SUBJECTS AND SYMBOLS: TRANSFORMATIONS OF IDENTITIY IN NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS

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Often, when folklorists approach literature, they look for transformations of "traditional" folklore materials, such as folktales, or they look for the use of forms of oral literature within a text. This paper in a sense continues with this sort of procedure, but rather than focusing on the uses and transformations of oral forms and genres, I turn instead to folk ritual forms and folk concepts as a means of understanding a work of literature, Angela Carter's **Nights at the Circus** (1984). Particularly, I found a classic tripartite ritual structure and its attendant symbolism used to transform the major characters in the book. I also found that Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of the grotesque helped to clarify what I perceived to be Carter's intentions in writing this novel. These are not the standard folkloric fare for approaching literature. What they are, respectively, are structures of symbolic action and a worldview that occur or evolve in the context of societies that have often been labeled as "Folk." To be sure, ritual structures and the concept of the grotesque have undergone radical transformations and shifts as the world has changed in the past few centuries. Indeed, these changes are central concerns of Carter, and fascinating material for folklorists to investigate. But it is not these changes that are primary in **Nights at the Circus**, however important they might be.

What I found to be at the heart of the novel were questions of love, desire, human relationships, and their transformations. It is helpful

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to use Kenneth Burke's ideas of literary form to get at those transformations through symbolism. Burke writes "poetry, or any verbal act, is to be considered as 'symbolic action'" (Burke 1957:8). He continues: "the symbolic act is a dancing of an attitude" (Burke 1957:9). He expresses this more elaborately:

> Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are strategic answers, stylized answers. . . . These strategies size up the situations, name their structures and outstanding ingredients, and name them in a way that contains an attitude toward them. [Burke 1957:3]

Nights at the Circus, then, is the "dancing of an attitude" about a situation. The situation a writer is dancing within is the motivation for the work; "situation is but another word for motives" (Burke 1957:18). Burke, in his analysis of Coleridge's **Rime of the Ancient Mariner**, lists five levels of motivation. In **Nights at the Circus**, Carter addresses many situations, but the level that I think is crucial is that of human relationship and desire. Burke concurs with the importance of this motivation: "I should expect to see a sexual problem assuming a major role in our typical expiatory strategies" (Burke 1957:78). Indeed, looking at **Nights at the Circus**, and Carter's work in general, it is clear this aspect of human relationships is a context that she is deeply concerned with and that motivates the trajectory of her writing. It is from this level of meaning that I will look at **Nights at the Circus** and particularly the symbol/character Sophia Fevvers. The drama Carter unfolds for us is about the deep questions of female (and male) personhood and sexuality, and the complexities of humans as symbolic imaginary constructs to each other and as thinking, feeling, subjective individuals.

This drama is set in Europe at the turn of the 19th century. In London, we are introduced through an interview with the American journalist Walser to Fevvers, the celebrated trapeze artist, especially renowned because of her possession of a large and conspicuous pair of wings on her back. Walser is smitten by Fevvers' cockney charm and, disguised as a clown, he follows the circus to St. Petersburg and on into Siberia. After many adventures and digressions, Fevvers and Walser are finally united in a Siberian shaman's hut. The novel is one long journey in which those who journey experience personal transformations.

Before following Fevvers' journey and transformation in this novel, we have to move with Burke beyond the simple idea of attitude. Carter is "dancing an attitude," but she is doing more than just that; she is affecting her readers. Burke again: "we must consider also the 'incantatory' factor in imagery: its function as a device for inviting us to 'make ourselves over in the image of the imagery'" (Burke 1957:100). As a form of incantatory communication, literature lacks the physiological power of ritual drama. However, it has numerous strategies to augment its affective power, and Carter beefs up the "magic" of her book as we shall see later.

Carter is not just giving us imagery to identify with, she is moving and transforming her imagery to transform us. She moves her main characters both within the space of the novel from London to Siberia and in terms of what they become, how they change. In Burke's words: "we should note the development from what through what to what" (Burke 1957:60). This tripartite structure is familiar to students of ritual through the work of Arnold Van Gennep, Victor Turner and many others. If many works of literature contain transformations, few are as explicit in their use of classic ritual

structures and symbols as **Nights at the Circus**. These structures and symbols are probably consciously chosen by Carter and are used by her in effecting the transformations of her major characters.

Fevvers herself can be seen as a ritual symbol, and yet, at the same time, she is not one. This dual aspect is a key to understanding this novel. She is a full-blown symbol but she is also a living, changing, thinking person. In a way, her situation is the situation of all people. We are all both subjects and objects. This universal symbolism is part of the "incantatory" function of this book. But it is especially to women that Fevvers' predicament resonates. In the social constructions of reality of human cultures, women are often defined in terms of their qualities as objects. Lacking full personhood in male-dominated cultural systems, anomalous in being at the same time person and possession and "natural" child bearer, they are hedged around and treated as symbolic objects. Nowhere is this more evident than in menstruation, childbirth, and sex, where the "mysteries" of their nature are dealt with by ritual and taboo. Also, as objects, valuable objects, women's lives tend to transpire as movements from one conditional role in relation to men to another, from daughter to wife or mistress.

Fevvers is woman in the symbolic aspect taken to the extreme:

> Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states, being on the borderline of species, manifestation of Arioph, Venus, Achamatoth, Sophia . . . Lady of the hub of the celestial wheel, creature half of earth and half of air, virgin and whore, reconciler of fundament and firmament. [Carter 1984:81]

The speaker here is Mr. Rosencreutz, and it is significant that Fevvers says that he is "apostrophisizing" her. As Mary Douglas shows us

in Purity and Danger (1966), ambiguous entities such as Fevvers are thought to have great power and are often used in ritual. Mr. Rosencreutz, the archetypical batty, 19th-century antiquarian, recognizes her potential ritual efficacy and attempts to use Fevvers in a ritual of human sacrifice to increase his own vitality. He sees her in her symbolic aspect only, and when Fevvers asks to use the bathroom in her brazen, inimitable way, "he stops admiring his purchase sharpish, as if he hadn't bargained for it talking back" (Carter 1984:75). Naturally, Fevvers wants nothing to do with this deadly, vampiric rite and flies out the casement window.

This is not the first symbolic guise in which we see Fevvers. When she was growing up at a brothel, she was fitted out as Cupid for the benefit of the patrons. Later, when she matured, she moved on to the role of The Winged Victory. At Madame Schreck's freakhouse she was the Angel of Death. In all these roles, she is resplendent as symbol, but also, she manages to maintain a strong sense of identity and inner self. Indeed, it is the very power of her symbolic identity that contributes to that sense of identity.

In the incident when she goes to the Grand Duke's palace, she nearly finds herself permanently frozen into a symbol despite her subjective vitality. The Grand Duke is a collector. He says "You must know that I am a great collector of all kinds of objets d'art and marvels. Of all things I love best toys--marvellous and unnatural artefacts" (Carter 1984:187). He wants to add Fevvers to his collection. What takes place is very instructive. Fevvers is lured to his palace by the promise of his great wealth. Her greed for his wealth brings her into danger and reveals some of the characteristics of the kind of symbol that Fevvers is representing here. The Grand Duke's palace is full of bizarre objects:

an ice scupture in Fevvers' likeness, mechanical musicians, and a room full of mechanized, jewel-encrusted eggs. The Grand Duke turns out to be a man of great power and in molesting her, he discovers and breaks her sword, her bastion of security. Showing her the eggs, he reveals one that sings the theme "Only a Bird in a Golden Cage." Another is opened to reveal an empty cage, presumably to be filled by Fevvers. She manages to escape only by a "sleight of hand" and the discovery of a third egg containing the train on which she is to go to Siberia. This fate, to be a bird in a gilded cage, to be an object of pleasure, a toy, is a metaphor for Carter of the potential fate of women. Dazzled by wealth, they could be destined to live a sterile existence as the "collector's item" of some man. For Fevvers this is a crucial moment. She has abandoned the protection of her adopted mother Lizzie, whose love and care buffered her from the dangers into which her role as symbol could lead her. This marks the beginning of her transformation. Before following that transformation, I'd like to focus on Fevvers' various symbolic guises.

The symbolic Fevvers we have seen so far is a version of herself that is limited and constrained. Regardless of the particular characteristics of the symbol she is cast as, whether as Winged Victory or caged bird, she is always an object. She is a fixed entity, and always her symbolic qualities are featured in some sort of economic exchange, especially evident in her encounter with the Grand Duke. Her magic is also interpreted in the context of scientific explanation. Walser's attempts to explain away her wings point this out. "So, if this lovely lady is indeed, as her publicity alleges, a fabulous bird-woman, then she, by all the laws of evolution and human reason, ought to possess no arms at all" (Carter 1984:15). What I'm driving at, but can only suggest here, is

that folk symbols, in this case a supernatural, anthropomorphic symbol, are interpreted in culturally specific ways. With the consolidation of modern culture at the beginning of the twentieth century, the time setting of this book, this cultural interpretation involves a petrification as archaism (symbolized by the antiquarianism of Mr. Rosencreutz), or a commoditization of use, or an attempt at scientific demystification. This is only a preliminary take on the exact semantic changes in the interpretation of symbols that took place at this point in history. Why these changes took place, and what implications they have for understanding folklore in the modern setting, are fascinating questions with far-reaching consequences.

Carter is addressing this scientific, capitalistic, symbolic semantics both here and in other works, such as her radio plays "In the Company of Wolves" and "Vampirella" (Carter 1985). Always, she tries to subvert the modern symbolic frame, usually through love, and **Nights at the Circus** is no exception. She is particularly interested in those symbols which are also people: the vampire, the werewolf, the angel. Here the nature of the modern meaning of the symbolic radically conflicts with the potential for growth, change, individuality and human relationship of the person/symbol. And if women have this symbolic quality, as I argue, it can wreak havoc on their humanity as well.

To further digress, elsewhere in this issue, Cyndee Johnson's article, "The Fate of the Legendary Mermaid in Modern Cartoon Jokes" addresses many of these same problems. The mermaid is a classic person/symbol, and Johnson charts the shifts of meaning from pre-modern to modern belief systems. "As a member of a magical race which enjoys a living belief tradition, the mermaid explores all human emotions and activities in both human and hybrid

forms" (Johnson 1987:72). Later, in the modern setting, the mermaid becomes "frozen" and available as a resource for the psychological "use-value" of dirty jokes.

Returning to **Nights at the Circus**, let us see how Carter shifts the meaning of the symbolic to allow a supersession of the modern symbolic semantic domain. My claim that Fevvers transcends her symbolic nature is somewhat misleading. She transcends the symbols that men create to contain her in the book. But this transcendence itself creates a symbol, a symbol spilling over, a grotesque symbol. According to Bakhtin, "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style" (Bakhtin 1968:303). If anyone in the world has these attributes, it is Sophia Fevvers. Here is just one example: "Without her clothes on, she looked the size of a house" (Carter 1984:292).

Fevvers exhibits other grotesque attributes as well. She "now shifted from one buttock to the other and--'better out than in sir'--let a ripping fart ring round the room" (Carter 1984:11), placing her explosively in the camp of Bakhtin's "material bodily principle" (Bakhtin 1968:19), that image of the body that concerns itself with "the lower stratum of the body" (Bakhtin 1968). She eats and drinks with reckless abandon, from pies with eel gravy, eaten in "gargantuan" fashion, to spoonful after spoonful of caviar, both foods charged with grotesque, regenerative sexuality.

So far I have defined the grotesque in terms of various attributes. More explanation is in order. I am using the concept of the grotesque as it was developed by M. M. Bakhtin in his book **Rabelais and his World** (1968). In this work, Bakhtin introduces the concept to make sense of Rabelais. He claims that to understand Rabelais, one must understand the folk milieu in which Rabelais wrote, and an essential

feature of this milieu was the grotesque. He sees the grotesque as a style of humor, an image of the body, a festive attitude, and more generally, a vision of existence in time based on fecundity, unrestraint, and regeneration. The grotesque is a lavish concept, but at its heart is always the notion of renewal gained whether through excess or excrement, carnival or the carnal. Bakhtin goes on to trace the subsequent history of the grotesque, and describes what he calls the romantic grotesque, a shift in interpretation of grotesque imagery that parallels the modern symbolic semantics that I discussed earlier. In the romantic grotesque, such imagery as anality, or monstrosity, is not seen as regenerative, but as "dirty," terrifying, or satirically amusing.

Looking at Fevvers' feathers, we can begin to see perhaps the strongest statement of Fevvers' grotesque nature. Remember that Fevvers embodies the ambiguous characteristics Mary Douglas discusses in **Purity and Danger**. It is her wings that set her up in this position as simultaneously a member of two categories, "fundament and firmament." Usually ambiguous things are treated in much the same way that the romantic grotesque is treated. They are marginalized and compartmentalized most often as the category "dirt." While Fevvers is not exactly treated like dirt by the Victorian-originated value systems that try to constrain her, she certainly is treated as dirt in her consistent marginalization in entertainment institutions of dubious repute. But Fevvers, as an ambiguous symbol, has another aspect: without ambiguity of concept, without untidiness, life is impossible. Sex is probably the best example of this truth. Without mixing the "categories" of male and female, and making a mess, procreation doesn't occur. Ritually, ambiguous symbols are used to represent the qualities of change, renewal, and disorder that serve as a

counterpoint to the structured processes of existence. Fevvers is such a symbol par excellence, and her renewing qualities are clearly grotesque. Rosencreutz would 'use' her as such a symbol for his own ends, but Fevvers is more than just a frozen idea. She is alive. She is a willful person, and her destiny lies elsewhere. She is a double symbol, one breaking out of the other. First, she is a frozen, virginal queen of ambiguity and wonder, a fetishized commodity in male fantasy without any room for her swarming subjectivity. Beyond that, she is grotesque, uncontained and uncontainable, a symbol that defies placement in any structure except finally the newborn anti-structure of freely given love. As such, she becomes the symbol for Carter of what women could be in the 20th century.

How she becomes this vital symbol is the transformational task of this book. A Burkean structure of scapegoating and sacrifice and a rite of passage are the means that Carter uses to effect this transformation. To understand the Burkean scapegoating schema, we have to chart this book in terms of associational clusters. "Now the work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations. He uses 'associational clusters'. And you may, by examining his work, find 'what goes with what' in these clusters" (Burke 1957:18). In this analysis, I am going to look at "what goes with what" in terms of characters.

To begin with, the grotesque imagery that surrounds Fevvers links her to a number of different characters in this book. These include: the prostitutes at Nelson's brothel, the freaks at Madame Schrenk's, and members of the circus, especially the clowns and the chimpanzees. Their grotesque nature is evinced in various ways. The prostitutes are certainly involved with the material bodily principle, the hallmark of the grotesque. It happens to be

their job. The freaks are all body parodies, without mouths, with eyes for nipples, hermaphroditic, dwarfish, constantly asleep. They are all exaggerations, diminishments, or transformations of biological states or processes, and hence eminently grotesque. It is in the chimp's parodying humor that they too are grotesque. They show most clearly "the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities" (Bakhtin 1968:11). But it is the clowns that are most crucial. Their anal, "lower stratum" humor is clearly grotesque, perhaps best expressed by Buffo the head clown's wig, which is actually a bladder, and the raucous display of anal imagery that follows their meal in Clown Alley.

The clowns are not just grotesque, however; they are grotesque in a special way that Bakhtin labels the "romantic grotesque." This concept of the romantic grotesque dovetails nicely with the semantic shift in symbols that I discussed earlier. The romantic grotesque consists of much the same imagery as the grotesque, but the imagery is interpreted in a fashion that loses the regenerating capacity of the grotesque. For instance, Bakhtin sees the theme of the mask as grotesque: "such manifestations as parodies, caricatures, grimaces, eccentric postures, and comic gestures are per se derived from the mask. It reveals the essence of the grotesque" (Bakhtin 1968:40). However, "The Romantic mask loses almost entirely its regenerating and renewing element and acquires a sombre hue. A terrible vacuum, a nothingness lurks behind it" (Bakhtin 1968:40). Thus Buffo says of his facepaint, "and what am I without my Buffo's face? Why nobody at all. Take away my make-up and underneath is merely not-Buffo. An absence. A vacancy" (Carter 1984:122).

The clowns are the quintessential romantic grotesque figures of the associational cluster I have outlined. This makes them particularly apt as sacrificial victims in Burke's vision of

ritual drama. Burke writes of ritual drama as the hub of human action (Burke, 1957:87). One form that this drama often takes in literature is that of sacrifice, where a figure or figures are destroyed, relieving and purifying those other figures with which they are associated. "Since the symbolic transformation involves a sloughing off, you may expect to find some variant of killing in the work. . . . So we get the 'scapegoat', the 'representative' or 'vessel' of certain unwanted evils, the sacrificial animal upon whose back the burden of the evil is ritualistically loaded" (Burke 1957:34). Not unexpectedly, the clowns, and particularly Buffo, are the central figures that serve the function of scapegoat in Nights at the Circus.

We are now in a position to sketch out a typology of the characters in terms of associational clusters relevant to the scapegoating function and the transformations in this novel in general. First, there are the grotesque characters already cited. The freaks, the prostitutes, and the chimps manage to escape their predicaments, foreshadowing the later transformations of the book. Likewise, the inmates of the women's prison escape from their confinement. The other grotesque characters, the clowns, along with the circus animals and the Siberian bandits, perform the role of scapegoat. Next come the background figures, including the Colonel, the escapee, and the babushka in St. Petersburg. These shape the existential stance and historical flavor of the work. I have already discussed the book's "villains." In addition to Rosencreutz and the Grand Duke, we could add Madame Schrenk and Nelson's brother. Finally there are the principals, those who go through the whole book and are transformed. These include the major characters Fevvers and Walser, and the minor principals, Mignon, the Princess, and the strongman. Lizzie stands in an odd position,

because she is both an adjunct to Fevvers and that which Fevvers is moving away from in some sense. Roughly then, we have: 1. foreshadowers of transformation, 2. background characters, 3. scapegoats, 4. villains, 5. minor principals, and 6. the principals. The characters within these groups are linked by function within the transformational "dance" Carter is enacting and when taken together communicate a rich, polysemic message shaped by the strands of description and incident that Carter creates. For example, the minor principals expand the field of transformation that Fevvers and Walser experience to include other forms of love, thereby isolating the essential aspects of that transformation from the idea of heterosexual, physical love. But there is also a message about redemption in these minor principals, and there is a message about capitalism and fantasy in the Colonel and the escapee's story. The meanings are very rich in this book, and for brevity's sake, I must focus on the transformations, and particularly Fevvers' transformation, because here is perhaps the most important message.

The transformations begin with leaving St. Petersburg and involve sacrifice and death. Fatal and near-fatal incidents abound. First, Walser is nearly killed by a tiger. Then, Fevvers is almost murdered on the trapeze. Walser is nearly killed again, this time by Buffo the Great. Buffo in turn goes mad. This is the central act in the sacrificial section of the novel. By destroying the romantic grotesque figures of the clowns, here in a soul immolation, Carter is freeing the grotesque from its modern interpretation. Buffo is a Christlike figure who "takes away the sins of the world," in this case the sin being the frozen, static, compartmentalized condition of the grotesque. On another level, what is happening here is a sacrifice of a symbol/person like Fevvers, but whose subjectivity has been

reduced by modern semantic practice to a "vacuum." By Buffo's scapegoating of that semantic practice, Fevvers will perhaps have a chance to forge a new understanding of her nature as both symbol and subject.

The sacrifice is rounded out by the killing of a tiger, the destruction of all the circus animals, and the disintegration of the rest of the clowns and their bandit partners in hopelessness at the hands of a raging snowstorm. These linked events again contribute to a polysemic message. One aspect of this message is an allusion through imagery to William Blake and his poem "The Tyger." The section describing the trainwreck and the tigers' demise by becoming fragments of mirrors speaks of "forests" and "stars" and "burnings," precise correlates to Blake's poem. By invoking Blake, Carter is enriching her message and allying herself with his view of things, a contention reinforced by another later allusion to Blake concerning "mind forg'd manacles" (Carter 1984:285). Another part of the message is revealed in the description of the snowstorm. "They danced the whirling apart of everything, the end of love, the end of hope; they danced tomorrows into yesterdays; they danced the exhaustion of the implacable present; they danced the deadly dance of the past perfect which fixes everything fast so it can't move again" (Carter 1984:243). Laid out here is the interpretation of reality that Carter wants to go beyond. As she has Lizzie say:

> What we have to contend with, here, my boy, is the long shadow of the past historic (reverting back to the grammatical analogy for a moment), that forged the institutions which create the human nature of the present in the first place. [Carter 1984:240]

By scapegoating this "past historic," Carter is opening up a space for reinterpretation, and a reorientation of human nature and human

relationships.

What Carter is doing here is laudable but certainly not original. The idea of "killing" old identities and interpretations of reality is a time-honored custom in rites of passage. Often death imagery and sacrifice occur at this separation stage in a rite of passage (Turner 1979:235-236). Through these means, the old structures can be shucked off, giving identity and interpretation a chance to reform. The various sacrifices purify the principle characters--Fevvers, Walser, Mignon, the Princess, and Sampson the strongman. This purification allows them to enter the next stage of a rite of passage, the liminal stage. This liminal stage is a period between states, where a great deal of malleability of identity takes place. Neither this nor that, the characters are in the midst of their individual transformations.

For Walser, his transformation is part of a process that has already begun, a development and deepening of character. We find at the beginning of the book, "Walser had not experienced his experience as experience. . . . In all his young life, he had not felt so much as one quiver of introspection" (Carter 1984:10). For Mignon and the Princess, their transformation is the deepening of their love and the freeing of their art. For the strongman, it is the birth of his introspection, like Walser, and the growth of his ability to love.

That this is a liminal phase is indicated by numerous symbols and qualities. To begin with, the symbol of the train and the journey mark this part of the book as a time between times. Also, we find Walser losing his social identity, a classic liminal feature (Turner 1979:235-236), as well as his memory. His amnesia is perhaps the ultimate sign of the pregnancy of possibility that occurs in the liminal state.

His slate has been wiped clean. As for Fevvers, we find her in a situation where time is distorted and ambiguous, losing the colors of her hair and her wings, and completely secluding herself from the rest of the world. She is indeed betwixt and between, apart from her old identity and from the larger world. "She knew she had truly mislaid some vital something of herself along the road that brought her to this place" (Carter 1984:273). Her old identity as colorful **aerialiste**, and "Cockney Venus" has left her. She, too, is in transition, but from what to what?

Earlier I described her tendency to be seen as a symbol. She thrived on this both emotionally and financially, her glory arising from the wonder in her spectators' eyes, her bank account enlarging from the money in their pockets. She could always get away with this and retain her inordinate, happy, grotesque personality because of Lizzie, her adopted mother. In this way her self was strangely divided, her symbolic self linked to "symbolic exchange in the marketplace" (Carter 1984:185), her subjective self linked with her mother. "There I was, unique and parentless, unshackled, unfettered by the past, and the minute you clapped eyes on me you turned me into a contingent being, enslaved me as your daughter who was no man's daughter" (Carter 1984:280). Fevvers has been lucky so far. Even though she has been contingent, it hasn't been a contingency destructive to her. She hasn't gotten trapped or reduced or disenchanted. But the incident with the Grand Duke was a close call, and it is obvious that she is moving out from the folds of Lizzie's skirts.

If this is where Fevvers is coming from, where is she going? The simple answer to this is that she is growing up and that she is falling in love with Walser. But the question is, how can she do this and still retain her individ-

uality? Lizzie points out the danger she is getting into:

I fear for you, Sophie. Selling yourself is one thing and giving yourself away quite another but, oh Sophie! what if you rashly throw yourself away? Then what happens to that unique 'me-ness' of yours? On the scrapheap, that's what happens to it! I raised you up to fly to the heavens, not to brood over a clutch of eggs!" [Carter 1984: 282]

And yet if she does not love, what is there in life? "Seized with such anguish of the void that surrounds us, she could have wept" (Carter 1984:280). Her old illusions, her old self is gone forever, she is laid bare, but the only thing that can restore her to vitality could paradoxically make her throw herself away. How can women maintain a strong subjective identity and yet also be treasured as a symbolic illusion by a loving other? Indeed, how can anyone? If we spurn the illusions, the result is a puritanical aridity reminiscent of the Bishop's philosophy in Ingmar Bergman's film **Fanny and Alexander**. If we fetishize the illusions, the individual behind them is lost and alienated. And not only is it a question of the relationship of the "Other" to the symbolic dimensions of the self. The projection of symbolic identity, the performance of self in the world is essential to the development of a healthy subjectivity. What Carter is saying is that subjectivity is not going to be healthy if the symbolic positing of self isn't in the frame of human relationships but takes place as a dehumanized economic exchange.

We have to remember here that Walser himself has been undergoing a transformation. He is not the bourgeois male--symbolized by Rosencreutz--who sucks the life energy of women, or the man who would fetter a woman in a golden cage as the Grand Duke tries to do. Nor is he the scrutinizing, scientific man he himself once

was. He has been made a clown and a shaman. He has been wiped clean and given the germ of a new identity and interpretive framework that "made no categorical distinction between seeing and believing" (Carter 1984:262). This "magical realism" is founded on a notion of confidence, a willingness to believe, to make-believe in a magical reality. Such a vision allows acceptance of illusions and their ontological validity. Walser's transformation thus lays a groundwork upon which Fevvers can transform to adulthood in a fashion that doesn't destroy her.

The reunion of Fevvers and Walser ends the liminal phase. We now enter the reintegration phase, which is again associated with ritual imagery. A scene involving a newborn child, a symbol of rebirth, occurs outside the shaman's village . This birth symbolism is often associated with reintegration, being born again into society. There is also sex in this episode, which is, one might say, the ultimate symbol of reintegration. Another image of reintegration is the movement from liminal darkness to light, which occurs in the final scuffle in the shaman's hut.

It is useful to use Victor Turner's idea of communitas to explain what happens between Fevvers and Walser, and indeed to explain Carter's solution to the problems she has laid out regarding human relationships. Turner defines communitas as essentially "an unmediated relationship between historical, idiosyncratic, concrete individuals" (Turner 1982:45). Emphasized here is both the bond made between people and their individuality. Communitas is both the many and the one. For Walser and Fevvers, the bond is made of "hubris, desire, and imagination," in a word, confidence. They are each other's ideals, but they also remain idiosyncratic. This is Carter's reforging of interpretive schema, and it required the sacrifice that freed the possibility of a

symbol's personhood, and also the regenerating aspects of the grotesque. This resurrected grotesque allows Fevvers to be a farting angel, both a reality and an ideal. Bakhtin writes of the carnival experience:

> People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnival experience, unique of its kind. [Bakhtin 1968:10]

Here it is by way of a freshly reinterpreted grotesque imagery that this merging occurs.

Communitas and the grotesque link up in another way at this point to contribute to the power of Carter's "incantation." Both concepts share a universalizing quality. "The material bodily principle is a triumphant, festive principle. It is a banquet for all the world" (Bakhtin 1968:19). "When even two people believe that they experience unity, all people are felt by those two, if only for a flash, to be one" (Turner 1982:47). We see this very clearly with Fevvers' laughter that closes the book. This laughter is "folk" laughter, communitas laughter.

> The spiralling tornado of Fevvers' laughter began to twist and shudder across the entire globe, as if a spontaneous response to the giant comedy that endlessly unfolded beneath it, until everything that lived and breathed everywhere was laughing. [Carter 1984:295]

It expresses a relationship to existence of all inclusive regeneration that is both mocking and triumphant. It is carnival laughter: "It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival" (Bakhtin 1968:12). It is a spilling over of body and mind, impossible to feel within the boundary of roles. It is ambivalent, regenerative, antistructural,

grotesque, and universalizing. This universal quality is another reason why the freeing of the grotesque in the clown's sacrifice was so important. Not only did it allow the grotesque's regenerating, humanizing aspects loose, it also freed its inclusive festive principle. This principle includes even the readers of the work. We too are part of the "giant comedy," and by reminding us of this fact through humor and grotesque imagery that "gets under our skin," Carter's power to actually effect us is increased. Thus, the sacrifice not only purifies the characters within the narrative, it also potentially transforms the way the book will be received.

This book ends with a vision of human relationships, a recognition of the need for imagination, the maturing and coming together as individuals of Fevvers and Walser, and a big joke. These are all interrelated and part of the solution to Carter's initial problem. The ending is a vision of a hopeful human future consecrated by the celebration of the beginning of the 20th century. Fevvers proclaims "On that bright day, when I am no more a singular being, but, warts and all, the female paradigm, no longer an imagined fiction but plain fact" (Carter 1984:286). To be this, however, she needs Walser "to bear witness" to her (Carter 1984:286). But both to be borne witness to and to remain an individual, that is the problem. It is through a reformulation of human relationship accomplished by ritual transformation, and predicated on the paradox-encompassing nature of the grotesque that this duality resolves itself. Fevvers can then be both symbol and image, with all their empowering aspects, and an independent, real, mature individual. The big joke at the end is that she was not a virgin. Her virginity and its defense served as a mechanism to create the structure of the plot. This puts the work in line with most romantic

fiction: virgin and hero struggle. They are united. They get married. They live happily ever after. But that sort of fiction always reduces the woman to a symbolic role, as virgin, as wife. By subverting this, Carter is rewriting the nature of the love relationship.

This rewriting is the heart of this book. Carter has seen something wrong with the manner in which people relate to each other. It is a deep problem, and can't be separated from a cultural, interpretive schema for understanding symbols and understanding human beings. How to transform this schema? Carter uses a sacrifice and rite of passage structure to open up new poosibilities for interpretation. Burkean symbolic analysis was a way of charting these structures as they transformed meanings and characters. Carter wants to go beyond the modern conceptual structure to something new, yet also old--new in that it involves a redefinition of the relation of men and women, and old in that it partakes of a sense of the grotesque much closer to that which Bakhtin calls folk, than that of the modern version of the grotesque. This redefinition of relationship recognizes the tension between the outward symbolic dimensions of selfhood and the inner aspects of subjectivity. Carter proposes a solution to this tension through a relationship which is witness to the magical, imaginative possibilities of the symbolic self, yet always grounded by the revitalizing earthiness of the humorous, the carnivalesque, the grotesque.

Carter's is indeed a hopeful vision, a post-modernism founded on a playful, intersubjective, erotic reinterpretation of the creation and recognition of human value. Carter tries to win us over, to transform us along with her characters, but even she has her doubts. Lizzie iterates this recognition when she says: "This old witch sees storms ahead, my girl. When I look to the future I see through a glass,

darkly. You improve your analysis, girl, and then we'll discuss it" (Carter 1984:286). Carter's Marxist sensibilities refuse to let her wholeheartedly believe that a decent relationship is THE cure for the world's woes. But she certainly would say it's a start.

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