will. The ending of the story shows the lovers' embrace in which the heroine reveals her sensual beastliness. She accepts her sexuality without her father's sanction.

The other tales in the collection similarly describe desiring heroines. "The Bloody Chamber" has a heroine who willingly marries Bluebeard. When she finds out her husband's crime, and being sexually frustrated by him, she chooses another

lover. This tale is also markedly different from the popular version: the saviour of the bride is not her brothers, but her death-defying mother who “had outfaced a junkful of Chinese pirates, nursed a village through a visitation of the plague, shot a man-eating tiger with her own hand” (7). “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” finds a daughter obedient to her father as a fairytale heroine should be. Through the course of the story, however, the loyalty and honesty of the Beast are emphasised while the heroine’s lack of gratitude and sincerity are condemned. At the end, just as the prodigal son in the Bible returns to his father’s house, she goes back, not to her father’s house, but to the Beast’s, saying “I have come home” (50). The hierarchy of human beings and beasts is yet again subverted.

Furthermore, Carter’s fairytales bring back the illogical and dark forces found in the original oral traditions. They are no longer moral instructions for children, nor a means to curb their wild desires, but exhibitions of dark desires and sensual fascinations that extend to cannibalism, vampirism, sexual intercourse with beasts, and murder. The desire of the heroines thus shifts them toward a criminal world. The moral of woman’s chastity and innocence is superseded by the superior importance of her freedom, hence the desiring wife in “Puss-in-Boots” kills her impotent husband to be with her lover. This woman is not a simple victim of her husband’s tyranny seeking to grab whatever help is offered. She chooses to be helped by this particular hero, whom she liked. The heroine of “The Erl-King” also kills. She kills her lover, the Erl-King, because he traps her with his stifling love. The heroine of “The Company of Wolves” sleeps with a wolf who has killed her grandmother. There is no clear moral lesson imposed by this collection. In fairytale worlds which blur distinctions between human beings and animals and monsters, the heroines of Carter’s tales move around freely with their own desires and wills.

Of course, the confining narratives of the popularised version of fairytales have

produced female monsters as well as their angelic counterparts. Matsumoto's narrative, by mirroring the system, unwittingly preserves the dichotomy. Contrary to Matsumoto's collection, however, The Bloody Chamber is less concerned to directly reflect the original and succeeds in creating a more positive narrative for its own heroines. The female monsters are exorcised, reconciled with their separated twins, as demonstrated in "The Lady of the House of Love," in which the female vampire who has been unwillingly confined within the vampirism imposed by patriarchal ancestors, is exorcised and freed by the non-phallic kiss of a virgin boy. The reader is introduced to the possible non-hierarchical reconciliation between two separated worlds.

Two more attempts at retelling the fairytales are made by Yumiko Kurahashi. It seems her attempts are somehow a negotiation of the middle ground between Matsumoto's and Carter's narrative subversion. Matsumoto's tales can be reductively political. Though they succeed in laying bare the hidden system of domination in a society in which feminism has barely taken root, they do nothing to prepare the general population for ready acceptance of such ideological deconstruction. The effect of this may be to limit her readership. Carter's narratives are complex in ways which seem to demand a more developed feminist comprehension than can be offered, on the whole, in today's Japanese society. So Kurahashi's effort seems to mediate between the two. She creates an original narrative, neither trapped within a pre-existent patriarchal narrative, nor too overtly ideologically subversive.

She published Brutal Fairytales for Adults in 1984, and Kurahashi Yumiko's Horror Stories in 1985. The first collection looks similar in form to Matsumoto's collection. The tales draw on original fairy stories and a moral is drawn at the end of each tale. However, unlike Matsumoto's tales, Kurahashi retells not only Western fairytales but Eastern ones as well, and she chooses to subvert the ending of the tales

and thus manages to utilise the “accommodating” capacity of the oral tradition to create a significantly different atmosphere. Take “Snow White” as an example.<sup>19</sup> It is not Snow White who becomes happy in the end, but the Queen, in Kurahashi’s version. The scheming Queen is praised, while the stupid Snow White is degraded. The morals drawn from her tales are not mirrors of the originals, but new ones in their own rights. Kurahashi’s collection, though, seems to be dedicated not so much to the creation of positive woman’s discourse, but to the subversion of the reader’s expectations. Perhaps it may be the author’s way of trying to avoid the alienation of the reader. By drawing irrelevant or wayward morals, or by emphasising the illogical nature of the tales, Kurahashi, in fact, restores the fairytale to its original form in folklore and oral traditions. Most written fairytales, as they now exist, are controlled and edited versions of oral traditions into which patriarchal ideologies have been succinctly inserted. Kurahashi’s tales seem to strip such ideologies from the tales. In “The Magic Bean Tree,” Jack finds his long-lost mother in heaven when he climbs up the giant tree given by an ogre. Jack has been missing his mother who abandoned him, and is overjoyed to find her. There is a joyful reunion based on maternal love. For his mother, the reappearance of Jack is nothing but an annoyance, so she kills him and eats him with her ogre lover. The reader’s expectation of maternal love is plainly denied.

Her fascination with the illogicality of folklore is developed more in her next collection, Kurahashi Yumiko’s Horror Stories. Each episode is, in one way or another related to folklore, but the connection is minimal, and the stories are very original. As in Brutal Fairytales for Adults, the reader is subjected to a series of unexpected and illogical twists and turns. The shocking effect is intensified more in this collection, because, set in a contemporary realistic world, the reader is less prepared for the inconsistent and fantastic development of the stories. “Vampire

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 3.



Association,” for instance, takes on the motif of the vampire. Set in contemporary Japan, a restaurant owner, Mr Kihara, regularly entertains a group of people, whom he later finds are vampires. The distinction between fictional and real existence is blurred:

Does a vampire really exist? Mr Kihara thought he had better refrain from declaring that it does not. In a Chinese text, Shikai, there is a story called “No Goblin Theory.” In the story, the protagonist, Gensen, insisted upon his theory that there is no goblin in the world and won an argument with a stranger. The stranger was at once transformed into a goblin and vanished. Mr Kihara was thoughtful not to follow Gensen’s path (15).

Since the story seems to begin as a realistic record of the contemporary world, Mr Kihara’s rational warning scarcely prepares the reader for the sudden, illogical transformation of this story into the horror of a vampire feast. Mr Kihara himself, who has seemed rational and logical, shows a fascination with vampirism, the drinking of human blood, and is also transformed into a vampire at the end of the story in order to complete the collapse of the boundary between fantastic and realistic characters. As in Carter’s The Bloody Chamber, Kurahashi succeeds in preserving the dark forces of the fairytales in their original oral forms.

“The Woman with the Flying Head” starts with the seemingly realistic recollection of a man. This story has a Chinese-box structure, in which the woman narrator tells the reader what she heard from her father who told her what he heard from his friend. This distancing narrative technique seems to increase the reader’s belief in the objective quality of the outer structure. The father tells his daughter that his friend was “a little bit mad.” This mad friend confesses that he had fallen in love with a girl whose head flew out of the house every night to see her lover. The friend became jealous, and one day, he wrapped the neck with a cloth while the head

was away so that it could not return to the body. The girl died when her head failed to re-unite with the body. The mad friend showed the father the shrunken head of the girl. Up to this point, the reader can separate this episode as a madman's tale. But then, the story goes on to reveal that the father was in fact the girl's lover whom the flying head had nightly visited. And the father told the narrator that in fact she (the narrator) had been born by that girl whose body was pregnant and remained alive for a while after the incident. The realistic surface of the story breaks down at this point where the formerly separated worlds of madness and normality converge. The transition from the realistic to the grotesque is subtle but drastic and similar slippages of the realistic into the fantastic occur in each episode.

Though not manifestly feminist, Kurahashi's narrative seems to be more successful in her attempt at the subversion of patriarchal narratives. Her stories in this collection betray the reader's expectation of a logical, linear narrative with clear moral implications. Instead, these stories offer the possibility that what is regarded as normal in one moment can become abnormal in the next. What is real can transform into the grotesque.

Kurahashi's attempt might not sound too drastic for a Western (feminist) readership. However, in the context of contemporary Japanese society, hers is a subtle and clever move. Since the time when Lady Murasaki created her ghost characters, Japanese women writers have been trying to avoid censorship by contriving various literary devices which screen out direct critique. Some share devices with Western writers, devices such as grotesque figures, monstrous women, ghosts, and fantastic narratives. Kurahashi's collections seem to exhibit the trace of such efforts that generations of Japanese women writers have made.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Since the efflorescence of realism in the nineteenth century, realistic narrative seems to have occupied a status equivalent to that of positivistic science or technology. It is supposedly “scientific” and “objective,” and therefore, “truer” to reality. Whilst other narratives are to be regarded as merely fictional constructions, realistic narrative is normalised as that which deserves higher appraisal for its artistry and objectivity, its skill in reflecting the “true” reality. However, since the advent of postmodernism, we have come to question the so-called “objectivity” and “truth” of realism. The sense engendered from such terminology is that of total exclusion of other kinds of narrative and is typical of what Lyotard has called the grand narrative.<sup>1</sup> The “grand narrative” of realism creates an internal hierarchy within the literary text by repressing other more “flexible” and fantastic narrative modes. In some sense, realism may indeed be closer to the “real,” in the way in which it reflects the internally constructed hierarchical system inherent in patriarchal society.

However, since its inception, the coercive and oppressive nature of the realistic mode of narrative has been variously demonstrated by many writers, and especially by women writers. English women novelists such as George Eliot and Emily Brontë, in the nineteenth-century, lay bare in the tragic deaths of defiant heroines the fact that happiness can never be achieved by women within the realistic frame. As, we have seen, other writers have tried to introduce non-realistic elements into a realistic frame in order to draw on the power of other kinds of narrative such as fantasy or myth to create alternative and more positive scenarios without the risk of censorship.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984).

The writing that I have analysed in this thesis belongs to the second kind of resistance and may be more or less labelled as “fantastic.” Though the term has often been negatively juxtaposed with “inauthentic” or “unsophisticated” in reductive construction of mainstream or canonical literature, there seem to be aspects of fantastic modes of narrative that so appeal to women writers that they have dared to run the risk of being regarded as lesser artists in their deployment of such modes. In fact, this phenomenon has a long history and tradition. Writers in the West and the East manoeuvre to strike a balance between the fantastic and more conventional or familiar narrative modes. Writers move on a continuum between realism and fully-fledged fantasy with some writers drawing on both kinds of narrative for different effects or on different occasions. For instance, Margaret Atwood mainly stays within the broad framework of realism while employing characters or narrative voices which are not conventionally realistic. Angela Carter, on the other hand, develops from early realism to full-fledged fantasy during her career. A similar development occurs with non-Western writers. Though the majority of Japanese writers are still working within a realistic mode, those writers that I have taken up for analysis use grotesque characters or transfigurations in order to introduce fissures into an otherwise stable and closed circuit of realistic narrative. For instance, Kurahashi and Matsumoto use fantasy as an alternative narrative method that is more powerful as a weapon of formal and ideological subversion.

The consistency of their effort becomes even more striking when we consider that the same tactics are employed in arguably the first novel in the world, The Tale of Genji, written in the eleventh-century by a Japanese woman writer. In The Tale of Genji, a female character turns into a ghost and gives voice to the sufferings of silent heroines. The ghost figure in this case serves as a means to articulate what is otherwise unspeakable. It also protects the main heroines (with whom the author tends to be identified) from criticism of their immodesty, for modesty was a quality of

tremendous importance in Japanese society around the time that the novel was written. Put differently, the female ghost first came into being coincidentally with the birth of patriarchal society, since this novel was written about the time of the transition of Japanese society from an inherently matriarchal to a Chinese-originated patriarchal structure. Along with patriarchy came a repression of the female body which engendered a new region of the unspeakable, and therefore, the need to find alternative modes of articulation. Hence the birth of the female ghost. From then on, ghosts, monsters, and grotesque figures have similarly populated women's writing in the West and in the East, in the service of two needs: one, to voice what is unmentionable, and two, to protect the outcome from censorship.

Situating the female body as "grotesque" and "abnormal" is one of the patriarchal means of control over women. From a patriarchal perspective, the human body (as opposed to the human mind) has come to signify a nature that has to be tamed and controlled in order for human society to develop. The progress of technologies and the development of society generally has seemed to succeed in keeping nature in check for most of the time so that we may be able to forget about nature's power over the human being. From time to time, though, we are reminded of its absolute tyranny over human beings when we face natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, typhoons, volcanoes, and tornadoes and the result is always psychologically devastating.

Our body, though, especially the female body, is also a continuous reminder of such destructive powers of nature. The female body has a mysterious connection to life and, therefore, death which incurs the fear of the ultimate power of nature and of the inevitability of death. The female body is represented as a volcanic cave filled with magma, as the wilderness, savageness, and inhumanity. Patriarchal society does not want to be reminded of human precariousness, of its weakness and its defeat by nature, so the human body must be kept rigorously under control. Many of the

patriarchal myths, religious tales, and fairytales exhibit the traits of such attempts at control. Yet there are other myths and folktales which seem to sustain qualities that originate from pre-patriarchal cultures. Many Japanese myths, for example, show a harmony of body and mind which is quite unlike their Western counterparts. The original oral traditions of many folktales also accommodate non-reductive concepts of the body. The retrieval of such a natural and sexual body is one of the projects which contemporary women writers have set out to accomplish even as they knowingly lay bare the constructedness of "nature."

From the beginning of the twentieth century, especially with the development of consumer culture, more bodies than ever seem to be regarded as "grotesque" or "abnormal." It would seem that the control of patriarchal power is tightening through the manipulation of the "beauty" concept. Yet the feminist movement has increased its power, so it may be that the patriarchal attempt to narrow the range of acceptable "beauty" and to label more female bodies "grotesque" is also a reaction to feminist opposition. In fact, the grotesque body comes to occupy women's writing more than before, and such bodies function not to affirm the patriarchal notion of beauty, but to subvert it. As I have analysed in this thesis, woman's writing makes use of the concept to create a reverse discourse, to re-situate the body.

The effort to contradict the alleged universality of patriarchy, and its claim of legitimacy for repression of the female body, is one of the marked characteristics of woman's writing. In one way or another, women writers have demonstrated that what is supposed to be "normal" in society can be "abnormal" when viewed from a different perspective. By employing the concept as it is engendered within patriarchy but by laying bare its fictionality, women writers shed light on a cultural system in which the female body is silently and continuously translated into the

grotesque body. Since the very beginning of woman's literary history, the grotesque body has carried a special connotation for women writers, perhaps because woman as writer has been regarded as a form of social deviance or social grotesquerie.

One of the conventions regarded as "normal" or "legitimate" with whose effects contemporary women writers have to contend is the convention of realistic narrative. Though even the heroines of nineteenth-century novels began to demonstrate the coercive circulatory system, it remains problematic for modern writers to disengage themselves entirely from the realism convention, since the humanist faith underpinning realism is so powerful that it has been made into the equivalent of a scientific truth in narrative. Its discriminatory system is nicely covered by terms such as "universality" and "objectivity." In fact, as Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth succinctly points out, the realistic narrative itself "produces and supports the existence of an objective world" (77), and it merely fortifies current systems of thought. The binary opposition and separation of body/mind can be found here yet again, as the omniscient narrator of realism is removed from situatedness and corporeality and ideally comes closer to a general viewpoint, a view from nowhere. Corporeality, locality, and immediate experience have been slighted within realistic convention even as they seem to be affirmed in the portrayal of character. When women writers write to retrieve the repressed body, however, realism is limited as a provider of appropriate devices. Mythic motifs, monsters, ghosts, and grotesque characters may therefore be introduced as deviant formal devices which also produce an ideologically subversive effect.

By using unrealistic motifs, women writers may disrupt the "general" consensus, for it is the "general consensus" confined in realism, which has excluded their viewpoints, their experiences, always privileging the male version. For women, however, the faith in "universal truth" has been long lost. By discarding realistic

conventions, women writers can articulate their own experience of particularity. This possibility of non-realistic narrative, the possibility of a closer relationship between the narrative and the reader, is suggested by Ermarth:

When we lost the faith (and perhaps the operative word is faith) that these regularities [that governs the world] exist, then at the same time we lost the possibility of that distance from which we could view them. When we cannot maintain distance, because it yields nothing or because the world does not require it, then the peril and possibility of the present are both enormously enhanced. A story that does not permit the generalizations to form actually prevents the consciousness from remaining disembodied, and the reader becomes the accomplice of the story, an unwitting participant...(91-2).

The dissolution of disembodiment described here may be the very aim of contemporary writers who engage in the discourse of the grotesque body. Though making use of fantastic methods, they choose not to completely separate them from the mainstream so as to secure their readership, and to work effectively towards the dissolution of repression as subversion is only possible from within. When one separates oneself into the "Other," one can no longer affect the power system, having nothing to do with it. But by remaining within the power structure, one can induce the fluctuation of power, and ultimately rearrange the structure itself. It is the kind of fantastic that Lucie Armitt described as "a form of writing which is about opening up subversive spaces within the mainstream rather than ghettoising fantasy by encasing it within genres" (3).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, contemporary women's writers do not confine themselves to one particular genre. Many of the writers I have analysed take up various forms of writing, sometimes mixing several modes in one story. And this applies both to Western and to Japanese writers.

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<sup>2</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic* (London: Arnold, 1996).



In spite of apparent cultural differences, women writers in Britain and Japan are engaged in similar practices. However, as we have seen, the cultural difference requires decoding for a full appreciation of their mutual qualities as reverse discourses. For instance, even though today's Japanese society enjoys almost the same quality of life as Western cultures, it is still influenced by its own peculiar history, one which upholds a stricter gender division. The Western influence and the propagation of consumer culture have not fully permeated into the infrastructure of Japanese society. Western feminism has given the power of articulation to Western women, but it has met stronger resistance in Japanese society where the establishment is less open to such outright political aggression. The morals peculiar to Japanese culture may make more moderate and culturally inflected practices necessary and those Japanese writers I have analysed demonstrate the available possibilities. It is inappropriate to compare two cultures simply at the level of surface expressions. A consideration of their respective cultural traditions and historical backgrounds is always important and it is especially vital for non-Western cultures. Since they are attributed the place of "Other" by Western culture, their quality is easily dismissed by Western-oriented scholars as "peculiar," "strange" or "different." They are sometimes cherished as "exotic," but more often than not Westerners merely idealise what they are not and use the "Other" as a reflexive mirror. In the process of such "Orientalism," real non-Western cultures are made invisible and irrelevant.

What I have tried to achieve in this thesis is to counteract such a reductive "Orientalism" and make Japanese women writers (who are doubly invisible as women and as non-Westerners) visible to the world. I have to admit that the qualities of resistance in their writing may not be easy to recognise, since it is often displaced and indirectly articulated. In the Tale of Genji, there are manifold ambiguities (stylistic, grammatical, and thematic) that have prevented censorship in its subsequent history.

A thousand years later, Japanese writers are still in need of such screens. Most of them prefer not to be manifestly feminist, therefore Western readers who are feminist-informed may find them timid or unsatisfactory. However, considering cultural pressures in contemporary Japan, writing which is not obviously resistant is far more likely to gain popular acceptance, and, therefore, to be effective in permeating and subverting social conventions. Writers like Kurahashi and Shono are fine examples of such manoeuvres. However varied they may seem on the surface, the key motif of the grotesque body runs through much women's writing even if its political effect is partially or fully hidden to the eyes of those from other cultures.

Those women writers which I have taken up for analysis in this thesis are all fine examples of the "repetitious performance" required to create a new concept of identity. As Judith Butler suggests, current gender bias is constituted and maintained by repetitious performance because "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (*Gender Trouble*, 93). The counter-performance is therefore vital in subverting the power-structure. The task is not to seek a "universal" identity outside power, but to seek to disrupt from within. The motif of the grotesque body might be the key to such disruption. Susan Bordo insists on the importance of being "pragmatic, not theoretically pure" (153). Well ahead of theoretical conceptualisation, contemporary writers seem to demonstrate its effectiveness, when they eschew "purity" and combine realistic and fantastic narrative, or high and low literature, or Western and Eastern motifs, and overthrow former hierarchies. As we have seen, the influence of English literature on Japanese writers and vice versa is clearly seen in contemporary writing and suggests a cultural dynamism which recognises the irrelevance of arguing for a "purely" Western or "purely" Eastern identity. Divisions and hierarchies of every kind are collapsing.

Bruno Bettelheim has claimed the virtue of fantasy as having a reparative effect: "After his most grandiose desires have thus been satisfied in fantasy, the child can be more at peace with his body as it is in reality" (57) "As we awake refreshed from our dreams, better able to meet the tasks of reality, so the fairy story ends with the hero returning, or being returned, to the real world, much better able to master life" (63). The power of fantasy described by Bettelheim here remains in the framework of fiction and only works to sooth the reader's dissatisfied feelings. However, contemporary women writers make more dynamic and disruptive use of the power of fantasy. It is not merely as a reparative effect, to cover up injury and sooth pain in order to face unchangeable reality, that fantasy is used, but as a transforming power of narrative which can work on that very reality and help to change it. What seems to be "unchangeable" becomes "changeable" when one stops being confined to the "normal" perspective. Changes of perspective bring forth changes of reality. My project also aims to help create this new narrative in which so many contemporary women writers are involved. This narrative accepts the body, including the "abnormal" and "grotesque"; this narrative does not seek to ground itself in a single "pure" theory; this narrative tries to avoid reverse colonisation. Such a new performative narrative, if successful, may trigger a positive change of perspective, and therefore contribute to the construction of a new reality. However unorthodox, the attempt is part of a pragmatic feminist campaign, to return the gaze from the gazed to the gazer.

## Appendix 1

Brief Summary of The Tale of Genji

The tale begins with the inappropriate passion of the Old Emperor for his low-ranking consort, Kiritsubo, which brings about the birth of Genji. As a result of the reprisal from the Empress and higher-ranking consorts, the stressed Kiritsubo dies when Genji is at the age of two, leaving him craving for a mother-figure. As an atonement to the Empress, the Old Emperor reduces Genji's status to common high courtier which enables him to lead a normal life. The Old Emperor later encounters Lady Fujitsubo who shows a remarkable similarity to Kiritsubo and makes her his consort. Lady Fujitsubo is a high-ranking lady and there is no fear of reprisal. Genji is fatally attracted by her, while the Old Emperor encourages Fujitsubo to treat Genji as her son. Genji has many affairs with those women who are, and are not, akin, or similar, to Fujitsubo and therefore his own mother. Fujitsubo finally succumbs to Genji, producing an illegitimate son, who is brought up as the Old Emperor's son and becomes the New Emperor. After that, Fujitsubo suffers from a sense of guilt and flatly refuses Genji. Genji, after the self-imposed exile caused by the forbidden affair with an Emperor's consort, lives with his ladies, among whom Lady Murasaki, another surrogate Fujitsubo, is regarded as his wife. But later he takes a higher-ranking Third Princess as his official wife and this breaks Lady Murasaki's heart. About three-fourths of the tale, thus, describes Genji's relationship with his ladies. The remainder of the tale describes the affairs pursued by Kaoru and Prince Niou. Kaoru is regarded as Genji's son, but is, in fact, an illegitimate child born of the Third Princess and another aristocrat. Prince Niou is Genji's grandson. Their affairs have no happy ending. Kaoru keeps on being rejected by Oigimi who eventually dies, and the last chapter shows both Kaoru and Niou in pursuit of Ukifune (half-sister of Oigimi), who refuses them both and becomes a nun.

## Appendix 2

## Summary of "The Witch Trial of Snow White" by Yuko Matsumoto

There was a lonely Queen. The King was always away from home, fighting in wars or hunting. Even when he was at home, the Queen would rather be alone than spend time with this indecent husband who loved wine, meat and women, and who could not understand the Queen's feelings. She, however, wanted a child and slept with her husband for this reason. She gave birth to a child, Snow White, and died.

The king remarried an aristocrat's daughter. Unlike the former Queen, the new Queen was sensually beautiful, clever, and fun to be with. He loved her. As for the new Queen herself, she was happy as she has fulfilled her ambition to become a Queen. She, the King and Snow White made a happy family, until Snow White grew up to be a stunningly beautiful woman. Threatened by her beautiful step-daughter, the Queen grows jealous of her. While Snow White stays young, the Queen can only see herself as older each day. This spoiled Snow White, insensitive to her step-mother's feeling, becomes defiant. The King's indifference adds to the Queen's misery. Only her mirror treats her kindly, telling her that she is the most beautiful woman in the world. One day, however, the mirror says that Snow White is the most beautiful. The Queen becomes resentful and decided to kill her daughter. She tells a male hunter to assassinate Snow White, because she cannot bear to murder her daughter by herself. But Snow White offers her virginity to the hunter and this saves her life.

She wanders about the forest to find seven dwarfs. They make her do the household chores. Upon knowledge of her step-daughter's survival, the Queen renews her attempt. This time she is determined to kill her by herself. She disguises herself as a merchant, and attracts Snow White's attention in order to strangle her. But the maternal instinct prevails and Snow White survives again. With poisoned merchandise, the Queen visits Snow White, but somehow she survives

yet again. The Queen then creates a poisoned apple. This time, Snow White is poisoned to death.

However, her corpse does not rot after seven days. Then a prince passes by. He spots her, falls in love. A corpse which does not decay! A perfect woman! When his servants carry her coffin to his castle, a piece of apple comes out of her mouth, and Snow White is alive again. The prince proposes to her and she accepts him. The prince is a necrophile, he makes Snow White sleep in the coffin as he masturbates. This frustrates Snow White, but she is more or less content, as her only interests are food and fashion.

The Queen is invited to the wedding of the prince and Snow White. She is now resigned to her ageing beauty. When the mirror tells her that the princess about to marry the prince is the most beautiful woman in the world, the Queen decides to attend the wedding out of curiosity, without knowing that the mirror refers to Snow White. At the wedding, she is arrested on a charge of witchcraft. She cries for Snow White's mercy reminding her of happy days. But Snow White is insensitive and merciless. She tortures her step-mother to death. The king, away hunting, learns about the incident later.

The moral: Woman must not ponder upon complicated matters. A wily woman like the Queen is punished. A stupid woman like Snow White is favoured by men and can become happy. A young woman must wait for a future husband at home, doing household chores, as Snow White does at the dwarfs' house. She should not go out. If she waits long enough, even after she dies as Snow White does, the prince appears to marry her. A woman must be beautiful. She should not be proud of her beauty, though. She must be modest.

## Appendix 3

## Summary of "Snow White" by Yumiko Kurahashi

Once upon a time, the Queen bore a beautiful girl. She was named Snow White. Her mother died when she was young, and the King took a second wife who was also remarkably beautiful. Threatened by her beautiful daughter, the new Queen asks her mirror who is the most beautiful, and the mirror one day replies that it is Snow White. The Queen orders a forest guard to murder Snow White. When he tries to kill her, she asks him to spare her life, and, in exchange, promises him to do whatever he wants. The guard happily unclothes her and takes his pleasure. Snow White wanders about the forest and find the hut of the seven dwarfs. When she tells them that she was nearly killed by her step-mother, they allow her to stay on condition that she does the household chores. She has never done such work, so she serves them as a bed-partner instead. She makes a good bed-partner and the seven dwarfs like her. They warn her of the possible attack by her step-mother. The Queen has learned that Snow White is still alive and comes to kill her herself, disguised as a merchant. Snow White, being stupid and vain, forgets the warning and buys the poisoned goods. She is saved twice by the dwarfs, but on the third time, she eats the apple poisoned by the Queen. It blackens Snow White's skin. The Queen laughs at her and says, "You never learn, do you? Nothing can cure your skin this time." Her words are true. As she is crying her eyes out, a prince passes by. On hearing her story, he promises her that he will get revenge upon the evil Queen, and that he will cure her skin by the power of his love. When he sees the Queen in the castle, however, he falls in love with this beautiful and wise woman. He begins to think of Snow White as a silly girl. The Queen also likes him and asks him to kill the King. He does so, and the Queen and he are married. The Queen breaks the mirror, and when the prince asks her why, she says, "I got rid of the evil spirit which had tormented me for so long." Snow White's life is not too unhappy either. She stays at the dwarfs' hut,

and bears them many children. They get along together. The moral: A silly person can never be happy.



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