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Angela Carter's Postmodern Feminism and the Gothic Uncanny

Emma Pi-tai Peng
Assistant Professor
Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University

ABSTRACT

Angela Carter is a most controversial feminist writer in contemporary literary scene as her writing handles many gender and cultural issues in a unique subversive, even provocative way. Critics have discussed the political (in)efficacy of her feminist views and the significance of her revisionary writing strategy, but as to what really constitutes the unsettling power, the sharp edge of Carter's writing, besides the enunciation of different feminist stances, critics have so far offered rather little in-depth analysis or new angles. With regard to this, the essay seeks to establish a critical model of reading Carter's horrific power by bringing in, or rather shedding light on, a narrative tradition that Carter has employed all along—the Gothic tradition—to the existing critical perspectives on Carter's writing, i.e., feminism, postmodernism, among others. The author argues that there exists an intricate dialectic between Carter's feminism, postmodern practice, and her use of the Gothic, that her Gothic view underlies the horrific power of her speculative writing, and moreover, her writing exhibits a space which is not just postmodern, full of the joy of depthless play, but also a fearful space of the Gothic where the play is haunted by its play.

Keywords : Gothic, postmodernism, feminism, Angela Carter

安琪拉卡特的後現代女性寫作之哥德式驚悚小說傳統

彭碧台
國立台灣大學外國語文學系助理教授

簡介

安琪拉卡特為英美當代寫作風格最為獨特的小說家之一。其寫作風格備受爭議，因其不僅以後現代觀點與女性主義顛覆傳統性別政治與寫實小說傳統，且因以後現代觀點批判女性主義中所蘊涵的本質主義，而備受其他女性主義者質疑。論者評其小說時亦多以此一二角度出發。然筆者認為，卡特著作中之獨特顛覆性，另有一關鍵特質未受到多數論者注意——即哥德式驚悚小說傳統，在卡特後現代女性寫作辯證中，所扮演的小說呈現文化性別實質經驗驚悚式突顯的批判力量。此一性別實質經驗驚悚式突顯，不僅為卡特獨特的小說性別解構，亦為卡特對後現代性別經驗的文化解析。

摘　要

本文分為三部份。第一部份概述分為兩部份，首先簡論有關安琪拉卡特的小說成就與學界評論並提出卡特另一未受論者議及之寫作特色，即哥德式驚悚小說傳統，除引述卡特本人有關哥德式驚悚傳統與其寫作有關之論述外，並連結其與卡特所作有關後現代及女性主義之言說的關聯，概述第二部份則建構本文的理論架構，探討晚近哥德驚悚小說最新評論發展，連結其與後現代思潮之相互激盪，並將之連結在卡特特有的女性主義文化批判上。本文第二部份為文章主體，依短篇、長篇小說、及哥德驚悚小說傳統中數項特質，揀選討論卡特早、中、晚期著作有關此一驚悚式突顯女性性別實質經驗的小說呈現文化批判。文章最後一部份為總結，歸結出卡特所勾勒的女性性別驚異式經驗，亦為後現代社會中的性別認同建構式詫異經驗。

關鍵詞：安琪拉卡特、後現代小說、女性主義、哥德式驚悚小說

Angela Carter's Postmodern Feminism and the Gothic Uncanny

Emma Pi-tai Peng

As a dedicated feminist writer, Angela Carter has been both celebrated and questioned for her fabulous writing on gender performance and sexual politics. For those who take issue with her, her writing is questionable on two grounds, her anti-essentialist stance and her alleged reproduction and complicity with the oppressive patriarchal system. For those who appreciate her work, her writing is considered constructive and positive to women and feminists, though it has been admitted that there are not without dangers in her radical subversion.[1] As we can see, the debate here involves two important issues, different feminist strategies and opposed views on the political efficacy of postmodernism. But these terms of debate do not completely cover the sharp edge of Carter's writing. I will argue there is an important narrative tradition, the Gothic, that lies behind her provocative writing, a tradition that tends to be passed over by most of her reviewers but actually plays a crucial part in her fictional play of sexual identity. Her postmodern celebration of the surface is overlapped with the Gothic space of horror and enthrallment. I will draw on ideas from recent Gothic criticism to illuminate Carter's postmodern feminism as an empowerment from an impossible site of central emptiness which is also a gothicised site of fear and desire. Her gender performers are not only enthralled with their freedom to create themselves, but also haunted by the performativity in their freedom.

Carter has employed the Gothic ever since her first fiction *Shadow Dance* (1966), but this is not to say Carter is a Gothic writer writing conventional horror. Rather she uses the Gothic in various ways, mostly to parody its theatrics of horror, as she is famous for parodic revisionary writing. But her use of the Gothic goes deeper than parodic rewriting. Parody is a major feature of Gothic writing;[2] thus her parody of the Gothic is a double play, a postmodern mimicking of Gothic horror which is itself theatrical. What is

Carter's view of the Gothic, and given the long history of it, which tradition does she find useful and follow? She gives some hint in the Afterword to *Fireworks* (1974):

> Though it took me a long time to realise why I like them, I'd always been fond of Poe, and Hoffman.... The Gothic tradition in which Poe writes grandly ignores the value systems of our institutions; it deals entirely with the profane. Its great themes are incest and cannibalism.... Its style will tend to be ornate, unnatural - and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the word as fact.... It retains a singular moral function - that of provoking unease.

From this passage we know the Gothic tradition she has in mind is the one Poe (as well as Hoffman) writes in although she also uses other traditions, and she views it mainly as a provocative form of writing. What is equally revealing is her subsequent comment: "We live in Gothic times" (ibid.). It is a resounding observation because she describes in Gothic terms her experience of the cultural change after her return to England from Japan, and also because her description illuminates the lurid side of the contemporary world in which the familiar old world becomes strange and uncanny in its phantasmagoric change.

Carter does not refer to her Gothic view in the article "Notes from the Front Line" (1983), in which she elaborates her feminism most clearly; but still we can see the Gothic shadow in her views. She describes the summer of 1968 as a period when "all that was holy was in the process of being profaned," and she can date to that time when she began to question "the nature of my reality as a *woman*," and how "that social fiction of my 'femininity' was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing" (1983: 70). The sense of the familiar becoming strange, the natural becoming uncanny, and the transgressive profaning of the holy are what marks Carter's subversive writing, and they are also the thematic concerns of the Gothic. Carter observes the contemporary Western civilization as at a historical moment of unraveling, and "the emergence of the Women's Movement, and all that implies, is both symptom and product of the unravelling of the culture."

Her feminist investigation of female sexuality regards the unprecedented free sexual woman such as herself as "the pure product of an advanced, industrialised, post-imperialist country in decline," a female self that "could not have existed, as I am, in any other preceding time or place" (ibid., 72-3). This sexual subject regarded as a *product* of history and technology rather than as something natural recalls the Gothic motif of the unnaturally created creature, Frankenstein's monster. But Frankenstein's monster roams in the space of horror; Carter's New Woman plays in a space of freedom, but she is also haunted by her play.

Carter's correlation of the Gothic and the postmodern is made more clearly with the development of recent Gothic criticism. As David Punter observes, critics have also found themselves, "in the 1990s in particular," "at a peculiar confluence between the major motifs of the Gothic and a set of ways of thinking increasingly current in contemporary criticism and theory." These shared ideas, for example, are the uncanny, the phantom, the spectre, and the crypt; and as Punter further points out, the confluence also reveals how contemporary theory is haunted by "the uncanny nature of knowledge itself" and "haunted, like Gothic, by the weight of a history, just behind its shoulder, which proves resistant not only to understanding but, more importantly, to change" (Punter, ix). While critical tools are seen to be moving closer to their object of study owing to "the uncanny nature of knowledge" haunted by itself and its history, and the awareness of knowledge's self-reflexivity is an integral part of postmodern thinking, we can see an implicit link between Gothic motifs and postmodernism. Moreover, if the confluence shows a tendency of the critical tools gothicised, it also indicates a rereading of postmodern self-reflexivity as self-*haunting*, as awareness marked by anxiety in its enjoyment of the loss of the depth meaning.

On this point I find Slavoj Zizek's view of postmodernism illuminating. Zizek defines postmodern cognitive experience in terms of the uncanny. In *Looking Awry* Zizek presents a model based on Lacan's psychoanalysis to explain the postmodernist break with modernism. Seen from this perspective, "The lesson of modernism is that the structure, the intersubjective machine, works as well if the Thing is lacking, if the machine revolves around an emptiness; the postmodernist reversal shows *the Thing itself as the incarnated, materialized emptiness*." Moreover, "The Thing," "the terrifying object" is shown directly, which is "an everyday object that has started to function, by

chance, as that which fills in the hole in the Other (the symbolic order)" (Zizek 145). Zizek's analysis is relevant because it highlights the psychological level besides the metaphysical, linguistic dimension of the postmodern experience of the "central absence" in the order of things and language (Zizek 143). The configured experience is an experience of the uncanny as it is marked by terror and occasioned by the loss of meaning and the rendering of the familiar strange. The configuration links postmodernism directly to Gothic for the Gothic is the discourse of the uncanny, fear, and excess of boundaries. However, perhaps the connection is only natural; according to William Patrick Day, the Gothic and Freud's psychoanalysis are two "cousins"--also not to forget "Freud wrote an essay on horror literature, 'On the Uncanny,'" (Day 179, 177), and Zizek's model is based on Lacan's rereading of Freud.

Zizek's analysis helps to illuminate the interplay I see in Carter's writing between the Gothic and postmodernism. I will combine his ideas with recent Gothic critical models of the uncanny, excess of boundaries, fear and desire, and boundaries of the self as part of my critical framework to discuss Carter's postmodern feminism and some of the recurrent Gothic motifs in her writing, such as the automaton, the monstrous feminine, the haunted house, and the play of the double. Some of the fictions I will discuss show direct use of Gothic conventions, such as *Shadow Dance*, "The Loves of Lady Purple," "The Lady of the House of Love," *The Passion of New Eve*, and "The Fall River Axe Murders"; others such as "Flesh and the Mirror" and *Wise Children* seem a far cry from the Gothic but will be shown to bear a dialectic relation to the Gothic tradition in their postmodern play.

"Flesh and the Mirror" (1974) is a tale standing between the fantastic and the realistic, with an importance as a hallmark of Carter's postmodern feminism. The tale is about an English young woman's erotic experience in Tokyo which exerts a magical effect on her romantic imagination. The heroine, using the first-person narration, tells the chance affair she has with a total stranger in an unknown hotel when she fails to find her Japanese lover the night of her return from a visit to England. She is shocked into an unexpected recognition of herself by a mirror on the ceiling reflecting her naked body in a close embrace with the stranger. She finds herself defined by the act shown in the mirror: "There was nothing whatsoever beyond the surface of the glass. Nothing kept me from the fact, the act" (*Burning Your Boats*, 70). Running away from the disturbing encounter, she finds her lover the next day, and after

a lovers' quarrel, they make it up in bed, also in a hotel, but this love making is experienced ironically as a fake romance. They soon break up, and with the end of the romance she finds the city loses its strangeness and becomes home to her. Lorna Sage reads the tale as expressing Carter's anti-essentialist feminism ("confronting her sense of the artificiality of her own 'nature,'" facing "herself as existence and action, not essence") and her "project of estrangement"--"'the fact, the act,'" "denying that magic is alien or strange" but what one feels at home with (Sage, 1994: 8-9). To Sage's point I will add a Gothic reading that the strange experience of the sexual subject as a mirrored body/surface is portrayed in terms of the uncanny.

In Freud's theory the sense of the uncanny arises when there is a breach between fantasy and reality and the breach cannot be readily reconciled (Freud, 1953-74c, 244; Massé, 230). Reality becomes strange, unfamiliar, but what is also frightening is that "the unfamiliar reveals itself as the open secret of that with which we had felt most at home" (Punter, 194). In "Flesh and the Mirror" the heroine goes through the uncanny process with two things most familiar to her, herself and the mirror. She sees herself in terms of the mirror in her relation to the world and herself--"The bureaucracy of the mirror issues me with a passport to the world; it shows me my appearance" (*Burning Your Boats*, 70). Her image in the mirror is a romantic heroine in quest of love in an Oriental city whose exotic setting enhances the romantic strangeness she has been questing. But the exotic strangeness itself becomes ambiguous. Instead of intensifying her experience of things, as romantic exoticism usually does, it foregrounds her sense of mediated experience, her lack of direct contact with the real and herself: "I never experienced experience as experience.... It was as if there were glass between me and the world. But I could see myself perfectly well on the other side of the glass" (69). In this histrionic state the city becomes strange as a mirror world as the heroine watches herself "pulling the strings of my own puppet" as a woman in love (69). This histrionic world is actually a reverted image of the mirror world in which she sees herself, the mirror which shows only what the self-puppeteer desires to see: "Women and mirrors are in complicity with one another to evade the action I/she performs that she/I cannot watch" (70). The mirror turns horrifying when it becomes incomplicitous, when it reflects not what the heroine expects to see. In "the magic mirror" of the hotel the heroine sees not her romantic self, the female subject that performs the self-mirror watching,

the I/she self-split drama, but herself as body, as "the subject of the sentence written on the mirror" "defined by the action reflected in the mirror." What is even more disconcerting is that "There was nothing whatsoever beyond the surface of the glass"--in the mirror her body takes the place of the subject position in the romantic discourse of love, revealed, as in Zizek's terms, as the terrifying object that fills in "the hole in the Other," the consecrated romantic feminine self. However, with the uncanny sense of herself as body, as act, the heroine is also precipitated into what is already known to her but repressed--herself as performing puppet. This uneasy recognition of the familiar in the unfamiliar impinges on her ensuing love making with her real lover, which is revealed as uncannily artificial as her love making with the stranger is artificially true. The story ends with a point where the Gothic and the postmodern converge: "The most difficult performance in the world is acting naturally, isn't it? Everything else is artful" (74). That is, to feel at home in the strange world of the mirror.

Another Gothic motif Carter has used in "Flesh and the Mirror" to present the "artful" female subjectivity is the figure of the automaton. The heroine's reflexive self-puppetry is a variation on the automaton motif, though it is not highlighted in the tale. In Gothic fiction, such as Hoffmann's German fantastic tale "The Sandman," the female automaton (Olympia) is a lifeless yet most seductive object of desire in which the male protagonist (Nathanael) "sees perfectly reflected his own view of himself" (Heller 90). While there is a male point of view implied in the figure of female automaton (or Poe's woman-corpse) which often reflects the male desire and fear of the seemingly passive female body, Carter reinvests the figure as a problematic site of female subjectivity. Concerning this, Pauline Palmer's analysis of Carter's "coded mannequin" is illuminating. According to Palmer, Carter uses the Hoffmanian female puppet to "represent woman's role in society" for the puppet signifies "the robotic state to which human beings are reduced by a process of psychic repression" (180). She observes that Carter "treats the relations between puppet-master and puppet as symbolic of the control exerted by a patriarchal culture on women and the roles available to them" (184). What I want to add here is Carter's emphasis on the problematic side of the puppet's *self*-enactment of the code and her *bodied* being. The puppet represents the "unnatural" Gothic body which is haunted by the return of the repressed "body in fragments," by the otherness, thingness of the sexed body,

and by the "stringed" mechanism of her fierce desire.

The most pronounced puppet theme can be found in "The Loves of Lady Purple" (1974), in which the title heroine, a vampiric marionette, comes to life under the arduous manipulation of the male puppeteer. In this tale Carter's treatment of the automaton is different from that of "Flesh and the Mirror" which approaches the body-automaton experience from the *living* woman's point of view. In "Lady Purple" the uncanny experience is presented as a supernatural event of a doll being transformed into a woman but at the end of the story the supernatural turns ambiguously close to the familiar and becomes uncanny.

The tale itself is a brilliant rewriting of several literary and psychoanalytical motifs: the fear of a female doll coming to life because of its uncanny life-likeness, fear of its necromantic power, the mingling of the manipulator's life and the doll's, and the male fear of unrestrained female sexuality. While fear in Gothic fiction is often the obverse of desire and the object of disgust is also the object that holds the hero(ine) in enthrallment,[3] these fears in the tale are bound up with a male desire to control the "insatiable" female sexuality. They are displaced by the puppeteer, the aging Asiatic Professor, as an intense desire to enact his self through the feared object, the figure of Lady Purple, with whom he lives in symbiosis. He creates his doll as a predatory whore enacting dramas of monstrous femininity such as "'The Notorious Amours of Lady Purple,'" which recalls de Sade's satirical narration of his famous whore Juliet and indicates Carter's Gothic parody of the Sadeian male enthrallment with "monstrous" female sexuality.[4] The doll seduces and tortures men, squeezes them dry of money and dreams, and in taunting their desiccated manhood, forces them to watch her make love with a beggar for nothing, and moreover, she does all these compulsively out of a dry desire insatiable and unknowable to herself (*Burning Your Boats*, 46). In her involuntary monstrosity she ends up "a marionette herself, herself her own replica" (47), so tells the ancient puppeteer his audience.

The puppeteer plays with his doll's metamorphosis between puppet and woman; he claims his doll had once been a woman but now turned into a puppet, "the petrification of a universal whore," for "too much life [in a woman] had negated life itself" (44). While monstrous metamorphosis is a recurrent theme in Gothic fiction, it is played here by Carter in a subversive manner. The same scenario of the doll's transfiguration is duplicated in the tale itself in

a reversed way; Lady Purple is transfigured from a puppet to a woman and is poised at the end of the story to reenact the scenario instilled by the puppet master. The striking point here is not just the play of narrative self-referentiality, but the intricate exchange of desire and identity implied in the reflexive structure. As Gothic fiction is a fictional discourse of the self in its fantasy world of utter subjectivity under siege by the Other,[5] the Gothic monster or bizarre "thing" is often an externalization of the self's fear of the threatening Other. Lady Purple, no matter a puppet or a woman, is always a monster (a sexual predator of men) in the Professor's scenario; in fantasizing her as metamorphosed from woman to puppet he has her under his control. In her permanent dormant state she is his sleeping beauty his kiss would not waken (43). But his script goes awry; one night "[t]he sleeping wood had wakened" by his kiss (50) and turned from puppet to woman, and sucked him dry of blood and life.

Carter's narrative subversion of the patriarchal fear of female sexuality is no doubt very remarkable in the tale, but her speculative force does not stop here. The doll is wakened by his kiss and becomes a woman--or an automaton? Or a woman with her sexualized body invariably starts as an automaton for she is awakened by *his desire* which becomes hers? Can she have an inherent desire of her own other than this dry desire that can never be satiated, "the Bovary syndrome" as the heroine has suffered though for a seemingly different "romantic" yearning in "Flesh and the Mirror"? While the heroine of "Flesh and the Mirror" concludes her tale with a most disturbing comment that "The most difficult performance in the world is acting naturally.… Everything else is artful," the doll-turned-woman Lady Purple experiences her self with a firm belief that she is authentic (51). The scene of her coming to life, becoming "real," is as gruesome and bloody as a sadomasochistic act in which the victim and victimizer exchange positions and desires. The exchange seems fantastic, but it produces an uncanny effect, because for the Professor it is the return of the repressed, and for the doll it is the circular paradox haunting her sexed body: as the narrator ironically asked, "had the marionette all the time parodied the living or was she, now living, to parody her own performance as a marionette?" (ibid.).

Carter's use of the combined figure of the automaton and the vampire to explore female sexual subjectivity under patriarchy can be seen in another tale "The Lady of the House of Love" (1979). In the tale it is the female vampire

who experiences her sexual life as an automaton. The beautiful vampire, the Countess, is the daughter of Count Nosferatu and the only heiress to the ruinous castle after the patriarch vampire was staked out by a priest of the Orthodox faith. But before his extermination, the father cried, "'Nosferatu is dead; long live Nosferatu!'" (*The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 95); and he did live, through the daughter. Here we see one of the satirical twists Carter makes of the conventional vampire script--the father remains undead, by haunting the daughter. The house the daughter inherits is a house of shadows--the ancestors watch and desire through the daughter's eyes from their portraits suspended in the family galleries and her bedroom (93, 100, 102). The woman vampire, a predator of men, enacts her desire as a puppet of the undead ancestors: "She herself is a haunted house. She does not possess herself; her ancestors sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes and that is very frightening.... The beastly forebears on the walls condemn her to a perpetual repetition of their passions" (103). In her haunted state she is like "a ventriloquist's doll," "a great, ingenious piece of clockwork" whose mechanism is "inexorably running down" and "would leave her lifeless" (102) for she has no real sexual subjectivity even though she is a relentless practitioner of desire.

The fatal "queen of night" has no sexual autonomy because this "I" is "only an invention of darkness," an "I" which "vanish[es] in the morning light" (107), an "I" whose ferocious desire is not just of the other but doubly so as it is the phantom of a phantom, of the vampiric father who is the antithetical spectre to the rational subject of the Enlightenment. The tale is for the woman vampire to reach such a recognition through a mirror which shows her monstrous being (or non-being) but is kept from her. The mirror is first provided by the rational eye of the young British officer and then by the shattered dark glasses whose sharp sliver pierces into her finger and makes her bleed, for the deconstruction of the woman-vampire sexuality is to be conducted on two fronts.

Carter's demythologising of the woman vampire is more complicated than other feminist narratives which use the woman vampire to subvert the rational-phallocentric sexuality. The woman vampire has been a heavily invested site of cultural fears about female sexuality; women vampires in conventional vampire fictions connote aggressive female sexuality and excess (Wisker 167) or reflect male fear of "the threat of the New Woman" as

conveyed in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (Byron 14). Carter's vampire story parodies the male-centered rational discourse with its exorcising power, not just to subvert its rational-phallocentrism but to deconstruct the myth of the fearful power that has been imputed to the female vampire, to show that this fearful power is debilitating for women in its empowerment from the phallocentric discourse. The Countess represents the dark space outside the rational discourse, haunting men with her dark excess, while the young man, representing the Enlightenment rationality, exorcises her vampiric power with his rational eye. He sees but disbelieves what he sees, for the woman vampire is outside his belief system; what he sees instead is a sick girl confined to a morbid house awaiting his deliverance (*The Bloody Chamber*, 103-4). The irony is, he is soon to die, not in her hands, but as a result of his unseeing eye which sees not the destructive power enacting her. He is soon called back to the battlefront of the Great War, where massive male self-destruction awaits him.

On the other hand, the Countess' doll-like vampiric desire reveals the contradictory nature of feminine sexuality--voracious passivity. A shadowy figure in the house, the woman vampire haunts people with her haunted presence--she haunts because she is haunted. She is fearsome *but/for* she is a captive figure, a Gothic damsel in distress (as "the queen of terror," she is marked by "her horrible reluctance for the role"), incarcerated in the castle surrounded by spiky roses (95), sick with a vampiric desire for love. She is "the Sleeping Beauty in the wood" waiting for the bridegroom to bring her back to life with a kiss (97 & 103). Her passivity is her source of power, but her power is forever self-annihilating--she desires something she is structured lacking, and she falls victim to romance,[6] which is ironically her rescue. Love shatters her shaded vision (her dark glasses), reverses her predatory sexuality (she experiences love as a soothing act as the young man sucks her wound when she bleeds for the first time in her life), and sets her free from the monstrous sexual subject, which means death, and she dies in the forbidden self-reflection. But love is never an unproblematic thing in Carter's writing even when it is liberating. The woman vampire falls in love because it is scripted in her identity--she puts on her feminine identity as she puts on her mother's bridal gown, which is "the only dress she has" (96), and she enacts her life with a script from the Tarot cards which prescribes her fate--love and death. When the young man appears, she falls in love with him as if on cue

(he is the golden image she desires), and though what follows may seem a series of happenings celebrating the liberating power of love, the ironic note of its predatory power (love in death or death in love) inscribed in the love script and the scripted nature of love is never lost. Thus, in the Countess' inner monologues of mourning the young man's imminent death for love (102-3, & 105), we become aware of a satirical note of a ventriloquist speaking in her inner voice even at her most intense moment of love. Her love is death—either the death of herself or her lover, for she is inscribed as "the lady of the house of love," where love is a monstrous predatory hunger in its structural lack and passivity.

While "The Lady of the House of Love" shows a woman vampire revealed to be a passive maiden confined to a haunted house, "The Fall River Axe Murders" (1981) plays with the lurid story of a maiden confined to a domestic sphere turned into a parricidal woman monster. In discussing "The Fall River Axe Murders" I will focus on the Gothic motif of anxiety over the inside and outside as a way to show Carter's exploration of the constrained femininity in the repressive patriarchal culture of industrious Protestant New England. As critics have pointed out, the inside/outside play in Gothic tradition is mainly about the anxiety about "the boundaries of the self," the "sudden, mysterious, seemingly arbitrary" division between self and Other, the barriers that keep the self "massively blocked off from something to which it ought normally to have access" in order to achieve a natural and necessary connection between self and Other.[7] This anxiety is more so for female than for male protagonists, for women are vulnerable to "intrusions from an outside world to which.… they have frustratingly little access" (DeLamotte 26). The maiden is trapped in a macabre house, afraid of what's outside, but also afraid of what is inside. Carter's tale both uses and abuses this tradition, parodying not only the anxiety that surrounds the maiden in the house but the anxiety projected by the father and the daughter against the disruptive forces from outside. But the disruptive force ironically erupts from inside the house, from the bloody house of the maiden, as Carter's tale extends the Gothic "interfacing surface" anxiety (Sedgwick 26) to the bloody house of the female body.

Another important point about "The Fall River Axe Murders" is that, unlike most of Carter's fiction, it is based on a real case in 1892, the sensational story of Lizzie Borden who was charged with the murders of her father and

stepmother with an axe. But different from the official verdict acquitting Lizzie, Carter's tale follows the popular belief convicting her, as is suggested in the children's rhyme Carter attaches to the fictional text as an epigraph. Critics have noted this later shift in Carter's revisionist writing from fantasy worlds to the real world (to "American and European historical accounts and legends"[8]) and "The Fall River Axe Murders" is one of such texts. What renders the tale striking is the preponderance of accurate historical account woven around not a court fact but a premise based on a children's rhyme, on a legend. Though it is typical of Carter's speculative writing to exploit different genres and speculate on the given terms, still the tale's unusual historical fabulation renders it of special interest to critics. For example, Janet L. Langlois reads this as indicatng Carter's speculation on the "different ways one might '*Marchen*-ize' Lizzie Borden's story" (Langlois 208) and analyses the story in terms of a fairy tale. (Langlois points out several fairy-tale motifs in the tale, such as the Bordens' "disordered house," the implicit incest motif, and the father-stepmother-daughter triangular relationship.) The *Marchen*-ized reading sheds light on the link of the tale's dark homely motifs with the fairy tale's, though not the tale's comic gruesome horror peculiar to the Gothic. Different from the fairy tale which tends to handle the social and domestic horror in a matter-of-fact manner, the Gothic genre tends to foreground, to theatricalize it. Carter's tale both highlights and parodies the horror effects, as in the tradition of Poe.

The domestic horror is theatricalized, not from direct description of parricide--the horrific deed is already foretold in the children's rhyme, but in the suspended horror hovering above the Borden house, poised to strike, to erupt from within. The suspended horror parodies the Protestant apocalyptic prophecy of doomsday and fear of evil lurking around them, seducing them from inside. The narrator, in a mocking prophetic, prescient manner, weaves the story to and fro, but always stops short at the bloody deed (the only slaughter described in the tale is the hacking of Lizzie's pet doves, not by Lizzie, but by the father). The tale begins on August 4, 1892, early in the morning, with the ruthless "attack of white, furious sun already high in the still air" while the whole household still sleeping, a few hours before the bloody outbreak, and ends at the same time, with the ominous presence of "the angel of death roost[ing] on the roof-tree" outside the Borden house ("The Fall River Axe Murders," *Black Venus*, 103 & 121). The horror lies in the tensely

sustained pause[9] awaiting Lizzie's uncovering her mummified self, revealing herself as the angel of death, as what Gina Wiska calls a "revenging living doll" that marks Carter's horror writing.

In the "sustained pause" Carter speculates on Lizzie's mummification and the world that mummifies her. Though the world can be as large as God has created and as enticing as Europe has appeared to a "rich" American girl like Lizzie, yet for Lizzie, a middle-aged spinster and Sunday school teacher, it always circles back to the narrow world of Father's "home" in an industrial port town of New England (118), where Father's desire predominates and the capitalist drive for production and profits combined with the Protestant "industrial and self-mortifying" spirit prevails (103). This relentless cultural climate oppresses people from both inside and outside and is symbolized by the fierce God-like August sun exerting its power on its subjects experienced down on the level of the body. Clammy and perspiring, the bodies, male and female, will soon be clothed, in defiance of the heat wave, in layers and layers of social costume. Andrew Borden will be dressed in "a serge suit," the effect of which will be, as the narrator humorously observes, "one look at which would be enough to bring you out in prickly heat" (104). Lizzie Borden will wear the full costume of a woman of that time: a cotton frock, two cotton petticoats, long drawers, woollen stockings, a chemise, and a whalebone corset that squeezed her viscera very tight--plus "a heavy linen napkin [strapped] between her legs because she was menstruating" (103-4). The suffocating way of dressing is deliberately juxtaposed with the cause of Lizzie's imminent violent outbreak (103) for this way of dressing symbolizes her stifled sexuality which approaches a *bloody* explosion.

The tale is full of bodily activities and images of clothed bodies, for the body in this cultural climate is repressed as the abject Other, the decaying matter, to the righteous, Christian soul. But the repressed always returns; and Carter makes it return in abundance, and mockingly in mortal decay, for the flesh is swaddled rotting in this oppressive heat. Andrew Borden, gaunt, skeleton-like, is seen to be walking "with stately dignity of a hearse" (his former profession is undertaker), holding himself so upright that it becomes *unnatural* to be upright, "that it is a triumph of will over gravity, in itself a transcendence of the spirit over matter" (111). His corpse-like being is further comically echoed by his stiff, decomposing way of sleep. In the "mortal stillness" of their bedroom, he and his wife Abby lie rigidly "back to back,"

both "fully dressed" in their nightclothes, and their faces "show up decomposing green in the gloom of the curtained room," the chamber pots brimming with their vomit, the smell "fit to make a sewer faint" (112-3). His wife Abby, who appears quite the opposite to him in her obesity, is also portrayed in a similar grotesque manner which turns gruesome later. She is all body, "a spreading, round little doughball," "made for the heavy food that made her," whose sole desire and delight in life is mindless eating (112). But her carnivalesque eating turns butcherly when she "fancied the slaughtered pigeons for a pie," and Lizzie's beloved pigeons end slaughtered by Old Borden with an axe (120). The pervasive body-macabre motif also appears in Bridget, the housemaid, who sleeps in a posture as if made ready for the undertaker, for "the good nun taught her in her Irish girlhood in case she dies during the night" (105).

Among the portraits of macabre bodies Lizzie Borden's is the most striking. Her body is stifled like a living mummy, which begins to bleed and will unwind itself when time comes: "She [looking in the mirror] traces the outlines of her face with an uncertain hand as if she were thinking of unfastening the bandages on her soul but it isn't time to do that, yet: she isn't ready to be seen, yet" (120). Lizzie's bandaged *soul* is a parody of two Gothic motifs, the *doppelganger* and the body as the dark house of the soul.[10] Like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, there is a ghostly double hidden in Lizzie's body which would come out of hiding "when time snaps in two" and this double "could have raised her muzzle to some aching moon and howled" (119-20). Lizzie's double is a werewolf-like monster which reveals itself when she comes into her menstrual cycle. But this monstrous double, the bandaged soul, is not just hidden but is out there all the time, for it is her bandaged body. That is, the bandaged soul unwrapped is paradoxically the body, the bloody chamber that houses the "soul." The bandaged-body-soul is "the revenging living doll" that will break out of the bloody chamber (both her body and the bedroom dominated by the phallocentric power) and strike.

While the children's rhyme shows the fairytale's archetypal sexual rivalry between the daughter and the stepmother in a patriarchal home ("Lizzie adores the adoring father who, after her mother died, took to himself another wife" and Lizzie felt "[t]his stepmother oppressed her like a spell," 114 & 118), Carter further shifts the emphasis to the patriarchal dominance of the daughter's sexuality and renders the Borden case a daughter's bloody strike

against the father.[11] Carter uses the Gothic conventions of burial alive and inside/outside anxiety as well as the fairy-tale motifs of the Sleeping Beauty and the werewolf to portray such a dormant "madwoman in the attic" as Lizzie. The Borden house itself is an image of such "a confining domestic space"[12] which makes a maiden's life a nightmare of entrapment and burial alive: "A house full of locked doors that open only into other rooms with other locked doors, for, upstairs and downstairs, all the rooms lead in and out of one another like a maze in a bad dream." Lizzie's sexuality is locked behind the father's bed as the only way to her room is through a door concealed behind the parents' bed and there is no other exit in her room except the door to the elder sister Emma's room which is a "dead end" (*Black Venus* 107). Locked up in this bloody chamber ("her room is harsh with the metallic smell of menstrual blood," 114), Lizzie is confined like a sleeping beauty ("Looking at the sleeping Beauty!" who "has gone to bed as for a levee in a pretty, ruffled nightdress," 113) who turns into a werewolf voracious in her forced passivity ("she is a restless sleeper.... Her bare feet twitch a little, like those of a dog dreaming of rabbits, 113-4). For Lizzie, while the father enjoys the power of having his desire satiated ("Lizzie adores the adoring the father who, after her mother died, took to himself another wife," 114), she is forbidden to have hers satiated. His chopping off her beloved pigeons' heads symbolizes his castration of her sexual power.[13]

Lizzie is going to strike, to have her desire consummated in a bloody deed, to chop off what has been threatening her in her entrapment. Here the Gothic conflation of fear and desire and the anxiety about inside and outside are brilliantly exploited. Lizzie's sleep is filled with "vague terrors and indeterminate menaces to which she cannot put a name or form once she is awake" (114), and these menaces come to haunt her in the form of "a *dark* man," whom she "sees" stalking outside the house whenever she cannot sleep (115). This dark man, a focus of both Lizzie's fear and desire, later envisioned to be carrying an axe in the moonlight, looms in her trance to be breaking into the house. The bloody deed of parricide has a prelude some time ago in the form of "burglary," in which an "intruder" broke in and violated Old Borden's bedroom, making him feel like "a man raped." While Old Borden regards it as an outsider job, the real "intruder" is the one locked behind his bed. What's threatening from the outside is often already inside. The Gothic anxiety about inside/outside often reflects the insecure boundary of

the self; it is the self under siege, threatened by something it fears to desire, something which is already inside the self. The dark man "with the aspect of death upon his face"--"the angel of death"--is what Lizzie fears to become, but desires to embrace. When the dark phantom breaks in, it is Lizzie, or Lizzie's double, breaking out, into the parents' room.

In discussing the significance of Gothic monsters to the postmodern configuration of human subjectivity, Judith Halberstam makes an illuminating observation:

> The postmodern monster is no longer the hideous other.… he makes the peripheral and the marginal part of the center. Monsters within postmodernism are already inside--the house, the body, the head, the skin, the nation--and they work their way out. Accordingly, it is the human, the façade of the normal, that tends to become the place of terror within postmodern Gothic.
>
> Postmodernity makes monstrosity a function of consent and a result of habit.... We wear modern monsters like skin, they are us, they are on us and in us.... What were monsters are now facets of identity; the sexual other and the racial other can no longer be safely separated from self (162-3).

Halberstam's observation applies to Carter's fiction for Carter's feminist exploration of sexual subjectivity is pursued along the line of the uncanny, of regarding what is given as natural and real as culturally mediated and *un*natural ("our flesh arrives to us out of history, like everything else does," *The Sadeian Woman*, 9). Carter's "monsters" do not just reside in the figures of the madwoman or vampiric woman but in the female subject's problematic relation to her body which is constructed as the body of the other, or in Gothic terms, the corpse, the doll's body. The female subject wears her sexual identity on her flesh; the female "monsters" are already in women; their "monstrosity" is shown when the "natural" sexual performance breaks down and is experienced as uncanny, and the body comes to haunt the sexual subject as a thing scripted up for the performance.

A recurrent question facing Carter critics regarding her gender performance is the questioning of its subversive power. How can a female subject speak and subvert the patriarchal discourse from an "object" position without reproducing the discourse that objectifies her in the first place? I will argue that, while how "monstrous" the other resides in Carter's female impersonators is determined by the gaze, by the mirror in which they see themselves being seen, the gaze, in Carter's fiction, is not a one-way master gaze from the outside, rather a complicated visual exchange the subject participates in; and it is the way in which the female subject participates that determines whether her sexual posing is subversive or objectifying. Take Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus* for example. Her winged body is a heavily invested site inscribed with various discourses and social forces, ranging from the monstrous, the grotesque, to the fantastic. She works as an aerial artiste, making a spectacle of her winged body to an audience who wonders about the authenticity of her unusual body. To combat the objectifying male gaze that sees her body as a fetish, Fevvers poses as a fantastic creature playing, not only with her audience but with herself, the game of hesitancy between fact and fiction--"Is she fact or is she fiction?". While the danger of objectification is always there, she manages to escape from it through a parodic strategy of dissimulation within simulation. The assumption of identity, as Fevvers is sharply aware, is a "confidence trick," and the identity she assumes for her winged body is a New Woman presaging unprecedented freedom of her sexual subjectivity. As she laughs joyfully at the end of the novel, saying, "To think I really fooled you!", the "you" is not just Jack Walser her lover, but the reader,[14] and also the gaze she is subject to.

So, sexual subjectivity can be a play, a carnivalesque activity, as Fevvers has exhibited. But Carter has also cautioned about the subversive power of carnival for it is permitted play, a play with limits set.[15] At the limit of the carnival is revealed the working of power, or the Law of the Father in psychoanalytical terms, and it is at this point that Carter's postmodern play joins the Gothic play of traumatic, uncanny identity. To juggle with being can be liberating, or self-disintegrating; the clowns in *Nights at the Circus* give the latter case a vivid example. They perform various farces of failed manhood in patriarchal terms. Among them, the master clown Buffo, once a great acrobat, now mimics a man who cannot even manage to walk without being stumbled by small things, or a tenacious patriarch in "the Clown's Funeral,"

miming a deceased old man who simply would not fit into the coffin and lie dead, jumping out of it persistently to hang on to the living. The traumatic self-deconstruction of the male ego comes when the mock-patriarch Buffo, chasing in a farce after the "Human Chicken" (played by Walser) with a castrating knife, is performing a real self-dissolution ending in madness. Buffo's disintegration comes from his failed play of patriarchal image, the son failing to become the Father even when he is placed in the patriarchal position. Behind his mock-play of the failed manly image is nothing, still the play of the failed male image, this mocked face has become his face: "'am I this Buffo whom I have created?.… 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'" (*Nights at the Circus*, 122). He is permitted to play, but with the same patriarchal gaze that sees himself, and he plays the "terror" of man, the clown, and becomes a horror to himself.

Carter is regarded by many critics as a postmodern feminist writer, and as I have tried to argue, also a gothicist. Carter said in the early 1970s, "We live in Gothic times," a time which has generally been dubbed as postmodern. Carter's sense of contemporary Gothic times is not just the experience of finding one's familiar world becoming alien and strange but an anxiety about the radical socio-cultural change. While postmodernism is construed by some critics as a celebratory acceptance of the loss of the Transcendental Object, the loss of the deeper meaning behind the surface, Gothic fiction is characterized by an ambivalence of fear and desire whose terror and horror, as Fred Botting points out (Botting 170), "have depended on things not being what they seem." In postmodern times this Gothic metaphysical uncertainty takes a further unsettling turn; Gothic horror, according to Botting, has become the anxiety that "things are not only not what they seem: what they seem is what they are, not a unity of word or image and thing, but words and images without things or as things themselves, effects of narrative form and nothing else" (171). Botting's observation shows how Gothic narrative anxiety turns from its duplicitous labyrinthine narratives to postmodern "horror of textuality." Carter's fiction deals with this kind of horror, but not just horror of narrative reflexivity but horror and pleasure of the surface. The inscription of the Gothic horror into the postmodern play renders the pleasure of the text ambiguous, haunting people with the depthless surface.

Carter's postmodern play is inscribed with Gothic horror, for, different from other postmodernists working with different concerns (such as Borges intrigued with the power of the word as object), Carter has been fascinated with the "bloody" way the female body has been scripted by culture as a corporal-textual site for gender/sexual identity, which is a Gothic fascination pursued by Carter beyond its scope. The exploration of the "bloody" textuality has persisted throughout Carter's work, from her first novel *Shadow Dance* (1966) to her last *Wise Children* (1991), though the narrative dialectic seems to tend more to the joy than the horror of play in later fictions. In the last part of the essay I'll illustrate the persistent dialectic by briefly examining three novels, *Shadow Dance*, *The Passion of New Eve*, and *Wise Children*.

In *Shadow Dance* the Gothic horror is more pronounced as it tells a gruesome tale of transgressive murder and self-immolation. The fiction explores the sixties youth revolt through camp against the "shadow existence" they have been subjected to, but their camp play with art and identity finds its ultimate transgression in the bloody text of the female body. The novel begins with the horrifying image of a doll-like young girl called Ghislaine appearing in the pub--horrifying because she has a terrible raw scar slanting across her face which completely ruins her beauty, leaving her like "the bride of Frankenstein." She tries to accost one of her former lovers, Morris, who, terrified of what she has become, shuns her. He knows who it is that has inflicted the wound--his alter ego, Honeybuzzard, who knifed her as a lesson for her unrestrained female sexuality. Morris is tortured by his sense of guilt because he feels mentally complicitous with his alter ego. Honeybuzzard is a fledgling figure of Carter's sexual predator and puppet-master; he plays with human beings as human stuff (they mean nothing but aesthetic surface to him) to rid them of what he calls their "shadow" existence. He and Morris are a couple of rebels representing the opposite sides of the counterculture--Morris the youth discontent with the numbing, decaying culture but paralyzed in the face of it, Honeybuzzard the radical rejection of the conventional view of identity by playing in and out of it (Honeybuzzard said: "I like - you know - to slip in and out of me. I would like to be somebody different each morning. Me and not-me. I would like to have a cupboard bulging with all different bodies and faces and choose a fresh one every morning," *Shadow Dance* 78). Their profession as "antique-dealers" symbolizes the cultural activity they embark on--dismantling and recycling cultural ruins as fashionable commodities.[16] They

plunder crumbling, soon-to-be-demolished houses for items of kitsch value. The decaying old house as symbol of cultural ruins is overlapped with its Gothic image as a repressive domestic space. However, the transgressive activity undertaken by Honeybuzzard against what it has stood for is conceived and executed mainly on the site of Ghislaine's body. He wants to "chain her on that symbol of her father" [a plaster Christ left in the house, for she is a clergyman's daughter] and "rape her" to "see just how far she'd go before reaction set in" (132). Morris tries to dismiss his idea as a joke, but Honeybuzzard realizes his dark joke on Ghislaine's body--he strangles her to death as an ultimate gesture of transgression and assertion of his power.

Ghislaine is a haunting figure. In writing her character like a female Frankenstein that haunts the textual world, Carter makes the male-centered counterculture become haunted with the monstered female sexuality. Ghislaine is a girl slain, *his* slain girl; she haunts men with her bleeding sexuality and women with the horrible things done to her body. She shouts outside the doors "let me in!" but she is a monster who has to be shut out. None of her former lovers would take her in while she with her terrible scar stalks their houses and their shadowy world. Her scar is carved on her face like a saint's emblem embodying her monstrous sexuality and she makes Emily (Honeybuzzard's new girlfriend, a latent-matriarchal figure) kiss it (166) to register its bloody significance. Her voracious sexuality is a revolt against the law of the father (132) which tries to contain her sexuality in virginity. But her sexual transgression ("she gathered them up in armfuls, her lovers, every night, in the manner of a careless baby playing in a meadow," 3), instead of liberating her, renders her a monster in the male-centered discourse. She becomes a figure of the "monstrous feminine," a dark hole that threatens male sexuality and has to be stopped. Her death by Honeybuzzard's hands is seen by Morris as "filling up her voracity once and for all by cramming with death the hungry mouth between her thighs" (178).

Ghislaine's sexuality is structured and seen through the male gaze, represented in the text by Morris's and Honeybuzzard's eyes; and so is her transgression. Her transgression lends her back to the male transgressive power, to Honeybuzzard, to whom she says, after everyone has repelled her, "'I've learned my lesson, I can't live without you, you are my master, do what you like with me" (166). The horror in their sexual play is that while he transgresses by immolation, she transgresses by self-immolation, by enacting

the corpse-like sexuality her body has been inscribed with. There is only horror in her play, for she has no power in playing with the male gaze. But in rendering her sexuality monstrous, the male transgressive play becomes haunted by her monstrosity.

If the sexual woman as monster has only horror and no enjoyment in her transgressive play in *Shadow Dance*, the monstrous woman in *The Passion of New Eve* learns to enjoy her artificial sexuality through the power to play. But the horror of the bloody process, whether imagined or real, of becoming a sexual woman still haunts the performing woman, and the horror looms most near when it seems most dissolved, when performance has become most genuine. Womanhood is monstrous in *The Passion of New Eve* because it involves a process of production like that of producing Frankenstein to make a notional woman, that woman is castrated and with an imaginary wound and forms the antithesis to the male thesis. The notional woman is Eve, a man-made woman, or ironically a woman-made woman out of a man, for Eve is made out of Evelyn who is castrated by "Mother," the black Matriarch of a secret society of women called Beulah in the desert. The bloody process gone through by women discursively and psychologically is performed literally on Evelyn for this scenario is the ironic corollary of the phallocentric discourse of femininity--woman as castrated man. Eve's castrated body is also a body of collage, a body of prosthesis, patched up by bits and pieces of human and non-human flesh to embody the idea of femininity in its lyrical, desirable form. Mother and the women of Beulah had carved out her new shape "according to a blueprint taken from a consensus agreement on the physical nature of an ideal woman drawn up from a protracted study of the media" (*The Passion of New Eve*, 78).

However, the technology of reconstructing the female self is not just conducted on the artificial Eve; it is also exercised on the "real" women like Mother of Beulah and Leilah. Mother's body is grafted with two tiers of breasts donated by the "daughters" of Beulah, to concretize the mythical essence of woman as fertility. She said to Evelyn, "'I am the wound that does not heal,'" and she transgresses against the Father by sleeping with the son Evelyn (64). Leilah, the black girl who seduces Evelyn in the ghetto of New York but later turns out to be Lilith, the seductress of Beulah, transforms herself nightly from a "grubby little bud" into a glamorous sexy girl that exists in the mirror. Leilah's nightly transformation is undertaken by consulting the

mirror, which is composed of fashion industry and cultural images of women, and Leilah's labor is to invoke, to become "the formal other" in the mirror. To become herself is to become the formal other because in her female self is inscribed a lack, an imaginary wound ("She was unnatural.… her self seemed to come and go in her body, fretful, wilful, she a visitor in her own flesh," 27). She, Eve, and Mother are monstrous for they all wear their flesh of femininity with a wound that does not heal.

Femininity is monstrous with an open wound because it is seen with the male gaze which projects its castration anxiety onto the female body, and the *castrated* female body is reassembled by the desiring gaze as a desirable body. In the novel the powerful gaze is produced by the film industry, which is part of the modern technology of producing the desirable/desiring sexual subject. The cinematic illusion produces an ethereal image of woman who exhibits her most feminine virtue--suffering, passive endurance. Tristessa is the iconic star enacting this type of femininity; her screen image of a forlorn maiden in distress conveys an erotic exchange to the audience, sadistic to the male, masochistic to the female. This production of masculine and feminine subjectivity is reflected in the relation between Zero, Tristessa, and Eve. Zero, a one-eyed monomaniac poet with a harem of eight wives, represents the phallocentric eye gazing at women. He is obsessed with male identity as virile power over women; his sadistic masculine desire is a direct response to Tristessa's screen image (he is an avid fan of her), but it also ironically reveals his identity as antithetically determined by the female wound. Eve's sexuality is likewise shaped by the Tristessa-Zero dialectic, for Evelyn is also a fan of Tristessa, and as new-born Eve, she is bombarded with Tristessa's image by Mother. Zero initiates her into "womanhood" as he forces her to become his eighth wife. Thus Eve becomes, like Tristessa, a maiden in distress, suffering Zero's misogynist sexual dominance. But the irony is, Tristessa turns out to be a transvestite. Tristessa wants to be a woman because s/he is seduced by the femininity s/he represents. He performs an imaginary castration on himself, wearing an imaginary woman's flesh/dress, abhorred by the uncanny male insignia on his body (128). S/he becomes a ghost in her glass mausoleum/home (112), as illusory as her image projected by the celluloid, for his notion of woman is "to be everything and nothing," an "absence of being." In her tomb/home (s/he said to Zero and his harem, "Welcome to Juliet's tomb," 124) s/he poses as a corpse, exhibiting a necrophiliac femininity, like

that of Madeleine Usher s/he has played in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (7). Her transparent mausoleum is a metaphor of Hollywood film industry producing desirable icons; but these mythical movie icons are shown to be works of industrious human design, as the numerous waxworks of "all the unfortunate dead of Hollywood" in "The Hall of Immortals" have shown (117-9).

The most fantastic episode of the story is Eve's love making with Tristessa in the desert. The love scene is a postmodern subversion of the essentialist view of gender and sexuality, but their virtuoso performance is haunted by its authenticity as authenticity is haunted by its infinite deferment. In the erotic relationship between Eve and Tristessa is an intricate exchange of desire and sexual identity. They fall in love with each other for they are each other's double, "twinned" by their "synthetic life." Eve loves Tristessa before she knows he is a man: "You were the memory of grief and I fell in love with you the minute I saw you, though I was a woman and you were a woman" (123). In the dark regard of Tristessa Eve sees the abyss of herself, a feminine self "of emptiness, of inward void" as Tristessa's glance orders her to negate herself with her (125). The feminine narcissistic love of her mirror image watched by the male gaze, so feared by Zero as lesbianism (he cursed Tristessa, "you dyke of dykes" before he found out "her" secret), hovers in their love for each other. Eve feels passionate for Tristessa as she feels herself so desirable: "I thought, how delicious I look! I look like a gingerbread woman. Eat me. Consume me.... I saw myself. I delighted me" (146). In her passion, she turns Tristessa into a *man* who has been posing as a woman (149). But the metamorphosis between the masculine and the feminine isn't just the work of Eve's female body on Tristessa's male body. Running deep in Tristessa's feminine pose is a male autoerotic desire which can only be satiated by a woman of his own enactment: "He had made himself the shrine of his own desires, had made of himself the only woman he could have loved" (128-9). In enacting the woman of his desire, Tristessa, he reveals a desire recalling Zero's, misogynist and sadistic, though expressed in completely contrary terms: "How much he must have both loved and hated women, to let Tristessa be so beautiful and make her suffer so!" (144). When s/he becomes a male lover for Eve, his desire is aroused as both a man and woman ("a female man"): Eve enacts the autoerotic object of his desire (Eve's femininity is made in *his* image) while he also desires Eve as a synthetic woman desires a synthetic daughter

s/he has lost in the movies. The mother-daughter longing looms in their relationship as it constitutes part of their feminine play, substituting the Oedipus complex. While Tristessa has suffered from his "fictive autobiography" the loss of her little girl (142, 152) and calls Eve "You enchanting child," Eve, assuming this place, finds herself, at the point of orgasm, envisaging a series of quest images unconsciously associated with the scenes of Tristessa's lost daughter (149).

Eve wants "the swooning, dissolvent woman's pleasure" she has "seen but never experienced" (147), and she achieves the experience with Tristessa--her body is "defined solely by his" and is lost in the ecstatic ocean-like rhythmic pleasure (149). The irony here is that the Lawrentian essentialist sex is achieved when everything is synthetic, when the procurement of orgasm is reflexive with constructed erotic moods. Their play is as real as real can be, but the real is problematized in its script status. Eve mourns for Tristessa after he is killed, and mourns like a true romantic heroine, like the image she sees of herself in the lover's gaze. Thus Eve says, at the beginning of her retrospective narration, in refuting Rilke's lament of "the inadequacy of our symbols" to express the life within us: "Our external symbols must always express the life within us with absolute precision.... A critique of these symbols is a critique of our lives" (6).

Carter's last novel, *Wise Children*, is a carnivalesque text subverting patriarchal inheritance and phallocentric identity, a novel which seems to have moved a long way from Gothic horror; but if we examine it further, we can see horror still haunts even the most accomplished performers. But let's examine the carnivalesque subversion first as it takes the front stage. The novel presents a fictional family history by Dora Chance on her seventy-fifth birthday about her paternal theatrical family, the Hazards, in which she deals with all their problems of identity and thwarted love. Dora and her twin sister Nora are the illegitimate daughters of Melchior Hazard who has a brief affair with their mother (a housemaid of his boarding house), who dies in giving birth to them. They are left to the care of his landlady Grandma Chance and they take the Chance name for Melchior refuses to recognize them. The question Dora teasingly asks "whence came we? Whither goeth we?" in relating the family history and searching for her own identity (*Wise Children*, 11) mimics the fundamental question of modern western culture, the question about the identity of *man*. To look for the female identity from a woman's

point of view in the male-centered culture is to both abuse and recognize the culture she arises from. Dora both desires and subverts what her father Melchior represents, the great Shakespearean legacy. The Hazards are a celebrated Shakespearean family; Melchior and his parents Ranulph and Estella are all great Shakespearean actors. Carter uses Shakespeare to symbolize the patriarchal legacy while also re-playing the Shakespearean motifs to portray the anxiety that besets the patriarchal inheritance. In this tradition a man is forever a son who tries to become his father, assuming all his power, but also playing the father trying to assert his paternal authority over the world which is supposedly created in his image. But this is an authority exerted through the containment of female sexuality. Contained by the patriarchal power, a woman is a daughter-wife, desiring and restrained from obtaining the power. What this patriarchal assertion bequeaths, as Carter implies through Dora's perspective, is a tragic script ridden with patriarchal anxiety bearing down on children.

The Hazards are a family exhibiting such a performance. The tragic legacy, as Dora looks into her family history, can be traced back to her grandfather, the first patriarch, old Ranulph, who, after a life-long performance of Shakespearean drama, kills himself after murdering his young wife Estella and her lover in an *Othello*-like tragedy. Their son, Melchior, inheriting the father's tragic pose, is poised to suffer like Hamlet, troubled by the ghost of the father that won't rest, trying to reenact the father even when he himself is already an old patriarch of his family (224). His twin sons Tristram and Gareth (by his third wife Lady Margarine) are trapped in the shadow of their father, unable to become a father, or *man*. Tristram, a TV game show presenter in his mid-thirties, has "his stock in trade" in "boyish charm," posing as a "kid" in life (10). He is involved in an incestuous relationship with his aunt Saskia (Melchior's daughter by his first wife Lady Atlanta) who in a sense is a mother to him as his mother Lady Margarine is Saskia's best friend before she becomes "Lady Hazard III." He is unable to disentangle himself from Saskia and become a father to his unborn child by his girlfriend Tiffany, who in her despair is believed to drown herself in the Thames. As for Gareth, he exiles himself from the family, trying to be a "holy father" in the jungle, fathering two illegitimate twins sent back to the Chance sisters (Nora and Dora) to raise, as his father has done with Nora and Dora. This patriarchal script fares even more tragically for the Hazard women. Estella, in spite of her

protean power as Viola, Portia, Desdemona and even Hamlet, dies in playing Cordelia to Ranulph's Lear (14), murdered for love of the old man. Lady Atlanta, deserted by Melchior (marrying a Hollywood star Daisy when he tries to expand his theatrical enterprise to America), plays the female Lear, deposed of her place in the dynasty, driven out by her twin daughters Saskia and Imogen who rob her bare and leave her maimed for life. Saskia and Imogen, acting like Regan and Goneril, though not to their father, are trapped in embittered desire for their unobtainable father obtained by Lady Margarine. Lady Margarine, following Estella's play, marries Melchior after playing Cordelia to his Lear.

In contrast to the grand tragic line of the Hazard dynasty is the joint laughter of Dora and Peregrine (Melchior's twin brother) who subvert the patriarchal culture from different positions. Dora's female, illegitimate, marginal, old-hag position gives her a vantage point to see through the theatricality of the tragic phallocentric pose while Peregrine subverts it with carnival laughter. Peregrine inherits from Estella the carnival view of life and protean power as well as unrestrained desire. His carnivalesque subversion of the patriarchal authority can be seen in a funny game he plays with Melchior on their cherished family crown. This cardboard crown, made by Estella to replace the real one gambled away by Ranulph, is inherited by Melchior as a real thing. But he loses it in a fire that breaks out in his mansion. Peregrine retrieves it miraculously for him and makes him jump for it as a toy (107-8). Peregrine furthermore disrupts the patriarchal legitimacy by making the legitimate illegitimate (he sleeps with Lady Atlanta and fathers Saskia and Imogen), and makes a farce of the patriarchal tragedy, singing "the man who resurrects": "Bedad he revives, see how he rises,/ And Timothy rising from the bed" (122).

Dora also possesses the transgressive power of carnival. She and Nora are song and dance girls, performing the so-called "low" female art in the vaudeville to their father's "high" art in the legitimate theatre. Their art is treated by the mainstream as its "*bastard* side" and their femininity too vulgar and lacking depth ("two painted harlots" who have many lovers) to be a true heroine to "die for love." But in her old age, from her perspective as a "hag," Dora sees their unrestrained female desire differently. It is a way of asserting their sexual subjectivity, a way of refusing to play a subservient role to the phallocentric anxiety. Their female art is constructed low just like their

position marginal in the family, to uphold the legitimate line. She and Nora use the hilarious performance of their duplicated bodies, "2b or not 2b" (90), to subvert the male tragic existential question "to be or not to be." They exchange identities in love and their lovers never find out--Dora falls in love (her first love) with Nora's young man and passes as Nora to make love to him, or switches identity with Nora to marry the Hollywood tycoon Genghis Khan for Nora is to marry another man (neither marriage materializes). In subverting her inscribed desire for the unobtainable father, she sleeps with Peregrine (a father figure to her and Nora) on Melchior's bed on his centenary party, to "fuck the house down" (220).

But different from Peregrine who makes a carnival of life, Dora knows the house isn't to be brought down by their transgression, that "there are limits to the power of laughter" (220). She and Nora inherit their feminist stance from Grandma Chance, who bequeaths them the resilience to face the irreducible tragic side of life and the power to see through the power play of patriarchy. Most important of all, she sees through the theatricality of their family performance, their scripted performance (including her femininity), which they enact most faithfully, whether in tragedy or comedy. It is especially revealing with their father, "the prince of players." In the most touching moment, on his final recognition of her and Nora, she finds him looking "two-dimensional," having "an imitation look," while Nora finds the performance is mutually invoked, that she and Dora have been "making him up all along" to have something to set their lives by (230). They thus know the answer to the question "whence came we? Whither goeth we?"--it is the power to create their identity and history: "We can tell these little darlings here [Gareth's twin babies] whatever we like about their mum and dad.… but whatever we tell them, they'll make up their own romance out of it" (ibid.).

As Dora sees through the theatricality of the patriarchal script, the fear is not so much in the tragic script as in the comic view of performativity, for the performing sexual subject is forever haunted by his or her performativity, by his being his own double. The novel foregrounds the play of the double on two different levels, postmodern and Gothic. The massive presence of twins in the novel is mostly postmodern play. Identical twins, like Dora and Nora, are an extension of each other; one is duplicated in the physical other, and the physically duplicated self-other does not appear uncanny, but *natural*. But the *natural* self-other is actually uncanny, for the mirror self walks out of the

mirror and makes a spectacle of the duplicated self. The self can be self and other, the same body performing on its own and by itself. The double here, unlike the Gothic double, does not fill the self with fears. Instead, the physical double is used as an extension of one's desire for the forbidden; so we see Dora desires the Father and is gratified in her transgressive sex with Uncle Peregrine, who is Melchior's twin, and Peregrine finds his desire for the daughters (Saskia and Imogen) in Dora. The haunting double of the Gothic in the novel is found rather in *one's reenactment of oneself*--one becomes the double of either oneself or the other. Melchior, inheriting Ranulph's paper crown, tries all his life to reenact, to impersonate his father; he puts on his father's costume and crown and becomes his father's double (224). One day he finds himself becoming a dubious double of himself: old Melchior began to doubt himself when "some old codger grasped him by the hand and cried out.… 'Good God, weren't you Melchior Hazard once?'" (203). Dora and Nora are haunted no less by the same problem. In their prime as song and dance girls they enjoy their young sexy femininity as the only femininity, laughing at the aging body of Grandma Chance. Grandma Chance "cackles" back at their young body, for she is their double in the mirror they don't recognize: "There we both were, captured in the mirror, me [Dora] young and slim and trim and tender, she [Grandma] vast, sagging, wrinkled, quivering. I couldn't help but giggle.... 'That's all very well, Dora,' she said, 'but one fine day, you'll wake up and find you're old and ugly, just like me.' Then she cackled.... She cackled and she cackled" (94). They become their own doubles when they become old hags, trying to impersonate their young selves: "We're stuck in the period at which we peaked.… All women do. We'd feel mutilated if you made us wipe off our Joan Crawford mouths.... We always make an effort. We paint an inch thick. We put on our faces before we come down to breakfast.... The habit of applying warpaint outlasts the battle; haven't had a man for yonks but still we slap it on" (5-6). Their self-doubling reaches its climax when they, two old hags, attending their father's centenary party, do themselves up as their twenty-five-years-old selves: "we painted the faces that we always used to have on to the faces we have now. From a distance of thirty feet with the light behind us, we looked, at first glance, just like the girl who danced with the Prince of Wales" (192). Nora's remark shows how femininity and masculinity are both theatrical performance, and also the anxiety that lies behind the play: "'It's every woman's tragedy that,

after a certain age, she looks like a female impersonator,'" and it is "every man's tragedy" that "'*he* doesn't'" (ibid.). They subvert their self-doubling with laughter, but their old-hag laughter is also part of self-doubling, an old hag haunted by her performance as a laughing old hag.

Carter's writing plays the intricate dialectic between feminism, postmodernism, and the Gothic. Carter's feminist thinking was sharpened and radicalized after her experience in Japan; her writing becomes more focused on the discursive control and construction of women, but also more controversial, and the reason isn't just because of her anti-essentialist views and her critique of the consecrated feminine identity. The sharp edge of her writing has come, for a large part, from her use of the Gothic. Her vehement attack of feminine passivity as a discourse of self-victimization for women, her analysis of sexual relationship in terms of predator and prey (victimizer and victim), of female sexuality as culturally constructed as either necrophiliac or monstrously voracious, of the body as a tampered site of surface, all indicate a sharing of the common ground with the Gothic. The Gothic deals with these themes as a space of horror; Carter deals with them as a theatrical site, a fearful space where people transgress the boundaries but are reflexively conscious of the theatricality of their fear, and the paradox is, though the fear is theatrical, it is no less genuine. Thus Carter's postmodern play of sexual subjectivity forms a new space of horror, a horror derived from the self-haunting of the play, a horror which is a play and nothing but play, as there is nothing beneath the surface. In this theatrical play, as in the model Zizek has drawn of postmodernism, "enjoyment" is affirmed as "'the real Thing,' the central impossibility around which every signifying network is structured," for "the real resists symbolization, but it is at the same time its own retroactive product" (Zizek 143). Carter's play is truly subversive, for it is *real enjoyment*, and thus horrible.

Notes

1. For a summarized discussion of the criticisms of Carter's writing, please see Elaine Jordan's essay "The Dangers of Angela Carter," *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 119-21.
2. According to William Day, "The relationship of the Gothic to the conventional world, and to the literary forms from which it derives, can best be described as parodic.... The Gothic reveals its originals as both monstrous and ridiculous, but it implies no alternative. It becomes a metaphysical statement because the object of parody is, not one aspect of society or a literary text or type, but all the world, both human and literary." Day, 59-60.
3. Please see William Patrick Day's analysis of the two seemingly opposed but fused emotions fear and desire and their relation to the self-Other interplay in Gothic fiction in the section of enthrallment, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire*, 23-6.
4. For Carter's in-depth analysis and commentary on Sade's notorious fictions of sexuality, please see her book *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*.
5. According to William Patrick Day, the Gothic fantasy "defines its world as place where there exists one self; everything else in that world is Other, an enemy to the desires and integrity of the self." Day, 19.
6. According to Gina Wisker, "Vampire writers also rescript romance.... Angela Carter's 'Lady in the House of Love' reverses the Sleeping Beauty myth, making the woman vampire victim to romance." Wisker, 2000:176.
7. Here I consult Eugenia C. DeLamotte's model of the Gothic as mainly concerned with "the boundaries of the self" and her use of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's spatial model of the Gothic (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. 1980). DeLamotte, 13-4, 25-6.
8. Here I consult mainly Janet L. Langlois's discussion in her essay "Andrew Borden' Little Girl: Fairy-Tale Fragments in Angela Carter's 'The Fall River Axe Murders' and 'Lizzie's Tiger,'" in which she points out another critic, Salman Rushdie, also holding a similar view. *Angela Carter and the*

Fairy Tale, eds. Danielle M. Roemer and Christina Bacchilega, 204-5.

9. In analyzing Carter's horror writing, Gina Wiska also observes the important effect of the prolonged pause in "The Fall River Axe Murders": "For many pages, Carter's narrative holds us in a terrifying stasis, awaiting Lizzie Borden's violent explosion into the ostensibly calm domestic interior." Gina Wiska, "Revenge of the living doll: Angela Carter's horror writing," *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*, eds. Joseph Bristow & Trev Lynn Broughton, 124.
10. According to Victor Sage in *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Traditio*, "Christian iconography commonly represents the body metaphorically as the house or mansion of the soul," with the emphasis placed on "the decay and darkness of the house," and the fantasy such as "burial alive" in the decaying dark body-house and the mixing of "the metaphor for the body and the grave together" are some common variations on the same motif. Sage 1-3.
11. In the epilogue, Carter cites the children's rhyme as "Lizzie Borden with an axe/ Gave her father forty whacks/ When she saw what she had done/ She gave her mother forty one," while in another version, perhaps more popular, the rhyme appears with a different order of the parents being hacked--"Lizzie Borden took an axe/ And gave her mother 40 whacks,/ And when she saw what she had done,/ She gave her father 41." The latter version shows Lizzie hacking the stepmother first, indicating the violence more as a result of intense hatred between daughter and stepmother than as a violent eruption against the father as is suggested in Carter's version.
12. Regarding this, Wiska observes, "the only response to repression and incarceration is eruption" when "Lizzie is denied the spirit of carnival." Wiska 1997:123-4.
13. The castration motif can be seen not just in the symbolic act of the father's chopping off the daughter's beloved pigeons' heads but in the narrator's play on Lizzie's shortened name: "Lizzie was not an affectionate diminutive but the name with which she had been christened.... A miser in everything, he even cropped off half her name [Elizabeth] before he gave it to her." "The Fall River Axe Murders," *Black Venus*, 113.
14. See Carter's remark in John Haffenden's interview with her, *Novelists in Interview*, John Haffenden, (London & New York: Methuen, 1985), 90-1.

15. Concerning Carter's view of carnival, please see Lorna Sage's interview with her in *New Writing* (eds., Malcolm Bradbury and Judith Cooke, 1992: 188) and Sage's discussion in her monograph *Angela Carter* (1994:54-5).
16. Please see Marc O'Day's analysis in "'Mutability is Having a Field Day': The Sixties Aura of Angela Carter's Bristol Trilogy," *Flesh and Mirror*, ed. Lorna Sage.

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About the Author

Emma Pi-tai Peng, an assistant professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at National Taiwan University, teaches Freshman English and Composition. She got her Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of Essex in 2000.
e-mail: ptpeng@ntu.edu.tw