Jeanette Winterson's Queering of the Carnivalesque in the Fiction of Angela Carter

Paulina Palmer

Abstract
I investigate the way in which the novels of Jeanette Winterson, influenced by the writing of Judith Butler and other theorists, develop from lesbian and queer perspectives themes that Angela Carter treats in her fiction, especially her feminist reworking of the concepts of the carnivalesque and the grotesque body associated with the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin. After commenting on the two writers' differing treatment of the motif of the carnivalesque arena or space, as exemplified in Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Winterson's *The Passion*, I discuss their representation of the human/plant hybrid, with its connotations of the fantastic, in Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman* and Winterson's *The PowerBook*. I conclude the essay by analysing Winterson's development in *The Stone Gods* of Carter's portrayal of the marionette in "The Loves of Lady Purple" and *The Magic Toyshop*. The two writers' experimental feminist/queer treatments of genre, including historiographic metafiction and fantasy, also receive attention.

Key-words: carnivalesque, grotesque body, feminist, lesbian, queer.

1. Introduction

Women with wings or webbed feet, human/plant hybrids, and a cyborg who forms a relationship with a human – these are some of the grotesque figures who feature in this essay. Their presence is explained by the fact that the discussion seeks to investigate the connections existing between Angela Carter's and Jeanette Winterson's treatment of motifs relating to the carnivalesque, a concept associated with the critic Mikhail Bakhtin. The article also explores the way in which Carter's representation of motifs and themes with carnivalesque connotations receives development in Winterson's fiction. As the examples I discuss illustrate, Winterson generally recasts them with the effect of either queering them

or accentuating the queer sexual connotations that they already evoke.

The connections between the fiction of Carter and Winterson have in fact already received a degree of attention from critics. Sonya Andermahr discusses the way in which the novels and stories that Carter produced in the 1960s and 1970s anticipate women's writing in the 1980s and 1990s, Winterson's fiction in particular. Andermahr explores how Winterson develops in *Sexing the Cherry* (1990), with reference to Fortunata, the motifs of flight and "the ariel sublime" (Russo 1994: 11) that Carter utilises in *Nights at the Circus* (1984) to depict Fevvers' trapeze act (Andermahr 2012: 13-15). Jeffrey Roessner also comments on the links between the novels of the two writers, discussing the critiques of the conventional patrilineal family they introduce (Roessner 2002: 102-122). Yet, as these examples illustrate, although critics have recognised some of connections existing between the work of Carter and Winterson, the links between their representations of the carnivalesque have been ignored. Whereas Carter's reference to the carnivalesque has been acknowledged both in my own writing (Palmer 1987: 179-205) and that of Sarah Gamble (Gamble 1997: 66, 73-78), Winterson's, in contrast, has aroused little interest. I aim in my essay to rectify this neglect. In addition to examining Winterson's development of Carter's treatment of carnivalesque themes and motifs, I shall examine, in the context of queer theoretical writing, the way in which Winterson expands upon and enhances their queer dimension. My discussion illuminates the different approaches the two writers adopt to queer experience. As we shall see, whereas Carter focuses chiefly on queer forms of gender, including transvestism and transsexuality, Winterson, though referring to these, tends to prioritise in her work reference to lesbianism and female same-sex relationships.

As a starting point for the discussion of the fiction of the two writers, I shall refer to an essay that I published on Carter's fiction in Sue Roe's collection *Women Reading Women's Writing* in 1987, in which I examined Carter's treatment of gender and sexuality (Palmer 1987: 179-205). Reference to the carnivalesque features prominently in the essay, chiefly with reference to Carter's famous novel *Nights at the Circus*. I examine how, in the episodes describing the visit that Fevvers pays to Russia with Colonel Kearney's circus and in the brothel-cum-women's centre where she spends her

childhood, Carter pioneers the treatment of the carnivalesque as a vehicle for treating topics relevant to feminism. These include the abuses and misogyny typifying a patriarchal economy and culture and the workings of the female community. In the episodes relating to the circus, the chief clown Buffo assumes the title of "Lord of Misrule" (Carter 1984: 117) and emphasis is placed on the inversion of hierarchy that carnivalesque experience and practices tend to involve. Carter draws attention to the way in which Buffo inverts and deconstructs his body, wearing, as she humorously describes, "his insides on his outsides" (p. 116). However, Carter's treatment of the carnivalesque differs significantly from Bakhtin's in that she constructs a feminist critique of certain practices and values associated with it. She describes the slapstick and beatings in which the clowns engage not as playful manifestation of male exuberance but as signifying the violence and misogyny rife in masculinist culture. Another innovation Carter introduces is the recasting of the motif of carnival to apply to the world of women and female community, as exemplified by her portrayal of Ma Nelson, the Madame of the brothel where Fevvers is raised, where Ma Nelson occupies the role of "Mistress of the Revels" (p. 49). Carnivalesque inversion operates prominently in this establishment since it functions, unusually, as a women's centre by day and a brothel by night. Fevvers' fabulous wings, central to her role in the narrative, also have carnivalesque associations. As well as relating her to the hybrid, grotesque body, they connect her to both spiritual and animal economies since they evoke angelic as well as birdlike connotations.

Since Carter sadly died of cancer in 1992, the historical position of her writing means that it limits her treatment of the carnivalesque chiefly to feminist interests. Carter did not have the opportunity to develop her utilisation of themes and motifs relating to the carnivalesque with reference to queer theory to any major degree. Nonetheless, she does on occasion depict characters and situations whose portrayal invites a queer reading. An obvious example is her representation of the transgender film star Tristessa in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). This alluring figure, adored and feted by her male admirers as the epitome of romantic femininity, is discovered in the course of the narrative to be not a woman at all but a man masquerading as one. Even more interestingly, her gender inversion is revealed as not being the product of surgery. In consonance

with the poststructuralist and queer view of gender as a discursive production dependent on cultural fantasy and performativity associated with theorists such as Judith Butler and Donald E. Hall, gender inversion is achieved by her repeated presentation of herself, by means of makeup, dress and body movement, as feminine, combined with audience's conviction that s/he is a woman (Butler 1991: 13-31; Hall 2003: 72-76).

Carter's portrayal of Tristessa illustrates the way in which ideas relating to queer experience occasionally infiltrate her representation of characters and themes relating to the carnivalesque. However, before turning to the recasting they receive in Winterson's fiction, there is another motif with carnivalesque associations that Carter employs and, since it is pertinent to my essay, it is one that we need to explore. This is the carnivalesque arena and space.

2. Carter and the carnivalesque arena

Nights at the Circus is not the first novel that Carter constructs around a specifically carnivalesque arena – in this instance, as its title signals, the circus. Published in 1972, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, with its reference to the fairground, furnishes an earlier example. Carter represents the fairground in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* not in terms of a particular geographical location but as a universalised utopian space that is inhabited by the eccentric and the marginalised. The narrative describes how "[t]he travelling fair was its own world, which acknowledged no geographical location or temporal situation, for everywhere we halted was exactly the same as where we had stopped last" (Carter 1982: 98). The novel represents it as the home of people whom so-called 'normal' society dismisses as oddities and misfits such as freaks and dwarfs. By foregrounding their tendency to group together and form a community, Carter's narrator describes how they "shared nothing but the sullen glamour of their difference from the common world and clung defensively together to protect and perpetuate this difference" since, as "natives of the fairground, they acknowledged no other nationality" (p. 98). This description, though making no reference to gay or queer sexuality, nonetheless looks forward indirectly, in its repetition of the word "difference", to the transgressive dimension of queer life.

In describing the fairground folk as sharing "nothing but the sullen glamour of their difference from the common world" and clinging "defensively together to protect and perpetuate" it, Carter could be describing the 1970s concept of "lesbian nation" or the more recent one of "queer community". The phrase "sullen glamour" that she employs to characterise them is also of interest since it anticipates, in linking the abject with the attractive, the ambivalent way in which heteronormative society tends to regard the homosexual. While dismissing queer people as immoral and scandalous, mainstream society nonetheless frequently displays a sneaking fascination with them. The discussion of the concept of the abject in the writing of Julia Kristeva and the feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young sheds light on this ambivalent response (Kristeva 1982: 1-31; Young 1990: 144-48).

Carter reworks the description of the carnivalesque arena in the *Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* in the story "The Loves of Lady Purple", first published in the collection *Fireworks* in 1974. Here, by describing the fairground folk as linked together by their "extraordinariness" and "an internationality which acknowledges no geographic boundaries" (Carter 1988: 25), the story represents them in terms of both a state of mind and an international community. The account of Colonel Kearney's circus in *Nights at the Circus*, published subsequently, adds yet another facet to her description of the carnivalesque arena – one that looks forward to Winterson's utilisation of the motif. Here Carter explicitly sexualises it, giving it lesbian associations. For, in addition to representing the circus as the home of the clowns and their brutal slapstick and beatings, the narrative describes it as the site where the oppressed Mignon, the victim of male abuse, and the Princess of Abyssinia, who is in charge of the circus tigers, first meet and become lovers. Carter's work describes the two women in terms verging on the utopian. Each character speaks a different language, and she portrays them employing the transcendent medium of music (German lieder, in fact) in order to communicate. Fantasy and utopian fiction, as Lucie Armitt explains, in their emphasis on excess and rejection of realism and conventional character representation, have carnivalesque connotations (Armitt 1996: 67-8), and Carter's fiction presents the lesbian relationship the two women form in similar terms. The narrator appropriately refers to it in the later chapters of the novel

where, in terms of Carter's writing career, the author is moving into the realm of utopian fantasy.

3. Winterson's representation of the carnivalesque

Carter's association of the carnivalesque arena with lesbian love in the episode depicting the involvement between Mignon and the Princess of Abyssinia in *Nights at the Circus*, discussed above, looks forward to and is developed in Winterson's fiction – in *The Passion* (1988), in particular. Here Winterson's novel explicitly associates the carnivalesque with lesbian sexual attraction.

Queer theory emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, articulated initially in the writing of Teresa de Lauretis, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Butler, and other theorists (Jagose 1996: 63-90, 127-29). In problematising and critiquing the identity-categories 'lesbian', 'gay' and 'homosexual', which were prioritised by the 1970s lesbian feminist and gay liberation movements, queer theorists also critique the concept of the binary division homosexual/heterosexual that these categories promote. Queer thinkers regard identity as provisional, contingent and the product of fantasy. Accepting the poststructuralist view of the mobility of desire, they problematise the concept of a stable sexual identity or gender and thus interrogate the hetero/homo binary. However, as Butler indicates, the gulf between lesbian feminist and gay liberationist views, on the one hand, and queer perspectives, on the other hand, is neither rigidly fixed nor insurmountable. Although she generally endorses a queer perspective and represents sexuality as mobile, in her essay "Critically Queer" Butler draws attention to the socio-political usefulness of identity categories, especially in relation to challenging homophobic prejudice and 'coming out'. As she states: "It remains politically necessary to lay claim to 'women', 'queer', 'gay', and 'lesbian', precisely because of the way these terms, as it were, lay their claim on us prior to our full knowing" (Butler 1993: 229).

Other theorists besides Butler, such as Michael Warner, also recommend the utilisation of both 'queer' and 'identity categories' (Warner 1993: XXVIII). They argue that, as is the case with the term 'queer', we need to resignify these categories positively, rescuing them from their shameful associations. This is, in fact, one of

Winterson's key interests, in both her early fiction, in which she writes from a lesbian viewpoint, and her later novels where her perspective is ideologically closer to the queer.

In *The Passion,* Winterson locates the narrative in the nineteenth-century, in the period of the Napoleonic Wars. Here she employs as a carnivalesque arena the city of Venice during carnival festivities and, like Carter in her reference to the circus, interrelates a particular location with a utopian space and state of mind. The narrator Villanelle, whose name appropriately signifies a song or dance, describes Venice as a "mercurial" city (Winterson 1988: 49), the images that it offers the spectator existing in a state of flux. The carnival entertainers are portrayed as similarly "mercurial" in terms of both body movement and gender. They include, as Villanelle describes them, "fire eaters frothing at the mouths with yellow tongues" and "women of every kind" (p. 58). Villanelle adds knowingly, with her innuendo hinting at their transgender qualities, "and not all of them are women" (p. 58). Here she signals the transgressive gender roles associated with carnivalesque festivity and lifestyles. Villanelle herself furnishes an illustration since, while working at the Casino, she dresses as a boy. In describing the male masquerade that Villanelle enacts, Winterson's novel explores the performative dimension of gender and the way in which, as Butler argues, it is produced by a series of repeated acts. Like Tristessa in Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), Villanelle has become so accustomed to wearing drag and performing the male role that she is no longer sure which her authentic sex and identity are – or if, in fact, she has them. "What was myself", she asks curiously, "Was this male breeches and boots self any less real than my [feminine] garters?" (p. 66).

Another feature of Winterson's representation of the Venetian carnival that develops Carter's treatment of the carnivalesque arena and the activities characterising it is her description of the performance staged by the acrobats in St. Marks Square. The scene develops the depiction of the performance enacted by the tellingly named "acrobats of desire" (p. 113) that Carter describes taking place in the fairground in *The Incredible Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. Carter's novel describes the gender of the acrobats as ambiguous for they all "shared a similar, almost female sinuosity of spine and marked development of the pectorals" (p. 112). Their

performance, signifying the triumph of art over nature, culminates, as Carter's protagonist describes, in "an abstract, geometrical dissection of the flesh that left me breathless" (p. 113). The illusion of having "dismembered themselves" (p. 113) that they create links their performance to the concept of the grotesque body and the incongruous inversions and shifts of persona that typify carnival festivity.

The representation of the acrobats' performance in Winterson's *The Passion* develops key features of the description in Carter's *The Incredible Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. In describing the illusion of having "dismembered themselves" that the acrobats create, she evokes the image of the carnivalesque grotesque body, described by Bakhtin as the body "in the act of becoming" (Bakhtin 1968: 317). And, possibly taking a cue from Carter, who terms the acrobats she portrays as "the acrobats of desire", Winterson's novel gives the acrobats erotic significance, by representing them as exploiting their physical agility to daringly snatch kisses from the lips of the revellers dancing in the square below. The narrative describes how

> [f]rom the wooden frame above where the gunpowder waits, there are also suspended a number of nets and trapezes. From here acrobats swing over the square, casting grotesque shadows on the dancers below. Now and again, one will dangle by the knees and snatch a kiss from whoever is standing below. (p. 59)

An interesting feature of this description is the way in which Winterson's novel links the acrobats' performance metaphorically to the sexuality of her protagonist Villanelle. Villanelle approves of the acrobats' style of kissing. She remarks: "I like such kisses, they fill the mouth and leave the body free. To kiss well one must kiss solely. No groping hands or stammering hearts. The lips and the lips alone are the pleasure" (p. 59). Their manner of kissing prefigures Villanelle's initial sexual encounter with the mysterious Venetian lady whom she terms "the Queen of Spades". Villanelle, on first encountering her at the Casino, assumes that the Queen of Spades is duped by the male attire she is wearing into thinking that she is a boy. Villanelle decides to play along with what she assumes to be this misconception and, when the Queen of Spades invites her back to her palazzo, deliberately conceals her sex by limiting her sexual practice to kissing. The stylised positions that she and the Queen

of Spades adopt and the exclusive focus they place on the mouth replicate the stylised, inverted posture of the acrobats. As Villanelle observes:

> She lay on the rug and I lay at right angles to her so that only our lips might meet. Kissing this way is the strangest of distractions. The greedy body that clamours for satisfaction is forced to content itself with a single sensation and, just as the blind hear more acutely and the deaf can feel the grass grow, so the mouth becomes the focus of love and all things pass through it and are re-defined. It is a sweet and precise torture. (p. 67)

The postures Villanelle and her lover adopt are stylised and artificial. In associating lesbian sex with artifice rather than 'nature', Winterson's novel touches on a topic of debate in lesbian writing. Her representation conflicts with 1970s lesbian feminist approaches to lesbian sex, as exemplified, for instance, in the essay "The Woman Identified Woman", produced by the early New York group Radicalesbians (1973). Radicalesbians, in order to challenge the lesbophobic view of the lesbian as a freak and monster that was current in the period, represent her as signifying a natural, "real" woman (Radicalesbians 1973: 245). Winterson's association of lesbian love and sex with 'artifice' and experimentation agrees, however, with postmodern perspectives, as exemplified by remarks articulated by Danae Clark writing in 1991. By associating female same-sex sexual practice with the lesbian struggle for survival, Clark writes: "Lesbians are accustomed to playing out multiple styles and sexual roles as a tactic of survival and thus have learned the artifice of invention in defeating heterosexual codes of naturalism" (Clark 1993: 194). The association of sex with cultural artifice agrees with Carter's view. It echoes her famous observation, articulated in her introduction to the essay, *The Sadeian Woman*:

> Our flesh arrives to us out of history, like everything else does. We may believe we fuck stripped of social artifice; in bed we even feel we touch the bedrock of human nature itself. But we are deceived. (Carter 1979: 9)

4. The grotesque body and historiographic metafiction

As well as associating the performance that the acrobats enact with the grotesque body, Winterson's *The Passion* connects Villanelle with

the concept by assigning her the feature of webbed feet. Like Fevvers who is distinguished by her wings, Villanelle's body is represented as a hybrid construction interrelating human and animal – or rather, in both cases, bird. Villanelle's webbed feet have been interpreted symbolically. Winterson describes her as having inherited them from her father who is a gondolier and, as only male members of the family usually inherit this attribute, Lisa Moore interprets it as signifying her queer difference (1995: 112). Like Fevvers, who utilises her wings to escape male assault, Villanelle makes practical use of her webbed feet. Winterson portrays her walking on the water of the canal, in a manner reminiscent of Christ, to help her friend Henri escape arrest. In order to prevent him from being arrested for murder and take him to safety, she drags away the boats that furnish evidence of the crime.

Like the portrayal of Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*, Winterson's *The Passion* challenges the Bakhtinian association of the grotesque body with the misogynistic concept of the "monstrous feminine" (Russo 1994: 5-6) and the relegation of woman to the domain of the abject that it signifies. Mary Russo, arguing that this misogynistic perspective is patriarchal in origin, explicates it by reference to Bakhtin's grotesque image of the motifs Russo terms the "senile, pregnant hags" and the "archaic, maternal version of the female grotesque" (p. 10). The latter concept is cited and theorised by Kristeva (1982: 53-5). Whereas Carter's novel, inverting its traditional misogynistic import, employs it, in relation to Fevvers, to celebrate female difference, Winterson's novel utilises it, with reference to Villanelle, in order to celebrate lesbianism.

A further connection between Winterson's *The Passion* and Carter's *Nights at the Circus* is that both novels represent works of feminist historiographic metafiction. It is no coincidence, I suggest, that the two writers choose to situate protagonists who exemplify the grotesque body in fictional texts that create a feminist or queer approach to history, in Carter's case the Victorian era and in Winterson's the slightly earlier period of the Napoleonic Wars. As Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn demonstrate, works of feminist historical fiction, if regarded from a conventional patriarchal viewpoint, tend to strike the reader as misshapen and grotesque. The two critics draw attention to the fragmented, discontinuous character of women's history and the contradictions of victimisation and empowerment, oppression and heroism that the trajectories

it describes frequently display. They also investigate the fractured interplay between private and public spheres, home and work, that frequently inform it. They emphasise the need for historians to represent "women not as victims of oppression, as passive spectators of the drama of history", as is only too often the case, "but as having an influence and history of their own" (Greene and Kahn 2003: 17). Winterson's novel, like Carter's, illustrates, in both content and structure, the fragmented and 'grotesque' facets of feminist historiographic narrative that Greene and Kahn describe.

As well as being works of historiographic metafiction, both Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Winterson's *The Passion* vividly interrelate realism with fantasy. This is yet another feature that connects the two novels with the carnivalesque. Lucie Armitt (1996), as mentioned above, connects fantasy and the utopian with the carnivalesque mode, while Rosemary Jackson also comments on the affinities they display. She describes Bakhtin as endorsing "fantasy's hostility to static, discrete units" and favouring a style that displays "a juxtaposition of incompatible elements" and "a resistance to fixity" (1996: 15). She argues that, in carnivalesque writing of this kind, language is employed experimentally and "spatial, temporal, and philosophical ordering systems all dissolve" (p. 15). The interplay between realism and fantasy that Winterson, possibly influenced by Carter, creates, illustrates these features. It also interestingly agrees with the form of narrative that the critic Terry Castle describes as appropriate to lesbian fiction. Attempting to answer the question "What is a lesbian fiction?", Castle tentatively suggests that, since lesbianism prioritises woman and looks forward to an era of freedom from hetero-patriarchal control, its fictional representation tends to be utopian in impulse. In consequence, it reveals a tendency to move into the realm of utopian fantasy and, as Castle perceptively describes, to "dismantle the real, as it were, in the search for the not-yet-real, something unpredicted and unpredictable" (1993: 91). Winterson's fiction, and the fluid interplay between realism and fantasy it creates, reflects this utopian impulse

5. Human/plant connections

The interrelation between human and animal that Fevvers and Villanelle reveal in their bodies is not the only form of grotesque

hybridity that features in Carter's and Winterson's fiction. That between human and plant is another. Carter's work again anticipates Winterson's treatment of the motif, introducing in *The Incredible Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* examples of hybrid constructs of this kind. Here, as in the classical myth of the metamorphosis of the nymph Daphne into a laurel tree, we encounter girls with branches springing from their foreheads and roses growing from their armpits. Carter's fiction critiques these grotesque images, representing them as perverse constructs created to appeal to male misogynistic fantasy. Winterson's *The PowerBook* (2001), on the contrary, treats the motif of the human/plant hybrid playfully. Here, her writing innovatively selects as a carnivalesque arena not the traditional site of the fairground, circus or carnival but the world of virtual reality that we access via the computer. It is here that the narrator Ali, represented as an alias for Winterson herself (2001: 26), encounters the woman she nicknames "Tulip". Ali emails her the fantasy narratives she creates on the web to amuse and entertain her and, when she discovers that she is falling in love with her, employs them as a form of courtship. The first story she narrates takes the form of an exotic fairy tale set in Istanbul in the style of the Arabian *One Thousand And One Nights*. Humorously portraying herself as a girl who masquerades as a boy by substituting tulip bulbs for balls and a stem for a penis, she describes herself embarking on a sea voyage. Having survived an attack by pirates, Ali eventually ends up at the residence of the Italian envoy to the Turks where she meets and makes love with Tulip, portrayed on this occasion as a beautiful princess. The couple's sexual encounter concludes in a fascinating episode of magic realism when Ali discovers to her astonishment that she is able to enjoy full sexual congress with Tulip. As she observes: "[…] I felt my disguise come to life. The tulip began to stand. I looked down. There it was, making a bridge from my body to hers […] [T]he Princess lowered herself across my knees and I felt the firm red head and pale shaft plant itself in her body […]. All afternoon I fucked her" (p. 22). Virtual reality, as Winterson's protagonist illustrates in this episode, represents the present-day, postmodern equivalent to the carnivalesque arena of the fairground, circus or carnival. It furnishes ample scope for the representation of the shifts of identity, transgressive sexual adventures and grotesque bodies in the act of becoming that we associate with the Bakhtinian carnivalesque.

6. The marionette and automaton

Another form that the grotesque body takes in Carter's fiction, one that Winterson also inventively reworks, is the interplay between human and technological inventions exemplified by the figure of the marionette or automaton. Figures of this kind, as well as carrying associations of the puppet Olympia who features in E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" and Sigmund Freud's commentary on the story in "The Uncanny" (1985: 348-55), have been theorised by Hélène Cixous (1973: 525-48).

The motif of the marionette furnishes Carter with a vehicle for treating a variety of uncanny themes. There is, for example, the uncanny double, to the fore in *The Magic Toyshop* (1967). The heroine Melanie, on watching the puppet performance of Leda and the Swan that her tyrannical uncle directs, sees in the figure of Leda a mirror-image of her own oppressed situation and sexual vulnerability. Carter's subsequent story "The Loves of Lady Purple" represents a scary version of the dark carnivalesque and centres, like *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman,* on a fairground. It focuses on another theme commonly associated with the marionette, its transformation from inanimate to animate. The marionette Lady Purple, who follows the trajectory that the puppet-master professor has mapped out for her but takes it to terrifying lengths that he did not envisage, unexpectedly metamorphoses into a vampire. The story concludes with Lady Purple taking revenge on him for his brutal treatment and sucking him dry of blood.

Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007) recasts the *topos* of the metamorphosis from inanimate to human that we find in Carter's "The Loves of Lady Purple", though Winterson utilises it in a more benign manner. *The Stone Gods* is a work of dystopian fiction set in the future age when genetic engineering and surgical modification have been taken to extreme lengths. Though the narrative is frequently grim in mood, incidents of carnivalesque humour introduce an element of light relief. Commenting on the fashion for "genetic fixing" (Winterson 2007: 58) with which society in the novel is obsessed, the protagonist Billie flippantly observes: "So, sexy sex is now about freaks and children. If you want to work in the sex industry, get yourself cosmetically altered in shape and size. Giantesses are back in business. Grotesques

earn good money" (p. 23). On entering the gym, represented as a futuristic version of the carnivalesque arena peopled by bizarre examples of the grotesque body, she encounters "an enormous woman […] hopping along on a diamond-studded crutch" (p. 23). The woman displays, Billie perceives, "impressive breasts – more so, because where I would normally expect to find a nipple, I find a mouth" (p. 23).

Winterson's novel initially portrays Billie as totally opposed to the reconstructive surgery and genetic adaptation that the majority of the population employ. Ironically, however, illustrating the irrationality of desire, Billie subsequently falls in love with a figure who in fact exemplifies it. This is Robo *sapiens* Spike, a cyborg whose construction interrelates the organic and technological. Spike reciprocates Billie's feelings of attraction and, defying the law against inter-species sex, the two become lovers. As a result of her attachment to Billie, Spike accommodates increasingly to the human. In positive terms, she discovers the ability to feel emotion while, from a negative point of view, she becomes subject to human physical limitations and ills, including mortality and death. As for Billie, though initially regarding Spike's body as odd and grotesque, she gradually comes to accept the difference that it signifies, acknowledging that "[s]he is a stranger. She is the strange that I am beginning to love" (p. 88). In exploring the relationship between self and 'other' that the attachment between human and robot signifies, Winterson treats in fictional form Kristeva's perception, articulated in *Strangers to Ourselves*, that since "[t]he foreigner [i.e. the unconscious] is within me, hence we are all foreigners" and "[i]f I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners" (Kristeva 1991: 192). Winterson also evokes, by referring to the sense of unfamiliarity and strangeness that a human can feel in forming a relationship with a cyborg, the initial unfamiliarity that the experience of same-sex love, on account of heterosexuality signifying the norm, can provoke. As Elizabeth Freeman asks, "Wasn't my being queer, in the first instance, about finding sex where it was not supposed to be? […] As a model for doing queer theory, doesn't that rely on the capacity to be surprised?" (Freeman 2011: 33).

Winterson's representation of Billie and Spike's relationship and her description of the way in which the two accommodate to each other's difference takes place against the background of other

carnivalesque events and phenomena, their occurrence paralleling the contradictions and ambiguities the two need to accept for their relationship to survive. In order to escape the oppressive political regime currently in power on planet Orbus (Winterson's term for the Earth), they join the exodus of other refugees emigrating to the mysterious Planet Blue to start a new life together. Billie poetically describes how, on entering this exotic terrain, they encounter "mammals with fins and fish with legs and birds with double wings like angels, and heads without bodies and bodies that seemed headless, and these teeming impossible experiments with life scattered away, deeper into the deep green" (p. 69). The extraordinary appearance of these creatures, though grotesque from the viewpoint of emigrants from planet Orbus, is nonetheless intriguing and exotically beautiful – as is indicated by the echoes of Andrew Marvell's phrase, "in a green thought in a green shade" (Marvell 2003: 158) that Winterson's words "deeper into the deep green" (Winterson 2007: 69) describing the forest evoke.

In centring *The Stone Gods* on the hybrid and, from a conventional viewpoint, 'grotesque' relationship between the human Billie and Robo *sapiens* Spike, Winterson develops the theme of lesbian difference, one that figures prominently in contemporary lesbian fiction. In order to avoid the pejorative representation of the female partners in a lesbian relationship as mere doubles or narcissistic reflections of one another (Creed 1995: 99-101), an image that, as Barbara Creed describes, is pictorially evoked by nineteenth-century paintings of a woman kissing herself in a mirror as if trying to embrace herself (Dijkstra 1986: 150-3), present-day writers frequently foreground the difference between the two partners. Winterson's fiction, as we have seen, generally utilises this strategy, emphasising the difference between the partners. Such relationships include the involvement of Villanelle, the daughter of a gondolier, who dresses as a boy, with her aristocratic, married lover she terms "the Queen of Spades" in *The Passion;* and the lesbian writer Ali and her financially affluent, bisexual partner Tulip who appears to be married in *The PowerBook*. *The Stone Gods*, in focusing on a relationship between a human and a cyborg, takes this emphasis on 'difference' even further.

My discussion of the hybrid figure Robo *sapiens* Spike, her portrayal characterised by the grotesque interplay of the

technological/organic and by the transgressive relationship she forms with the human Billie in Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, concludes my analysis of the connections between Winterson's and Carter's respective treatments of carnivalesque motifs and themes. In illustrating the strategies that Winterson employs to develop Carter's representations, generally with the effect of accentuating their queer significance, I have drawn attention to the diversity of the two writers' treatment of carnivalesque sites and images. In addition to the carnivalesque arena, exemplified in Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and *The Infernal Desires of Dr Hoffman* by the circus and fairground, and in Winterson's *The Passion* by St Mark's Square, the two writers create a number of striking variations on the motif of the grotesque body and the different forms it can take. They include the interplay between human and animal, exemplified by Fevvers in Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Villanelle in Winterson's *The Passion*; the interconnection between human and plant, described by Carter in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman* and Winterson in *The PowerBook*; and the marionette and cyborg, exemplified by Carter in *The Magic Toyshop* and "The Loves of Lady Purple", and by Winterson in *The Stone Gods*. Winterson's queer sexual reworking of Carter's motifs are notable for their vivacity. They range from the lesbian relationship between Villanelle and the Queen of Spades in *The Passion* that, like the involvement between Mignon and the Princess of Abyssinia in Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, commences in a carnivalesque arena, to the relationship between Billie and Robo *sapiens* Spike in *The Stone Gods* that is described in terms that are explicitly queer. The carnivalesque connotations of historiographic metafiction, discussed by Greene and Kahn, and theoretical debates about the 'artifice' of lesbian sexual practice as opposed to the association of the lesbian with 'nature', illuminate the two writers' work. There are, no doubt, other facets of their treatment of the carnivalesque that merit investigation – and I shall be interested to read the analysis that critics writing later produce.

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