



Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe

Rosemary Rowan Capewell

Student Number: [REDACTED] | **EAN:** [REDACTED]

SEVERAL PERSPECTIVES: ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION IN THE WORKS OF ANGELA CARTER.

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for the importance of reading Angela Carter's works alongside the visual art that inspired her. Taking inspiration from the 2016 RWA exhibition *Strange Worlds: The Vision of Angela Carter*, I have analysed three of Carter's written publications: *Shadow Dance*, *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Bloody Chamber collection*. In concurrence with these texts, I have scrutinised Carter's pornographic polemic *The Sadeian Woman*, particularly as it relates to the iconography of womanhood, which I argue is a central focus in Carter's oeuvre. In each chapter, I have examined the artistic period from which the narrative draws inspiration and identified the specific artworks that support this connection. Overall, this research will analyse Angela Carter in conversation with visual art to gain a greater understanding of her beliefs and the iconography that upholds the structures she seeks to criticise.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Marie Mulvey Roberts and Fiona Robinson curated a substantial collection of artworks that were influential on or inspired by Angela Carter's literary oeuvre. The resulting exhibition, *Strange Worlds: The Vision of Angela Carter*, offered a sizeable reappraisal of visual media's significance in shaping the narrative structures and political discourses embedded in Carter's fiction; Marie Mulvey Roberts writes in her opening essay of the "considerable but often underestimated" (16) influence of art on Carter. The exhibition aimed to shed light on these influences and, 25 years after her death, reinvigorate public interest in her "dazzling imagination" (Roberts 14).

Through three of Carter's literary works: *Shadow Dance*, *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Bloody Chamber* collection, I will explore the extent to which engagement with visual art is essential for a nuanced and comprehensive interpretation of Carter's literary output. I will build on the works of scholars like Anna Watz and Marie Mulvey Roberts, who have written about Carter's interest in "the Pre-Raphaelites, which influenced her work in *Shadow Dance*", and her "keen interest in Surrealism" (Roberts 37), to prove, over the course of the following three chapters, that Carter's *entire oeuvre* is saturated with artistic references. I have limited myself to three works that span from the beginning (1966) to the height (1979) of her career, as their progressive publication illustrates the importance of contemporary art, and displays her continued interest in art as a personal and political tool of societal understanding, while maintaining the appropriate scope for a master's level dissertation. For example, works such as *The Holy Family Album* and the screenplay for *The Company of Wolves* demonstrate cinema's profound influence on Carter's imagination, as Caleb Ferrari writes, "It was the cinema [...] which made the most profound impact on Carter's imagination" (68). Laura Mulvey likewise observes that Carter's writing is permeated by a "magic cinematic attribute even when the cinema itself is not present on the page" (230). However, these works fall outside the scope of this dissertation, which centres specifically on Carter's relationship with

art history. With a broader remit than a Master's project allows, cinema would form a more substantial strand of the discussion.

My analysis of Carter's work will frequently refer to 'female representation' and the 'icons of femininity'; by 'icons', I am here referring to the symbols used in art to quantify various experiences in a visual format. As art historian Erwin Panofsky defines it, iconography is "that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art as opposed to their form [...] it is apprehended by simply identifying certain visible forms with certain objects known to me from practical experience." (1) These icons can take many forms (object, animal, plant, etc.) and usually refer to a broader concept or societal experience. For example, as Simona attests, even "animals were used as [...] reflections of human behaviour, exempla of both negative and positive moral precepts, adduced for didactic functions." (Simona, 167). Carter used similar iconographic shorthand for femininity in her writing; she did this to expose these icons as an egoic mediation through which the cultural consciousness has sanctioned the abuse of women. Despite her consistent criticism of the icons of femininity, Carter understood that the eradication of iconography was a risible fantasy, as it is fundamental to how we understand and communicate our experiences of the world. Carter believed her fiction could introduce a more diverse range of representations, or else elucidate the patriarchal nature of the current icons, revealing the "token women in person" (Carter 99), and thus provide women with a broader array of images by which they could be identified.

Carter targets the 'perfect victim' archetype as a particularly egregious example of female iconography. Contemporary psychoanalyst Winnicott described such icons as the armour of the "false self" (4). These "mythic abstractions" (Carter 8) protect the 'true self' from harm, blame or ridicule. However, Carter was not merely concerned with individual or narrative prevalence of female iconography; she believed its ubiquity alienates us from ourselves and

from the nuances of human relations. As Carter writes in *The Sadeian Woman*, “The nature of the individual is not resolved into but ignored by these archetypes” (6). Thus, to reveal our “true selves” (Winnicott 4) and genuinely connect with others, we must critically examine the iconography through which we mediate our interpersonal connections.

As I have mentioned, Carter believed that iconography was a bastardisation of real experience, which codified the circumstances of women's lives, transforming them into an attractive symbol of ‘femininity’, representative of only the most marketable elements of “an infinitely complex organisation, the self” (Carter 4). The marketability of women has been discussed in detail by Luce Irigaray in her essay *Women on the Market*, in which she describes “this new matrix of history, in which wives, daughters, and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men” (Irigaray 5). This value is calculated based on the extent to which a woman successfully adheres to the icons of her sex; the male observer always makes this judgment. As John Berger describes him, “[the observer] is the spectator in front of the picture, and he is presumed to be a man. Everything is addressed to him. Everything must appear to be the result of his being there.” (Berger 24). Since “everything is addressed to him” (Berger 24), it is reasonable to assume that the commissioning and ownership of art by the male observer has historically functioned as a potent instrument of hierarchical propaganda, mobilised by patriarchal governments and monarchies to legitimise authority and shape collective consciousness. The Second World War, for example, famously produced Howard Miller’s *We Can Do It* poster, which inspired women to join the war effort, mobilising an entire demographic in service of a single goal. Iconographic articulations of social ideals operate similarly, insofar as their pervasive circulation within cultural discourse establishes ideals to which the target demographic is encouraged to conform. Through mechanisms of habituation assimilation, these icons have been naturalised within cultural consciousness, diminishing the necessity for their continued overt visual articulation. By redirecting her readers’ attention toward artistic representation, Carter effectively “breaks their identification with the fiction” (Sivyer 225). This strategy

reflects her conviction that icons, regardless of their form, impede women's emancipation, as they are rooted in and perpetuate patriarchal ideological frameworks. Even those that purportedly represent 'female empowerment' are facilitated by their reversal of existing patriarchal icons without changing them, and are thus, in Carter's eyes, "consolatory nonsense" (8). The woman in Miller's image, for example, would not have been so impactful were it not a parody of the male-centric workforce propaganda that preceded it. In addition, icons are only able to maintain such power over art and representation through their consistent presence in artwork; consistently perpetuating the societally erected femininity that mediates the expectation and reality of womanhood in the eyes of men; as Donald Hoffman writes, "Perception is not a window on objective reality. It is an interface that hides objective reality behind a veil of helpful icons." (86).

Angela Carter worked to expose icons through a process she dubbed 'demythologisation', which she described to Anna Katsavos as "discovering what certain configurations of imagery [...] stand for, what they really mean [...] in the service of women." (para 5). In all the works this paper focuses on, Carter has made efforts to demythologise the icon of the perfect (female) victim, in particular. A figure Catherine McCormack described as "the virgin martyr, more blessed and lovely when her beautiful body is mutilated", who has, "at best, enshrined female suffering as something noble and beautiful; at worst, it has contributed to the normalisation of violence against women by turning it into poetry, religious devotion, beauty, or even just a historically condoned inevitability." (116).

Interestingly, Carter's only full-length non-fiction publication, *The Sadeian Woman*, is an interrogation and critique of iconography. It concludes that a mediation between the varied icons of "lambhood and tigerishness" (Atwood 120) is the only reasonable solution to the problem of icons, since encouraging actions at either extreme would only exacerbate the already existing power dynamics of gender and class. Carter focuses on two specific cultural

icons through the works of the Marquis de Sade: Justine, the central character of *The Misfortunes of Virtue* and Juliette, from *Vice Ample Rewarded*. Juliette and Justine are the namesakes of the works in which they are principal agents. *The Misfortunes of Virtue* follows the life of the perpetually victimised Justine, whose life can be likened to a series of unfortunate events precipitated by her perpetual virtue. *Vice Ample Rewarded*, on the other hand, follows the life of Juliette, whose early Libertine education provides her with the power to utilise sexuality as a weapon and mode of profit production. At the end of both novels, the sisters reunite, though in one, Juliette sees the error of her ways, and in the other, Justine dies tragically, as befits a perpetual victim. Carter argues of these icons: “Justine’s image gave birth to several generations of mythically suffering blondes, Juliette’s image lies behind the less numinous prospect of a boardroom filled with glamorous and sexy lady executives” (117). Juliette is consciously complicit in violence, in addition to perpetrating it, for her own benefit, choosing to be subjected to victimisation in pursuit of personal pleasure or strategic advantage and as such her suffering is reframed as a source of agency. For Juliette, the victimisation inherent to being a woman in the eighteenth century is not merely endured but instrumentalised, rendering it advantageous to her as an individual. However, Carter recognises that any semblance of freedom women attain within such a system remains fundamentally subjective, circumscribed by the very ideological structures that purport to liberate them. As long as patriarchal structures remain operative, those who wish to be successful must engage in strategic complicity and “negotiate the terms of defeat from a position of strength and so end up ahead of the game” (Sage 65). This conclusion is the basis for Carter’s diversification of female iconography; if women must utilise a “certain amount of tigerishness” (Atwood 121) in order to succeed, their representations cannot be made up of just tigers or lambs; only an amalgamation of both can begin to represent the depths of experience. Justine is the lamb to Juliette’s ‘tigerishness; she represents women who unconsciously preserve patriarchal ideas through internalisation. It is as a result of these women, who are exalted and idolised as beacons of womanhood, that such icons of femininity have become

culturally entrenched. Carter diagnoses these women with so-called “Monroe syndrome” (Carter 80). These “lovely ghosts” are “never completely born as women, only as a debased cultural idea” (Carter 80) and as such, perpetrate what they perceive as their identity since they know no other. Justine contains a “wholesome eroticism, blurred a little around the edges by the fact that she herself does not quite know what eroticism is” (Carter 72), and, to this, she owes the victimhood that makes her the ideal woman. Carter criticises Justine for her inability to escape from self-pity. Writing that “Justine cannot bring herself to put an exchange value on her body” (Carter 45), though in doing so she may have avoided many of the ensuing events. As Carter declares: “at least a girl who sells herself with her eyes open is not a hypocrite in a world with a cash-sale ideology” (Carter 66). Sally Keenan poignantly reiterates that this criticism in particular made Carter an enemy of feminist critics like Susanne Kappeler: “Her suggestion that women too readily identify with images of themselves as victims of patriarchal oppression, that in effect they are frequently complicit with that oppression, was a distinctly unfashionable notion in the mid-1970s. Her savage indictment of the figure of Sade’s Justine as an extreme embodiment of this complicity made her argument the more treasonable.” (Keenan, 133). Despite such criticism, Juliette and Justine serve as emblematic figures drawn from the extensive repertoire of female icons within the Western art canon; Carter’s analysis of them has only served to elucidate the insidious nature of female iconography to a broader audience.

To develop this argument, this dissertation proceeds through three chapters that trace the relationship between Carter and art from her first novel, *Shadow Dance*, through to her most well-known publication, *The Bloody Chamber*. Given Carter’s now-infamous penchant for unearthing and disrupting “traditional figures of patriarchal mythology” (Katsavos, para. 9), it is no wonder that her career began with an effort to demythologise one of the most prevalent of these images: the female victim. Using the works of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Surrealists, Carter showcases the absurdity of the ‘perfect female victim’ iconography by exposing its appearance in two seemingly opposing art movements.

The first chapter will trace the influence and utilisation of these movements through the character of Ghislaine. However, as the second and third chapters will prove, Carter was inspired by more than these two movements. As Bristow and Broughton argue in their introductory essay, “[Carter] did not refrain from swiping at prominent tendencies within the Women’s Movement” (11), and feminist art is no exception. Chapter two will explore Carter’s relationship to the feminist art movement through the character of Tristessa, the “perfect man’s woman” (Carter 128) who appears as an amalgamation of “the construction of gender as a scripted performance” (Bristow and Broughton 6). As she said herself to David Pringle in 1979, “*New Eve* was in fact calculated to offend. That is my feminist novel – though none of my sisters liked the book. It is my feminist statement.” (para 106).

An analysis of the connection between Carter’s written work and art cannot be done without analysing the iconography of Carter’s short stories, which cemented her status as a titan of feminist fiction. Although some artistic analysis of *the Bloody Chamber* has been undertaken, an analysis connecting the concurrent rise of feminist artists who use food as a medium remains underexplored. Therefore, the final chapter of this paper will analyse Carter’s connection to the contemporary rise in feminist art concerned with food, to demythologise the icon of the female victim or woman as ‘eaten object’.

Over the course of these three chapters, this paper will demonstrate that understanding art history is fundamental to comprehending the works of Angela Carter, as the icons she demythologises are taken from, perpetuated by, and deconstructed in the art that surrounded her. Across her oeuvre, Angela Carter consistently engaged with the visual iconography, deliberately foregrounding it to expose it as an ideological construct rather than an authentic representation of womanhood. As Carter asserts in the opening pages of *The Sadeian Woman*, when ideology remains unchallenged, individuals risk becoming “the slaves of history and not its makers” (Carter 4).

SHADOW DANCE: FEMALE ICONS MEDIATED THROUGH PRE-RAPHELITE AND SURREALIST ART.

Shadow Dance, Carter's first novel, was written in 1966 and published to mixed reviews. Sarah Gamble remarks that "it is a remarkable first novel because it delivers an artistic vision that is more or less fully formed: its central preoccupations [...] are ones that would continue to preoccupy its author more or less throughout her career." (Gamble, 95). On the other hand, Edmund Gordon's recollection of the narrative highlights its gruesome violence: "*Shadow Dance* is palpably not the creation of a happy person." (Gordon, 116).

The narrative of *Shadow Dance* stages a gothic exploration of fractured relationships and gendered violence, structured around Morris and Honeybuzzard, business partners whose past entanglement with lover Ghislaine culminated in her brutal disfigurement. Told from Morris's perspective, *Shadow Dance* filters events through his self-consciously artistic sensibility, through which surrealist blends of guilt, fear, and fantasy distort the ordinary world around him. Crucially, Morris interprets his relationships through what Carter calls "mythic abstractions" (Carter 6), a mode of perception that transforms the women in his life into symbolic figures rather than autonomous subjects. Within this framework, Ghislaine becomes the idealised victim. Before her disfigurement, Morris imagines her as a suffering Pre-Raphaelite muse, an aestheticised embodiment of fragility and wanton abuse. His desire for her to conform to this iconographic fantasy reveals how he constructs Ghislaine not as a person but as the perfect object of male desire, a role that the novel later exposes as both violent and dehumanising. As Katie Garner concurs, "the image of the suffering Pre-Raphaelite muse reoccurs again and again in *Shadow Dance*" (Garner 150).

The "perfect victim" is defined by Nils Christie in *Crime Control as Drama* as a "completely white" individual (Christie, 4). Here, meaning a completely innocent victim of abuse. Moreover, as Hanna Ferguson further explains: "The 'perfect victim' [...] is unmarked in the eyes of the law. She shares just enough with the public to be empathised with, but not too

much, or she is hysterical. Most importantly, she does not exist. She is an ideal that sets every survivor up for failure, for judgment, and to bear the burden of their own victimhood.” (Ferguson, 1). Outside of the legal context, and as I will be using the term, the ‘perfect female victim’ is a woman who can be victimised without fighting back and, to the abuser’s eye, has about her an air of desire for the abuse, meaning he can continue without guilt. Artist Lydia Pettit described how she interprets this archetype in her art after being raped as a teenager: “For years I was trying to perform the ‘perfect victim’ as a means of protection [...] I never got angry; if I remained meek and compliant, not vengeful, then maybe it would not happen to me again [...] the “perfect victim” is not meant to stand up for themselves. They are a recipient of trauma – and that is all.’ (para 2). Carter believed that the perfect victim was a detrimental icon for women, as it presented them as an aspirational figure of continual subjugation. If women think they should be, and will always remain victims, they cannot become otherwise. The imagery of the Pre-Raphaelites reinforced this image by idealising “the virgin, smiling at the rapist” (Carter 120), thus suggesting that the most attractive women are those who suffer without complaint.

The violence suffered by the ‘perfect victim’ is typically perpetrated by an individual who holds more social, political, or personal power. This can be likened to the artist’s power to manipulate the subject of his art into any desired position. Many of the tensions in *Shadow Dance* stem from the relationship between the text’s two artists, Morris and Honeybuzzard. As Katie Garner explains, “*Shadow Dance* tentatively explores [...] a wider, and more sinister, critique of male artistic practice” (Garner 152). Morris is an aspiring, yet ultimately dejected, artist who knows he will never achieve greatness. Despite Morris’ claim that he “thought as a painter, dreamed as a painter, defined himself as a painter” (Carter 19). His art is hidden, stacked “still wet, face to the wall” (Carter 20), away from public view. His belief that he will never be a good painter is a “fatal secret” that “burns inside him all the time” (Carter 18). Morris’ artistic identity is described as a repressed desire, “he could only think in this way, never execute; never paint the painting which would justify treating her as a thing.” (Carter

18). Honeybuzzard, in contrast, is a successful curator of a collection of abused women whom he exhibits openly; to him, art and violence are naturally synonymous. Emma Parker describes him as having a “cannibalistic [...] male desire” (7), consuming the women around him with a “full, rich-lined mouth that unequivocally conveys that, this man eats meat” (Carter 57). In comparison, Morris’ “tender stomach” (9) cannot withstand much strain, and thus his lack of artistic talent is supplemented by his complicity in the violence perpetrated by Honeybuzzard (Honey). Overall, as an artist, Morris’ character functions as a condemnation of misogynistic artists who have created art out of icons and expected women to conform to their depictions and remain subjugated without understanding the true impact of their portrayals. The central figure of *Shadow Dance*, and the subject of Honeybuzzard’s most violent art, Ghislaine, haunts the narrative as a deliberate demythologisation of the iconographic female victim. Initially, she appears as the perfect victim, “marked by passivity and submissiveness [...] the image of the wounded woman, shackled by her self-imposed martyrdom” (Watz 56). Her subsequent disfigurement, however, transforms her into a surrealist fusion of the material and the immaterial. As Sarah Gamble observes, “Ghislaine’s scar comes to represent a conceptual break between the past and the present; what Ghislaine was and what she is” (Gamble 49). Carter constructs this shift by positioning Ghislaine between two dominant visual traditions in Western art: the ethereal Pre-Raphaelite muse and the uncanny Surrealist woman; the scar functions as the hinge between them. Before her injury, Ghislaine exists as an incorporeal feminine icon onto whom her lovers project their fantasies; she is simultaneously a “golden girl,” “a Fiery bud,” and, like Blanche DuBois, “as in *A Streetcar Named Desire*”, a fragile figure of theatrical femininity (Carter 5). When Morris encounters her in the pub at the novel’s opening, she has already acquired the injury that anchors her in material reality. The scar renders her “horribly lopsided, skin, features, and all dragged away from the bone” (Carter 3), signalling her departure from the realm of idealised Pre-Raphaelite beauty as Morris had imagined her. In its place emerges a distinctly Surrealist woman, visibly marked, insistently embodied, and no longer available as a passive surface for male fantasy.

PRE-RAPHAELITE BEAUTY AND THE FEMALE VICTIM

John Berger explains that “to be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men” (Berger 23). As such, the most desirable woman is one onto whom a man’s desire can be projected easily and without complaint; this is the perfect victim: “wounded creatures who were born to bleed” (Carter 26). The artistic movement most synonymous with representing these beautiful suffering women is the Pre-Raphaelite movement. The ‘Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood’, better known as simply the Pre-Raphaelites, was a ‘secret’ group of young male creatives, formed in 1848 with a mutual disdain for the Royal Academy’s promotion of Raphael as the artistic ideal. They believed principally in a return to depicting nature, departing from the classical poses and subjects of Raphael’s paintings. As Hawkey writes, “the PRBs announced themselves opposed to sombre palettes, meretricious efforts and conventional subject matter.” (6). Despite the beauty and lasting impact of the PRB’s works, the original group disbanded around 1850. Though Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris would reinvigorate a second wave of the movement, c.1860, that adhered less strictly to the brotherhood’s original focus on realism. The mythically suffering muse was a common subject matter across both phases of Pre-Raphaelite art and, though it has been used consistently in popular paintings, has “gotten too big for its boots and bears, at best, a fantasy relation to [the] reality [of women]” (Carter 7). The perfect victim depicted by the Pre-Raphaelites assumed iconic status by being immaterial, a blank slate devoid of personal preferences or history onto which male viewers can project their fantasies. These portrayals draw inspiration from Victorian ideals and poems such as *The Angel in the House*, which present the ideal woman as subservient to the male whim: “Man must be pleased, but him to please is woman’s pleasure” (Patmore 74). Such portrayals emphasise an idealised view of feminine suffering; as Edgar Allan Poe noted in *The Philosophy of Composition*, “The death of a beautiful woman is the most poetical topic in the world.” (Poe 46).

This idealisation, John Berger writes, is a result of the spectator:

“The principal protagonist [...] is the spectator in front of the picture [...] Everything is addressed to him. Everything must appear to be the result of his being there. [...] A Woman must survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others [...] is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. [...] To acquire some control over this process [...] women watch themselves being looked at. Thus, she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.” (Berger 25)

In his primary publication, *Ways of Seeing*, from which the above quote is taken, Berger explains that women emulate their artistic representations in an effort to be perceived as valuable in the social marketplace of interpersonal relations, in which women are traded as currency between men. Images of femininity in art often represent the most valuable attributes of women and, therefore, the pinnacle to which other women should aspire. Memling's *Vanity* [Figure 1], for example, foregrounds the virtue of modesty, warning against the seemingly exclusively female trap of vanity. This is achieved through the mirror, which captures the woman's attention entirely despite the surrounding nature, as Berger writes scorchingly, “you painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand, and you called the painting *Vanity*” (51) Likewise, Titian's *Penitent Magdalene* [Figure 2] foregrounds the importance of sexual purity in its depiction of the contrite ex-prostitute Mary Magdalene; She attempts to cover herself, pulling the fabric of her dress around her as she looks up at the heavens with tear-stained eyes. However, as the nature of Berger's male observer foreshadows, female iconography serves a dualistic purpose. The nude women in Memling's *Vanity* and Titian's *Penitent Magdalene* are painted in such a way that the male spectator can observe their titillating nudity free of judgment. In contrast, any female viewers are reminded to remain obedient and subjugated. The male observer's appreciation of the image, which is most likely due to its provocative nature, can therefore be passed off as an intellectual interest in the continued disenfranchisement of women as opposed to a sexual indulgence.

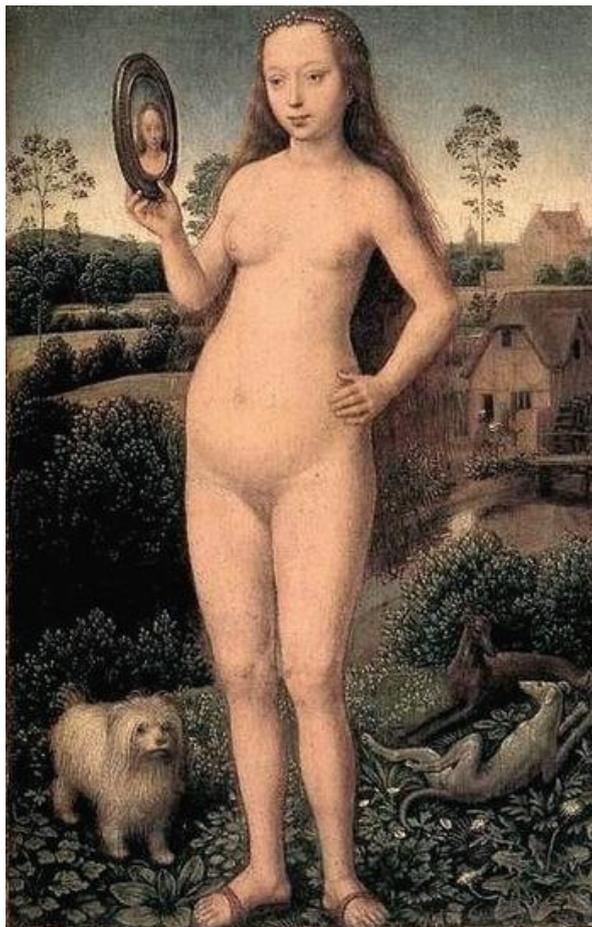


Figure 1: Earthly Vanity and Divine Salvation (Memling)

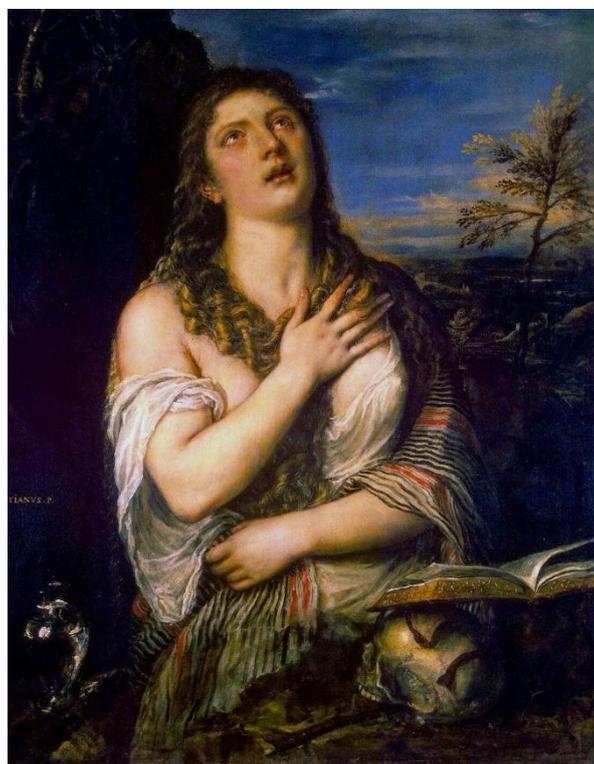


Figure 2 The Penitent Magdalene (Titian)

Ghislaine bears striking similarities to these idealised, sexually appealing women, particularly as depicted by the Pre-Raphaelites. She is described as “so light and fragile” (Carter 3) and as a “golden girl” (4), with no personality traits or character development beyond her status as a victim. Marie Mulvey Roberts recalls that “one of Carter’s favourite paintings was John Everett Millais’ *Ophelia* [Figure 3], which she displayed as a print on the wall of her home” (37); a work from which it is reasonable to assume Carter took significant visual inspiration for Ghislaine. For example, she exists (before her assault) in visual alignment with the Pre-Raphaelite woman, characterised by beautiful “milkmaid hair” and a “soft, dewy” (Carter, 4) ethereal beauty that suggests her immateriality. Her nature is somewhat fantastical, reminiscent of De Sade’s *Justine*, in her “expectation of reverence [which] ensures her passivity and her weakness and also her horrid surprise when the state of grace in which she exists is abruptly revoked” (Carter 83). Ghislaine’s Pre-Raphaelite looks are clearly important as she asks Morris, “Am I so very ugly?” (Carter 8). Both Justine and Ghislaine share a desecrated beauty and innocence that “adds the irresistible dew of suffering to [their] ripeness” (Carter 75). Although Carter claims she had not yet encountered the Marquis de Sade during the time she wrote *Shadow Dance* (1966), traces of (what would later be identified as) his ideas are present in the characterisation of Ghislaine. De Sade’s publication *Justine or The Misfortunes of Virtue* (Sade, 1791) depicts the falsity of the perfect victim, perpetually maltreated despite her virtue. As Merja Makinen writes: “Justine’s miserable martyrdom discloses the appalling victimisation that results from the Madonna’s virtuous passivity.” (Makinen 154). By presenting Ghislaine as visually aligned with the Pre-Raphaelite muse, Carter has brought attention to the suffering that results from aligning oneself with the icon of the perfect victim. Through Ghislaine, Carter warns that when women portray themselves as immaterial, they perform a symbolic femininity devoid of any real physical embodiment. As a result, they become more amenable and receive favoured treatment, because the material woman is a quantifiable being, not merely a reciprocal for male desire.



Figure 3 [*The Death of*] *Ophelia* (Millais)



Figure 4: *The Lady of Shalott* (Waterhouse)

When women part from the immateriality of their ascribed iconography, they must then be returned to their immaterial nature through subjugation, abuse, or death to restore the previously established order. Ghislaine's narrative follows this pattern; as the perfect victim, she invites the abuse that the men around her so fervently desire to subject her to. Nevertheless, when that violence is enacted, her materiality is revealed, and she separates from the iconography that Morris ascribes to her. Her mutilation "disrupts the order" (Kristeva, 4) of her image and incites feelings of abjection as a result of two opposing images of the same object being forced to reconcile.

Julia Kristeva conceptualises the abject as "something rejected from which one does not part" (Kristeva 4). Accordingly, the unveiling of Ghislaine's concealed presence within the iconography she inhabits, an entity simultaneously repudiated yet indistinguishably retained, constitutes a site of abjection. Ghislaine's scar is the physical manifestation of this site, and thus the point at which she becomes a grotesque Surrealist woman, as Katie Garner writes of the transition: "Carter's early fiction punctuates surrealist circumstances with occasional nods to Pre-Raphaelite fathers [...] to expound her fundamental critique: that all nineteenth- and twentieth-century art is underlined by a monolithic antifeminist approach involving some cost to the female body." (Garner, 147). In this statement, Garner corroborates the purpose of this research: to argue that Angela Carter has employed artistic references to illuminate the icons of femininity, which are constructed through a monolithic antifeminist approach.

ABJECTION AND THE SURREALIST WOMAN

As discussed in the introduction, the 2016 exhibition *Strange Worlds* brought to light the impact of art on Angela Carter. Upon reanalysing Carter's first novel, *Shadow Dance* (1966), the influence of the Surrealists has been noted as particularly significant. Anna Watz has written extensively about the Surrealists in her book *Angela Carter and Surrealism: 'A Feminist Libertarian Aesthetic,'* and her analysis has shed substantial light on the Surrealist psychology of the repressed and the uncanny, which my analysis will build on by using specific works produced by the Surrealists. In the following section, I will argue that Carter has contrasted the work of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Surrealists to highlight the similarities in their representations of women. In doing so, she foregrounds the absurdity of these representations because of their simultaneous use across such diverse artistic styles.

As Anna Watz explains, Freud had a profound influence on the Surrealists; Carter herself wrote that the movement was “derived from a synthesis of Freud” (Carter 568). As such, *Shadow Dance* is fraught with references to psychoanalysis, particularly the repressed and taboo. As Anna Watz explains, “Morris’ uncontainable and uncontrollable feelings of guilt, terror and anxiety perpetually threaten the boundary between reality and imagination in the text” (Watz 50). This is particularly clear when he describes imagining “cutting her [Ghislaine’s] face with a jagged shard of broken glass” (Carter 18) and describes Honeybuzzard as “acting out desires that [he] only fantasises about” (Sonat 19). Freud reasons that, especially during dreams, “from the ego proceed the repressions, by means of which it is sought to exclude certain trends in the mind not merely from consciousness but also from other forms of effectiveness and activity.” (Freud 8). The connection between dreams and repression had a profound influence on the Surrealists. Andre Breton writes in *The Manifesto of Surrealism*, “Freud very rightly brought his critical faculties to bear upon the dream. [...] I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surrealist, if one may so speak.” (Breton, 2, trans. Richard

Seaver & Helen Lane). Due to the interconnected nature of Freud and Surrealism, the themes of repression and taboo desire are present throughout *Shadow Dance*. However, as the Surrealists would discover, the boundary between the taboo and the societally acceptable is bordered by abjection. As Nicholas Chare writes in *Manet's Abject Surrealism*, "Surrealism seeks to harness the power of the unconscious [...] initiating a 'systematic illumination' of the hidden places of the mind. [...] This system is one [of] abject elements." (Chare 51).

Kristeva's theory of abjection, which explores the border between the repressed and the self, was first published in *Powers of Horror* (1982) and was influenced by the ideas of the French writer, thinker, and surrealist Georges Bataille. Kristeva explores the overwhelming fear that arises when we encounter the boundary between self and other, a fear first experienced during our separation from the mother, when we begin to recognise a distinction between "me" and "other". She argues that, at a certain point in psychosexual development, a distinction is formed between human and animal, order and disorder, object and subject. This boundary elicits feelings of abjection: "it preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationships, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body" (Felluga 4). The primary example is birth, which violently separates the infant from the maternal body, producing a material reminder of mortality and a clear line between two entities that previously existed as one: "childbirth induces the image of birth as a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides" (Kristeva 110). Later in life, feelings of abjection resurface when confronted with liminal phenomena, evoking a complex mix of fascination and repulsion. The original abject separation of the infant from the mother parallels the psychological separation of the real and the imagined; the surreal occupies the space between the real and the unreal, where abjection occurs. Ghislaine's disfigurement, "The scar drew her whole face sideways and, even in profile, with the hideous thing turned away, her face was horribly lop-sided" (Carter 3), serves as a physical manifestation of this point of abjection, and simultaneously as Ghislaine's demarcation as a Surrealist woman. As has been discussed, the Surrealists were concerned

with the taboo and, therefore, the abject. Women, in particular, expressed this feeling during the Surrealist period, as artists grappled with the falsity of the icons of femininity that had defined the preceding Neoclassical and Romantic periods. In reaction to these idealised representations, the Surrealists depicted women as representations of their dark desires to maim, mutilate and sexually defile. Katie Garner uses the writings of Salvador Dali to elucidate these desires, “The Pre-Raphaelites place on the table the sensational dish of the eternal feminine [...] which seems reminiscent of Carter’s scarred Ghislaine in *Shadow Dance*, who embodies the same mixture of repulsion and desire.” (Garner 149). The simultaneous disgust and arousal felt by these artists is palpable in their work, especially as it relates to the unconscious perceptions of women as objects. As Elizabeth Mahoney explains, many male artists believed that “women were unable to articulate their own desires and remain trapped as objects of masculine desire, as the ‘other’ of the male gaze.” (74). Such simultaneous disgust and desire is visible in the works of the famous surrealist Salvador Dali. His painting *Young Virgin Sodomised by the Horns of her own Chastity* [Figure 5], for example, depicts a ‘young virgin’ who is objectified and subjected to the brutal unconscious desires to abuse and consume; the irony of its previous display in the Playboy manner is not lost on anyone. As Kropf and Armstrong’s exhibition described, “The surrealist and Freudian muse [...] becomes the spectral image of a woman as the object of obsession and the repressed forces of unconscious desire” (para 2). Conversely, Carter was also inspired by the women of the Surrealist and proto-Surrealist movements, such as Paula Rego, whose work is featured in *Strange Worlds: The Arts of Angela Carter* (Mulvey-Roberts, 2016). She is often credited with undermining the ‘boys club’ culture of the Surrealist movement and, therefore, held some affinity to Carter’s own literary position. I firmly believe that, as Anna Watz concurs, “[Carter’s] career was influenced by the aesthetics and political concerns of the surrealists” (Watz 4), and Carter’s own work confirms this interest. For example, *Eyes* [Figure 6] utilises the same distorted forms of the unconscious to depict a disturbing collage of eyes appearing in an unnatural formation.



Figure 5: Young Virgin Auto Sodomised by the Horns of Her Own Chastity (Dali)



Figure 6 Eyes (Carter, Eyes)

Surrealist imagery, particularly its focus on the melting and dissolution of boundaries, is used by Carter to destabilise the 'perfect victim' archetype. She achieves this by rendering the physical and metaphorical boundaries of Ghislaine fluid, unstable, or non-existent. Since Ghislaine is the novel's representative of the perfect female victim, her fluidity reflects the icon's instability. The application of surrealist forms to the 'perfect victim' icon can be understood as Carter's attempt to present it as an image of repressed male desire, rather than as a model of real experience that women should emulate. As Rebecca Munford reasons, in *Shadow Dance*, "as in the work of the Surrealists, rigid structures crumble and fluidity and mutability reign in the aftermath." (Munford, 2006, p. 21). In particular, Carter can be read as having taken inspiration from the prominent Surrealist artist Hans Bellmer, specifically his work 'La Poupée' [Figure 7], for her depiction of Ghislaine as she transitions from a Pre-Raphaelite to a Surrealist woman. In Bellmer's work, the boundary between human and doll, object and subject is blurred. *La Poupée* is a series of photographs that depict "mutilated and reassembled dolls posed in domestic interiors, exemplifying the Surrealist view of the female body as the source of simultaneous fascination and revulsion" (MoMA para 1). Carter describes Ghislaine in a similarly grotesque fashion, "naked, on her back", "surrounded by candles [...] dribbling wax like long tears" (Carter 177). In particular, the image of Ghislaine upon her death invokes *The Doll's* grotesque sexualisation. In [Figure 8] Bellmer has positioned a doll on its back, emphasising the grotesquely oversized breasts, stomach and genitalia. In doing so, he has visualised the Freudian repressed desires often elucidated by the Surrealists. Ghislaine is very much like Bellmer's doll: a warped representation of something real, an evocation of "the uncanny, [dramatised] in a surreal manner that revolts, disturbs and unsettles" (Watz 48). Similar to the dolls in Bellmer's *La Poupée* Photographs, Ghislaine's body blurs the line between object and subject. Through the use of Surrealist imagery, Carter clearly demonstrates the perfect victim's lack of autonomy and identity by equating her to a doll.



Figure 8 *The Doll* (Bellmer, *The Doll*)



Figure 7 *La Poupée*. (Bellmer)

Morris “defines himself as a painter” (Carter 18) and thus believes in his self-appointed power over the subjects of his art. Although he does not physically commit the murder or mutilation of Ghislaine, this self-definition positions him as the artist who renders her image. In doing so, he asserts a form of aesthetic control over her, mirroring the authority an artist holds over their work. This control becomes a means of neutralising the threat she poses to him. By returning Ghislaine to an immaterial, idealised representation of womanhood, he attempts to eliminate her capacity to provoke his abjection. That abjection arises from the rupture between his two conflicting images of her: the ethereal icon and the material woman. Carter emphasises this split through the juxtaposition of Ghislaine’s “surreal beauty” (16) with the “rotten” (16) wound that now marks her body. To reconcile these irreconcilable versions, Morris concludes that she must be restored to a state of permanent incorporeal beauty: death. Carter introduces this tension in the novel’s opening pages, describing Morris as feeling “as though he had an erection at a funeral” (5) when seeing Ghislaine for the first time since she received her injury, a visceral expression of simultaneous desire and disgust. This confrontation with abjection forces him to acknowledge the physical reality of a woman he had previously perceived only as a hollow, decorative icon, “with a half-open mouth as if she was expecting, somebody, anybody, everybody she met to pop a sweetie into it” (Carter 2). By the time the narrative begins, Ghislaine’s body is defined by openness, irregularity, and the collapse of internal and external boundaries, evoking both Surrealist aesthetics and the Bakhtinian Grotesque. Morris blames Ghislaine for this grotesque materiality that he himself has produced, a contradiction revealed in his frustrated inability to possess her; she is “so beautiful but never to be enjoyed” (Carter 35). Because she does not conform to his desires or desire him, Morris instructs Honey to “teach her a lesson” (35), hoping to remake her permanently in the distorted image of his own desire. Instead, Ghislaine’s form becomes irrevocably altered: ugly, material, and insistently real. Her disfigurement refuses the immaterial, idealised femininity Morris seeks to impose. Carter’s grotesque descriptions, “The whole cheek was a mass of corrugated white flesh, like a blancmange a child has played with

and not eaten” (152), continually remind the reader that the icon to which Ghislaine was once aligned is a fabrication of Morris’s artistic imagination. By comparing her to food, Carter further frames Ghislaine through the lens of Morris’s appetite, both sexual and gastric, exposing the consumption-based logic underpinning his desire. This motif anticipates Carter’s later work in *The Bloody Chamber*, where she returns to the semiotics of food as explored by feminist artists, using it to interrogate the objectification and devouring of women within patriarchal visual culture. Carter also draws on the work of the British Surrealist Francis Bacon to articulate Ghislaine’s unsettling fluidity, describing her as a “Francis Bacon horror painting of flesh” (Carter 20). By comparing Ghislaine to a Baconian image, such as *Study for a Portrait* [Figure 9], Carter emphasises the shift from Ghislaine’s earlier Pre-Raphaelite beauty to her present surrealist image. The contrast between Millais’s idealised femininity and Bacon’s distorted corporeality mirrors Morris’s own jarring confrontation with the collapse of his previously perfected muse. Carter mentions Bacon again in *In a Well-Hung Hang-Up*, where she describes him at the forefront of “our merciful age of unbelief” (78), a moment in which long-standing icons, “a language we accept as universal because [they have] always been so” (4), were being dismantled. Bacon’s work, with its twisted, gaping, and perpetually unstable bodies, resonates strongly with Bakhtin’s concept of the grotesque body. As Richa Arora notes, “During carnival, rank is abolished, and everyone is equal. Carter [...] depicts the radical themes of the female body and her defilement. [...] The tools of carnivalesque helped her to [...] destroy old images” (Arora 358). Bakhtin describes the grotesque face as “reduced to the gaping mouth,” and the body as “never finished, never completed,” and as something that “swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world” (Bakhtin 318). The recurring motif of the gaping mouth, central to both Bacon’s paintings and Carter’s depiction of Ghislaine, reveals a clear line of artistic influence. Through this intertextuality, Carter situates Ghislaine within a visual and theoretical lineage that emphasises instability, permeability, and the collapse of idealised forms.

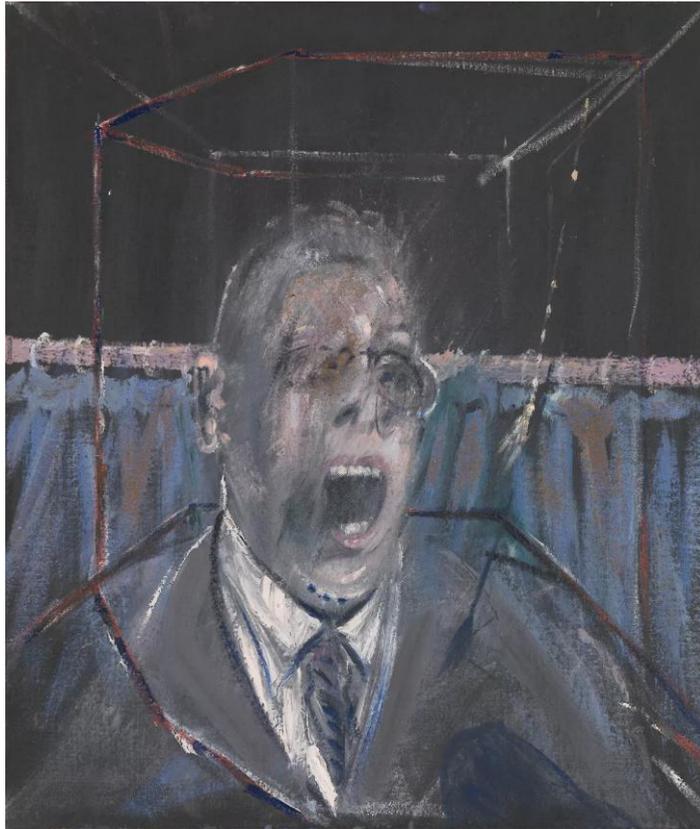


Figure 9 Study for a Portrait (Bacon)



Figure 10 Wine Crucifix (Rainer)

Another work within this artistic lineage is Arnulf Rainer's *Wine Crucifix* [Figure 10], cited in *Strange Worlds: The Vision of Angela Carter* as a direct influence on Carter and later reproduced in *The Holy Family Album*. Rainer's work, itself indebted to Bacon, shares his palette, centralised composition, and preoccupation with grotesque depictions of human suffering. The resonance of this imagery surfaces explicitly in *Shadow Dance* when Honeybuzzard proposes "chaining her [Ghislaine] to that symbol of her father there and raping her [...] you know her father is a clergyman?" (Carter 132). By staging this threat of material violence against the crucifix, the emblem of righteous, redemptive suffering, Carter exposes the futility of the cultural script that demands women embody the 'perfect victim', endlessly compliant and endlessly violated. The reward for such complicity, she suggests, is merely further degradation. In addition to Anna Watz's persuasive reading of these religious allusions as part of Carter's "atheist and iconoclastic project" (Watz 49), the precision with which Carter invokes specific artworks and iconographies could suggest a mimicking of Surrealist strategies of distortion, which frequently targeted institutions and cultural figures. Through these allusions, Carter critiques not only religious iconography but the broader, futile pursuit of conforming to the icons of femininity: images that promise transcendence but deliver only suffering, distortion, and erasure.

In addition to surrealism, Carter utilises other works from Western art history to represent Ghislaine's fluidity. For example, Ghislaine is described like the *découpées* (cut-out) technique developed by Henri Matisse toward the end of his life [Figure 11], a method later imitated by Carter [Figure 12]. This particular technique represents Morris's inability to integrate Ghislaine the icon and Ghislaine the real woman; thus, each element of her is segmented onto a separate piece of paper: "Ghislaine, not yet cut out but drawn and coloured in segments on paper." (Carter 125). Matisse was part of the Fauvism movement, which rebelled against Impressionism by prioritising impactful painterly brushstrokes and colour over realistic depictions. These techniques paved the way for the later Surrealist movement and the works described so far.



Figure 11 The Parakeet and the Mermaid. (Matisse)

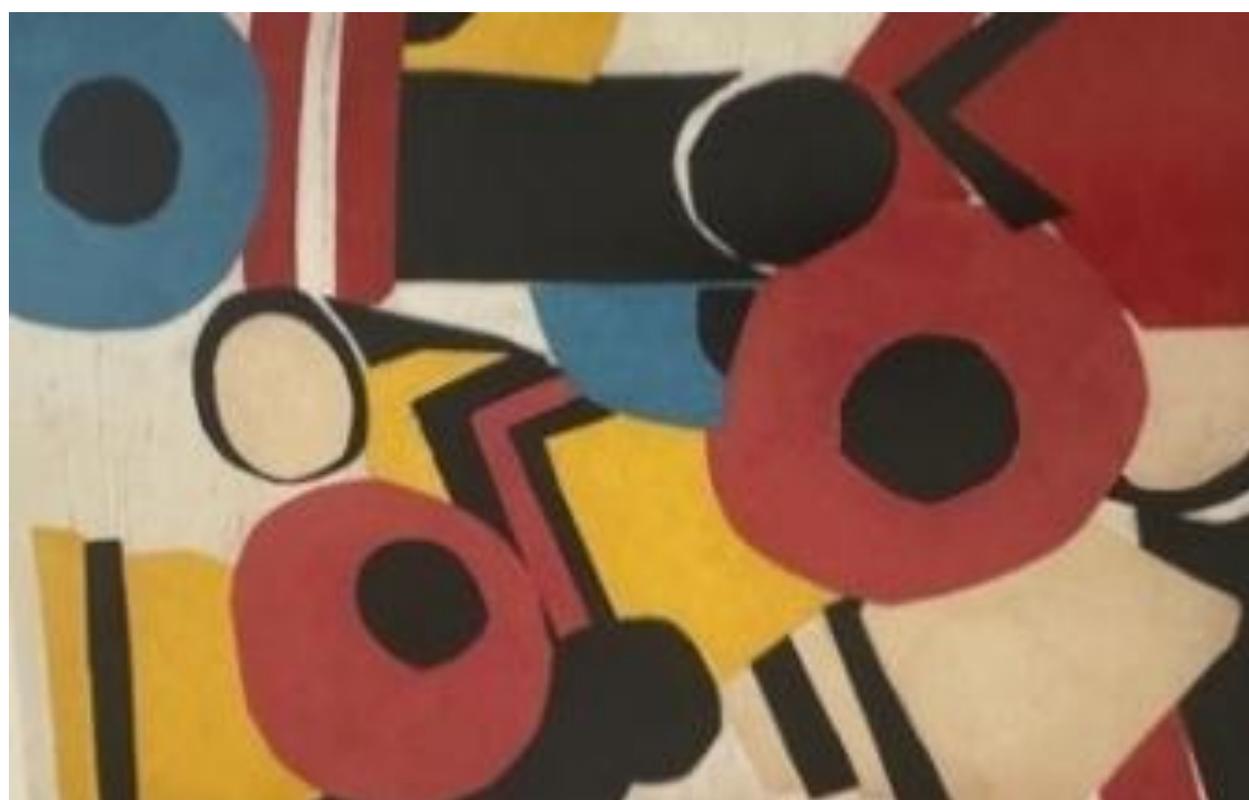


Figure 12 All Sorts. (Carter)

Throughout *Shadow Dance*, Ghislaine is constrained within a visualised framework of victimhood; her subjugation functioning as a symbolic articulation of repressed male desires to objectify and violate the female body. Echoing the disarticulated forms of Bellmer's dolls, she is severed from any authentic subjectivity, instead becoming emblematic of a constructed 'feminine' icon, an aestheticised image of desire devoid of agency that Carter seeks to criticise. Morris's fantasies, particularly his compulsion to test the limits of Ghislaine's endurance, expressed in his wish to "see how far she would go before reaction set in" (Carter 132), underscore her identity as a conduit for his surrealist, psychosexual projections. This dynamic has prompted critical responses such as Jennifer Gustar's, who contends that the novel constitutes "a sinister act of male impersonation that leaves little room for female agency" (Gustar 2), further critiquing its alleged "glamorisation" (35) of victimhood and its deployment of gratuitous violence against women. Nevertheless, *Shadow Dance's* critical value lies in its engagement with visual and literary iconography to interrogate the aesthetic mechanisms by which female suffering has historically been romanticised and commodified. The novel's unsettling portrayal of Ghislaine operates not merely as a reproduction of misogynistic tropes but as a commentary on the cultural apparatuses that sustain them.

THE PASSION OF NEW EVE: THE PERFORMANCE OF FEMININITY AND THE IMPACT OF FEMINIST ART.

The Passion of New Eve is one of Carter's less well-known but more controversial novels. It is a semi-theoretical narrative that follows the British literature professor Evelyn from his arrival in America through his forced transformation into a woman, an act framed as reparation for his misogynistic past. The narrative perspective shifts as Evelyn, now Eve, navigates escape, sexual abuse, and an encounter with film idol Tristessa, who is revealed to be a biological man, performing a fractured ideal of femininity for a patriarchal gaze.

The novel's belated prominence in academic study came about as researchers reflected on the contentious challenge it presented to "the widespread contemporary feminist belief that violence emanates from an exclusively male source." (Makinen 150). Its recent resurgence of interest has largely stemmed from its strikingly prescient engagement with "what might now be termed transgender politics" (Caroll 20). However, Angela Carter herself was explicit about her intentions. In an interview in 1984 with John Haffenden, she clarified: "The central character is a transvestite movie star. I created this person to say some quite specific things about the cultural production of femininity." (para 11). In keeping with Carter's own framing, this chapter focuses on femininity rather than on the queer theoretical readings that have since been retrospectively applied to the novel. This chapter will argue that *The Passion of New Eve* should be read as Carter's response to the feminist art of the 1960s and 1970s, which was deeply invested in exposing gender as a performative construct, one scripted by cultural icons rather than grounded in women's lived experience. To articulate this, I draw on Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of gender as a performance shaped by myth and social expectation: "It is evident that woman's 'character', her convictions, her values, her wisdom, her morality, her tastes, her behaviour, are to be explained by her situation [...] and derives somewhat from myth, somewhat from make-believe" (590–592). David Gauntlett similarly describes femininity as "just one of the performances that women can choose to employ in everyday life

– perhaps for pleasure, or to achieve a particular goal” (9). Through these frameworks, I will analyse the figures of Eve and Tristessa, who each perform societally defined femininity and thus Carter’s depiction of femininity as an imposed script that her characters must inhabit, resist, or reconfigure.

The Passion of New Eve was initially received with incredulity. Overcome by the pace at which Carter addressed multiple ideas, those unfamiliar with her writing described it as “leaping from one improbability to the next” (Ackroyd para 3), seemingly unaware that Carter’s novels were deeply allegorical. Something of an academic in-joke that those like Peter Ackroyd, who wrote of the book with little sympathy, were not, seemingly, in on. Conversely, Robert Nye reflected in *The Guardian* that Carter “has made something of a speciality of novels and stories in which rusty Gothic weapons are repolished and then employed to open up some pretty modern wounds” (para 4). In *The Passion of New Eve*, these “gothic weapons” take the form of visual archetypes of gender, which are so deeply embedded in cultural consciousness that their absurdity often goes unnoticed. Relatedly, Carter described the novel as “a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity” (Carter 60), and she exposes this construction through graphic depictions of female sexual violence. By allowing women to enact the violence to which they are most commonly subjected, she moves them beyond their culturally imposed “victim status” (Carter 56). Through which she worked to destabilise the stereotype of the ‘perfect victim’ that society encourages women to embody. As Charley Baker argues, Carter’s victims “demonstrate a range of very different yet equally valid responses to their experiences, responses which often differ from social expectations of victims [...] In this respect, Carter displaces the myths defined as ‘certainties’, which are held about victims” (Baker 3). In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter defines the ‘perfect victim’ as one who believes that unyielding “piety, gentleness, honesty, [and] sensitivity” in the face of violence “will do some good.” (56). By depicting women who respond to violence with violence, she opens up imaginative space for female individuality, beyond the confines of what is socially prescribed. As she writes of de Sade’s work, “women may see themselves as they have been, and it is an

uncomfortable sight” (36). Carter’s fiction confronts this discomfort directly, challenging a cultural legacy in which aestheticised suffering has conditioned women to internalise and reproduce restrictive roles. However, many of Carter’s second-wave contemporaries argued that **any** representation of sexual violence merely reinforced women’s ‘victim status’. Andrea Dworkin, for instance, contends in *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* that representations of sexual violence teach each generation of men that “the norm of femininity [...] is masochism. Force actualises femininity. Pain is pleasure for the woman [...] the normal female demands the force, the violence, the pain” (Dworkin 193). However, *The Passion of New Eve*, particularly when read alongside contemporary feminist art, can be understood as a nuanced and necessary intervention in the debates between ‘anti-pornography feminists’ and ‘libertarian, sex-radical feminists’ (Bracewell 26) despite Dworkin’s dismissal of Carter’s work as a “flight of fancy” (85).

Contemporary to the publication of *The Passion of New Eve*, artists like Judy Chicago were reclaiming misogynistic icons to advance their feminist agenda, harnessing the power of female iconography for a newly aligned common goal: female artistic emancipation. Chicago’s famous installation, *The Dinner Party* [Figure 13], is a significant example. This artwork features 39 place settings on an enormous triangular table, each representing a real or fictional woman of significance. The installation was constructed with the aid of hundreds of women and was praised for its promotion of ‘female arts’ like embroidery, which have historically been invalidated as art. However, the installation received significant criticism. For example, Lolette Kuby suggested in her *Frontiers* article that “Playboy and Penthouse had done more to promote the beauty of female anatomy than *The Dinner Party*” (para 4). Chicago used the imagery of the vagina across several plates to represent the female identity of her subjects, drawing on a symbol typically used to distil women into merely a vapid sexual representation. This caused significant issues for several feminist critics who, like Linda Nochlin, believed that: “No subtle essence of femininity would seem to link the work of Artemisia Gentileschi, Angelica Kauffmann, Rosa Bonheur, etc. [...] In every instance, women artists and writers

would seem to be closer to other artists and writers of their own period and outlook than they are to each other.” (5). By separating female artists, as Judy Chicago has done with the likes of Artemisia Gentileschi [Figure 14], by gender alone, she has distilled their individual personhood into a sexual icon, thus alienating them from an art canon which would never differentiate the likes of Caravaggio or Dali as ‘male artists’; they are just artists. As I imagine Carter would concur, Judy Chicago’s artwork reduced the individual lives of real and mythological women into kitsch vaginal dinner plates. Such representations reiterate the male-centric notion that femininity can be condensed into the possession of a “nether mouth” (Carter 5) by which women are often singularly defined. Some of Chicago’s place settings are particularly egregious. *Judith* [Figure 15], for example, represents the biblical figure Judith from the deuterocanonical *Book of Judith*, in which she decapitates the general of the force oppressing her people. She has become a figure of female power and retribution, something a vagina-themed dinner plate does not accurately capture. Angela Carter, in response to this wave of artwork, wrote a novel that critiques the icons themselves, used by both men and women alike. While Carter was critiquing iconography, her ‘feminist sisters’ were engaged in the feminist sex wars; the colloquial name referring to the warlike debates between feminists during the 1970s and 1980s. Inaugurated at the 1982 Barnard Conference on Sexuality (Bracewell 26), the feminist sex wars were the coalescence of debates between ‘anti-pornography feminists’ and ‘libertarian, sex radical feminists.’ Gayle Rubin, a significant member of the debates, wrote of the experience that:

“They [anti-pornography feminists] attempted to excommunicate from the feminist movement anyone who disagreed with them, and they aggressively sabotaged events that did not adhere to the antiporn party line. Their conduct left a bitter legacy for the feminist movement. Like many others involved in the sex wars, I was thoroughly traumatised by the breakdown of feminist civility and the venomous treatment to which dissenters from the antiporn orthodoxy were routinely subjected.” (5)

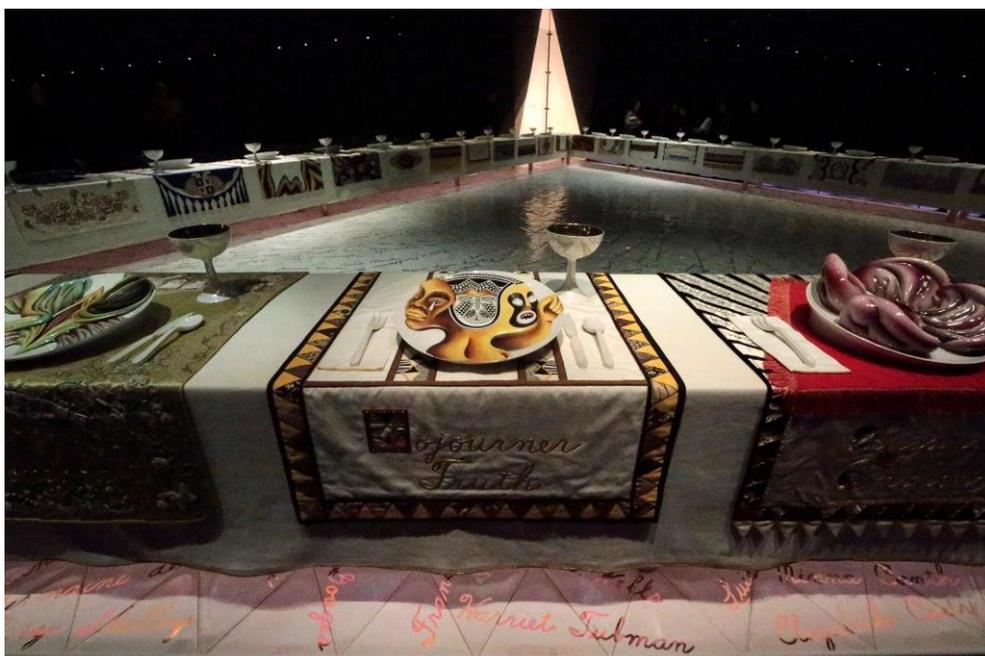


Figure 13: *The Dinner Party*. (Chicago)



Figure 14: The Dinner Party, Gentileschi. (Chicago)



Figure 15: The Dinner Party, Judith. (Chicago)

With similar animosity, Gordon recalls Carter explaining her relationship with her feminist peers, “when my sisters think of me – and I do not for a moment imagine that they do that very often – they see me as a small quantity of an Uncle Tom.” (215). Through this euphemism, which relates to the ‘Uncle Tom’ in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Carter expressed how many of her feminist peers believed that her feminist views and writings were subservient to her oppressor (male sensibilities), as Uncle Tom was to the ‘whites’ in Stowe’s novel. The publication of *the Sadeian Woman*, semblances of which can be seen in *The Passion of New Eve*, did nothing to dissuade this opinion. Carter was ostracised on account of her attempt to find a middle ground between the opposing contemporary positions that “did not exhaust the possible feminist perspectives on sexual pleasure, sexual freedom, and danger.” (Ferguson 110). Carter’s ambivalence towards pornography, despite the “sisters” critique, is evident in *The Passion of New Eve* and several essays in *Shaking a Leg*. In her analysis of the porn star Linda Lovelace, for example, she writes,

“Now I am permitted as much libidinal gratification as I want. Yippee! However, who permits me? Why, the self-same institutions that hitherto forbade me! So, I am still in the same boat, though it has been painted a different colour. I am still denied authentic sexual autonomy, perhaps even more cruelly than before, since now I have received permission to perform hitherto forbidden acts. So, I have acquired an illusory sense of freedom that blinds me more than ever to the true nature of freedom itself.” (73).

Though she does not critique the existence of pornography as a whole, Carter contends that representations of women in pornography, as in other examples of visual media, are severely limited because they do “not encompass the possibility of change” (1979, p. 1). She critiques the “alienation” (Carter 402) between the sexes, produced by the necessity of suspending disbelief to consume pornography for its intended use as a masturbatory aid: “pornography, almost more than any other cinematic genre, must depend on its audience suspending disbelief” (Carter 152). Similarly, Abrams writes that the total prohibition of pornography would “obscure the ambiguity and variety of women's sexual engagements and discourage

more particularised investigation into women's sexual pleasure" (311). Despite such benefits, pornography has been misused as inspiration for the perpetration of violent sexual crimes, as Dworkin describes, though this is not the fault of the pornography itself. Studies such as those by Emily Mellor and Simon Duff have since demonstrated that "It consistently appears that men who sexually offend report less exposure to pornography and that exposure to pornography does not result in more harm being caused to the victim." (125). To further corroborate Carter's pro-pornography (more realistically described as ambivalent) position, it has been argued that the complete banning of pornography would do significantly more harm to women than its continued, legislated production. As she would discover in Japan, "Pornography has always been a fact of life" (Bertin, 2) even within the most "astoundingly respectable" societies (Carter 9).

Despite being fundamentally integrated into the contemporary feminist debates of the 1970s, *The Passion of New Eve* is not generally viewed as an example of second-wave feminist fiction, particularly since part of her criticism is directed at them. For example, "Mother's (admittedly rather absurd) version of 'feminism'" (Gamble 108) can be read as constituting a witty and vicious critique of Carter's contemporary Valerie Solanas and her vitriolic S.C.U.M. (Society for Cutting Up Men) manifesto. Solana's proposal advocated for the removal of men from modern society as they were unfit to function in her proposed matriarchy: "he is at best a bore, an inoffensive blob." (Solanas 2). The matriarchal colony Beulah (Carter 47), in which Evelyn is raped and forcefully 'transitioned', parodies Solanas' proposed utopia in which women "come to see the utter uselessness and banality of the male" (Solanas 2). The citizens of Beulah live underground in service of their "Great, [...] self-anointed, self-appointed prophetess [...] breasted like a sow" (Carter 60) Moreover, they commit acts of heinous violence, not dissimilar to the violent rape and oppressive governing of any patriarchy, as a police officer warns Evelyn in New York: "Women are angry. Beware, Women!" (Carter 11).

In addition to reflecting contemporary feminism, Carter's novel is firmly rooted in the historical context of 1960s and 1970s America. Carter first travelled to the United States in 1969. She found Manhattan, the basis for her dystopian portrayal of the cityscape in *The Passion of New Eve*, "a very, very strange, and disturbing and unpleasant and violent and terrifying place ... The number of people who offered to do me violence was extraordinary." (Gordon) She later described the novel as "only a very slightly exaggerated picture, not of how it was in New York but of how it felt that summer" (Gordon 134) "That summer" refers to 1969, marked by the pivotal Stonewall Riots, police clashes with the Black Panthers and the recent withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. This period was also a time of widely reported cases of gender reassignment surgery and the publication of several transsexuals' autobiographies, of which *Tristessa* is a pertinent reflection. Carter used America as the tumultuous backdrop for her novel, as it provides the perfect setting for her controversial overturning of traditional feminist ideas. As Evelyn says, "Historicity in America goes more quickly [...] than the elegiac measures of the old world [Europe]" (Carter 93). Thus, new doctrines can be integrated much more easily into the fast-moving historical narrative of America. This allows Carter to make a commentary that "pre-empted, by nearly two decades" (Ramos, 2014, p. 167), the complex study of gender in relation to violence against women.

THE 'CONSOLATORY NONSENSE' OF FEMALE ICONS

The Passion of New Eve begins with an introduction to Tristessa, the Monroe-like silent film star, who laments the “inadequacy of our symbols [to express our inner experience] [...] we cannot blame our symbols for their fleshy manifestations” (Carter 6). This is incredibly ironic, considering Tristessa¹ is Carter’s most explicit manifestation of iconic falsity; they are a kitsch replica of womanhood, constructed from an amalgam of icons, all of which are vapid bastardisations of the female experience that, in fact, fail to capture the truth of practice compellingly. The anti-mythic nature of this novel was asserted by Carter herself, “I wrote one anti-mythic novel in 1977, *The Passion of New Eve*” (60) and was further corroborated in her interview with Anna Katsavos where Carter asserted that she was in the “demythologising business [...] trying to discover what certain configurations of imagery in our society, in our culture, truly represent, what they mean, beneath the semi-religious coating that makes people reluctant to intervene”.

The ‘Mother Goddess’ was Carter’s first significant target in *The Passion of New Eve*. She believed that Mother Goddesses were simply an aesthetic reconfiguration of the oppression represented by Father Gods. For example, she wrote in *The Sadeian Woman* that “Women using the invocation of hypothetical goddesses are flattering themselves into submission” (6). At the time, Mother Goddesses were used as icons by Second-wave feminist artists, such as Mary Beth Edelson [Figure 16], Ana Mendieta [Figures 17], and Judy Chicago, to communicate their desire for female community, power, and recognition. Ana Mendieta, for example, explained that her “ties with the earth are the reactivation of primaeval beliefs [...] [in] an omnipresent female force” (Ramos 1). The popularity of the so-called ‘Goddess Movement’ was substantiated by publications such as those by Carol Christ and Mary Daly, who identified examples of Goddess worship in classical society and presented these communities as

¹ For this dissertation the pronoun “they” will be used to describe Tristessa.

idealised safe havens for women. Carter described this type of reflective history in *Edward Shorter: A History of Women's Bodies* as “the ongoing squabble with those silly sisters who, for ideological reasons, wish to deny the intractable nature of the past” (Carter 91). Despite the factual inaccuracies of these ‘goddess worship’ claims, in reaction to the lack of social freedoms afforded to women, Cold War austerity and the Western focus on Abrahamic male Godheads, the art of the women’s rights movement shifted focus to the icon of the Goddess. Carter’s opposition to Mother Goddesses stemmed from her criticism of icons. She believed that images simplifying entire groups alienated the sexes from each other and were partly responsible for the ongoing abuse of women. For example, “the probe and the fringed hole, twin signs in graffiti” (Carter 4) reduce men and women to their sexual functions, neglecting the emotional completeness of the person behind the icon and thus absolving the abuse; an image cannot be abused, and an image is not a person. As Carter herself states, “One cannot generalise about any breast [...] To generalise is to lose the woman to whom they belong” (Carter 126).

In addition to her rejection of mother goddesses, Angela Carter returns to the concept of the ‘perfect victim’ and its damaging nature as a significant impediment to women’s social and sexual emancipation. In *The Passion of New Eve*, Tristessa represents the ‘perfect victim’ with a more explicit focus on the performative nature of social womanhood, a focus that Ghislaine (the previous iteration of this icon) failed to capture. The secretly transvestite film star Tristessa de Saint Ange is celebrated for her performance of victimhood, called a ‘perfect woman’ despite their adherence only to the societal abbreviations of womanhood seen in art and film. Through Tristessa, whom the reader can clearly identify as performative, Carter questions why these performances are not recognised in the lives of everyday women. Must it really take a biological man enacting the archetypes of womanhood to demonstrate the performative nature of female icons? Evelyn, the novel’s narrator, described Tristessa within the opening pages as exhibiting “a pain, whose nature [...] was the very essence of [her] magic” (5). As such, Tristessa is imagined as the latest iteration of Carter’s effort to destabilise the

myth of the 'perfect victim.' Tristessa achieves this by performing as an idealised version of femininity, until they are revealed as not being female at all: "out of the vestigial garment sprang the rude red-purple insignia of maleness." (Carter 128). This revelation is foreshadowed in the opening pages in which Tristessa is described as executing their existence in "arabesques of Kitsch" (Carter 5). Kitsch is a "tacky replica which seeks to deconstruct [an object's] origins in high culture" (Ulewich, 2) through the acknowledgement of its ironic nature. By describing Tristessa as kitsch, Carter acknowledges the garish falsity with which Tristessa performs a role that society believes embodies the inherent, truthful experience of femininity. As a result, the archetype of the 'perfect victim', which Tristessa embodies, is revealed as inherently unstable; its representation is mediated through a performer whose identity contradicts the role:

"That had been why he had been the perfect man's woman. He had made himself into a shrine of his own desires, had made of himself the only woman he could have loved! [...] Tristessa, the sensuous fabrication of mythology." (Carter 128)

Carter characterises Tristessa as a man performing a man's perception of a woman. Congruently, Tristessa believes that victimhood is inherent to femininity, arguing that "solitude and melancholy [...] is a woman's life" (Carter 125) This viewpoint, Carter argues, is the result of pornographic icons: "the universal pictorial language of lust [...] that we accept as universal because, since it has always been so, we conclude that it must always remain so" (Carter, 4) This is a type of imagery that notoriously "disparages women and treats them as victims" by presenting the woman as a performer of the "woman icon" (Mulvey-Roberts 190). While simultaneously concealing her own falsity, Tristessa exposes the icon's constructed, illusory nature.

The *Passion of New Eve* was written during the period in which Carter's fascination with the French pornographic writer, the Marquis De Sade, began. During this time, she was fervently engaged with the social function of pornography and its associated icons.



Figure 16: Some Living American Women Artists. (Edleston)



Figure 17: On Giving Life (Mendieta)

Carter has located the construction of female victimhood within the iconography of pornography. She argues that “pornography reinforces the false universals of sexual archetypes” such as the perfect victim, “because it denies [...] the social context in which sexual activity takes place.” (Carter 19). Similarly, for Andrea Dworkin, pornography functions as a cultural apparatus that eroticises women’s subjugation, sustaining the myth of the ‘perfect victim.’ She observes, “The most enduring sexual truth in pornography [...] is that the normal female desires sexual violence, needed by her [...] She, perpetually coy or repressed, denies the truth that pornography reveals” (Dworkin 194). Carter’s fiction engages with this exact ideological mechanism, dismantling the allure of passive, idealised femininity by revealing it as a performative construct that serves patriarchal desire. In addition to her interest in Sade’s pornographic icons, Carter has drawn inspiration from her characters. To further undermine the ‘perfect (female) victim archetype that Tristessa represents, she is both similar to the perpetually victimised Justine and endowed with the same surname, “de St. Ange,” as Madame de Saint-Ange, the boudoir mistress of De Sade’s *La philosophie dans le boudoir*. The conflation of these figures proves that the ‘perfect female victim’ is a sexual fetish more so than a real identity. As Mulvey Robert observes, Tristessa is only attractive to Evelyn because she is not a real woman, only an icon: “real, but not substantial” (Carter 6). Thus, the ‘perfect victim’ serves as a socially imposed standard to which women are expected to conform, ultimately reinforcing male-centric ideals and prioritising men’s sexual gratification over women’s autonomy and lived experiences.

FEMINIST PERFORMANCE ART AND THE CONCERT OF WOMANHOOD

Throughout Carter's work, she demonstrates that femininity, in its socially recognised form, is a performance constructed for the male observer. She was postulating similar ideas to Simone de Beauvoir, who contended that "If her functioning as a female is not enough to define woman, if we decline also to explain her through 'the eternal feminine', and if nevertheless we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question: what is a woman?" (14). As such, Carter defined gender-performance as a social enactment of archetypes done for personal or social recognition, to be seen, or not seen, as a woman. Once again, turning to the analysis presented by John Berger, the artistic iconography underlying the phenomenon of the female performance is clear:

"Men act, and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of a woman is typically male: the woman being surveyed. Thus, she turns herself into an object, and most particularly an object of vision: a sight." (42)

The relationship to oneself as a woman, as described above, is emulated by Tristessa; however, as has been established, Tristessa is a man performing the male fantasy of a woman, which, as they demonstrate, is the surveyed female perpetually victimised by her own objectification. Carter was "an artist herself" (Mulvey-Roberts 2) and therefore possessed an acute understanding of the mechanisms of viewing. *The Passion of New Eve* can thus be read as a response to the cultural surge of feminist art that emerged alongside the novel's publication: a moment in which female artists increasingly explored the performative nature of art and used their own bodies as material. Drawing on the legacy of Marcel Duchamp, whose work opened the door to creating art from any object or medium, feminist artists such as Carolee Schneemann [Figure 18] and Ana Mendieta began to employ their bodies in avant-garde works that directly interrogated gender and sexuality. Schneemann openly stated her desire for her body "to be combined with the work as an integral material" (Schneemann 116), a principle

she enacted through photographs of herself nude in her studio, surrounded by objects and textures that emphasised this integration. Earlier precedents, such as Yves Klein's *Anthropometries* [Figure 19], also shaped the artistic climate of the period. Klein used women's bodies as paintbrushes, coating them in pigment and pressing them against canvas to produce a series of organic imprints. Carter echoes and critiques this lineage in *The Passion of New Eve* through the figure of Mother, who transforms her body into a living canvas for religious iconography, undergoing repeated skin-graft surgeries to attach multiple teats and appear as a sow, nourishing her female followers. Mother's self-fashioning embodies the power shift of the 1960s and 1970s, a period in which women increasingly rejected their historical role as objects and asserted themselves as artists in control of their own representation.

Marina Abramović's controversial 1974 performance *Rhythm 0* [Figure 20] is a particularly striking example of this transition from subject to artist. To expose the conditions and vulnerabilities that shape women's experiences, Abramović declared herself "an object" in a Naples gallery and invited the audience to act upon her using any of the 72 objects laid out beside her, including a gun and a scalpel, without fear of legal consequence. *Rhythm 0* elucidated the precarious position of the female artist: even as women claimed authorship and artistic agency during this period, they remained acutely susceptible to violence, objectification, and the projections of others. Bearing in mind the feminist art of this period, which repeatedly foregrounds the victimisation of women, whether as subjects or as artists, it is reasonable to read *The Passion of New Eve* as, in part, Carter's response to the visual culture surrounding her. The novel critiques the persistent portrayal of women as perfect victims and receptacles of pain, a trope that endures even as women gain new freedoms as creators. This critique crystallises in the figure of Tristessa, whose carefully constructed falsity, and by extension, the falsity of the 'perfect woman', is exposed towards the end of the novel. During an encounter with a group of child militants, Tristessa dies abruptly and without grace: "An officer shot Tristessa immediately with his revolver" (156).



Figure 18 Eye Body #7. (Schneemann, Eye Body #7)



Figure 19: Anthropometries (Klein)

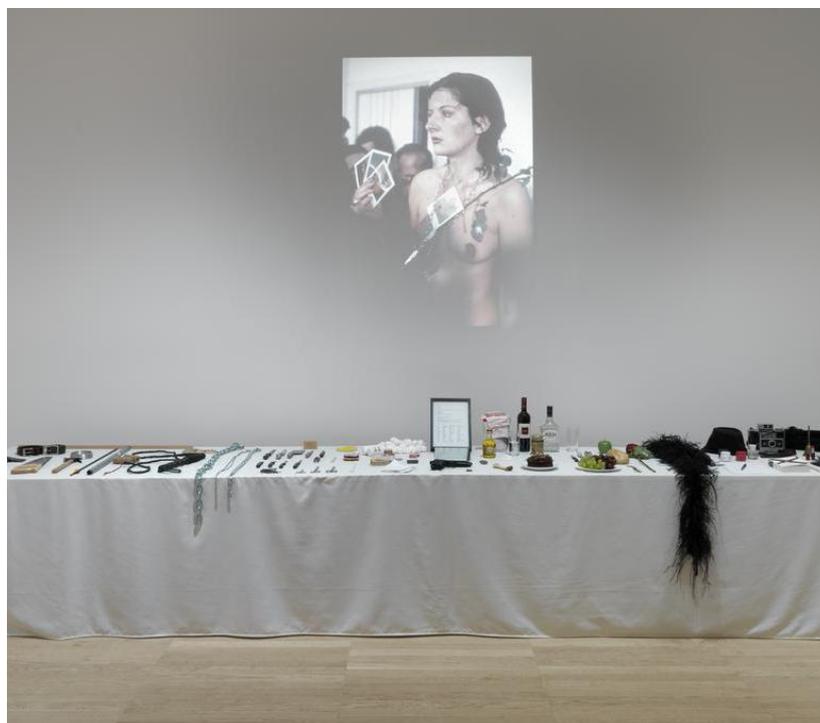


Figure 20: *Rhythm 0*. (Abramovic)

In dying unceremoniously, Tristessa is stripped of their iconographic aura; an icon has no meaning in death, and thus its supposed power is revealed as hollow. The setting of Tristessa's death, a liminal, lawless space outside the structures of society, further reinforces the emptiness of iconography. Removed from the social context that sustains it, Tristessa's identity collapses. By staging this moment, Carter exposes the intrinsic falsity of the icon Tristessa embodies: an identity that depends entirely on societal prejudice and projection. In the end, Tristessa dies not as an untouchable symbol but as an insignificant person amid an apocalyptic wasteland. It is precisely this collapse of the icon into the human that reveals the ideological mechanisms sustaining the myth of the 'perfect woman'.

Overall, *The Passion of New Eve* serves as a significant example of Carter's involvement with contemporary art, especially feminist performance art. Her examination of gender as a performative act rather than an innate trait highlights her link to both art and critical theory. Additionally, the novel expands on the demythologisation of the ideal victim, a theme introduced in *Shadow Dance*, by challenging its veracity through a character who embodies that image. By approaching iconography from a new perspective, Carter demonstrates its falsehood and significant negative effects on women. Ultimately, Carter's collaboration with her feminist peers foreshadows the feminist themes central to *The Bloody Chamber*, which would become a defining aspect of her work and career.

THE BLOODY CHAMBER: WOMAN AS EATEN OBJECT AND THE ADVENT OF FOOD ART.

As previously analysed by academics such as Emma Parker, Margaret Atwood and Sarah Sceats, food plays a significant role in Carter's deconstruction of social power dynamics. In particular, *The Bloody Chamber* uses food to critique the idea that women are objects of consumption, that "exist in a culture in which their bodies are, for whatever reasons, looked at, evaluated, and always objectified" (Fredrickson and Roberts 177). The collection opens with a reimagining of *Bluebeard*, centring on his infamous bloody chamber of ex-wives. From there, it unfolds into a series of feminist retellings in which the heroines gain the agency and power largely absent from their traditional counterparts. In this analysis, I will focus on *The Bloody Chamber* (Bluebeard), *The Lady of the House of Love* (Sleeping Beauty), *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* (Beauty and the Beast), and *Wolf Alice* (Little Red Riding Hood) as these stories most explicitly showcase Carter's use of appetite as a tool of demythologisation.

To successfully critique the concept of women as eaten objects, Carter's fiction contains, as Sceats explains, "prevalent [examples of] food eating and desire [...] the play of appetites is constant in her complicated representation of power and desire and the challenging of the status quo." (Sceats 7). Carter also draws on the cultural theory that "the sensual nature of eating now constitutes an optic through which to consider how identities and the relations between sex, gender and power are being renegotiated." (Probyn 14). Carter writes that her experience with food, and thus its position in her work, explores how "women, [have been] regarded as items of consumption" (Carter 75). She expounds on this critique of food semiotics in *Fat Is Ugly*, suggesting that the "the aesthetics of cooking and eating," (74) which appear in marketing and popular culture have compelled society into indulgence in "food-for-food's sake" (75), a type of gluttony that "characterises [the powerful] by their eating" (Parker 349). This, in turn, reinforces the subsidiary position of women, who are regarded as "non-eaters" (Parker 349). *The Bloody Chamber* writes against this idea,

influenced by the concurrent rise of feminist artists who wield food as imagery for their movement. They, like Carter, whose process of demythologisation worked in part to expose the desires within female archetypes, “often tug at the plumb lines marking bodies for gender [...] to expose their link with representational structures of desire.” (Schneider 3).

However, the concurrent development of feminist food art, which uses food to explore the female body as a “site of cultural and religious inscription” (Driscoll 3), has been underexplored in relation to Carter. Martha Rosler’s *Semiotics of the Kitchen* [Figure 21], for example, uses food and the figure of the housewife to illustrate “the transformation of the woman herself into a sign” (Rosler para 2). Rosler does this by “mimicking the television cooking demonstrations popularised in the 1960s by US cook and author Julia Child” (Rosler para 1), interspersed with expressions of her frustration with the domestic position of women. *The Bloody Chamber* uses the semiotics of food for a similar purpose, to challenge the notion that women are an edible commodity. In *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter equates the ‘perfect victim’ icon with the figure of the ‘woman as eaten object,’ allowing her to interrogate the woman/food dichotomy and demythologise this icon within a second-wave feminist context. Furthermore, by drawing on the fairytale genre and the sociological history of “appetite as a metaphor for sexual desire, possession, enslavement, and empowerment” (Probyn 2). Food also serves as a vehicle for parody: in *The Bloody Chamber*, it mocks the magical transformations typical of fairy tales, the very genre Carter rewrites. As Natalia Andrievskikh observes, “In fairy tales [...] the imagery of cooking allows for expression of female experience in contexts of transformation, creation, and empowerment” (11). For example, Goldilocks porridge, Snow White’s poisoned apple and the gingerbread house visited by Hansel and Gretel are all examples of food within the fairytale genre that affect the women of each story the most significantly.

The link between food and the objectification of women is articulated further by Fredrickson and Roberts in Objectification Theory: “Sexual objectification occurs whenever a woman’s body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated from her person [...] regarded as if they

were capable of representing her” (176). A similar process occurs when women are associated with food: their sexualised characteristics are made to stand in for their whole identity and are depicted as consumable matter. For example, Sarah Lucas’s *Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab* [Figure 22] foregrounds this dynamic by equating the image of a woman with the edible items named in the title: the eggs represent breasts and the kebab, a vagina.

Sarah Lucas was a member of the YBAs (Young British Artists) who emerged from Goldsmiths and the Royal College of Art in the late 1980s. They embraced an unrestricted approach to materials, and food frequently appeared in their work. Damien Hirst, another member, used food to critique consumer-driven culture, drawing inspiration from Andy Warhol. *The Last Supper* [Figure 23] explores the broader semiotics of food in relation to capitalist systems. This intersection of consumerism and feminism remains central in modern art, where women have long been positioned as commercial and consumable objects. The American art group ‘FLUXUS’ was also significantly inspired by food as an art medium; they embodied the ideas of Marcel Duchamp and the broader philosophy of ‘conceptualism’, prioritising the meaning of their art almost as highly as, if not more than, the art itself. Many influential female artists, such as Carolee Schneemann and Yoko Ono, were associated with this movement and made significant contributions to the critical analysis of the connection between women and food. Caroline Schneemann’s *Meat Joy* [Figure 24], in particular, elucidates the power struggle between women and their social characterisation as a commodity. She did this by picturing human performers crawling on the floor “playing with raw fish, meat, and poultry” (MoMA). By physically contrasting women and edible matter, Schneeman draws attention to the absurdity of equating the two, thereby undermining women’s status as objects of consumption. Schneeman described *Meat Joy* as, “an erotic ritual for my starved culture, with the body extended into raw fish and chickens and sausages [...] I wanted things to really break at the edges and to merge [...] The old patriarchal morality of proper behaviour and improper behaviour had no threshold” (Schneemann para 2). In drawing attention to the boundary between women and food, Schneemann acknowledges the inherent absurdity of their

connection; by attempting to “break at the edges and merge” with the meat in her performance, she forces the audience to acknowledge the boundary between women and food.



Figure 21 Semiotics of the Kitchen (Rosler)



Figure 22 Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab (Lucas, Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab)



Figure 23: *The Last Supper* (Hirst)



Figure 24: *Meat Joy* (Sheeman)

Sarah Lucas [Figure 25] builds on Sheeman's critique of the woman/food parallel by depicting women's sexuality as defined by edible matter; in doing so, she explicitly reflects the societal perception of women as inherently associated with food. In *Chicken Knickers* and the aforementioned *Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab*, Lucas uses common sexual symbols to "in turn implicate viewers" (Epps para 6), who recognise the otherwise abstract works as symbolic of the female form. The work of earlier art historian Linda Nochlin similarly ridicules the association of edible matter with the female form. In *Buy My Bananas* [Figure 26], Nochlin parodies an anonymous 19th-century photo of a woman holding a tray of fruit against her breasts by photographing a man holding a tray of bananas up to his penis. She draws attention to this visual interrelation by contrasting male and female figures holding fruit alongside the respective body part for which that fruit is often used as a representative. The double entendre of the title humorously undermines men's buying power by equating them with a saleable product. The male depiction in *Buy My Bananas* also draws attention to the normalisation of female objectification by contrasting it with an objectified male. Likewise, Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) uses food within the familiar fairytale genre to take a bite out of the apple of misogynistic imagery and reveal its rotten core; the "bitten apple" will not be able to "flesh out its scar again" once its rotten nature has been revealed. (Carter, 142).



Figure 25 Chicken knickers (Lucas)

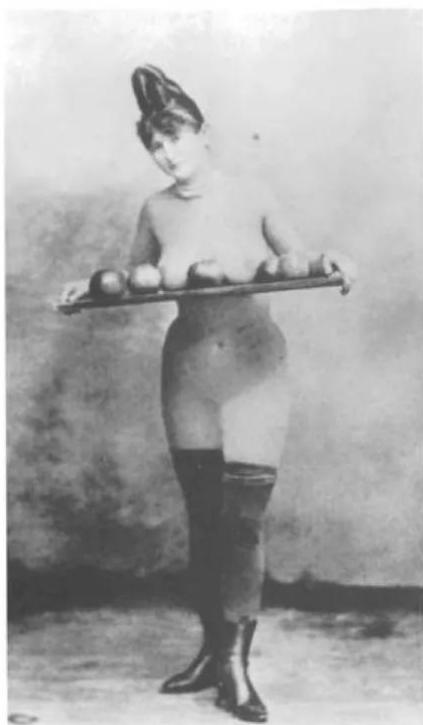


Figure 26: Buy my Bananas (L. Nochlin) [left image of naked male]

MONSTROUS EATERS AND THE RECLAMATION OF THE APPETITE

For the young wife in *the Bloody Chamber* short story, eating is an enactment of her agency; her own act of eating demonstrates her rebellion against being eaten herself. Although she remains unnamed throughout the story, unable to enact agency through the sense of personhood a name conveys, her food choices are well documented; as such, it is clear that food epitomises her acquisition of agency, as it is foregrounded above other significant elements of her identity. She begins as an edible object; her primary identity is that which can be eaten: “a Christmas gift of crystallised fruit” (Carter 1) and a “bare lamb chop” (9). Atwood describes her as, “exactly the kind of protected maiden de Sade delights in having his evil folk ravish, humiliate and kill [...] she is the object of perverse male desires.” (Atwood 123). The “disheveling” loss of the protagonist’s virginity (Carter 4) is also described as a meal for her husband, “stripped [...] as if the leaves off an artichoke” (Carter 11). By equating her to food and thus lacking her own appetite, Carter has highlighted the prevalent view of women as being devoid of sexual appetite and more attractive in this lack.

The reclamation of the young wife’s appetite instigates her journey to agency. For example, following her husband’s departure from the castle, she orders an extravagant dinner menu, decreeing choice in the singular sphere of her experience over which she can exert power. She requests, “A Fowl in cream – or should I anticipate Christmas with a Varnished Turkey? No; I have decided. Avocado and shrimp, lots of it [...] every ice-cream in the ice box [...] I had shocked her. Such tastes!” (Carter 21). As Pires observes, “Her list reflects defiance and free will” (Pires 244). As such, the young wife’s choices of food and power over consumption define her state of agency. The narrative’s prevalence of food and the multitude of depictions of eating exemplify its importance as a semiotic of female agency. The heroine eats “sticky liquor chocolates, a Mexican dish with pheasant [...] voluptuous cheese, acrid coffee, and croissants” (20). Despite the extravagance available to her, she ultimately requests “sandwiches and a

flask of coffee” (22). This choice defines her as someone other than the object of consumption her husband has groomed her to be, and not a violent consumer herself.

The reclamation of appetite as an emancipatory act is explored further in *Lady of the House of Love*, in which the traditional eater/eaten dichotomy or “those who are preyed upon and those who do the preying” (Atwood 118) is upended through the portrayal of women as the primary consumers and progenitors of food. The narrative's continual assertion of the countess's appetite serves as a direct comparison to the traditional male fairy tale figures who possess substantial appetites; “hunger overcomes her” (110), and she is “ravenous” (108). The novel's secondary consumers are the countesses' victims; these young men are given food, though they are never explicitly depicted as eating it: “The countess herself will serve them coffee and little sugar cakes” (Carter 110). Thus, the countess retains her position of power as she is the only figure ever depicted eating. The countess's vampiric nature characterises her as a particularly monstrous consumer. For example, as Emma Parker argues, “the vampire-woman is one category of the monstrous-feminine” (Parker 8), “a woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject.” (Creed 7). Barbara Creed coined the term ‘monstrous feminine’ in her film analysis of the same name, in which she describes the female vampire as:

The most persistent threat to the institution of heterosexuality [...] comes from the female vampire. Once bitten, the victim is never shy. [...] The female vampire is abject because she disrupts identity and order; driven by her lust for blood, she does not respect the dictates of the law, which set down the rules of proper sexual conduct. (Creed, 131)

The countess's othering, on account of being a vampire, can be seen as a parallel to the othering of women in broader society; thus, her reclamation of the consumer identity is representative of the notion that women should refuse to be objects of consumption and eat their way into power. Notably, the countess is the “hereditary commandment of the army of shadows who [...] make milk curdle and butter refuse to come” (Carter 109). The specific nature of her

vampiric power's manifestation corroborates the countess's control over food. As the controller of sustenance, the countess cannot herself be a 'victim' or an 'eaten object'. Her power to "make milk curdle" (109) is particularly significant because milk production is a capability shared by most mammals, including humans. As a result, Breast milk has become a staple of taboo modern art and a site of exploration for the comparison between women and animals. *Dutch Mother's Milk Cheese* [Figure 26], for example, is a cheese made from the artist Poppe's breast milk, a process she documented. The countess's ability to curdle milk removes her further from the typical perception of women as the originators of sustenance.

By virtue of her vampiric nature, the countess is also a kind of cannibal, as Sceats writes, "cannibalism [is] an attractive trope for Carter" because "the giving and receiving of nourishment lies at the core of human bonding and [...] underpins adult sexuality." (Sceats 122). As such, Cannibalism, in much of the literature where it appears, represents a hyperbolic and grotesque expression of reclaiming appetite and, therefore, reclaiming sexuality. Its immorality is often associated with the corruption of gluttony and consumption. However, the English language is suffused with expressions of appetite regarding the consumption of women, 'eating out' and 'popping her cherry', among others, which negate the immorality of metaphorically cannibalistic practice when it is perpetrated against women. Jennifer Brown describes the feminist imagery of cannibalism as "privileging the mouth as a means of satisfying deep hungers" (Brown 191). Since women's mouths have long been a site of legislation and societal debate, it follows that reclaiming the mouth is a way to reclaim agency and the deep-seated hunger for equality. Sarah Sceats draws on the analysis of the female cannibal to categorise the types of cannibalism as "eating a loved one as an ultimate act of possession, eating to obliterate someone, or eating a brave enemy to become courageous" (Sceats 127). The cannibalistic nature of the Marquis in *The Bloody Chamber* short story mirrors Sceats' "act of possession" (Sceats 127). As such, the young wife's escape from this cannibalism is representative of her escape from her 'female destiny' as the 'eaten object' destined to be eternally "inspected like horseflesh" (Carter 10). As Margaret Atwood writes,

“the Bluebeard story [...] supplies a male protagonist who is about as close to de Sade’s cannibal Minski as anything in Carter, complete with Sadeian torture chamber” (Atwood 120). By virtue of this characterisation, the agentic nature of the heroine’s eating and escape from being eaten is all the more powerful; Minski, the cannibal count, is one of DeSade’s most fearful participants in edible ceremonies of patriarchal power. As Helen Simpson concurs, “The story is set in a castle on sea-girt Mont St Michel in fin-de-siècle France, with more than a nod to De Sade’s cannibal Minski and his lake-surrounded castle with its torture chamber and captive virgins” (Simpson para 11). The explicit reference to cannibalism, as evidenced by the similarities between Minski and the Marquis, highlights Carter’s ongoing interest in food as a metaphor for power. Emma Parker concurs that “[Carter’s] texts, mostly dark and disquieting, expose how the culturally sanctioned Sadeian philosophy of 'eat or be eaten' operates to oppress women.” (Parker 8). Going on to reason that “while Carter illustrates that the desire to control female consumption and to consume women is one means of exercising power over them, she also suggests that this desire is the product of male insecurity and, in particular, angst about the consequences of women's capacity to consume.” (9).

However, the edible nature of women engenders contradictory reactions. While there exists a significant “representation of women as meat, and of animals as feminised” (Douglas 7), the consumption of women in our language and our development triggers a dual abjection when we encounter the nature of women as both edible objects, progenitors of sustenance and as fellow human beings. Douglas cites Jess Dobkin’s 2006 performance piece *Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar* [Figure 27] to illustrate this boundary of abjection, in which adults were given the option of tasting the artist’s breast milk, as illustrative of the contradictory nature of women as edible objects, “only as flesh, and primarily as a metaphor for sexual consumption” (Douglas 7). With this in mind, Carter’s cannibalistic narratives indicate the possibility of women’s reclamation of both food production and its consumption.



Figure 26 Dutch Mother's Milk Cheese (Poppe)



Figure 27 Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar (Dobkin)

Keenan describes Carter's revisionary fairy tales as illustrative of how "the discursive structures we inherit are not inevitably monolithic or resistant to recasting." Going on to reason that "Carter presents the relationship between cultural structuration and human agency as dynamic and malleable" (Keenan 132) through the conflation of sexual and gastronomic appetite. Carter's concurrent publication of *the Sadeian Woman* establishes this connection in relation to pornography by "offering a prophetic intervention into the battle that was to ensue, writ most starkly between feminists campaigning against pornography and the counterarguments put forward by feminists opposed to censorship." (Keenan 132). As she would discover in Japan, pornography, the nude, the naked and other forms of sexual imagery "have always been a fact of life" (Bertin, 2) even within the most "astoundingly respectable" (Carter, 9) societies. The iconography of female figures in contemporary pornography, where images of sexual appetite appear with the most frequency, is not an isolated regime. These codes, often grounded in the aestheticisation of female nudity and the objectifying gaze, function as cultural scripts that inform and legitimise the pornographic imaginary; Carter has since become recognisable for her adeptness at putting "new wine in old bottles" (Sage 58).

Violent appetites are frequently represented through the figure of the whore. By drawing attention to the monstrosity of this figure, Carter has transformed the blunt instrument of the classical nude into a sharp tool for feminist dichotomy. The whore, or the woman, who "fucks in the active sense" (Carter 31), is the antithesis of the 'perfect victim' as has been represented by Ghislaine in *Shadow Dance* and Tristessa in *The Passion of New Eve*. As conceptualised by Carter, the Whore is a woman who, within the confines of limited female liberation, has achieved emancipation by monetising her primary asset: the performance of being "most immediately and dramatically a woman when beneath a man" (8). The Whore has been the subject of artistic fascination since her inception, owing to her dual function. She is represented, nude, as a way for the male spectator to view titillating or erotic images without fear of judgment. Kenneth Clarke argues that "no nude, however abstract, should fail to

arouse in the spectator some vestige of erotic feeling [...] if it does not do so, it is bad art. (8). As a result, it can be concluded that the icon of the whore, who is invariably depicted nude or semi-nude, has been created as the image through which the male spectator, as defined by John Berger, can indulge in his sexual fantasies, protected from criticism by the subject matter, who is herself the subject of substantial societal critique. Carter's most prolific whore is Juliette, the Sadeian Libertine, upon whom many of *The Bloody Chamber's* heroines are based in their use of the system to their advantage. To add to this, in *The Bloody Chamber* collection, the women who are engaged in a marriage or similar contractual agreements can be read as whores; Carter invites us to ponder what marriage is, if not prostitution to one man instead of many, stating "marriage is a form of legalised prostitution" (Carter 67). As she recollects in *Poor Butterfly*,

A friend of mine, [...] asked one of his Japanese students: 'What is the quality that you would require in a wife?' The student [...] replied in all seriousness: 'Slavery. I can get everything else I need from the bar hostesses. (Carter, 52)

As such, Carter's postulation of the similarity between being a whore and a wife aids in the demythologisation of the whore by identifying her presence as part of, not separate from, women who are married and would thus be characterised as more virtuous; Carter is presenting the whore as a woman of agency, rather than an object for the uncompensated viewing of the male gaze. A whore makes money from the service she is already providing by virtue of her identity as a woman (as an object), and in doing so, she has made the most out of a system that oppresses her. However, this is not an icon of Carter's own invention, but one she has borrowed from an artistic tradition of 'aware women' who look directly at the male observer, acknowledging his presence and thus breaking the observer's ability to consume her as an object, without first acknowledging her willing participation in this transaction. As Kristin Plys writes for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "The body had finally become a perfect and complete commodity with its own exchange value. The nude figure represented the 'new' prostitute who does not engage in the illusion of seduction but instead sells her body to anyone

who can pay.” (para 12). Carter’s interest in the whore and pornography as a perpetuator of iconography was clarified in Japan, where she discovered the presence of soft porn, in the form of the ‘hostesses’ profession, as well as explicit depictions in Japanese Shunga 春画. Shunga is a type of erotic art, typically executed in the ukiyo-e (woodblock print) style, depicting various sexual encounters, appealing to many across the Edo period, in which they were popularised. Carter’s interest in these prints may have arisen from their lack of Western constraints on depiction. As she explains in *Nothing Sacred*, her desire to visit Japan stemmed from its separation from Judeo-Christian moral laws that, since time immemorial, have governed much of the West’s iconography. As such, the imagery of pornography is readily available in Japan and carries significantly less social stigma. As the ‘Japan period’ closely preceded the publication of *the Bloody Chamber*, it is clear that the same thematic concerns are central. For example, *Fireworks: The Loves of Lady Purple* depicts a marionette Oiran (courtesan) who breaks free of her strings to kill her puppeteer. Lady Purple, the “Oriental Venus, [...] famous prostitute and wonder of the East” (Carter 17), wears “A glowing, winy purple gown splashed with rosy peonies, sashed with carmine,” which clearly identifies her with the historical fashion of the Japanese Oiran 花魁. Similar to De Sade’s Juliette, Lady Purple uses her position as a whore to reconfigure the society in which she finds herself devalued by virtue of her sex. The whore, however, is still governed by the patriarchal system that permits her economic success. For example, the countess depicted in *The Snow Child* short story, “dresses clad in a manner befitting a brothel, echoing Sade’s Juliette, just as the innocent but deathly snow child is an avatar of Sade’s Justine” (Keenan 137). As such, when her vindictive nature is not regarded as subversive “nor an escape from her patriarchal inscription” (Keenan 137), Carter reinforces the inability of icons to capture the breadth of female experience accurately and, as such, their insufficiency as tools with which to understand others. From this analysis, we can conclude that Carter remains a writer focused on drawing attention to and demythologising the icons that govern women’s experiences, rather than proposing solutions to these issues. Her use of the whore as an icon of womanhood is problematic insofar as it reiterates the idea

that icons govern women. However, it is more than enough to draw attention to this toxicity and question its place in culture.

The procurement of food is an important part of facilitating the monstrous appetite. In *the Lady of the House of Love's* narrative, the "governess" (Carter 110) is the primary agent of meal acquisition: "a crone in a black dress and white apron will invite you with smiles and gestures; you will follow her. The countess wants fresh meat." (Carter 110). Through this, Carter is alluding to the power of women over food, its procurement, production and preparation for ingestion. As Sceats writes, "the cook is, after all, in command of the ingredients, and may use this dominion either to reinforce or sabotage the status quo. Angela Carter exploits this possibility, [...] producing figures who disavow the archetype of woman as nurturing and caring cook and feeder, emphasising her power over those within the sphere of her catering instead." (Sceats, 210). Food procurement comes at the behest of the appetite, something that Carter's work in *the Bloody Chamber* seeks to reinvigorate as a female experience. She characterises the women with appetite as animalistic in some way, free of the "skins of a life in the world" (Carter 75). Through this, she draws attention to the societal othering of both women and non-humans. The oppositional experience to that of the 'eaten object' or 'victim' is that of the 'eating animal' or 'predator'. This differentiation is here inspired by Margaret Atwood's lamb/tiger dichotomy, which establishes the two positions of power as "lambhood and tigerishness" (Atwood 123). Although these are typically associated with femininity and masculinity, respectively, Atwood, in agreement with Carter, states that "a certain amount of lambhood and tigerishness can be found in individuals at different times." (Atwood 122). Beauty in *The Tiger's Bride* displays such tigerishness and thus appetite. Her transition represents her capability for sexual appetite and animality "he will lick the skin off me [...] beautiful fir," (Carter 75), by becoming animalistic in her acceptance and her appetite, but ultimately happy, Carter has presented women with the possibility of "that mixed blessing

[human complexity] which Carter valued above the 'consolatory nonsense' of absolutists, reductionist myth." (Atwood 135)

In many of Carter's texts, food holds a persuasive power over men in particular, just as the countless lures men to her with promises of food: "she rubbed her stomach, then pointed to her mouth [...] turning determinedly on her heel as though she would brook no opposition." (Carter, 1979, p. 112). Similarly, Beauty's father in *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* is drawn into uncompensated indulgence by the simple instructions "Drink me [...] Eat me" (Carter 45). Suppose the realms of eating and food are presided over by women. In that case, Carter's reclamation of power over men can be read as a feminist act of demythologization in which women are no longer 'edible objects' due to their foregrounded role as providers of said food. The power of food is explored in the art world through the work of Judy Chicago, who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, utilised the Dinner Party to depict influential women from across history and myth. This representation is notable because the dinner table carries implications of women's association with food, both as objects and as cooks. However, *the Dinner Party* received significant criticism on account of its representation of women as merely their vaginas on dinner plates: the most direct statement of women's edible nature. This narrative, artists like Cornelia Parker claimed, was "all about Judy Chicago's ego rather than the poor women she is supposed to be elevating – we are all reduced to vaginas, which is depressing. [...] not a very feminist gesture, but I do not think the piece is either." (Parker para 2) The critical reception of this piece highlights the growing displeasure among feminists with the persistent association of women with food. The popularity of food and eating as subjects in feminist art, concurrent with Carter's writing, including Nochlin's *Buy My Bananas* and Alison Knowles' *Proposition #1: Make a Salad*, reinforces the influence of these works on Carter's deconstruction of female icons.

In addition to being a female duty to provide food, eating has historically been perceived as a singularly female sin, as *Genesis 3:6*, tells us, woman's original sin was eating: "the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it" as a result women's consumption of edible matter is seen as harmful and sinful. As such, the act of eating has retained doctrinal meaning over the centuries, bolstered by the bodily purification touted as a result of Anorexia mirabilis or holy starvation. By transforming the act of eating into a feminist activity, Carter has made efforts to demythologise the iconography that depicts women as 'victims' and 'consumed', casting them instead as consumers. *The Sadeian Woman* bears significant similarities to *the collection The Bloody Chamber* in its analysis of cannibalistic narratives. De Sade's *Juliette* is a self-cannibalising figure of libertine sexuality who is defined by her insatiable appetite and takes part in various eating rituals as an assertion of her power. As Beatrice Fink writes, "eating, as ingestion, leads to absorption, hence dominance" (Fink 404). The edible lexicon of Sade's work is pervaded by coprophagy, the ingestion of human faecal matter: "Juliette soon accustoms herself to eating the shit of the great." (Carter 99) As such, a form of control is exerted through the ingestion of human matter: "The libertines usurp the primary physical freedom of the body [...] all must be consumed" (Carter 99). This overindulgence to the point of abject greed characterises the extremity of the female reclamation of eating; by reclaiming their appetite, women are engaging in a radical act, a shadow of which can be seen in the actions of the Marquis's young wife.

On the other hand, the starvation present in *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* represents the female reclamation of appetite as it relates to withholding. The narrative begins with an assertion of the woman as synonymous with domesticity. The text's heroine begins by looking "outside her kitchen window" (Carter 50), asserting the difference in the space allotted to women. Her lack of ownership reinforces her relegation to the realm of domestic food preparation; it is "her kitchen" because she is a woman forced to do "mean chores" (51) in this space by virtue of her sex. By beginning the text this way, Carter has established the icon of femininity she will

unravel as the narrative continues. Femininity has long been associated with starvation on account of the antithetical expectations of the male form to exhibit signs of physical strength and virility. As such, Mr Lyon's act of starvation undermines the narrative of women as "non-eaters" (Parker 349) by taking on that role himself. Ellen Driscoll argues that "The body functions to represent the collective fantasies and obsessions of a society." (Driscoll 6). By undermining traditional societal perception of the male and female body through the medium of food, Carter has removed women from their position as 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1975), imbued them with agentic power. *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* is therefore a subversion of the 'woman as victim' narrative as the male figure is victimised, unable to eat as a result of the woman's actions. Mr Lyon claims that he "could not eat" (Carter 54). On account of his lack of interaction with Beauty, though his tone is altered significantly, "I think I may be able to stomach a little breakfast today" (Carter 55) upon her return. As such, Carter restores women's agency by giving them the ability to give and withhold food. Elleman poses an alternative interpretation of starvation, "The emaciated body is the de-gendered body" (14), with this in mind, the act of starvation in which Mr Lyon engages can be seen as a complete deconstruction of the gender boundary of 'othering', as a result, Carter has created a space in which "certain amounts of tigerishness" (Atwood 121) This can be exhibited by both parties, as their gendered nature, as denoted by their habitual patterns of eating, has been disrupted. As Emma Parker surmises, "Heroines who are initially complicit in their victimisation are emancipated when they cease to collude in their subjection by rejecting their status as comestible. Increasingly, Carter stresses the mutability of roles, and as women become consumers, the nature of consumption changes accordingly." (Parker, 12).

MUTUAL EATING AND PERVERTING THE LAST SUPPER.

The most famous act of mutual eating is, of course, *The Last Supper*, the metaphorical cannibalisation of the body and blood of Christ by which all are cleansed and equalised. Despite Carter's unequivocal atheism, it would be remiss to claim that mutual eating as an act of equalisation does not appear, though admittedly more sexually in *the Bloody Chamber* collection. *The Company of Wolves* and *the Tiger's Bride* pose eating as an equalising act through which men and women can understand each other without the hindering iconography of social mediation, as Margaret Atwood writes, "Carter [...] is looking for ways in which the tiger and the lamb [...] can reach some sort of accommodation." (121). The animalistic nature of hunger is depicted in various illustrations by Anita Capewell. Her work on *The Tiger's Bride* [Figure 28] visually signifies the homogenising quality of mutual eating; the tigers in her illustration merge into one another, devoid of separating lines and thus devoid of power dynamics. Many of Carter's stories present mutual or collective eating as a solution to the power dynamics associated with gendered eating. As Parker contends, "Mutuality displaces domination to create a form of nourishment that is no longer premised upon the principle of negation, signalling a new development in Carter's representation of sexuality and the relationship between eating and power." (Parker, 16). In *The Tiger's Bride*, the climactic final scene depicts mutual/ complicit eating: "He will lick the skin off me" (75). By framing such an act as a positive shedding of societal iconography, Carter highlights the power of diverse representations in expanding women's experiences. Similarly, in *The Courtship of Mr Lyon*, Beauty's question, "Who prepared [her] meals?" (Carter 49), initiates this iconographic unravelling, drawing poignant attention to the power dynamics within the Beast's home. By refusing to attribute the domestic task of cooking to any particular character, Carter forces the reader to question to whom they ascribed this role.



Figure 28 The Tiger's Bride Monoprints (Capewell)

The lack of control both parties have over food highlights the equalisation of power dynamics in this narrative. Because both Beauty and Mr Lyon are othered on account of their immutable characteristics, neither possesses any inherent power over the other, and they are both food for each other. The short story concludes with them eating together, which symbolises the relative happiness that the mutual act of eating can bring: “If you would eat something with me.” (Carter 55). A similar power displacement is evident in *Wolf Alice*, where the two primary characters are othered for lacking humanity and are thus homogenised by their mutually unnatural appetites. Neither the “corpse eater” duke (Carter 141) nor the “not wolf nor woman” Alice (Carter 143) is troubled by each other’s appetites. “She encountered the duke with a leg of a man slung over his shoulder [...] she padded incuriously past.” (Carter 145). Through this acceptance, the idea of a ‘monstrous appetite’ is de-gendered. Thus, Carter draws attention to the banality of the woman-food equivalence and the notion that women with considerable appetites, whether edible or not, are monstrous figures in need of societal othering.

The contrasting figures of the heroines in *The Bloody Chamber* collection display Carter’s effort to demythologise the icon of the woman as an edible object through their agentic, aberrant consumption. By drawing attention to the connection between women as objects of consumption, Carter has made the act of consuming women uncomfortable, breaking the observer’s ability to consume the woman as an object without first acknowledging her willing participation in this transaction. The woman’s willingness in the transactional nature of her consumption makes her less desirable as the power dynamic between the ‘consumer’ and the ‘object of consumption’ is no longer clearly differentiated.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF ANGELA CARTER'S ARTISTIC IDENTITY

Catherine McCormack suggests that “the way forward is [...] by interrogating art and taking the opportunity to rethink the stories that have shaped our understanding of power and gender” (235) In light of this, my research has endeavoured to build on the works presented in *Strange Words: The Vision of Angela Carter* and the contribution of other scholars, to further this conjunctive area of study and elucidate the connection between Angela Carter and art. Although this research begins with an analysis of the well-documented connection among the Pre-Raphaelites, Surrealists, and Angela Carter, it later reveals areas of study that have received little attention. Carter spent a significant portion of her literary career demythologising the icons of social femininity through which women's lives are mediated. As such, it is clear that she was influenced by contemporary feminist debate, even if her engagement was limited to “sniping from the sidelines” (Gordon). This influence did, as I have shown, extend to the art world, with which she engaged in a multimodal act of demythologisation focused on the icon of the ‘perfect victim’, the “mythically suffering blonde” (Carter 117), which has confined generations of women to subordinate roles. Modern literary developments have shown a concerning development in our conceptualisation of individuality. While Carter was writing, women were still fighting for the right to their individuality; modern women’s individuality has been harnessed for profit. Icons of femininity are now being used as a tool of re-homogenisation. Within our capitalist society, individuality is often viewed as a necessity – how will you stand out to an employer, potential spouse, or investor if you are not an individual? Simultaneously, the community which we have been robbed of is sold back to us through reinvented icons of ‘aesthetics’ and in-groups. Since our consumer identity defines our power, to keep the patriarchal structure intact, women must be sold an identity or icon. By examining Carter’s work, we can see that these icons are essentially reinventions of those she critiqued, and that this knowledge carries substantial power. The perfect female victim is now the ‘coquette aesthetic,’ for which you can buy a multitude of

identifiable products on Amazon, Shein, and any number of other accessible retailers. In light of this, Carter's work is more important than ever for highlighting the need for a nuanced approach to re-evaluating how we conduct our interpersonal relationships. Her work demonstrates that diverse iconography enables us to take pride in our individuality while still maintaining our community and identity within the group, if we so desire. Therefore, continued research into these subjects elucidates the nature of the human condition and, as such, continues Carter's work in demythologising the icons that uphold the suppression of women.

In the first chapter, I analysed the influence of the Surrealists and the Pre-Raphaelites on Carter's work, particularly regarding the icon of the 'perfect victim' and the character of Ghislaine. A lot can be learnt from Carter's perpetual battle with this icon. As it stands today, the 'perfect victim' remains a prevalent blight on the lives of women, subtly coercing them into a state of martyred suffering from which they gain nothing. Likewise, *the Passion of New Eve*, somewhat prophetically, questioned the nature of socialised femininity and the degree to which our egoic mediations with the world are a performance. The feminist art of the 1970s, though influential, remains sorely under-researched in relation to Carter, despite the impact of her commentary. Therefore, further research in this area is necessary to fully understand Carter's impact. Finally, in discussing *the Bloody Chamber* collection alongside the emerging avant-garde 'food art' of the 1970s, I have drawn attention to aspects of Angela Carter's artistic influence that remain unexplored. In summary, Angela Carter was deeply influenced by a variety of art forms, and as a result, these influences appear frequently in works across her career. Through these references, she sought to demythologise the icons of femininity upheld by artistic depictions and, in the service of women, introduce a wider array of icons by which individuals could be defined. As Marie Mulvey Roberts poignantly recalls, "the fantastical and multi-dimensional work of Angela Carter is like a series of curious rooms or a textual cabinet of curiosities" (2019, p.1) from which a great deal about ourselves and our images can be surmised.

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