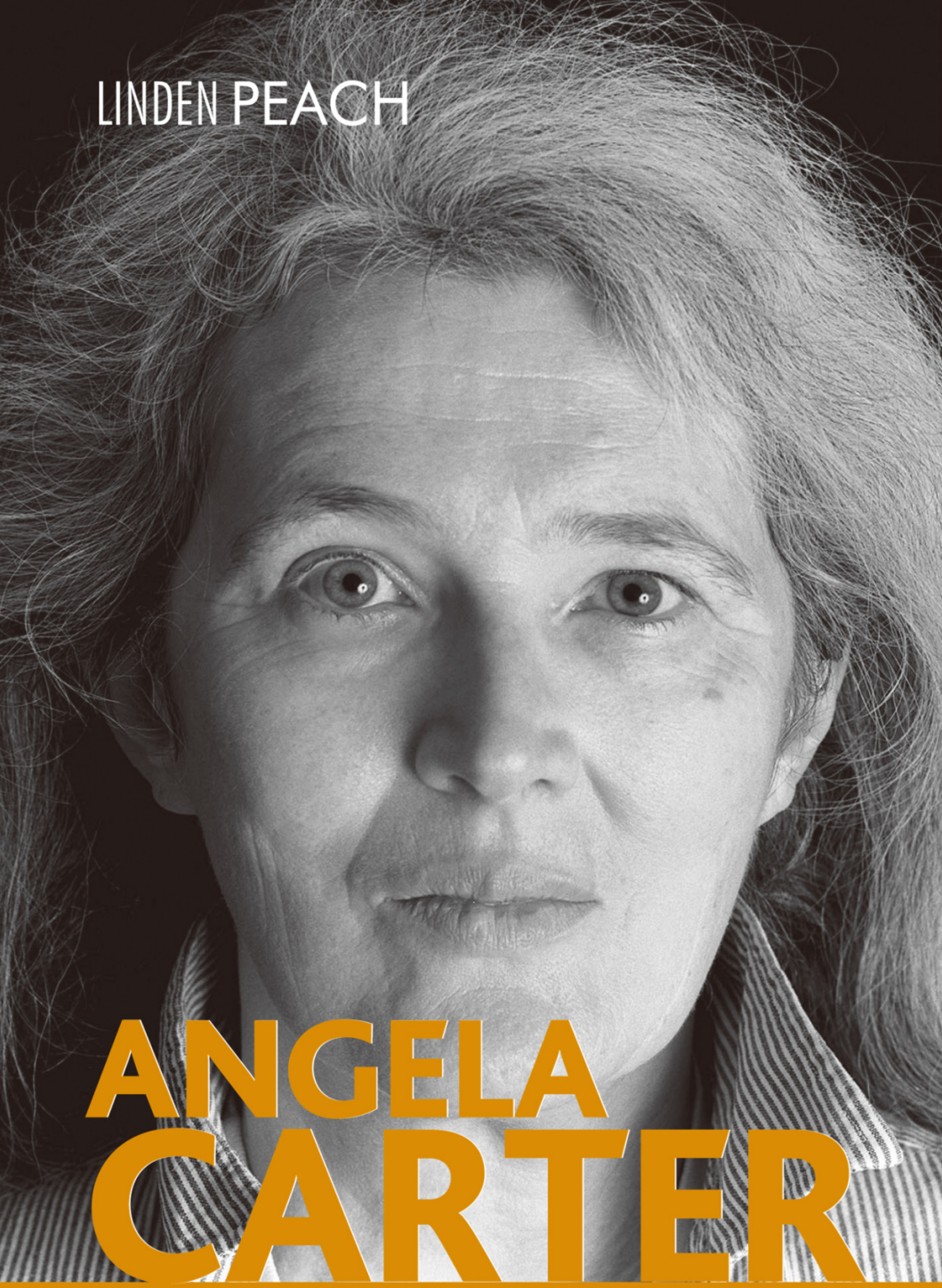
LINDEN PEACH



ANGELA CARTER

SECOND EDITION

ANGELA CARTER

ANGELA CARTER Second Edition

At the time of her death in 1992, Angela Carter had already become an important and widely read British author. In this fully revised and updated second edition of his popular study, Linden Peach provides a wealth of new material including:

- contemporary critical approaches to Carter's work
- one of the first discussions of the Italian film director Frederico Fellini's influence on her fiction
- an engaging study of Carter's interest in the aesthetics of the circus and music hall
- extended analysis of her most widely-studied novels, including *The Passion of New Eve* and *Nights at the Circus,* and her long essay *The Sadeian Woman*.

Arguing that Carter's fiction anticipates current debates around concepts such as 'postfeminism' and 'postfeminist Gothic', this lucid account of Carter's contribution to the modern novel features exciting re-readings of her key works and examines the impact she has had on other women writers for whom she paved the way. It is an ideal introduction for anyone who is looking for an approachable but sophisticated, twenty-first-century assessment of Carter as a novelist.

Linden Peach is Professor of English at Edge Hill University and an Honorary Research Fellow at Swansea University. His previous publications include books on Toni Morrison, Virginia Woolf, Crime Fiction, and contemporary Irish and Welsh fiction.

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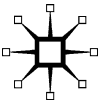

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For Angela

Contents

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1
Introduction

THE LIFE AND THE ACHIEVEMENTS

Angela Carter (1940–1992) was born Angela Olive Stalker in Eastbourne, where her mother, her maternal grandmother and her eleven-year-old brother had moved to escape the bombings in London. The prospect of a German invasion through the south coast meant that the Stalker family moved again and the first five years or so of Carter's life were spent with her maternal grandmother in Wath-upon-Dearne, a village in the South Yorkshire coalfield. Her father, a journalist, remained in London during the war. After the war, Carter and her mother returned to their London suburban home in Balham. But they did not find what Carter described in her essay 'The Mother Lode' (1976) as 'a solid, middle-class suburb, lace curtains, privet hedges and so on'. The area had been much changed by the war and 'had had the residue of respectability bombed out of it' (*Shaking A Leg*, p. 11).

On leaving school, Carter followed in her father's footsteps and began work in 1959 as a junior reporter on the Croydon Advertiser. However, she did not pursue a career in journalism, but in 1962 accepted a place to read English at Bristol University, specialising in the medieval period. Her maternal grandmother died, aged ninety, the following year. Carter was married twice: in 1960 to Paul Carter, whom she left to go to Japan, where she took a Japanese lover for a while, and in 1977 to Mark Pearce, with whom she settled once again in South London; their son, Alexander, was born in 1983. When her mother died, her father decided to return to his home town, Macduff, in Aberdeenshire. Although Carter spent some time in Australia and the USA, it was probably the years when she lived in Japan, 1969–1972, that proved the most significant for her intellectual development. Her time there stimulated her to think about 'cultural foreignness', a concept that clearly informs her essay, 'My Father's House' (1976): 'The Japanese have a phrase, "the landscapes of the heart", to describe the Romantic correlation between inside and

outside that converts physical geography into part of the apparatus of the sensibility. Home is where the heart is and hence a moveable feast' (*Shaking a Leg*, p. 18). Since the seeds of the defamiliarisation and deconstruction which are so pronounced in her post-1970s work are evident in her early fiction, I am reluctant to see the period which she spent in Japan after she and her first husband separated in terms of a watershed. Sage (1994a) has suggested that it was 'the impetus she had built up through her own early work that had sent her on her travels' (p. 29). But clearly, the period in Japan, according to Salman Rushdie (1995) 'a country whose tea-ceremony formality and dark eroticism bruised and challenged Carter's imagination' (p. x), was important. As Gerrard (1995) points out, Carter herself believed: 'In Japan, I learned what it was to be a woman, and became radicalised' (p. 23).

Carter completed nine novels: *Shadow Dance* (1966; reprinted in America as *Honeybuzzard*, 1966), *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *Several Perceptions* (1968), *Heroes and Villains* (1969), *Love* (1971), *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972; reprinted in America as *The War of Dreams*, 1977), *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991). Although the works written before *Nights at the Circus* (1984) are relatively short, even they are crammed with an extraordinary range of ideas, themes and images. She also published several collections of short stories: *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974), *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), *Black Venus's Tale* (1980) and *Black Venus* (1985; reprinted in America as *Saints and Strangers*, 1987) in addition to *American Ghosts & Old World Wonders* (1993), which was published posthumously. Of her non-fiction works, the most relevant to an appreciation of her novels are *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (1979; reprinted in America as *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, 1979), *Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings* (1982) and *Expletives Deleted: Selected Writings* (1992). There are also four collections of children's stories, a work in verse entitled *Unicorn* (1966) and four radio plays. Because of her interest in editing fairy stories, that genre had a profound influence on her fiction and, especially, her short stories. She edited and translated *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (1977) and *Sleeping Beauty and Other Favourite Fairy Tales* (1982) and also edited two collections for Virago: *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (1990) and *The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (1992).

Her work won prestigious literary prizes as well as favourable reviews during her lifetime. *The Magic Toyshop* won the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and *Several Perceptions* won the Somerset Maugham Award. *Nights at the Circus* was the joint winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1985. In the same year, the film *Company of Wolves*, based on *The Bloody Chamber* and a rewriting of 'Red Riding Hood', was released. During the period 1976–1978, Angela Carter was Arts Council of Great Britain Fellow in Sheffield. Further recognition of her work and her skill as a teacher of writing came with prestigious appointments which included Visiting Professor at Brown University, Rhode Island, USA; tutor on the MA in Writing at East Anglia University, UK; and writer-in-residence at the University of Adelaide, South Australia. She achieved international recognition as a teacher as well as a writer, holding writing residencies at Austin, Texas, Iowa City, and Albany, New York State.

SOCIAL ORIGINS

Carter began writing in the 1960s, and had completed her first five novels by the end of the decade. She recalled the 1960s in 'Notes From the Front Line':

> towards the end of that decade there was a brief period of public philosophical awareness that occurs only very occasionally in human history; when truly, it felt like Year One, that all that was holy was in the process of being profaned ... I can date to that time and to some of the debates and to that sense of heightened awareness of the society around me in the summer of 1968, my own questioning of the nature of my reality as a *woman*. (Wandor, 1983, p. 70)

However, the radical nature of her work is rooted not just in the 1960s but in the contrast between the 1960s and the 1950s. Admittedly, the 1940s/1950s saw the introduction of the National Health Service, increased educational opportunities and social mobility. And the 1950s was a radical decade for the arts, which saw the 'Angry Young Men' in Britain, the Beat Generation in America and the existentialists in France. But Carter's family also experienced the austerity of the 1950s, and advertising campaigns which encouraged women

to believe their place was in the home. Lorna Sage (1994a) pointed out that 'the prevailing style of British writing and of film-making (and of grey-and-white television) was neo-realistic – of a piece with the general atmosphere of austerity' (p. 2). The protest voices of the 1950s were male, and men benefited more than women from the increased educational and social opportunities. Indeed, the importance of Carter's origins in the dialectic between the 1950s and the 1960s has been noted by Carter herself who, in 'Notes from the Front Line', declared: 'I am the pure product of an advanced, industrialised, post-imperialist country in decline' (Wandor, 1983, p. 73).

Steven Connor (1996) reminds us that in the post-war period 'Britain came progressively to lose its confident belief that it was the subject of its own history' (p. 3). It appeared increasingly subject to outside pressures and influences, including the unpredictable forces of international capitalism which lay beyond the control of any one state. For Carter, there were positive aspects to Britain's changing position: 'The sense of limitless freedom that I, as a woman, sometimes feel *is* that of a new kind of being. Because I simply could not have existed, as I am, in any other preceding time or place' (Wandor, 1983, p. 73). But, whatever one's perspective on the matter, there could be no denying that the psychology of Britain was changing.

In her early novels, Carter depicts Britain in what one school of psychoanalysis might call a 'depressive condition'. In psychoanalysis, the depressive condition is the one in which infants begin to separate themselves from their mothers and experience a sense of loss. Carter herself did not regret the passing of imperialist Britain as such. Convinced that 'Western European civilisation as we know it has just about run its course', she believed that 'for the first time for a thousand years or so, its inhabitants may at last be free of their terrible history' (Wandor, 1983, pp. 72–73). But not everyone saw things this way, of course, and the experience of decline for the country after the war was also for many the cultural experience of loss.

In *Several Perceptions* (1968) and *Wise Children* (1991), Britain's waning power is linked with the decline in the prestige and influence of the English theatre. Whatever the subsequent benefits for women, Carter acknowledges that Britain as 'post' – post-imperialist, post-industrial – is cast, albeit temporarily, into a condition of loss; as a nation, Britain after 1945 began to separate from its mythical 'mother', industrialised, imperialist Britain. This view of Britain is incorporated in her first novel, *Shadow Dance* (1966). An auction sale is held in the gutted corpse of what had once been an Edwardian

department store, 'where tall, thin pillars topped with fading garlands of gilded leaves insinuated hints of departed elegancies' (p. 23). The two junk shop owners know that there is a market for objects which evoke a period of lost elegance and glory. They are interested in a cake tin because it was produced as a souvenir of the coronation of Edward VII and a bidet because it depicts a pastoral scene of nymphs and shepherds. In *Several Perceptions* (1968), the decline of imperialist Britain is reflected in the run-down bohemian district of Bristol where the main street 'had once been the shopping promenade of a famous spa and still swooped in a sinuous neo-classic arc from the Down' (p. 9). Joseph Harker also alludes to this sense of cultural loss later in the novel when he regrets the passing of 'Victorian shooting jackets, Eskimo anoraks lined with wolf fur and military greatcoats of the elegant past' (p. 123). In Carter's final novel, which is discussed in Chapter 6, a sense of cultural loss is pursued through the disappearance of some of the icons associated with London, such as the Lyons teashops, and through the figure of a stand-up comedian who has the Empire tattooed on his body. Performing on stage, flexing his muscles to patriotic tunes, his ageing body positions parts of the Empire in less than complimentary places.

CRITICAL REPUTATION

When Angela Carter died of cancer in 1992, she was one of the best known British authors of the twentieth century, whose novels, short stories, reviews and journalism won her both critical acclaim and controversy. But, nearly twenty years after her untimely death, what do we see now as her contribution to the British novel?

At one level, it is misleading to think of Carter's writing in terms of the separate genres in which she worked. It is always hard to separate out the various strands in a prolific author's *oeuvre*, and it is especially difficult in Carter's case. The many connections between Carter's novels, short stories, children's fiction and even non-fiction are testimony to her interest in blurring the boundaries between them, challenging our perceptions of what we mean, for example, by a 'novel' or a 'short story'. However, the novel is the genre which still dominates British literary publishing and is read and studied more than any other. It is also the genre which in English culture in the middle of the twentieth century appeared to be in crisis, with some critics even talking of the end of the novel.

Nearly twenty years after her death, it is clear why Carter's work generated so much controversy, and it is still difficult to quarrel with Margaret Atwood (1992), who observed in her obituary of Carter, with only a hint of exaggeration, that she 'was born subversive, in the sense of the original root: *to overturn*' (p. 61). But, nearly twenty years on, Elaine Jordan's (1992) claim that 'I'll please no one least of all her, by trying to say she's not offensive' (p. 120) seems to have lost its edge due to the way in which in the academic nature of her work now stands more revealed.

While Carter was still alive, there was no greater bone of contention among critics than her representation of women. Paulina Palmer (1989) criticised the female characters in *The Passion of New Eve* who seek to liberate themselves from qualities associated with femininity in the early 1970s, such as dependency, passivity and masochism, but are 'composed of attributes which are predominantly "masculine" ' (p. 16). Robert Clark (1987) criticised Carter for unwittingly repeating the 'self-alienation' to which patriarchal power relationships give rise. Even Jordan (1992) admitted that she had had her 'moment of horror and cold feet at what I was letting myself in for ... [Carter] started out writing as a male impersonator, with a strong streak of misogyny' (p. 16). In reading *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), Sally Robinson (1991), too, had reservations. Although she found that 'there is, quite simply, *no place* for a woman reader in this text', she was prepared to argue that the novel challenges 'the reader to occupy a position on the outside of that narrative' (p. 105). At times, Carter revelled in her provocative reputation, once sending a note to Elaine Jordan, referring to two leading feminist writers: 'If I can get up Suzanne Kappeller's nose, to say nothing of the Dworkin proboscis, then my living has not been in vain' (Sage, 1994a, p. 332). In some respects, Carter's fiction anticipates what has come to be called 'post-feminism', which some feminists argue 'participates in the discourse of postmodernism, in that both seek to destabilise fixed definitions of gender, and to deconstruct authoritative paradigms and practices' (Gamble, 1998/2001, p. 298). It is a term which is also used to identify feminists, such as Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe and Natasha Walter, who attack 'feminism in its present form as inadequate to address the concerns and experiences of women today' (ibid.).

Five years after Carter's death, Bristow and Broughton (1997) claimed that her most popular collection of short stories was *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) and her most widely read

novel was *Nights at the Circus* (1984) (p. 1). This is probably still the case, and in some ways it has skewed her reputation. The emphasis in Carter scholarship has been upon a writer who, Bristow and Broughton (1997) maintain, 'delved into the most unsettling depths of Western culture, only to transmogrify its myths and unleash its monsters' (p. 1). Their view of her is typical of how Carter was seen in the decade immediately following her death. Nikki Gerrard (1995) argued that she was 'the one-off'. And what made her 'the one-off' at the time was the subversive nature of her 'strange, ribald novels': 'undecorous, overripe and mocking tales in which nothing is sacred and nothing natural' (p. 20).

Certainly Carter's novels are not in the English mainstream. Indeed, it might be argued that they are not 'novels' in the conventional sense at all, given the way in which their characters, often parodic and overly symbolic, are schematically drawn and how their plots are marked not by an interaction between characters and places but the unfolding of a speculative narrative. But now the initial shock waves created by her preoccupation with desire, sexuality and excess have subsided, there is a better understanding in Carter scholarship of the intellectual projects in which she was engaged.

The tide has turned against the emphasis in 1980s Carter scholarship on the mocking, monstrous feminine in Carter's novels, consistently with a wider change in contemporary Gothic writing. Stéphanie Genz (2007), in a discussion of post-feminist Gothic, a concept to which I will return later, argues:

> What comes to the fore in postfeminist Gothic is not the monstrous feminine that has been the figure of subversion and excess in H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984). Quite the contrary, the postfeminist Gothic monster is neither abject nor excessive, but strangely conventional and, dare I say, trivial. (p. 69)

Possibly arising from the tenor of what Genz calls 'postfeminist Gothic', there is a discernible scepticism in feminist criticism toward Carter's monstrous, female 'figures of subversion and excess' that can be traced to the end of the 1990s. Sara Martin argues that although Carter's *Night at the Circus* (1984), Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983) and Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) are concerned with women who enjoy power over men, there are questions to be asked about their effectiveness in adding 'a

new direction to the portrait of women in British Fiction' (p. 193). However, Martin's approach is typical of attempts in the second decade after Carter's death to contextualise her work through comparison with other female novelists. The studies by Rubinson (2005) and López (2007) compare Carter with Jeanette Winterson. Nicola Pitchford (2002) takes a different approach, comparing Carter with Kathy Acker, for whose novels she coins the term 'unreasonable texts'.

Helen Stoddart (2007), following critics such as Isobel Armstrong and Christina Britzolakis, believes that Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus* is reflected in the energy, excess and vulgarity of the prose, which 'is aligned with the popular'. However, as is typical of twenty-first century Carter criticism, she adds a note of clarification: 'Yet what is distinctive about Carter's writing is the way that these same popular attributes are also applied to the explication of intellectual and sometimes abstract concepts' (p. 114). Now the dust has settled around the controversy which Carter caused, the exuberant enthusiasm which she generated and her perceived preoccupation with excess and the monstrous Gothic, there is a greater emphasis in Carter scholarship on the intellectual depth of her work. Sarah Sceats (2001), focusing on the Gothic trope of the vampire, suggests that Carter's representation of sexual desire and predatory sexual behaviour is a vehicle for exploring political oppression. In much of the new criticism, Carter's intellectualism is linked, as here, to intertextuality. All texts inevitably contain traces of other texts which signal different ways of reading them. Julia Kristeva (1969) has pointed out: 'Tout texte se construit comme mosaique de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte' [Every text builds itself as a mosaic of quotations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text] (p. 146). At Bristol University, Carter became familiar with European art, and the French Symbolists and Dadaists are obvious influences on her writing. Later, she became more conversant with European critical theorists, especially the post-structuralists and the feminist psychoanalysts. The literary influences on her work include Chaucer, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, early modern dramatists, Jonathan Swift, William Blake, Mary Shelley, the Marquis de Sade, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Dostoevsky, Lewis Carroll and Bram Stoker. Her close friends included postmodernist fiction writers such as Robert Coover and Salman Rushdie. She was an avid devotee and scholar of European and world cinema. Indeed, perhaps one of the reasons why Carter's work has aroused such controversy is that it is

not typically English. Her novels are closer to the speculative fiction of writers such as Swift, the fiction of European Romantic writers, European film, folk tales, fairy stories and American Gothic than they are to the traditional English novel.

The influence of twentieth-century cinema on Carter's work should not be underestimated and the self-conscious eclecticism of New Wave French cinema, through the work of Jean-Luc Godard especially, was undoubtedly responsible for inspiring the highly allusive nature of Carter's fiction. Her novels often exploit the creative possibilities in shifting between different frames of reference and in subverting the cultural forms and traditions which structure our thoughts, perceptions and actions. Whereas the early works are, to employ Kristeva's viewpoint, a 'mosaique de citations', the intertext in subsequent novels is often more clearly the totality of a particular cultural or literary tradition. Eventually, intertextuality became not so much a characteristic of her writing as a boldly thematised part of it. At times, it seems that the novels' chief area of interest is the way in which meanings, boundaries and identities are rendered 'real' through cultural and linguistic metaphors. In this regard, Carter's fiction portrays Western culture as 'foreign'. The texts are driven by the twin processes of 'defamiliarisation' – making the literary and the familiar strange – and 'deconstruction'. The latter provides a means of looking critically at what we take for granted; the original meaning of the word 'deconstruction' is 'to take things apart'.

Contemporary Carter scholarship distinguishes between 'postmodern ludism', in which textual allusion is part of a wider 'play' with cultural referencing undertaken largely for its own sake, and intertextuality as a deliberate, intellectual and even academic strategy in which traditions, mythologies and conventions are subjected to sophisticated scrutiny. Though Carter was once seen as the *doyenne* of the former, her work is increasingly aligned with the latter. Munford (2006), with reference to select cultural and literary influences on Carter, including Jean-Luc Godard, Marcel Proust, Charles Dickens and Surrealism, argues that intertextuality is one of the most important drivers in Carter's fiction. Anna Watz Fruchart (Munford, 2006), examining surrealism in *Shadow Dance*, borrows Susan Rubin's term 'double allegiance' for the way in which allegiance to the source material in Carter's work coexists with a critique of it. This is certainly true of Carter's interest in Sade, discussed in Chapter 6, and, in some respects, of the influence of

the Italian film director Federico Fellini on *Nights at the Circus*, discussed in Chapter 6. However, Carter's use of her source material is always complex.

There is considerable 'critique' combined with 'allegiance' in Carter's intertextuality, as Fruchart says, and Carter's ideological critique is as important in twenty-first-century as in twentieth-century Carter scholarship. Anna Katsavos's posthumously published interview with Carter on her interest in deconstruction continues to determine the majority of critical approaches to Carter's novels. There Carter explains that she is interested in 'what certain configurations of imagery in our society, in our culture, really stand for, what they mean, underneath the kind of semireligious coating that makes people not particularly want to interfere with them' (p. 12). Carter appears determined to challenge the comfortable and familiar way in which many of these ideologies are accepted as part of everyday reality. This is something which Carter's work shares with Bertolt Brecht's. He explained: 'The new alienations are only designed to free socially conditioned phenomenon from the stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today' (Willett, 1964, p. 192). Carter's fiction encourages us to perceive for ourselves the processes that produce social structures, sociohistorical concepts and cultural artefacts.

Katsavos's interview with Carter is the springboard for Maria Perez-Gil's (2007) argument that 'Carl Jung's assumptions concerning the archetypal feminine and the androgynous self fall within the range of "semireligious" discourses that Carter satirically demythologizes in *The Passion of New Eve*' (p. 216). Perez-Gil argues that Carter not only dismantles these traditional stereotypes but turns Jung's concept of 'individuation' into a feminist narrative that subverts it. Patricia Smith (2006) argues that, while *The Magic Toyshop* is a feminist, 'modern day fairy-tale fantasy celebrating the awakening of adolescent female sexuality', it is also a 'complex web of signification that Carter weaves in an elaborate allegory of 1960s Britain that engages and retropes the works and philosophies of T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence and W. B. Yeats' (p. 333). Smith maintains that Carter employs an 'allusory system' that, like modernism, combines high and low culture. But in Carter's work she sees the 'endgames' of modernism brought down 'in a tumultuous decade of social, cultural, and individual change' (p. 333).

Thus, 'deconstruction' remains the most consistent thread running throughout Carter scholarship. Sarah Gamble (2006), arguing

that deconstruction of binaries lies at the heart of Angela Carter's artistic agenda, has defined Carter as being concerned with 'domestic deconstruction'. Other critics have focused on Carter's allusive metaphorical style and have veered toward a postmodernist, deconstructive intertextuality in Carter's fiction, emphasising the confidence trick and lucid game. The latter are at the heart of Jennifer Gustar's (2008) exploration of the structural and thematic elements that circulate in Carter's *oeuvre*. The recurring academic interest in deconstruction in Carter's fiction is not surprising, as her feminism focuses on the oppression of the 'signified' and how in the conventional heterosexual male gaze women are 'fixed' by what they are perceived as 'signifying'. Carter's work probes the subtleties of this process, of the different ways in which women are oppressed by cultural meanings, and through the process of deconstruction it seeks to reclaim women as 'signifiers' within their own narratives rather than as 'signified' objects in someone else's narrative.

WHAT KIND OF NOVELIST?

Carter's work has eclectic origins, in, for example, prenovelistic narratives, fairy stories, romance, pornography, Sade and European cinema, especially the films of Jean-Luc Godard and, as I mentioned above, the films of Federico Fellini. Attempts to 'label' Carter's fiction inevitably fail because they come up against the extraordinary eclecticism and the formidable intertextuality that give Carter's fiction its intellectual depth.

Positioned at the boundaries between 'realism' and 'fantasy', Carter's novels seem to have more in common with a range of subgenres and popular narratives, such as Gothic, horror, fantasy narrative, speculative fiction and even sexploitation, than with the mainstream English novel. In the 1980s, and even the 1990s, scholarship seemed preoccupied with debates over what kind of writing Carter produced. Helen Carr (1989), believing that this posed a particular problem for Carter's readers, even suggested that 'Carter's novels became much more acceptable in Britain after the discovery of South American magic realism: her readers discovered that she was writing in a genre that could be named' (p. 7). It was a description of her work which Carter herself found problematic, explaining that the kinds of social forces that produced Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who is most often associated with this mode of writing,

were very different from those that produced her (Haffenden, 1985, p. 81). Isabel Allende's definition of magic realism suggests some of the characteristics of Carter's later work: 'Magic realism really means allowing a place in literature to the invisible forces that have such a powerful place in life ... dreams, myth, legend, passion, obsession, superstition, religion, the overwhelming power of nature and the supernatural' (Lewis, 1993, p. 26). But 'dreams, myth, legend, passion, obsession, superstition, religion' cohere around the wider concerns that Carter's novels share with literary subgenres such as horror and the supernatural: victimisation arising from oppressive discourse. Carter's interest in legend, religion and myth is more astutely linked than in magic realist fiction to the way in which cultural discourses inform oppressive social practices and preconceptions, and her concern with passion, obsession and power informs her wider deconstruction of gender categories, depolarising of archetypes and demythologising of sexual pleasure.

Twenty years after her death, the debate as to whether Carter's fiction is 'magic realist' appears to have dwindling relevance. Of more interest to contemporary Carter scholarship is her mapping of new significance, otherness and subversion in premodern narratives that had a complexly ambivalent relationship with the bourgeois and the domestic, such as fairy stories and Gothic fiction. This led Carter to a way of 'knowing' the world which was sceptical of 'realism' as a vehicle of sociocultural critique. It is a commonplace that, although realism is based on a particular, historically located mode of awareness as partial as any other, over the last few hundred years it has been the preferred mode for writers with a commitment to social change. Carter's novels, on the other hand, are parodic, allusive and, often, elusive. Such artistic innovation has been regarded by social realist Marxist critics and writers, such as George Lukacs, as too decadent, introverted and 'bourgeois'. However, as Angela Burton and I have argued elsewhere (Peach and Burton, 1995), writers such as Dennis Potter have recognised that, as society changes, different strategies and techniques are needed to write effective social critiques (p. 31). Social realist fiction 'naturalises' what it portrays so that we trust what we are reading. Non-realistic fiction distances, or even alienates, us so that we are disturbed, puzzled, confused and possibly very critical of what we are reading. As a student of English at Bristol University, Carter would have been familiar with 'alienating techniques' through the work of writers such as Bertolt Brecht. Certainly in Carter's fiction, as in Brecht's work, everyday things

are 'raised above the level of the obvious and automatic' (Willett, 1964, p. 92).

Non-realistic fiction usually presents the reader with new insights into how society is structured, into the forces behind it and into how it is organised according to the interests of particular powerful groups. In *Heroes and Villains* to some extent, but especially, as I shall discuss later, in the post-1970 novels, Carter acknowledged that the mode of awareness which in the previous three hundred years or so had been associated with realism had broken down. Although Carter's novels do not offer any clear, coherent alternatives, they are written from the realisation that many of the traditional principles which have governed our perception and organisation of 'reality' have been brought into question by modern and postmodern European and Euro-American thinking.

Beginning with Carter's attraction to Gothic and to premodern narratives and the way in which she may be seen as anticipating what post-feminist Gothic has identified as 'a new critical space beyond the Female Gothic' has enabled me to suggest that, if anything, her novels are 'postgenre'. In saying this, it is not my intention to exchange one problematic 'post' for another. What I mean to suggest by this term is that one of the principal lines of development in Carter's novels is the extent to which it brings forth unpredictable and transgressive forms. Thus, at the centre of Carter's novels is a speculative and creative space that is, may I dare say, 'post-feminist', 'post-Gothic' and 'post-genre'.

THE NOVELS

Carter's works are best read not as independent texts, but as part of an ongoing process of writing. Whilst to some degree this may be true of any author, it is especially true of Carter. In the chapters that follow, each of the novels is related to each other. Although many valuable insights are to be gained from a chronological consideration of her work, there is also a strong cyclical dimension to her *oeuvre.* Carter herself seems at pains to draw attention to it. Apart from the recurring preoccupation with key themes and ideas, details such as the names of characters are repeated across a range of the texts. Honeybuzzard in *Shadow Dance* (1966), for example, recurs as two characters in *Love* (1971); Toussaint in *Several Perceptions* (1968) is resurrected in *Nights at the Circus* (1984); and the names of two of

the characters in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) are borrowed from a passage in *Heroes and Villains* (1969). There are pointed similarities between characters in different novels, as, for example, between Mrs Boulder in *Several Perceptions* and Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus* or between Desiderio in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) and Walser in *Nights at the Circus.* Carter employs similar scenarios in different contexts, such as the psychiatrist–client interview between Joseph and Ransome in *Several Perceptions* which occurs again between Lee and Annabel's doctor in *Love.* Moreover, where Carter engages with the characteristics of a literary tradition, for example, the fairy story or the apocalyptic novel, rather than with particular texts, the engagement is frequently carried over a number of her novels.

In the chapters that follow, discussions of individual works are structured to help readers who may not be familiar with all of Carter's novels and are designed to illuminate important interpretative issues in her work as a whole while providing extended treatment of topics and features particular to each book. Several works are juxtaposed, such as *Several Perceptions* and *Love* or *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Sadeian Woman*, where there is a clear *raison d'être* for reading them together, while key texts, such as *The Magic Toyshop*, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, are the subject of single chapters. Although *Shadow Dance*, *Several Perceptions* and *Love* constitute a trilogy, concerned with the bohemian district of Bristol with which Carter was familiar in the 1960s, *Shadow Dance* is singled out. It plays a key role in discussing whether Carter is a 'Gothic' writer or whether her work anticipates, to employ a term which has become current in twenty-first-century scholarship, the 'post-Gothic'. However, the emphasis of the chapter is on how far the Gothic genre becomes a means of engaging with other perspectives, including realism, Jungian philosophy and twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory. *Shadow Dance* is seen as a novel particularly indebted to the work of Melville and Dostoevsky and to Carter's own critique of the Marquis de Sade in its pursuit of key Euro-American literary tropes such as the 'man of sorrows', body horror associated with 'necrophagy', and the 'double'. However, it is also suggested that the novel can be approached through a particular psychoanalytic framework provided by what has become known as object relations theory.

Several Perceptions (1968) is seen as continuing the interest of the previous novel in the particular type of melancholy to be found