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THE PICARESQUE IN ANGELA CARTER

PIKARESKNÍ PRVKY VE VYBRANÝCH ROMÁNECH ANGELY CARTEROVÉ

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Ráda bych poděkovala vedoucí a konzultantce této diplomové práce, PhDr. Soně Novákové, CSc., M.A., za její laskavou pomoc a rady při vypracování.

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Abstract in English

This MA thesis focuses on the analysis of picaresque elements and traces of the picaresque genre in chosen novels of Angela Carter, namely her two most picaresque novels: *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984). However, as I have strived to prove throughout the analysis, Carter's earlier novels from the sixties, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), and *Heroes and Villains* (1969) are also rich in picaresque themes and motives of the journey and therefore deserve to have their place in the analysis too.

In the introduction the dissertation traces the history of the picaresque from its sixteenth-century Spanish roots until its more modern and postmodern development. It also stresses that in relation to Carter's work it is important to take into account her intertextuality. In describing it Linden Peach borrows Julia Kristeva's quotation from *Semiotike, Recherches pour un Semanalyse* where she observes that: "Every text builds itself as a mosaic of quotations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text."¹ For Carter this is especially valid – her novels are hybrid, multi-layered mosaics which use and at the same time subvert mythology, the Bible, European and English literary works, Renaissance drama (Shakespeare), fairy-stories and folk literature but also gothic tales, detective stories, horror motifs, porn and erotic romance as well as other art forms such as cinema, ballet, Saussure's linguistic and Freud's psychoanalytic theory.

Although Carter's work is so diverse and many-layered, a lot has already been written on her treatment of myth, her fusion with popular culture, the gender and gothic elements in her work, many feminist readings of her texts have been conducted as well as interpretations of her allusions to other authors. However, what has been hugely neglected are the picaresque motifs in her work, an omission which this dissertation seeks to correct.

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Semiotike, Recherches pour un Semanalyse* (Paris, Seuil, 1969) 146.

In John Haffenden's *Novelists in Interview* Carter defines picaresque as a "certain 18th century fictional device where people have adventures in order to find themselves in places where they can discuss philosophical concepts without distractions."² The main questions this dissertation strives to answer are how precisely does Carter 'reinvent' the picaresque? Who might be seen as the roguish hero in her novels? Is he or she an outcast openly defying social conventions? Is there the model of the faithful servant accompanying the roguish figure in her novels or is it just a mirror image, a reflection, of the main character? Do her characters actually finally come to terms with their place in the world or is it just one of Carter's illusionistic tricks? etc.

Although Carter's interpretation of the picaresque is rather loose and has more in common with its eighteenth-century examples than the original sixteenth-century models of the genre, she is nevertheless "orbiting in the picaresque galaxy."³ This thesis analyses her modern reinvention of the genre which consists not only of the concept of geographical travelling – with Carter it is very much a journey of the mind, journey into a land of fantasy and opportunity where the impossible becomes possible, a journey of maturity, a passage of rite, in order to discover the hero's/heroine's place in the world, a self-discovery and very often a revelation of the character's conception of sexuality and its fulfilment. In looking at the types of pícaros Carter provides, their journeys, metaphorical as well as physical, their growth and the change they undergo this dissertation demonstrates what Carter achieves by the clash of expectations of the genre and proves that it is an essential part of her work that she uses to challenge literary as well as philosophical and political boundaries and to keep readers wondering about the ongoing process of writing.

² John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Routledge, 1985) 87.

³ Alexander Blackburn, *The Myth of the Pícaro: Continuity and Transformation of the Picaresque Novel 1554-1954* (USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979) 7.

Key terms

the picaresque = a genre of the novel which has emerged in sixteenth century Spain, presenting the adventures of a roguish hero, usually in first-person narrative, who is of low social origin and strives to improve his place in society, by recounting pícaro's adventures the novel reveals corruption and hypocrisy of the society as such

pícaro = Spanish for rogue or rascal, the protagonist of the picaresque genre, usually charming but dishonest, a servant of many masters who undergoes a series of adventures

pícaro's companion = on his travels, the pícaro is usually accompanied by his faithful servant (or in Carter's case (potential) lover)

Abstrakt v českém jazyce

Předmětem této diplomové práce je analýza pikareskních prvků ve vybraných románech britské spisovatelky Angely Carterové. Zaměřuje se zejména na dvě díla, která tento žánr odrážejí nejvíce, její romány *Noci v cirkuse* (*Nights at the Circus*, 1984) a *Ďábelské generátory touhy doktora Hoffmana* (*The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, 1972). Nicméně i ranější romány Carterové ze šedesátých let dvacátého století, *Magické hračkárství* (*The Magic Toyshop*, 1967) a *Padouši a hrdinové* (*Heroes and Villains*, 1969), v sobě skrývají mnoho prvků tohoto žánru a proto jsem je ve své analýze nevynechala.

V úvodu této práce je vysledována historie pikareskního románu od jeho počátků ve Španělsku šestnáctého století až po pozdější modernistický a postmodernistický vývoj. Zároveň je zdůrazněno, že v souvislosti s analýzou určitého žánru v díle Angely Carterové je podstatné přihlédnout k intertextualitě její tvorby. Její romány jsou mnohvrstevné mozaiky a skrývají v sobě mnoho různých žánrů a inspirací jako je např. bible, renesanční drama (Shakespeare), gotická a hororová literatura, pohádky, folklorní tradice, mytologie, detektivní příběhy i pornografie, balet, film a divadlo. Carterová těmto žánrům vzdává hold, ale stejně tak se jim i vysmívá a poukazuje na omezení, která v sobě nesou.

Dosavadní rozbory a diskuse o její tvorbě byly především zaměřené na její pojetí feminismu, mýtu, genderové problematiky či gotických prvků, ale pikareskno, které je nedílnou součástí její tvorby, bylo doposud zanedbáváno. Proto se tato diplomová práce snaží tuto chybu napravit a určit, čím se liší její modernistické pojetí pikareskna od tradičních románů tohoto žánru. Zabývá se tím, kdo je píkárem v jejích románech, jakého má společníka a kam vlastně směřuje. Čeho Carterová dosahuje tím, že se přesně nedrží hranic vytyčených definicí tohoto žánru, ale interpretuje jej spíše volněji, kam na svých cestách její píkarové dospějí, jaké jsou krajiny, kterými procházejí a jak se liší od původních příkladů žánru.

V Haffendenově knize *Novelists in Interview* Carterová v rozhovoru vyjadřuje svou definici pikareska jakožto „určitého žánru osmnáctého století, ve kterém postavy zažívají různá dobrodružství, aby se ocitly na místech, kde se mohou zamýšlet a diskutovat o filozofických tématech bez rozptylování.“¹ Přestože si Carterová koncept tohoto žánru vykládá spíše volněji, pikaresko je nedílnou součástí její tvorby. Umožňuje jí zpochybňovat zažitě filozofické, literární i politické koncepty a ideje, vytyčovat nové hranice žánrům i pojmům a nutit čtenáře k přemýšlení o procesu vzniku a psaní románu, který je paralelní se začátkem a koncem píkarovy cesty, jež v Carterové pojetí nemá jednoznačný konec ani začátek, stejně jako text sám. Stejně jako se Angela Carterová nechala inspirovat autory a žánry, kteří její tvorbu předcházeli, nepřestává inspirovat ani ty, kteří přicházejí po ní.

Klíčová slova

pikaresko/pikareskní román = žánr, který vznikl v šestnáctém století ve Španělsku, jeho hlavní hrdina je obvykle okouzující podvodníček z nižší společenské vrstvy, během svých dobrodružství slouží mnoha pánům, jeho snaha zlepšit své postavení také odhaluje pokrytectví a pochybnou morálku celé společnosti

pícaro = španělské pícaro znamená taškář, šibal, šejdík, hlavní hrdina pikareskního románu, který pochází z nízké společenské vrstvy a snaží se nějak protlouct a vypracovat, obvykle svá dobrodružství popisuje a román vypráví ich-formou

píkarův průvodce/společník = věrný sluha či druh, který píkara doprovází během jeho cest, radí mu či jeho počínání satirizuje, v románech Carterové je to často potencionální druh/družka postavy

¹ John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Routledge, 1985) 87: “certain 18th century fictional device where people have adventures in order to find themselves in places where they can discuss philosophical concepts without distractions.”

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Chapter One: Introduction

In his general editor's preface to Linden Peach's collection of essays on Angela Carter's works Norman Page observes:

The death of the novel has often been announced, and part of the secret of its obstinate vitality must be its capacity for growth, adaptation, self-renewal and self-transformation: like some vigorous organism in a speeded up Darwinian ecosystem, it adapts itself quickly to a changing world.[...] the novel has shown an extraordinary capacity to find new forms and techniques and to accommodate new ideas and conceptions of human nature and human experience, and even to take up new positions on the nature of fiction itself.¹

This dissertation aims to focus on the elements of one of the traditional sixteenth-century genres – the picaresque – in the chosen novels of Angela Carter. As Page accurately states in order to survive and retain its contemporaneity, to continue to hold interest for readers, the novel had to adapt itself in a 'Darwinian' sort of fashion. However, the new forms, conceptions and styles the modern novel finds are very often not as brand new as could be expected but are based on the re-invention of the old forms, of genres that have been there for centuries, and it is precisely this partial familiarity that makes the modern novel continue to hold its appeal for readers. Using the archetypal strategies and yet reworking them into something not quite as familiar, adapting the traditional forms of genre, sculpting it and re-modelling it according to their own needs is exactly what contemporary authors do to enthrall the modern readership, they challenge the boundaries of literary genres as well as language itself and demonstrate what more they can achieve by not only bending the iron of language but also re-defining the genre forms familiar and popular for centuries by presenting them from a fresh angle. This strategy

¹ Linden Peach, *Angela Carter*, "General Editor's Preface," ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1998) ix.

is also useful in that it reminds us of genres and literary styles that might have been partially forgotten but continue to hold their importance in the history of the novel and its development.

Precisely this kind of strategy of re-inventing and remodelling the picaresque is adopted by Angela Carter, mainly in her two picaresque novels *Nights at the Circus* and *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, her earlier novels from the sixties, *The Magic Toyshop* and *Heroes and Villains*, also contain elements of the picaresque to a smaller or a bigger degree. The aim of this dissertation is to assess what exactly it is that Carter does to the picaresque. Does she redefine the genre in her own terms or does she more or less work within the established form only replacing the traditional realistic kind of setting and the roguish pícaro by an imaginary symbolic background, a fantasy world full of magical realism? Who are the pícaros in her novels? Are they women or men? Or are their gender roles even blurred? To what extent is the gender relevant? Who accompanies the pícaro in Carter's world and what kind of journeys and revelations does he or she have to undergo in order to gain some answers and arrive at revelations triggered by experience?

In analyzing Carter's approach to the picaresque, first and foremost, it is essential to establish and mention the boundaries and historical development of the picaresque genre. As Martin Halliwell points out in the *Encyclopedia of the Novel*: "The picaresque has very precise cultural and historical roots, but it has mutated into a number of different literary forms during the past 400 years."² The roots of the picaresque date back to sixteenth-century Spain and in its original mode it is a Spanish narrative of roguery with a hero who moves through different social spheres, encounters various sets of people, is born of lowly origin and strives to rise in society. The prototypes of the Spanish picaresque would be seen in *Lazarillo de Tormes* and Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán*. Harry Sieber in his concise history of the picaresque genre points out that: "The picaresque novel as a genre emerges, as Cervantes clearly perceived, out of the confluence of the *Lazarillo* and of the autobiography of a criminal."³ The picaresque genre in Spain had been consolidated by means of its frequent imitations and through translation

² Martin Halliwell, "Picaresque," *Encyclopedia of the Novel*, ed. by Paul Schellinger (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998), 2 vols.

³ Harry Sieber, *The Picaresque* (London: Methuen, 1977) 11.

transferred into other European countries such as France through which it was mediated into the English literary context. However, as Sieber points out, with the translations and transformations into other European contexts, the picaresque also started to dissolve into its merely formal elements, although these, such as the first-person narration, autobiographical form, the low-birth of the hero and the motif of the pícaro as a servant of many masters, remain, Sieber claims “‘the inner form’ becomes loose [...] and the pícaro often becomes a satirist while simultaneously being the satiric object of the real author [...]”⁴

As it moved into the eighteenth century, the nature of the picaresque started changing and diverting into several branches and streams, the famous French representative of the genre Lesage’s *Gil Blas* published between 1715 and 1735 exploits the comic and the satiric element to a much greater extent. Although it is set within the Spanish context as Sieber points out, Blas’ life is never really in danger: “he never really becomes a *pícaro* in the Spanish sense. He is rarely, if ever on the verge of starvation nor is he an obsessive thief or gambler. Money seems not to be a problem. Moreover his role as a satirist of morals and manners, especially of political intrigue, favouritism and bribery, demands that he participate but only to show how ‘wrong’ they are.”⁵ Consequently, the picaresque tradition in England started with the translations of *Lazarillo* and during the eighteenth century was also heavily influenced by its French interpretations and Lesage’s *Gil Blas*.

In England the tradition emerged with tales or narratives of roguery, such as Thomas Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller* published in 1594.⁶ What Sieber sees as the most marked distinction between the Spanish and the English pícaro is the mercantile interest of the latter. The English eighteenth-century representatives of the picaresque: Daniel Deofe’s *Moll Flanders*, Henry Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones* and Tobias Smollett’s *The Adventures of Roderick Random* all shift the sense of morality and the attainment of a happy-ending.

⁴ Sieber 31.

⁵ Sieber 49.

⁶ Sieber 51.

Richard Bjornson in *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction* observes that although all the European works confronted similar values as the original Spanish genre such as

the disintegration of traditional value systems, the rise of bourgeois ideology, and the increasing difficulty of reconciling aspirations for upward social mobility with psychological needs for security and self-respect in a hostile, dehumanizing society, [...] Moll Flanders, Gil Blas, and Roderick Random live in fictional worlds which permit them to cope successfully with problems posed by these conditions, each of them succeeds in his own way”, however, “for the Spanish pícaro, [...] there was generally no way out.⁷

Sieber agrees with Bjornson, he also finds that these European rogues manage to rise above their low social background and attain a higher position. Moreover, very frequently due to a series of coincidences they discover an advantage they were not aware of at the beginning of the story such as a rich relative they did not know about. Tom Jones, for example, finds out he is actually a nephew of the Squire and Roderick Random gets reunited with his now wealthy father in Argentina. As Sieber reflects: “At the end of their lives, far from being hunted fugitives or social outcasts, they had improved their situations considerably.”⁸ However, adding the happy ending and “the business”, self-made man (or woman) aspect is not the only way in which the English authors transform the picaresque. As John Richetti observes in *English Novel in History*: “Defoe, Fielding, and Smollett [...] domesticate the scabrous European picaresque tradition, adding romance, along with a measure of moral

⁷ Richard Bjornson, *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1977) 19-20.

⁸ Sieber 55.

decorum and psychological depth, to energetic social satire.”⁹ Bjornson, on the other hand, sees a significant difference between Defoe’s and Smollett’s picaresque, according to him, *Moll Flanders* and *Gil Blas* reflect an assimilation of the picaresque format to the expression of a bourgeois world view [...]”¹⁰, in other words, Moll and Gil can rise in society in spite of their low origin, whereas “Smollett transformed the picaresque hero into a genuine nobleman momentarily separated from the elevated social station he deserves. [...] As that hero proved himself worthy, he also illustrated the aristocratic assumption that one’s nature is determined at birth and ought to govern one’s place in a static social hierarchy.”¹¹ This transformation clearly complicates any simplistic assumptions we can make about the so called outcast status of the pícaro. The kind of outcast status may indeed be vastly different. Therefore during the later development of the genre, the social origin and rise of the character varies. “*Lazarillo* [...] established a precedent which would be followed under quite different circumstances in other picaresque novels.”¹² As I tried to demonstrate in this brief history of the development of the genre, although the Spanish sixteenth-century novels established a precedent, a basis out of which later developments sprung, the varieties in the different European cultures presented several other branches of development, different even within the individual cultures themselves. Therefore it is extremely complicated, limiting and almost impossible to provide one clear-cut, precise definition of the genre. As was mentioned in the development of it, various authors use the picaresque to different ends and the eighteenth-century as well as later, modern developments, further complicate the understanding and multiple development of the term.

What is important to stress in relation to Carter is the intertextuality of her work. In describing it Linden Peach borrows Julia Kristeva’s quotation from *Semiotike, Recherches*

⁹ John J. Richetti, *English Novel in History, 1700-1780* (Florence: Rutledge, 1998) 15.

¹⁰ Bjornson 244.

¹¹ Bjornson 244-245.

¹² Bjornson 42.

pour un Semanalyse where she observes that: “Every text builds itself as a mosaic of quotations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text.”¹³ For Carter this is especially valid – her novels are hybrid, multi-layered mosaics which use and at the same time subvert mythology, the Bible, European and English literary works, Renaissance drama (Shakespeare), fairy-stories and folk literature but also gothic tales, detective stories, horror motifs, porn and erotic romance as well as other art forms such as cinema, ballet, Saussure’s linguistic and Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. She oscillates between cheap mass literary genres, exploiting the kitsch, and canonical ones as well as intellectual philosophical works such as de Man’s, Derrida’s Saussure’s and Freud’s. Peach claims that: “It is an indication of the subversive nature of Carter’s work that often she refers to two of three different frameworks [...]”¹⁴

Although Carter’s work is so diverse, a lot has already been written on her treatment of myth, her fusion with popular culture, the gender and gothic elements in her work, many feminist readings of her texts have been conducted as well as interpretations of her allusions to other authors. However, what has been hugely neglected are the picaresque motifs in her work, an omission which this thesis seeks to correct. Although Carter’s interpretation of the picaresque is rather loose, the inspiration and motifs from the picaresque she uses are an essential part of her work which should not be neglected. In his definition of the modern uses of the picaresque, Martin Halliwell notes: “The postmodern picaresque moves even farther away from its Spanish roots and *is often assimilated into a pastiche of other literary forms.*” [italics mine]¹⁵ Although Carter uses the picaresque in the more general sense and her work follows rather the adapted English and French eighteenth-century tendencies than the traditional Spanish picaresque, she employs precisely the techniques Halliwell describes in his

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *Semiotike, Recherches pour un Semanalyse* (Paris, Seuil, 1969) 146.

¹⁴ Linden Peach, *Angela Carter*, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1998) 18.

¹⁵ *Encyclopedia of the Novel*.

definition of the picaresque in *The Encyclopedia of the Novel*. Her picaresque is part of other frameworks and genre diversions but it forms a very significant part of her melange or pastiche. Despite the complexity of the term itself, and the additional difficulty to trace the picaresque thread throughout Carter's work, the aim of this thesis is to point out that the picaresque elements, even in the looser sense, are an important part of Carter's postmodern writing and extend the history of the genre further. The thesis will seek to attract attention to the elements of journeying and moral, mental as well as physical growth of her characters, their lowly origin and narrative history in order to determine what she achieves by inserting the picaresque into her melange and how it contributes toward the final result, to prove that the picaresque constitutes a valid part alongside the gothic, feminist, mythical, philosophical, linguistic and other elements of Carter's work, a part that is worth analyzing.

As already stated, the main focal point of the analysis will be Carter's two most picaresque novels. However, her earlier novels from the seventies *The Magic Toyshop*, and science-fiction apocalyptic novel *Heroes and Villains* will also be dealt with in order to provide a more complete picture. The thesis will demonstrate that other literary forms and elements Carter uses such as fairy-tale, fantasy and science-fiction are also rich in picaresque elements with the picaresque element even being inherent in the genre itself – her fairy-tales and fantasy novels almost always contain some kind of journey setting the plot of the story, at the end of which the hero or heroine becomes wiser, and typically for Carter is liberated, becomes more mature, usually acquiring sexual experience, coming to terms with his or her sexual role as a means of power, no longer being the victim, gaining a respectable position in society. It will also be considered whether happy-ending is in any way essential or even possible within the picaresque since inevitably, experience brings with it disillusionment and a degree of cynicism, whether it is necessary for the picaresque to come back to the past or again it is something Carter herself introduces – journeying into the past in order to be able to confront the future and the present.

To be able to provide an objective analysis this dissertation intends to work with the established definition of the picaresque as it is stated for example in *The Encyclopedia of the*

Novel or the *OED*. Moreover, other novels typical of the picaresque genre will be compared to Carter's treatment of it so as to point at where or how precisely Carter departs from the traditional picaresque and to what extent she is faithful to it. As Carter herself admits in Haffenden's *Novelists in Interview*: "The last half of *Nights at the Circus* gets very picaresque indeed [...]."¹⁶ Moreover, in Haffenden Carter also defines picaresque as a "certain 18th century fictional device where people have adventures in order to find themselves in places where they can discuss philosophical concepts without distractions."¹⁷

Nevertheless, there is an obvious contrast between the traditional understanding of the picaresque and Carter's conception of it. The traditional expectations see the picaresque as the genre which in realistic and humorous detail describes the adventures of a roguish hero, pícaro, usually on the verge of the respectable society or from a low social class who outwits the society and accompanied by a faithful servant undergoes a series of adventures, changes his identity and gets some sort of enlightening experience on his travels. Therefore there are two basic elements included: the idea of 'being on the road' and also a certain stance of the outcast to the majority of the society. Both of these are elaborated in Carter's novels and short stories yet in a different 'modern' way.

Therefore, as I have hinted in the beginning, this thesis is going to examine how the traditional expectations connected with the genre apply to Carter's use of the picaresque; even though it might seem there is a huge discrepancy between the two, it can certainly yield interesting results. Susan Watkins points out that Carter not only uses "hybridity and fragmentation" of various styles "but instead reinvents traditional forms like that of the picaresque: the eighteenth-century novel genre where the lovable rogue hero travels on a series of random adventures before finally coming to terms with his place in the world."¹⁸ Yet

¹⁶ John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Routledge, 1985) 89.

¹⁷ Haffenden 87.

¹⁸ Susan Watkins, *Twentieth-century Women Novelists: Feminist Theory into Practice* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001) 138.

how precisely does Carter 'reinvent' the picaresque? Who might be seen as the roguish hero in her novels? Is he or she an outcast openly defying social conventions? How does Carter describe the travel part and how does the unreal sense of time contribute to it? Is there the model of the faithful servant accompanying the roguish figure in her novels or is it just a mirror image, a reflection, of the main character for example with Fevvers and Lizzie, Mignon and the Princess in *Nights at the Circus* etc.? Do her characters actually finally come to terms with their place in the world or is it just one of Carter's illusionistic tricks?

The exclusion from the society is in *Nights at the Circus* represented by the circus which is a whole world in itself where Carter uses the carnivalesque to mix with the picaresque. The circus and Fevvers' account of her life also bring to light as Watkins calls it "the 'other' Victorian culture of prostitution, exploitation, poverty, monstrosity and crime [...]"¹⁹. Part of Carter's picaresque in *Nights at the Circus* is precisely the atmosphere of the circus, the carnivalesque, that poses the protagonists often at the edge of society, such as when in the novel Carter describes clowns almost as a specific species with an alien identity, not completely human, on one hand people are repelled by them, on the other they laugh at them. The episodes that some of the characters undergo in connection with the circus influence their future development. How does Carter depict this influence of the picaresque upon her characters? How do they develop after they are confronted with the other reality on their travels? Is Carter's definition of the picaresque reflected in *Nights at the Circus* and *Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, do the characters ever find themselves in a place without distraction so as to discuss philosophical issues? In what ways do Carter's magically picaresque landscapes differ from the pícaro's?

These are the main questions the dissertation seeks to answer in its analysis of Carter's treatment and modern reinvention of the picaresque. By mixing it with other genres and creating dreamy worlds with questionable authenticity Carter forces the reader to think

¹⁹ Watkins 137.

independently, to rediscover the genre by himself or herself. She even splits it into different forms – her picaresque consists not only of the concept of geographical travelling – with Carter it is very much a journey of the mind, journey into a land of fantasy and opportunity where the impossible becomes possible, a journey of maturity, a passage of rite, in order to discover the hero's/heroine's place in the world, a self-discovery and very often a revelation of the character's conception of sexuality and its fulfilment. Lastly, Carter's picaresque is also a journey in time – mostly a journey into the past where the past, the present and the future grapple with one another to reveal whether any kind of fulfilment or a discovery, a revelation, is possible or whether the characters just remain frozen in time, imprisoned in a magical illusionistic un-reality. The dissertation will seek to determine whether, in Carter's conception of it, the picaresque is not rather a form of escapism into the land of fantasy as opposed to the confrontation with the real world the Spanish pícaro undergoes on his travels. After all, it is by such contemporary popular attempts as Carter's that the older forms are challenged and reminded of and if Carter parts from the original form of the genre than it tells us something about the nature of contemporary literary thinking and taste. All the previously posed questions inevitably lead to the main issue that looms behind the suggested analysis: What does Carter achieve by this clash of the expectations of the genre?

Accordingly, to organize and structure this work into a coherent analysis this thesis will be divided according to the most important issues it aims to research. The second chapter called *Who Is the Pícaro and His Companion?* will analyze the various types of travellers and seekers in Carter's novels as they are related to the adventures and development they participate in and undergo in the novels. It will also discuss their gender roles and pícaro's relations to his or her companion, comparing the treatment of the hero/heroine in Carter to that of the traditional Spanish picaresque. How the two are related or reflected, if they actually are two separate characters or mere reflections of one another, the companion being a mere shadow of the narrator/experiencer.

The third chapter – The Journey – will deal with the individual episodes and the background of the travels. Discussing how the landscape is reflected in pícaro's experience, how does it contribute to the outcome of the journey? How different is Carter's landscape from the one of the traditional picaresque and how much does the difference matter in relation to the outcome? How is the journey divided and what are the hero's or heroine's confrontations with reality? The fourth chapter The Destination will seek to analyze where the journey ends, if it ever ends, and find out what is the main motivation behind it and steer the thesis towards its conclusion. What are the outcomes of Carter's characters' philosophical wanderings? What have they learned, how have they changed? Are there happy-endings in Carter's picaresque or do the confrontations with the truths of life lead to the pícaros' disillusionment? Or is it a trick as Fevvers suggests in answer to her question to Walser: "To think I fooled you!"²⁰ How does it compare to the outcome of other famous examples of the genre? What if the actual happy-ending is to know more and learn to live with it as opposed to being happy without knowing? Does Carter define if her pícaros can ever know more or are the truths to which they can arrive always limited? How worldly does the pícaro become? With relation to all the questions posed above, the last chapter, the conclusion, will try to close the analysis by summing up and reiterating what the specifically carteresque features of the picaresque are, how they build on the traditional picaresque elements and to what extent or in what ways they differ from it so as to be able to ponder what she achieves by the clash of expectations of the genre.

²⁰ Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus* (London: Picador, 1984) 294.

Chapter Two: Who Is the Pícaro and His Companion?

The foremost concern in discussing the pícaro and the picaresque is first to have a definition to base it on. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* describes picaresque novel as “a novel with a picaroon (Spanish, *pícaro*: a rogue or a scoundrel) as its hero or heroine, usually recounting his or her escapades in a first-person narrative marked by its episodic structure and realistic low-life descriptions.”¹ *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* describes the pícaro as “a wily trickster” in a first-person narrative whose adventures are often “criminal or sexual,”² *The Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance* as a “shrewd rogue of humble origin”³ and *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* as “a rough and dishonest but appealing hero.”⁴ The ultimate authority, the *OED* defines the picaresque as originally “relating to or characteristic of a rogue or a knave. Now chiefly designating a genre of narrative fiction which deals episodically with the adventures of an individual, usually a roguish and dishonest but attractive hero.” When speaking about a lifestyle it can mean “wandering, drifting, transitory, impermanent.”⁵ It looks like even the Oxford dictionaries have trouble determining who exactly the pícaro is, only two of them agree that pícaro is supposed to be dishonest but appealing at the same time. As Harry Sieber concedes in his study of the genre it seems that the picaresque shares the fate of other literary terms where the attempts to define it precisely “produced more confusion than understanding.”⁶

One of the most detailed and accurate definitions can be found in F.W. Chandler’s *The Picaresque Novel in Spain*. According to him:

The picaresque novel of the Spaniards presents a rogue relating his adventures. He is born of poor and dishonest

¹ “Picaresque novel,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 3rd ed., 2008.

² “Picaresque,” *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 6th ed., 2000.

³ “Picaresque,” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance*, 1st ed., 2003.

⁴ “Picaresque,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 1st ed., 2000.

⁵ “Picaresque,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, electronic, 2012.

⁶ Sieber 1.

parents, who are not often troubled with gracing their union by ceremony, nor particularly pleased at his advent. He comes up by hook or crook as he may. Either he enters the world with an innate love of the goods of others, or he is innocent and learns by hard raps that he must take care of himself or go to the wall. In either case the result is much the same; in order to live he must serve somebody, and the gains of service he finds himself obliged to augment with the gains of roguery. So he flits from one master to another, all of whom he outwits in his career, and describes to satirize in his narrative. Finally, having run through a variety of strange vicissitudes, measuring by his rule of roguery the vanity of human estates, he brings his story to a close.⁷

On the other hand, Sieber also admits that the more recent definitions of the genre are much broader, he acknowledges that “more recent critics tend to stretch the term to include any novel in which the hero takes a journey whose course plunges him into all sorts, conditions and classes of men.”⁸ Carter would definitely be one of the modern writers who rather than seeing it in the strict sense of the sixteenth-century Spanish novel perceive the picaresque in a more general, broader way, in Haffenden, as mentioned above in Chapter One, she defines it as a “certain 18th century fictional device where people have adventures in order to find themselves in places where they can discuss philosophical concepts without distractions.”⁹

⁷ F.W. Chandler, *Romances of Roguery: An Episode in the History of the Novel. Part I: The Picaresque Novel in Spain* (London: Macmillan, 1899) 45-46.

⁸ Sieber 3.

⁹ Haffenden 87.

For Carter, the picaresque is not a genre with a set border and a precise definition but one of the many genre forms she builds on and one of the many frameworks she oscillates between in her heterogeneous work. As Linden Peach observes: “Carter’s work is different from the conventional English novel in the extent to which she is indebted to European literature and to pre-novelistic modes of writing such as fairy-stories, “warning tales,” the European picaresque narrative and German romantic tales.”¹⁰ Carter’s aim often is to subvert the genres, to turn them upside down, to question and subvert the traditional modes of thinking and writing. According to Peach: “the intertexts are exploited in Carter’s writing as part of a general scepticism about frameworks.”¹¹ Nicci Gerrard sees Carter’s novels as “undecorous, overripe and mocking tales in which nothing is sacred and nothing natural.”¹² Carter’s flamboyant, magically realistic and mocking style uses many of the different frameworks, she subverts the European traditions to call into question some of the grand narratives of Western culture. As she admits in Haffenden’s interview: “Just as anything that wants to call itself a novel is a novel, by definition, so fiction can do anything in wants to do.”¹³

In order to complement the presence and definition of the literary styles Carter uses, magical realism should also be mentioned in relation to her work. The term magical realism is often freely applied to her work. Whereas fairy tales and folk traditions refer back mainly to traditional orally transmitted stories and legends, literary magical realism originated in Latin America. The setting of *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* is not put into a fictional South American city simply by accident. As Sarah Gamble points out it is “the right setting for [picaresque] vertiginous frontier crossing.”¹⁴ Mario Vargas Llosa has described magical realism as “fantastic literature [which] ... has its roots in objective reality and is a

¹⁰ Peach 24.

¹¹ Peach 19.

¹² Nicci Gerrard, “Angela Carter Is Now More Popular than Virginia Woolf...,” *Observer*, 9 July 1995, 20-23.

¹³ Haffenden 79.

¹⁴ Sarah Gamble, *Angela Carter: Writing from the Front Line* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) 111.

vehicle for exposing social and political evils.”¹⁵ Whereas it might be “straining a point,”¹⁶ as Gamble observes, to place white British Carter alongside Southern American writers who had to deal with political oppression and cultural domination, there are, nevertheless, clear parallels. Carter herself was happy to accept the label since, as Gamble concludes, she often cited Gabriel García Márquez and Alejo Carpentier as major influences on her work, especially during her later career.¹⁷

In compliance with her strategy to use many genres and literary styles, Carter also states that part of her aim in writing novels is to “invite the reader into the fictionality of the narrative”¹⁸ so that the readers can add, create and re-create their own fictions by entering the fictional world. As a result, Carter’s picaresque may be seen from many viewpoints, it is a genre partially co-created by readers themselves that enriches her novels in order to set them in relation to European tradition and demonstrate that she belongs to it as well as setting her apart from it. In mocking, re-defining and re-creating the genre Carter works with some of the traditional elements as the *OED*, Sieber and Chandler define them but also confuses and mixes the individual elements, adding reader to the equation to demonstrate the ongoing process of creating fiction since as Peach asserts: “Carter’s works are best not read as independent texts, but as part of an ongoing process of writing.”¹⁹ As the analysis of the pícaros and their companions in the suggested novels in the ensuing part of this chapter will prove, Carter’s treatment of the picaresque is not only part of “the ongoing process of writing” but also part of the ongoing (hi)story of the novel and its literary genres that keep being re-created, mocked and satirized over and throughout time.

The main problem in determining who the pícaro in Carter’s one but last novel *Nights at the Circus* is, is that we have two major candidates for the role, the two main characters of

¹⁵ In Gamble 111.

¹⁶ Gamble 111.

¹⁷ Gamble 111.

¹⁸ Haffenden 91.

¹⁹ Peach 22.

the novel, “the only fully-feathered intacta in the history of the world,” Fevvers, and the journalist who decides to write her story and expose her as a sham, Jack Walser. If the pícaro is the one who narrates his story in the first-person throughout the whole of the novel than the narration mode of *Nights at the Circus* leaves things ambiguous – the first two parts of the novel, taking place in London and St Petersburg, are narrated in third-person but perceived more through the eyes of Walser, the journalist, Walser, the note-taker, recorder and chronicler of the grand tour of Colonel Kearney’s circus, he is thus the so-called focalizer. However, Fevvers gets to be the one who is enabled to narrate her story and be in control of what she says and how she says it in order to fool and manipulate Walser. As Peach puts it: “The female narrator [...] assumes a position of authority, taking control of her own story-history and asserting herself as the author of her own words and actions.”²⁰

The last section of the novel taking place in Siberia changes narrative voices even more abruptly – there is a different one for each chapter. Fevvers’ first-person narrative (which at points becomes the plural narrative voice of “us” – meaning Fevvers and Lizzie) is followed by third-person narration of the fates of the other characters after the train accident, the women prisoners having escaped from the Countess P.’s panopticon and even Walser’s, who having lost his consciousness re-emerges as a new and different Walser, no longer an empty sheet of paper, a tabula rasa. If in Carter’s conception of the genre we should see the pícaro as the one character who has more control over the story in telling the episodes of her life then it should be Fevvers rather than Walser, after all, she is the one who gets the first-person personalized direct voice in the last section of the novel. In the beginning of the story we get to know that Walser did get a chance of becoming the pícaro of his own story but he did not take it. The narrator tells us that Walser came to London from California,

from the other side of a world all of whose four corners he
had knocked about for most of his five-and-twenty-

²⁰ Peach 132.

summers – a picaresque career which rubbed off his own rough edges; now he boasts the smoothest of manners and you would see in his appearance nothing of the scapegrace urchin who, long ago, stowed away on a steamer bound from ‘Frisco to Shanghai. In the course of his adventuring, he discovered in himself a talent with words, and an even greater aptitude for finding himself in the right place at the right time. So he stumbled upon his profession [...] he could travel wherever he pleased whilst retaining the privileged responsibility of the journalist. [...] *Yet there remained something a little unfinished about him, still. He was like a handsome house that has been let, furnished. There were scarcely any [...] personal touches to his personality. [...] it was almost as if he himself were an objet trouvé, for subjectively, himself he never found, since it was not his self which he sought.* [italics mine]²¹

Therefore, Walser is a traveller who has not arrived at his destination yet, he is a book unfinished, “his inwardness had been left untouched.”²² Walser has to become part of Fevvers’ story in order to arrive at his destination, to find his self, to discover that things are not either black and white but there is a blurry border between fact and fiction, art and trickery. In this sense we should see Fevvers more as the pícaro, the heroine of the story, as well as the main attraction of Kearney’s circus, symbolizing the circle of life, and Walser as her companion, the one who tags along, follows her all the way to Siberia in order to get the

²¹ *Nights at the Circus* 9-10.

²² *Ibid.*

correct perspective and the most authentic version of her story which she constantly subverts by taking control of the narrative.

Moreover, if the pícaro is the rogue and the wrongdoer of the story than it is Fevvers who keeps manipulating time by means of Lizzie's grandfather clock, Fevvers whose poor origin, unknown parentage and love of all things material makes her the illegitimate, orphaned child who has to find her way around, serving all kinds of various (mostly perverse) masters that destines her to be the pícaro of the story. Of course even the reader does not know if what Fevvers tells Walser is the "true" version of events. However, not only is Fevvers an outsider in the sense of being poor and orphaned, she is also the ultimate outsider – a freak. When talking about Fevvers in her interview with Anna Katsavos Carter admits the character had been inspired by Guillame Apollinaire who writes about the new woman "who will have wings and will renew the world." In reaction to Apollinaire's statement Carter visualized the new woman in the literal sense, sprouting wings on her back:

'How wonderful...How terrific,' and then I thought, 'Well no; it's not going to be as easy as that.' And I also thought, 'Really, how very, very inconvenient it would be for a person to have real wings, just how really difficult.' How inconvenient to have wings, and by extension, how very, very difficult to be born so out of key with the world. Something that women know all about is how very difficult it is to enter an old game. What you have to do is to change the rules and make a new game, and that's really what she's about.²³

²³ Angela Carter, "A Conversation with Angela Carter," Interview by Anna Katsavos, *Dalkey Archive Press*, Dalkey Archive Press, 2012. Web. 8 Jun. 2012, <www.dalkeyarchive.com>.

Therefore, Fevvers is not only an outsider by origin but also an outsider in the sense of being a new woman. Although her wings in the story are literal, this is just another way in which Carter alters the picaresque, in showing the difficulty of the journey for the new woman. Moreover, Fevvers has to take care of herself even when her wing is broken and she cannot fly out of all the mess in Siberia.

In addition to the added gender perspective, Carter further complicates the picaresque by adding and confusing the pícaro's companion. In *Nights at the Circus* there are two kinds of companions – Walser, as the potential lover, who follows Fevvers out of journalistic interest, to which romantic infatuation adds later. Lizzie, on the other hand, had been her faithful companion and servant since her childhood, since the very beginning of the story. Lizzie is probably the only one who knows “the truth” about Fevvers, the one who is in on her tricks and the faithful companion throughout the whole of the journey, in character with Don Quixote's Sancho Panza. Lizzie is also the older, wiser consultant who gives advice to her ward, sometimes protecting her from evil, and very often satirizing her as well. Lizzie finds Fevvers' love for Walser foolish, sees marriage as a form of imprisonment and keeps mocking her romantic tendencies. Nevertheless, these divisions can get very blurry and very often the companions are interchangeable, or the two merge into one. In *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* Albertina is Desiderio's constant faithful companion (although he does not know about her initially) and the potential lover in one. Her role is similar to Walser's in that she checks on Desiderio to give reports to her father, to be able to take full control of him later in the story, revealing her intentions at the very end of the novel where Desiderio decides to break free. Like Walser, she also falls in love with the person she follows and like him she also changes her identity to be able to do so. Whereas Walser becomes a clown in Kearney's circus, Albertina changes identities (and genders) even more often – she is Doctor Hoffman's exotic ambassador, the blind peep-show proprietor, the servant of the depraved Count and the Madame of the brothel Desiderio and the Count visit together. Peach

even goes as far as claiming that: “Albertina does not appear as a character in her own right, only as a creation, or projection, of Desiderio’s phantasies.[sic]”²⁴ In addition to this, Maggie Tonkin also asserts: “That Albertina is the product of memory and desire, rather than an objective woman, is apparent from the first.”²⁵ The many roles she plays and many costumes she takes on as the pícaro’s companion in order to follow and secretly watch Desiderio make her change identities even more often than the pícaro himself. Tonkin voices that all these disguises point at Albertina’s oscillation between a real character and a simple projection of Desiderio’s desires since: “When each disguise is stripped away, what is revealed is not the ‘authentic’ being within but simply the next layer of an onion-like enigma.”²⁶ Consequently, Albertina as a companion as well as the nature of Carter’s picaresque is elusive, distinct and yet constantly shape-shifting and many-layered at the same time.

If Albertina as a companion of the pícaro is rather elusive, then Desiderio is a typical example of the pícaro. He is the first-person narrator of the story, sharing the fate of Lazarillo de Tormes. Lazarillo retells his story in order to defend his reputation, he has been asked by an unknown person, referred to as “vuestra merced” (“your grace”) to respond to rumours that have been circulating around the city of Toledo. Lázaro’s reaction is to become an author – he must begin at the beginning and in order to deny the rumours retells his story from his birth to his final present. Desiderio’s predicament is very similar to Lázaro’s, except his only judge are not any respectable citizens of an existing city but his own conscience, the framework of his story, however, is very similar in that he starts in his present and comes back to the past in order to write his autobiography and confront his memories. Nevertheless, if Lázaro’s purpose is to defend himself and remain a respectable citizen in the eyes of others then Desiderio’s purpose is to fix his memories as they are now so that his story and mainly the figure of

²⁴ Peach 103.

²⁵ Maggie Tonkin, “Albertine/a the Ambiguous: Angela Carter’s Reconfiguration of Marcel Proust’s Modernist Muse,” *Re-visiting Angela Carter Texts, Contexts, Intertexts*, ed. Rebecca Munford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 69.

²⁶ Tonkin 78.

Albertina pictured vividly in his imagination will not be forgotten. Desiderio seeks to prove the exact opposite of what Lázaro strives for – by recording his memories he wants to show the world he is no hero, and never has been:

Because I am so old and famous, they have told me that I must write down all my memories of the Great War, since, after all, I remember everything. So I must gather together all that confusion of experience and arrange it in order, just as it happened, beginning at the beginning. I must unravel my life as if it were so much knitting and pick out from that tangle the single, original thread of my self, the self who was a young man who happened to become a hero and then grew old. [...] I became a hero only because I survived. [...] But you must not expect a love story or a murder story. Expect a tale of picaresque adventure or even of heroic adventure, for I was a great hero in my time though now I am an old man and no longer the 'I' of my own story and my time is past, even if you can read about me in the history books – a strange thing to happen to a man in his lifetime. It turns one into a posterity's prostitute.²⁷

At the end of his story, Desiderio addresses the reader directly, he admits he probably acted for the common good but it was on impulse, Desiderio is condemned to perpetual disillusionment. Even though Albertina had been his heart's desire, he could not accept her at the terms the doctor offered, and although propelled by them during his quest, Desiderio refuses to be the slave of his desires. When he explains how he killed Albertina and left the

²⁷ Angela Carter, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982) 11-14.

final scene Desiderio admits desperately: “It is very hard for me to write this down. [...] Do you not already know I don’t deserve to be a hero? [...] I wanted a heroic struggle. I wanted a heroic struggle to justify my murder to myself. And all I did in the end was to stab the harmless technician [...] If you feel a certain sense of anti-climax, how do you think I felt?”²⁸ Desiderio is in a certain sense an anti-hero. His picaresque is similar to Fevvers’ and Walsler’s in that it is a mission, a quest. If Fevvers’ mission is to earn money and spread her fame with Colonel Kearney’s circus then Desiderio’s mission is to stop Doctor Hoffman’s infernal machines, to help the Minister of Determination and save the country he comes from. However, Desiderio’s defence is his disaffectedness, his matter-of-fact rational approach to life which makes him accept that some things are simply impossible. Nevertheless, his final ordeal is perpetual disillusionment. What he realizes throughout his journey is that a low-born man, a son of a prostitute and an unknown Indian, can rise to become a hero undeservedly, by giving up the insatiable extreme desires which cannot be attained in life, but for him the ultimate liberation comes with dreams or death, unfulfilled fantasies when “unbidden, she comes.”²⁹ Desiderio’s story is antithetic to that of Lázaro, he is not concerned about what people will think of him, with Albertina he has lost what mattered most to him and instead of maintaining his image of respectability, disillusioned himself he seeks to reveal he is no hero, uncovering how subjective and limited the notion of heroism and respectability is in the eyes of others. Unbidden, he has become a hero, unbidden Albertina never stops haunting him. As well as Lazarillo will be perpetually haunted since although he managed to defend his respectability, his good reputation is rickety and something or someone could always come with an alternative story to topple it. Desiderio is the ultimate pícaro of his journey of involvement – he is the experiencer, the first-person narrator, the hero, and the final and severest judge of his actions.

²⁸ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 217-218.

²⁹ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 221.

Carter's other works – the novel *Heroes and Villains* and *The Magic Toyshop* use the picaresque in the more general sense. They all document her strong tendency to see the picaresque as a journey of maturity, a passage of rite including sexual initiation and a growing of the body, in its very physical, sexual sense, as well as the mind. The notion of sexual maturity and experience is in these works connected to a desire to wander, to leave the well-known and get to know the world beyond. Very often the beginning of the journey is connected to two things – the death of one or both parents and a shattering, Freudian kind of experience or memory which propels the heroine to uncover the matter further (usually connected to blood, violence and some kind of revelation), dividing the world in the eyes of the picaresque heroine to the before and after the experience and the change it brings with it. For Marianne in *Heroes and Villains*, the world is strictly divided between the societies of the Barbarians and the Professors, she does not leave her world out of pure necessity but out of sheer boredom, a fear of dying alive. The memory that keeps haunting her and later entices her to leave with Jewel, the Barbarian she helps to save, is of having seen the little boy killing her brother, she had been fascinated by the other's difference as well as the impersonal nature of death itself, as Sarah Gamble observes: “[...] the description of the encounter contains an unsettling mixture of the terminologies of death and desire.”³⁰ :

He [Marianne's brother] rolled in the dust with a shaggy Barbarian boy armed with a knife. [...] The Barbarian boy's mound of black plaits and ringlets covered and uncovered them but she saw them staring at one another, both oddly startled, as if this was the last thing they expected to happen, this embrace to kill. Their mother had returned to the tower. Perhaps she saw them and perhaps she called out and perhaps her brother heard

³⁰ Gamble 78.

her voice [...] for he glanced away from his adversary, who immediately took advantage of this lost guard to stick a knife into the other's throat. Blood bubbled. The Barbarian boy dropped the knife and clasped his victim in his arms, holding him with a strange, terrible tenderness until he was still and dead. [...] The boy looked up and saw the severe child who watched him.³¹

The motif of blood, violence and a revealing experience is reiterated – during their escape into the world of the Barbarians Marianne is bitten by a poisonous snake and Jewel has to cut her and suck the poison out of her wound, later he rapes her when she tries to escape, Jewel catches up with her and forces her to come back with him. The rape is symbolic in several ways – it establishes Jewel's dominance over her, it forces her to become a woman as opposed to the girl she had been and disenables her to go back. During the rape scene, Marianne recalls the earlier act of violence she witnessed: “[...] she recalled the murder she had witnessed, how the savage boy stuck his knife into her brother's throat and the blood gushed out.”³² In relation to this recollection Sarah Gamble points out that: “Not only does this bring to the surface the homoerotic undercurrent implicit in the earlier event, it also hints that for Marianne, sex and violence are not poles apart.”³³ At the end of the novel Marianne ‘overgrows’ Jewel, while he is shot by the soldiers, she decides to take matters into her own hands. While Jewel “departed from life with swiftness and ease”³⁴, pregnant Marianne decides to “be the tiger lady and rule them with a rod of iron.”³⁵ Part of the problem is that Marianne's fascination with Jewel wears thin, instead of the glamorous noble savage he

³¹ Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 5-6.

³² *Heroes and Villains* 55.

³³ Gamble 78.

³⁴ *Heroes and Villains* 151.

³⁵ *Heroes and Villains* 150.

seems to be, a materialization of Marianne's subconscious desires, she gradually finds him dirty, violent and confused. As Gamble puts it:

Jewel himself falls short of the glamorous, murderous hero of Marianne's adolescent imagination. [...] Falling into the pattern of Carter's previous novels, Marianne turns out to be another middle-class girl attracted by the allure of the rough working-class boy, only to find that he has been educated into a kind of ambiguous classlessness, and thus isn't as alien as she had hoped. By the time Marianne has finished with Jewel, he is 'far fallen from that magnificence bred of sophistication and lack of opportunity,' and she has learnt how to manipulate the mystique of myth and spectacle for her own ends.³⁶

Accordingly, there are many parallels between these two novels from the sixties and Marianne's and Melanie's destinies, their development and stories to a great extent reflect one another. For Melanie in *The Magic Toyshop* the situation is very similar, she is also on the brink of her womanhood: "The summer she was fifteen, Melanie discovered she was made of flesh and blood. O, my America, my new found land. She embarked on a tranced voyage, exploring the whole of herself, clambering her own mountain ranges, penetrating the moist richness of her secret valleys [...] she was no longer a little girl."³⁷ The body here is seen as a sensual landscape and the physical as well as mental maturity is seen as a voyage of discovery. This proves to be Melanie's picaresque mission – to discover and come to terms with her own sexuality and womanhood, the journey from childhood to adulthood without the presence of a mentor, her parents having died in a plane crash and her aunt being struck dumb

³⁶ Gamble 76.

³⁷ Angela Carter, *The Magic Toyshop* (London: Virago, 1981) 1.

since the day she married her Uncle Philip. The night before she must set up on her journey to London and chaperon her two younger siblings, Melanie tries on her mother's wedding dress. At fifteen she sees marriage as the main purpose and fulfilment of a woman's life. The dress seems to represent how fragile virtue is yet Melanie thinks "it seemed a strange way to dress up just in order to lose your virginity."³⁸ Dressing herself up as a bride, "she was, tonight, sufficient for herself in her own glory and did not need a groom."³⁹, Melanie leaves to walk in the dark garden but the long dress makes her panic, locked out she climbs the tree in the garden to get back home and in the morning finds out that the dress has been shredded to pieces and is "streaked with green from the tree and her own red blood."⁴⁰ The fact that Melanie is so frightened and unwillingly stains her mother's dress with blood is a way to prove she is not ready to admit and face her sexuality and desires yet. However, only the day after she has to embark on her journey where the confrontation with her uncle's family, Uncle Philip's strongly patriarchal figure and especially Finn, makes her lose the illusion of innocence in spite of her initial unreadiness.

Melanie's and Marianne's companions are almost forced on them – Marianne has to escape with Jewel because if someone discovered she helped save him, it would mean her death. Melanie has no choice but to leave for her uncle's home after her parents' deaths where she is observed and seen as a sexual object by both Finn and her uncle – who even makes her into a sexual object when he casts her as Leda in a marionette play and 'rapes' her by the swan. What Walter Kendrick in "The Real Magic of Angela Carter" observes about Marianne could be extended to all Carter's heroines: they are tougher and more courageous than the male characters and carry with them more potential to come up victorious. According to him they "share even perverse integrity that assures her [Marianne's] [their] survival when

³⁸ *The Magic Toyshop* 13.

³⁹ *The Magic Toyshop* 16.

⁴⁰ *The Magic Toyshop* 22.

those about her [them] are getting blown to smithereens.”⁴¹ In retelling the story of maturing and experience Carter uses her favourite modes of the folk tale and the fairy-tale. As Kendrick rightly observes: “The characters who interest Carter most, whose stories she loves to tell and retell, all share this unhatched quality. [...] In the course of these characters’ stories, experience *as* experience rips them open, spills them out, often with appalling violence and – an unsettling combination – ravishing sexiness.”⁴² The sexual experience, however violent or just metaphorical as in Melanie’s case, is always a part of Carter’s picaresque and the journeying of her characters brings with itself a change of vision, a breakthrough and is necessary in order for the character to reach his or her destination.

Consequently, the idea of the journey in the two novels and short-stories contains elements of the fantastic and is closely connected to fairy-tale. In *The Magic Toyshop*, the idea of being orphaned, leaving the home and having to live in a step-mother’s household refers back to a traditional fairy-tale framework, with the figure of the evil uncle in the background. Linden Peach points out the connection between the traditional fairy-tale and the so called warning tales: “Traditional fairy-tales, rewritten by male writers, became vehicles for the socialisation of young women producing a subgenre of ‘warning tales.’” However, “such stories do not warn against the dangers of predators in forests, but warn girls against their own natural desires which they must tame.”⁴³ Nevertheless, Carter turns the genre upside down and uses the fairy-tale episodic narration to release rather than subdue the heroines’ desires. As Kendrick puts it: “She [Carter] sees herself, justly, as the heir of literary ages; her rudeness is always a form – perhaps the only valid form of reverence.”⁴⁴

For the picaresque hero or heroine as Carter portrays them the important part of the journey is leaving the home (and for some characters, such as Desiderio, returning to it with

⁴¹ Walter Kendrick, “The Real Magic of Angela Carter,” *Contemporary British Women Writers: Texts and Strategies*, ed. Robert E. Hosmer Jr., (London: Macmillan, 1993) 69.

⁴² Kendrick 70.

⁴³ Peach 74.

⁴⁴ Kendrick 68.

the experience). Her picaresque is a quest, a quest for freedom, a search for the idealized home since the original one is not sufficient or impossible for the character to stay in. All her pícaros are haunted by a feeling of unbelonging, just as Lázaro attains his respectability, he is still aware of his low origin, so do Carter's characters realize that no matter how unsatisfied or unhappy they were with their "original" home, the place they set from, it can never be fully replaced. During all their various adventures, the characters try to find their home anew but every time they feel they might have found it, there is a desire or a necessity to move further, just as Carter's restless narrative has to move on. Carter's picaresque is the cirque in *Nights at the Circus* as well as a string, the narration keeps coming back to events past, to the "known" experience, all the time propelled to go on, since returning to the past as the inexperienced character has known it is impossible. Carter's technique of retelling and narrating the development of her pícaros as well as her plots is that of a "flicker book" as Lorna Sage calls it⁴⁵: the plots "move from one tableau to another, 'still' after 'still', quickened into movement by a kind of optical illusion – as in a flicker book, or of course a film."⁴⁶ What Sage calls "the flicker-book technique" demonstrates well Carter's retelling of the individual picaresque episodes which suddenly get interrupted and the narrative abruptly moves on to another chaotic, imaginative adventure without much of a plot coherence or a reason, giving the narrative a "surreal quality."⁴⁷ The how, why and to what effect she flickers the individual images and picaresque episodes in her novels and short stories will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁴⁵ Lorna Sage, "Angela Carter," *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-war Women Novelists* (London: Macmillan, 1992) 169.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Sage 173.

Chapter Three: The Journey, the Pícaro's Progress

As frequent definitions of the picaresque genre suggest, the narrative contains within it several kinds of movements, parallel with the episodes. Firstly, there is an upward movement demonstrated in pícaro's mental as well as physical growth and in his ambition to move upward on the social ladder. As Sieber points out the picaresque emphasizes travel "as an escape from despair" and the ambition of "upward mobility" is connected to the pícaro's desire of self-improvement.⁴⁸ Lazarillo comments on it at the very beginning of his story: "I enjoy telling Your Honour about these minor matters, because then I can show what a fine thing it is for a man of the people to rise in life and how awful it is to fall if you are highly placed."⁴⁹ Secondly, the picaresque narrative has a cyclic nature, the pícaro's desire to improve is connected to his home-coming, he wants to prove his success in the place of his origin, yet at the same time he often ends up making the same mistakes. Lazarillo, as Sieber stresses, has come a full circle in that he married a manipulative woman similar to his mother, who had been the ruin of his father. His marriage instead of bringing him respectability only makes him a target of more gossip and puts him at the mercy of another. He is no longer an independent self-made man. Thirdly, the narrative is framed by two temporal frameworks: the time of narration and the past when all the adventures took place. Moreover, "the picaresque episodes are punctuated with the narrator's digressions and commentaries."⁵⁰ Therefore, in addition to the forward movement and the cyclic one, the picaresque moves back and forth in a small series of digressions, as the individual pícaros comment on or express their opinions about their individual episodes.

Angela Carter in her novels metaphorically depicts all these narrative movements of the picaresque. In *Nights at the Circus* it is the circus that represents the full circle Fevvers and Walser have to come in order to realize their voyage of self-discovery and personal

⁴⁸ Sieber 9.

⁴⁹ Anonymous, *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes*, transl. Michael Alpert (London: Penguin, 2003) 8.

⁵⁰ Sieber 18.

development. The circus with its various attractions, protagonists and artistic acts also represents the episodic nature of the picaresque, these are the sequences taking place at the circle of life. In addition to this, the circus also points at the status of outcasts the characters have, being in the margins of society their nomadic life and unusual abilities cast them in, as Anna Hunt puts it, they are a collection of “the misfits, the runaways, and the bizarre.”⁵¹ The circus as Carter uses it also points back at the pícaro’s role-playing. In order to survive, the pícaro has to become many protagonists in one – he has to change costume, language register and identity as well as the various circus protagonists, he has to be a versatile performer. Therefore the circus could be compared to Sage’s concept of the flicker-book technique where one episode swiftly follows another.

The means of transport used in the novels demonstrate the back and forth movement of the narrative itself. In *Nights at the Circus* it is the trans-Siberian express carrying the protagonists further and further into the heart of nothingness. The images behind the windows are part of the episodic slide-show. Fevvers observes that:

Outside the window, there slides past that unimaginable and deserted vastness [...]. And were we not progressing through the vastness of nothing to the extremities of nowhere? Sometimes the lengths to which I’ll go for money appal me.[...] We have no right to be here, in all this *gemütlich* comfort, stuck on our fat bums down this straight track from which we never deviate, like tightrope walkers in a dream traversing an

⁵¹ Anna Hunt, “‘The Margins of the Imaginative Life’: The Abject and the grotesque in Angela Carter and Jonathan Swift,” *Re-visiting Angela Carter Texts, Contexts, Intertexts*, ed. Rebecca Munford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 148.

unacknowledged abyss in five-star comfort, through the
deep core of winter and this inimical terrain.⁵²

Fevvers' description underpins the surreal, magical aspect of carteresque travelling where nothing really is as it seems to be. In addition to this, it also stresses the pícaro's helplessness to influence his individual adventures. Although he or she is to a certain extent a self-made man/woman, very often he has little powers to influence where he will find himself next and what will happen to him/her there. Fevvers hates this feeling of helplessness. Yet as the trans-Siberian train documents, the adventures change suddenly and abruptly: "Then, just as the Princess and Mignon arrived in the restaurant car in bloody aprons, [...] there came a thunderous boom. And, as if at the command of the biggest drum-roll in the entire history of the circus, the dining-car rose up in the air. For a split second, everything levitated. [...] Then, before shock or consternation could cross their faces, the whole lot fell down again and, with a rending crash, flew apart in a multitude of fragments."⁵³ Just as the train falls apart into fragments from the seemingly unified solidity with a straightforward line, so does Carter's narrative and the circus scatter around in Siberia. Walser and Fevvers get separated and go through the various digressions among the forest people before they come full circle and are re-united again. After they meet again, Fevvers gathers up her strength and spreads her wings, embracing her vibrant new-woman persona once more: "She would be the blonde of blondes, again, just as soon as she found peroxide, [...] she would soar up on her mended wing [...] Home! Yes! She would see Trafalgar Square, again; and Nelson on his plinth [...] And then she saw he [Walser] was not the man he had been or would ever be again; some other hen had hatched him out."⁵⁴ The new Walser starts asking her questions: "What is your name? Have you a soul? Can you love?" [...] When she heard that, her heart lifted and sang. She batted her lashes at him, beaming, exuberant, newly armed. Now she looked big enough to crack the

⁵² *Nights at the Circus* 197-199.

⁵³ *Nights at the Circus* 204.

⁵⁴ *Nights at the Circus* 291.

roof of the god-hut, all wild hair and feathers and triumphant breasts and blue eyes the size of dinner plates. ‘That’s the way to start the interview!’ she cried. ‘Get out your pencil and we’ll begin!’”⁵⁵ When Fevvers rediscovers Walser, he is a new Walser but she needs him to become the new woman once again, the confidant, statuesque winged enigma who can pull it off. However, their first conversation also takes them back to the very beginning of the novel where sceptical Walser interviews her under Lizzie’s supervision. Thus although *Nights at the Circus* does not have the picaresque narrative framework with the protagonist coming back to the past and concluding the narrative in the present, it is the interview which provides it for her. Fevvers’ and Walser’s interview, their voices merged create the pícaro’s narrative framework and in the end when they get reunited it is a reminder that their voice as well as their personalities are stronger and clearer together. Fevvers’ needs Walser to be her audience and to record her story in order to become fully herself again. Fevvers’ interview plays a similar role to that of Desiderio’s memoir but whereas Desiderio feels trapped by the recording, turned into “posterity’s prostitute,”⁵⁶ Fevvers needs the “recording” to feel alive.

The train in *Nights at the Circus* in Carter’s words scatters the characters into the picaresque setting so that they can philosophically contemplate their destinies but it also continues as a symbol of time and the approaching twenty-first century: “Unbeknownst to the lovers, midnight, that moveable feast, rolled over the taiga at that moment, disturbing nothing in its passage in spite of the era it was dragging in its wake. Precipitated in ignorance and bliss into the next century, there, after it was over, Walser took himself apart and put himself together again.”⁵⁷ The train as a symbol of a journey in time is also used in *The Magic Toyshop* where Melanie has to become “a little mother”⁵⁸, and leave her rural home with her two younger siblings to chaperon and enter the unknown scary world of London. Except that

⁵⁵ *Nights at the Circus* 291.

⁵⁶ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 14.

⁵⁷ *Nights at the Circus* 294.

⁵⁸ *The Magic Toyshop* 31.

the shattering has taken place prior to her own journey, during her parents' accident: "An amputee, she [Melanie] could not yet accustom herself to what was lost and gone, lost as her parents scattered in fragments over the Nevada desert."⁵⁹ Melanie has to say goodbye to the only mother figure she knows, Mrs. Rundle, and accept the responsibilities herself, unable to collect the fragments of her past, the memories of her parents, the fragments they have left behind. Melanie describes the train journey as if she felt suspended in time: "The train was a kind of purgatory, a waiting time, between the known and completed past and the unguessable future which had not yet begun. It was a long journey."⁶⁰ However, just as Carter's characters balance on the line of a tightrope between chaos and order, so does the nature of Melanie's journey on the train keep changing between a horizontal and a vertical line. Sarah Gamble observes that: "Instead of proceeding in a logically straightforward manner from point of departure to destination, at some point on the train journey to London Melanie's adolescent state becomes the blueprint for the ordering of her world. Like Alice falling down the rabbit hole, she is precipitated into a world which, in a number of different ways, is essentially transitional [...]."⁶¹ Just like Alice, Melanie also suddenly finds herself cast into the semi-fantastic world of her uncle's toyshop which is a part of the sixties working class London and a fairy-tale fantasy at the same time.

For Melanie, as for Marianne, the journey makes a clean cut, separating her reality into two significantly different worlds: the past and the future with the unrealistic, surreal present suspended between them. Similarly, just like after the train accident in *Nights at the Circus* Fevvers and most of the other passengers are kidnapped by Siberian savages, Francie and Finn Jowles who pick the children up at the train station have a similar native-like savage look about them with their dirty, disintegrating clothes, low-class Irish accents and their unwashed, craggy faces :

⁵⁹ *The Magic Toyshop* 31.

⁶⁰ *The Magic Toyshop* 32.

⁶¹ Gamble 70.

Obviously brothers although startlingly dissimilar – two different garments cut, at one time, from the same cloth. The younger [...] wore washed-out, balding corduroy trousers wrinkled with their own tightness. His clothes had the look of strays from a parish poor-box. His face was that of a Simple Ivan in a folk-tale, high cheekbones, slanting eyes. [...] His companion was the same man grown older and turned to stone. Taller, wider in the shoulder, clumsily assembled, with a craggy, impassive face. A bruising-looking man in a navy-blue, pin-striped suit with trousers frayed at the turn-ups and a beige and brown shirt that is not supposed to show the dirt. He had a half-smoked, stubbed-out, hand-rolled cigarette, disintegrating into rags of paper and shreds of tobacco, stuck behind his ear.⁶²

Just like Fevvers and Marianne who is suddenly dependent on Jewel, Melanie also has to confront the savage, sexual side in her, she has to be confronted with “the wilderness” that is the London house of her despotic uncle, to emerge an adult woman who can make her own choices. Observed and followed by Finn, Melanie starts discovering and realizing her own body and exploring her emerging sexuality, as Peach observes: “he [Finn] draws her away from her past.”⁶³ Although Finn initially imposes his view of sexuality on her by coaxing Melanie to wear her hair loose and observing her through the hole in the wall between their two rooms, this principle works both ways since this hole also enables Melanie to observe him walking on his hands in his room, as Gamble says: “it is through the practice of Finn’s

⁶² *The Magic Toyshop* 33-34.

⁶³ Peach 83.

voyeurism that she is enable to see out.”⁶⁴ At its close, the novel and Melanie come back full circle to the very primeval beginning – the myth of Genesis: “At night, in the garden, they [Melanie and Finn] faced each other in a wild surmise.”⁶⁵ As if Melanie and Finn are the only two people left, on the verge of leaving the garden of Eden. With the toyshop in ashes and the family scattered, an absolute break with the past is indicated and Melanie’s adult life begins yet, as Jacqueline Pearson notes, “though, ironically, even this scene merely replays the past, for Melanie has already lost everything once.”⁶⁶ Therefore this quotation from Keats is one of Carter’s many allusions, it brings Melanie, albeit unwillingly, cyclically back to her pre-departure past and, as Gamble notes, although theirs could be a brand new beginning with a clean slate, the past shattered and burned to pieces, both Finn and Melanie are “strangely bereft in the absence of the patriarch, neither of them know where to go from here. Melanie’s fairytale journey may have brought her her prince, but what exactly happens in their ‘happily ever after’ future – the point at which stories end and systems are overthrown?”⁶⁷

Carter also uses a similar “shattering” technique in *Heroes and Villains* when Marianne leaves the Professors’ village with Jewel, they steal a lorry to crash the gates of the well protected village. When thinking about setting on her journey Marianne looks back and contemplates: “She loved nobody in this place but beyond it lay the end of all known things and desolation.”⁶⁸ Jewel forces her to push as much speech of the truck as she can and tells her to crash the car into a tree: “She directed the lorry towards the tree, convinced they would both die in a few seconds. But he opened the door on his side of the cabin, grabbed her shoulders, hauled her from her seat and jumped. The lorry crashed on, driverless, hit the tree with the loudest bang she had ever heard and burst into flames. They fell softly into a marshy

⁶⁴ Gamble 73.

⁶⁵ *The Magic Toyshop* 199.

⁶⁶ Jacqueline Pearson, “Foreword,” *Re-visiting Angela Carter Texts, Contexts, Intertexts*, ed. Rebecca Munford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) vii.

⁶⁷ Gamble 73.

⁶⁸ *Heroes and Villains* 19.

pool.”⁶⁹ The crashing of the lorry has a similar effect to the train accident in *Nights at the Circus*, it forces Marianne and Jewel to start their journey afresh and wander into the wild woods towards the Barbarians’ camp. Moreover, just like the train, the lorry also bursts into flames. Carter uses the motif of fire frequently as something that cleanses the accumulated layers of the previous, the past, and provides a new beginning. For example, when the Barbarians leave their place of temporary settlement, Jewel feels compelled to burn the house down: “‘They’re all off on the road,’ he said. ‘I have stayed behind to burn the house down.’”⁷⁰ Similarly, the London house at the end of the *Magic Toyshop* is burned down by Uncle Philip while Melanie and Finn escape onto the roof: “The house burnt like a giant chrysanthemum, all golden. [...] All burning, everything burning, toys and puppets and masks and chairs and tables and carpets and Mrs Rundle’s Christmas card with all her love [...] Edward Bear burning, with her pyjamas in his stomach. [...] ‘Everything is gone. Nothing is left but us.’”⁷¹ The burning truck for Marianne symbolizes the same the burning toyshop means for Melanie – a childhood ultimately left behind with a grown mysterious man as the sole companion on their other journey. The fire in Carter symbolizes sexual maturing, entrance into adulthood and an escape from the entrapment that had been, including the loss of innocence which is stressed by all the items Melanie cites on the list that connected her to her childhood and its memories.

Before another accident, Marianne’s perception of the journey is very similar to Fevvers’ – the feeling of entrapment and inevitability, a certain passivity and powerlessness to influence where the journey will take her: “Movement itself progressed so slowly that distance, like time, no longer had a practical application; motion became another aspect of the road. Now the travellers were in their element, a steady persevering progression from nowhere to nowhere, in featureless, colourless weather. [...] the day was absolutely devoted to

⁶⁹ *Heroes and Villains* 20.

⁷⁰ *Heroes and Villains* 98.

⁷¹ *The Magic Toyshop* 199-200.

perpetual motion and Marianne felt herself stretched out upon the road as if it were a rack.”⁷² As well as Fevvers, Marianne “progresses” through nothing to nowhere, the perception of movement and time is timeless and undimensional, as if the travellers were not moving at all and the journey is, by the heroine, perceived as a stasis. This stasis is once again disrupted when the convoy is attacked by the Out People: “Marianne stared at the back of the woman in front of her [...] She did not know this woman’s name but soon she knew her back by heart. [...] And then she saw an arrow stuck and quivering in this back [...] an arrow tipped with red come out of the blue, from nowhere. Everything changed immediately.”⁷³ Soon the convoy reaches the open country, breaks a camp, the countryside as well as the nature of the journeying changes. Moreover, Melanie finds out that she is pregnant. Gradually, the novel reveals that her pregnancy gives her purpose and Marianne is shown to be the one with a concrete purpose and plan (also because of her child), unlike Jewel who only resignedly does what the tribe expects of him. Therefore as well as the accident of the train, the attack and scattering of the convoy shatters the here-to reality and changes the nature of the travelling. Carter keeps repeating similar motifs to achieve similar effects, as Walter Kendrick observes, she frequently repeats herself “but when Carter does so, she seems to be admitting that the world contains about half a dozen stories, which can never be told too often, simply because they’re true.”⁷⁴

In other words, Carter uses similar “archetypal” stories and symbols that unwind the progress of her picaresque motifs. The echo of Melanie’s and Finn’s escape to the roof of the house is present in Desiderio’s actual start of the journey. He is imprisoned by the determination police but manages to climb to the roof and to escape the imprisonment he plunges into the dark abyss beneath him: “When it was quite dark, I made it; I pitched forward into the abyss and the sprawling fall winded me completely – but I landed on the

⁷² *Heroes and Villains* 100-106.

⁷³ *Heroes and Villains* 108.

⁷⁴ Kendrick 68.

other side, alive.”⁷⁵ However, unlike Melanie and Marianne who actually leave their childhood and their past behind, by changing his clothes Desiderio comes back to his past, assuming his Indian origin that he tried to suppress before: “Now nothing at all was left of the brisk young civil servant who had left the city such a short while ago. I looked the perfect offspring of the ancestors my mother had so strenuously denied and to that, perhaps, I owe my life.”⁷⁶ Also, as Peach points out, unlike Melanie and Marianne who although they have to adapt and get used to poorer, lower social background Desiderio has to “assume in serial fashion a number of different identities.”⁷⁷ in order to survive in the outer world.

On the other hand, if there is something all Carter’s pícaros have in common, it is the desire to find the sense of a home again. As she watches them playing through the kitchen keyhole, Melanie longs to belong to the Jowles’ intimate circle: “They were an entity, the Jowles, warm as wool. She envied them bitterly. ‘Make yourself at home.’ How could she? It all fell apart, her detachment. Suddenly, she yearned above all things to break into their home movie.”⁷⁸ Marianne also finds the well-known maternal figure of Mrs. Green soothing because it reminds her of her own world. For Desiderio, the desire to discover home is possibly the strongest, with the river people he has forgotten his troublesome past and he feels he had come back to his own people. He fully embraces his new identity: “And Desiderio himself had disappeared because the river people had given me a new name. It was their custom to change a given name if someone had suffered bad luck or misfortune, as they guessed I had done, so now I was called Kiku.”⁷⁹ When Nao-Kurai offers Desiderio his daughter to marry, Desiderio is moved to tears: “If I murdered Desiderio and became Kiku for ever, I need fear nothing in my life ever, any more. I need not fear loneliness or boredom or

⁷⁵ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 65.

⁷⁶ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 66.

⁷⁷ Peach 99.

⁷⁸ *The Magic Toyshop* 76.

⁷⁹ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 77.

lack of love. My life would flow like the river on which I lived.”⁸⁰ However, as Carter aims to show throughout all her novels, the forward narrative string movement of all the trains, boats, horseback journeys and carriages is always just an illusion, only the cycle connected to the pícaro’s male or female companion is ultimate, the quest for maturity which returns the hero/heroine back from where they started yet more mature and experienced. The hero or heroine cannot stay stranded in one of the fictional worlds indefinitely but has to hop on to another means of transport which takes him into another story, experience another episode where similar motifs repeat as in the previous act yet it is never exactly the same. The slow soothing movement of the boat is only illusory, as Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* had demonstrated, the river has to end somewhere and by staying on it the boat only gets into the more dangerous zone, in this case the pro-slavery oriented American South. In Desiderio’s case, his safety and his sense of belonging and having found a home is illusory as well because if he stayed his newly-wed wife would kill him during their wedding night: “And I knew as well as if Nao-Kurai had sung it out that they proposed to kill me and eat me [...] so that they would all learn how to read and write after a common feast where I would feature as the main dish on the menu at my own wedding breakfast.”⁸¹

To escape the unwanted destiny of being eaten, Desiderio has to swim across the river to face his other adventures and reunite with Albertina again, yet Desiderio finds it more difficult this time, saying goodbye to his idea of a home:

The wind blew through my soaking clothes and the cold woke up the old Desiderio. As I turned my back on the barges and set my face towards the distant lights of the town, I welcomed myself to the old home of my former self with a bored distaste. Desiderio had saved Kiku from

⁸⁰ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 80.

⁸¹ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 91.

the dear parents who would have dined off him but Kiku still could not find it in his heart just yet to thank Desiderio for it, all his hopes of ease and tranquillity ran off and away from him like the river water that dripped from his clothing at every step.⁸²

Linden Peach observes that: “The way in which Desiderio interprets his time with the River People [...] suggests that he is impelled in a Freudian sense, like Melanie in *The Magic Toyshop*, to discover a sense of a home as an ideal in his own psyche.”⁸³ Although outwardly Desiderio’s is a quest narrative, a search for Doctor Hoffman in order to find out what principle his machines work on, inwardly it is a Freudian search, a search for home, love and understanding. Yet as the water dripping from his clothes at every step suggests, it is all a mirage, Albertina as well as the temporary home he tries to convince himself he has found, can never turn out to be permanent. They are merely the desires Desiderio convinces himself he is not subject to. Although he refuses to submit to them in the ultimate act of revolt at the end of the novel when he destroys Doctor Hoffman’s machines and kills Albertina, they do not cease to haunt him. As Gamble observes, each of the fictional worlds he enters offers Desiderio a different kind of belonging, yet “In seeking inclusion [...] Desiderio only experiences repeated exclusions, and the ultimate object of his quest is no exception.”⁸⁴

An inherent part of the picaresque genre closely connected to the individual episodes is masking, disguising of speech, personality and character. Richard Bjornson observes that masking, or disguising, in the picaresque serves several purposes. Firstly, it is a technique the character employs in order to survive. Not only does the pícaro need to assume a different identity and character but the society he/she lives in also forces him to adopt a false morality in order to survive. As Bjornson puts it: “In practical terms it represents a necessary survival

⁸² *The Infernal Desire Machines* 92.

⁸³ Peach 104.

⁸⁴ Gamble 113.

technique, allowing clever individuals to extract what they want from people who would never give it to them if they simply requested it. Traceable to the simulated amiability which permits the beggar to smash Lazarillo's head against the stone bull as a means of alerting him to the *deceptiveness of appearances*.⁸⁵ [italics mine] After the blind beggar hits his head on the stone bull, Lazarillo realizes he has to use his cunning, he cannot trust anyone and he must be sharper than a needle: "I must keep awake because I'm on my own, and I've got to look after myself.' [...] It's a fact that if I hadn't used all my cunning and the tricks I knew, I would have died of hunger more than once."⁸⁶ Secondly, masking also serves a psychological purpose: "In a society, which demands an outward show of respect for traditional concepts of honour and religious faith, masking also serves a psychological function. If people are obliged in practice to contravene values which they are supposed to espouse in theory, they must develop some means of coping with the dichotomy between what they are and what they say they are."⁸⁷ The traditional Spanish picaresque employs this hypocritical masking in order to allow the characters to maintain self-respect, in deceiving others they, in fact, deceive themselves since in their situation everyone else would have acted the same, as Lázaro explains to His Grace.

In *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* Desiderio uses the masking in order to survive in the various societies he finds himself in but, unlike Lázaro, he has a political mission, choosing between the rigid regime of the Minister of Determination or the seemingly more liberating "capitalist control of desire through media technology"⁸⁸ employed by Doctor Hoffman. For him, it is not a matter of political conviction, nor is it a matter of life and death since he does not feel threatened by the mirages but merely ignores them. For Desiderio, it is connected to ennui and romance, he is bored, his life is unfulfilled and he

⁸⁵ Bjornson 33.

⁸⁶ *Lazarillo* 8-9.

⁸⁷ Bjornson 33.

⁸⁸ Peach 102.

longs to follow the dream of Albertina. Desiderio recounts that he had been promoted between lunch and teatime: “I became the Minister’s special agent and my mission was, if I could find him, to assassinate Dr Hoffman as inconspicuously as possible. I was chosen for the mission because: (a) I was in my right mind; (b) I was dispensable [...] I think the Minister thought of me as a kind of ambulant computer [...] I guessed it was something of a forlorn hope.”⁸⁹ Therefore although Desiderio’s quest is not driven by necessity at first, later he is betrayed by the Determination police members and his quest also becomes a matter of survival. Desiderio’s hypocritical masking throughout his journey or mission consists in the fact that he has not chosen his side. He had been betrayed by the rational order presided over by the Ministry and he is prepared to forget about his mission, follow Albertina and attain his happiness with her. The reason why Desiderio refuses to become the Doctor’s puppet and generator of eroto-energy, “the simplest yet most powerful form of radiant energy in the entire universe”⁹⁰ is a motif repeated throughout Carter’s work – if he consented, it would deprive him of his purpose, his journey would be turned into a stasis, his progress would be trapped in the Doctor’s laboratory and he would never be able to come full circle, to learn and grow from his experience. When he watches the lovers he notices their vacant stares, so immersed in their activity that the cubicles do not even need to restrain them. He is “awed and revolted” by “the tremendous clamour that rose from all those lovers caught perpetually in the trap of one another’s arms, for there were no locks or bars anywhere; they could have come and gone as they pleased. Yet, petrified pilgrims, locked parallels, icons of perpetual motion, they knew nothing but the progress of their static journey towards willed, mutual annihilation.”⁹¹

Although Carter’s definition of the genre, with regards to the historical perspective, is rather broad, as Carter’s pícaros – Desiderio, Marianne and Fevvers prove, what Carter’s

⁸⁹ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 40.

⁹⁰ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 215.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

picaresque narratives have in common with the original is the idea of social critique – mainly the notion that society is easily fooled by those who believe in themselves and are able to pull off the trick. Fevvers’ final words sum it up very fittingly: “To think I really fooled you! [...] It just goes to show there’s nothing like confidence.”⁹² As Jacqueline Pearson observes: “[...] the novel ends with Fevvers’s triumph over reality, her triumphant assertion that she has ‘fooled’ not only Walser but [also] *us readers*.” [italics mine]⁹³ Moreover, the kind of society that provides enough manoeuvring space for dubious morality, a society that is easily fooled by either moral deceptions or visual mirages, deserves to be taken on and satirized. This is what all the pícaros in their narratives do – by telling their own version of events they reveal the hypocrisy of the society that produced them.

Richard Bjornson points out the different viewpoints from which we can regard the pícaro and his im/morality:

Whether Lázaro is a victim or a trickster, he has clearly adopted a dehumanized value system in attempting to cope with the schizophrenic demands of society in which “good” people must act in one way while pretending that they are acting in another. In either case, Lázaro is implicitly condemned, but because he is the product of repeated contacts with a harsh world where people must learn to play by rules which require them to suppress their impulses toward generosity, compassion, truthfulness, and genuine religious belief, the anonymous author of *Lazarillo* is actually drawing attention to (and commenting upon) that society. By revealing the debased

⁹² *Nights at the Circus* 295.

⁹³ Pearson x.

mentality behind Lázaro's pretentious and self-serving letter to Vuestra Merced, he is implicitly questioning the societal values internalized by his picaresque hero.⁹⁴

In the end, the society itself is to blame. This is what Carter satirizes in Fevvers' fantastic narrative, her adolescence in Ma Nelson's brothel, her work in the freak show museum of Madame Schreck, the imprisonment in Mr. Rosencreutz's phallic fantasy and her entrapment in the gilded cage of the Grand Duke. No matter how unbelievable her stories sound or how much control she takes over the narrative, the episodes of her life document the hypocrisy of a society which leaves an orphan to be brought up in a brothel. Fevvers' taste for all things fine, diamonds and what Lizzie calls "foppery" reveal that there had been a time when she did not have much to eat or live off. Although nothing probably comments on the hypocrisy of society in *Nights at the Circus* as much as Mignon's story, she is forced to "become" a ghost by a swindler who pretends to be a medium, calling lost daughters and wives from the grave, all impersonated by Mignon: "Herr M., a once-a-night, on-and-off man, screwed Mignon with the absent-minded regularity with which he wound the grandfather clock, although never quite for so long. As for Mignon, she could hardly believe her luck: a bed, with sheets; an armchair; a warm stove; a table, with a cloth; mealtimes! Mignon thought she was in heaven but it was a fool's paradise [...]"⁹⁵ Mignon is happy to be taken advantage of by the misogynist opportunist who exploits other people's sorrows. It is Fevvers and her idea of mutual female solidarity that finally bring Mignon out of her misery when she persuades Princess to make her a part of the tiger show.

Desiderio's experience with the different societies he moves through is similar to Mignon's and Fevvers' in that his being in it is always connected to the self-interest of the society. The river people, although they seem pure and unspoiled by society at first, saved his

⁹⁴ Bjornson 39-40.

⁹⁵ *Nights at the Circus* 134.

life and continue to keep him as long as he is useful to them, however, after they find out they could exploit his knowledge and skills, Desiderio must leave before they butcher him. Similarly, at one point of the narrative, Desiderio is indispensable to the Minister of Determination in his quest to find and stop Doctor Hoffman, at other times, he is indispensable to Doctor Hoffman and Albertina in becoming their puppet in order to spur a major charge of eroto-energy and destroy the City. In the end, those characters that enjoy putting up the show and are able to pull off the pretences with confidence are most successful – such as Fevvers and her female vanity, after all, her beauty is only a part of a carefully constructed image. As she observes upon entering the Grand Duke’s palace: “The sums he is about to squander on this bright, pretty, useless thing, myself, have nothing to do with my value as such. If all the women in the world had wings, he’d keep his jewels to himself, to play at ducks and drakes on the icy waters of the Neva.”⁹⁶ It is all only a show, part of a good presentation. In the end, the society even takes the events out of the pícaro’s control – Desiderio is put on a pedestal as a hero in spite of his scepticism and unwillingness to be a hero and “posterity’s prostitute.”⁹⁷ Marianne assumes control in the Barbarian society because Jewel is dead and she is pregnant with his baby. It is either fight or fly and she prefers to “be the tiger lady and rule them with a rod of iron.”⁹⁸

The various historical developments of the picaresque treat the social satire differently, Henry Fielding does it with comic condescension, providing his naïve hero with a happy ending, similarly, for Roderick Random, everything, including the lovely Narcissa, falls into his lap. The fourth ensuing chapter of this dissertation aims to analyze to what extent does Carter provide her heroes or heroines with a happy-ending and where does the journey take them. In his assessment of Carter’s work Walter Kendrick argues that Angela Carter cannot

⁹⁶ *Nights at the Circus* 185.

⁹⁷ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 14.

⁹⁸ *Heroes and Villains* 150.

write a plot, “not to save her life.”⁹⁹ Kendrick claims that: “*Nights at the Circus* displays one breathtaking set piece after another, strung on a picaresque string, and girl gets boy at the end, but nothing really develops. It’s less a novel than a carnival of brilliant tableaux. The same is true, in lesser degree, of Carter’s earlier novels: they don’t cohere and on the last page they just stop.”¹⁰⁰ Kendrick’s argument is in a way similar to Sage’s, as if Carter’s series of picaresque episodes were like a series of slides where the projector suddenly and abruptly gets switched off. The last-but-one chapter of this thesis will try to assess whether this is true of Carter. Is it a specificity pertaining only to her novels or is in the nature of the genre as such? Does our journey of self-discovery and development ever end? Is not that why the picaresque seems to end abruptly, simply to end somewhere as opposed to going on and on? Does the ending involving the pícaro’s companion always entail a romance in Carter’s version of the picaresque? What does the self-discovery provide the pícaro with? These and other questions will be addressed in the following chapter dealing with the destination of the journey.

⁹⁹ Kendrick 79.

¹⁰⁰ Kendrick 79.

Chapter Four: The Destination

As has already been suggested this chapter will seek to analyze the pícaro's destination and the ending of his journey in Carter's specific treatment of it with relation to the psychological development of the character and the journey itself. The third chapter has analyzed the journey physically, in terms of the types of movement and episodes that are provided within the carteresque frame. The aim of this chapter is to look at the journey and the hero from a psychological point of view so as to assess the metaphorical aspect of the journey and the inner life of the character of pícaro. In his study *The Myth of the Pícaro* Alexander Blackburn suggests that Western literature has been "orbiting in the picaresque galaxy"¹ over more than four centuries. His argument is that "the trickster myth" of the pícaro is timeless and it "tends to appear wherever and whenever the modern mind, in flight from decadence, in quest of meaning, declares its freedom from narrow confines of law, custom, and circumstances."² A key part of this argument is, as Blackburn quotes, that "From *Lazarillo* to our day, the picaresque has been an outlet for the expression of human alienation."³ In other words, as Blackburn points out: "the fundamental situation of the literary pícaro is the loneliness of an individual isolated *within* society."⁴

Unlike the other definitions of the genre that have been provided so far, Blackburn emphasizes the pícaro's loneliness and alienation from society and perhaps even from himself. He compares the pícaro's situation to the predicament of the modern man – "the lonely individual cut off from, though yearning for, community and love."⁵ According to him: "The myth of the pícaro emerges as *the negative journey of the soul* toward order, meaning, and that full humanity implied by the word love."⁶ [italics mine] On the other hand, in

¹ Alexander Blackburn, *The Myth of the Pícaro: Continuity and Transformation of the Picaresque Novel 1554-1954* (USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979) 7.

² Blackburn 13.

³ In Blackburn 13.

⁴ Blackburn 19.

⁵ Blackburn 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Carter's definition of the genre, loneliness seems to be on the other side of the scales and is perceived as something desirable, as she says in Haffenden's interview, she sees the picaresque as a "certain 18th century fictional device where people have adventures in order to find themselves in places where they can discuss philosophical concepts without distractions."⁷ Therefore Carter's definition suggests that her characters need to be lonely or even isolated from each other in order to realize profound truths, become more mature and come to terms with the world. Carter even purposefully isolates her characters in order to provide them with the space to think and confront "philosophical concepts without distractions." She uses this technique in *Nights at the Circus* when she scatters Colonel Kearney's acrobats around the Siberian forest, in *The Magic Toyshop* when both Melanie's parents suddenly die, she feels lost on her way to London, chaperoning her younger siblings "lost as her parents scattered in fragment over the Nevada desert."⁸ The same goes for Marianne whose father is killed by the crazy nurse and she decides to abandon the community of the Professors', the only place she has known so far, with Jewel.

Desiderio is the only one of Carter's characters who is abandoned both at the beginning and the end of his story/journey with the sole difference that he does not mind at the beginning, he relishes his isolation and difference from all the other citizens of the society, he does not even mind his low social background:

In those tumultuous and kinetic times, the time of actualized desire, I myself had only one desire. And that was, for everything to stop. [...] I was too sardonic. I was too disaffected. [...] I was of Indian extraction. I do not know who my father was but I carried his genetic imprint on my face, although my colleagues always contrived

⁷ Haffenden 87.

⁸ *The Magic Toyshop* 31.

politely to ignore it since the white, pious nuns had vouched for me. Yet I was a very disaffected young man for I was not unaware of my disinheritance.⁹

However, after he discovers a sense of community with the river people and is constantly accompanied by Albertina, Desiderio comes to regret his lonely life, the life of an undeserved hero whose story is misinterpreted by the society. Desiderio's single desire before his death is to see Albertina again before he dies. Yet his journey changed the sceptical young man he is and as he admits, Doctor Hoffman has gained a partial victory over him since as he says:

If I believed there were anything of the transcendental in this scabbed husk which might survive the death I know will come to me in a few months, I should be happy, then, for I could delude myself I would rejoin my lover [...] And, sometimes, when I think of my journey, not only does everything seemed to have happened all at once, in a kind of fugue of experience, just as her father would have devised it, but everything in my life seems to have been of equal value [...].¹⁰

What Blackburn calls the "negative" or perhaps even dark journey of the soul does not, in Carter's interpretation of the picaresque journey, at first seem to be so. However, if looked at closely, it turns out her pícaros embark on their journeys ignorant, accompanied like Fevvers by Lizzie, Marianne by Jewel or alone like Desiderio, but happy with their single status and the general state of affairs. Their journey, nevertheless, makes them realize a profound difference, a sense of necessity and a deep need to belong to a community or at least to one other person, for the rest of their lives. Marianne is oscillating between the community

⁹ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 11-16.

¹⁰ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 13.

of the Professors and the Barbarians but only the uncivilized ways of the others enable her to embrace her desire to become a leader. Desiderio's sense of unbelonging in the City is strong, he regrets having to leave his illusion of happiness with the river people or the domestic sense of happiness he experiences with Albertina in the society of the centaurs but in the end it is mainly Albertina herself he craves. All of Carter's pícaros are at the end of their story confronted with a painful awareness, a change of feeling. Fevvers realizes her need to be loved by Walser and vice versa. Melanie turns to Finn in order to find a connection in the new, scary, fantastic world of her uncle's toyshop and Desiderio, in spite of his final rebellion, is haunted by Albertina's loss. Finally accepted by the society that used to shun him, he does not perceive himself as a hero. This change of awareness is described by Walser in the shaman's hut after his reunion with Fevvers:

He was as much himself again as he ever would be, and yet that 'self' would never be the same again for now he knew the meaning of fear as it defines itself in its most violent form, that is, fear of the death of the beloved, of the loss of the beloved, of the loss of love. It was the beginning of an anxiety that would never end, except with the deaths of either or both; an anxiety is the beginning of conscience, which is the parent of the soul but is not compatible with innocence.¹¹

Walser's words express the philosophy and motivation of Carter's characters' picaresque journeyings. The philosophical concept they most frequently think about and discuss either with their companions or with themselves, the deep desire that propels them to journey on and on, curious whether it can be found, is a sense of belonging represented by love. As a result, the deep awareness that changes their selves and their perception of the world after the

¹¹ *Nights at the Circus* 292-293.

destination is reached is their discovery of love and their (potential) loss of it. Walser reaches his maturity by realizing he could lose his beloved, Desiderio has lost her and the loss has been haunting him for fifty years: “She closed those eyes that were to me the inexhaustible well-springs of passion fifty years ago this very day and so I take up my pen on the golden anniversary of her death as I always intended to do.”¹² and as Gamble fittingly observes: “Although he begins the narrative as an exemplary example of the Baudelairean flaneur, ‘in whom the joy of watching is triumphant,’ by the end he [Desiderio] is a shaken shadow of his former self.”¹³ In spite of her initial unwillingness, Marianne also finds a sense of community with the Barbarians and makes peace with Jewel, who although he is no longer the hero of her adolescent dreams, is nevertheless going to be missed by her. When Jen suggests that Marianne would be glad to be rid of him Marianne starts crying and after she finds out he is dead Marianne faints. Therefore, in spite of her disappointment in him and her later derision, Marianne also feels bereft without Jewel before she decides to take matters into her own hands and rule the whole community.

As a result, aside from the hero’s or the heroine’s picaresque mission which creates the leading plotline of the narrative such as spreading the fame of the circus and her acrobatic skills along with multiplying her financial resources in Fevvers’ case, finding the journalistic truth on his travels in Walser’s, discovering the other side of the world behind the Professors’ community barbed wire borders in Marianne’s and stopping the greedy Doctor Hoffman in his mission to destroy the city with his mirages in Desiderio’s case, the main motivating force behind Carter’s picaresque is the desire to belong and the force of love. However, as I have tried to prove in this thesis, Carter is always full of contradictions when it comes to the main themes in her work. Therefore, as Anna Hunt observes in connection to Walser when he is first confronted by Fevvers, Walser “is struck both by enchantment and revulsion at the

¹² *The Infernal Desire Machines* 13.

¹³ Gamble 111.

physicality of Fevvers [...] [and for him she embodies] the fundamental contradiction of desire and disgust.”¹⁴ Hunt’s observation points out that there is always a kind of contradictory quality in the relationship between the lovers – the pícaro and his companion, there is always a certain degree of alienation and repulsion, as well as fascination and the desire to come closer, to get to know more, to get to the core of this fascination. Consequently, the main theme of Carter’s picaresque connected to the search of love and the sense of belonging is how the relationship between the two lovers evolves, the distancing and joining of her two companions before they can either come together or be separated forever.

In her analysis of *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* Maggie Tonkin asserts that desire is “an all-pervasive and overwhelming force which lies at the heart of this text.”¹⁵ However, it could be argued that desire is an all-pervasive, overwhelming force which lies at the heart of all Carter’s text, although perhaps more implicitly than in this particular one. For example, when Fevvers looks at Walser in the Siberian train she feels this kind of desire in spite of his yet unfinished personality:

What *is* it this young man reminds me of? A piece of music composed for one instrument and played on another. [...] Oh, yes; he is unfinished, just as Lizzie says, but all the same – his sun-burned bones! His sun-bleached hair! Underneath his makeup, that face like a beloved face known long ago, and lost, and now returned, although I never knew him before, although he is a stranger, still that face which I have always loved before I ever saw it so that to see him is to remember, although I do not know who it

¹⁴ Hunt 139-155.

¹⁵ Tonkin 79.

is I then remember, except it might be the vague,
imaginary face of *desire*. [italics mine]¹⁶

Desiderio also finds Albertina's face familiar and her image keeps haunting him in his dreams, this sense of déjà-vu and Carter's play with knowing and yet not knowing the other, the lover being familiar, a specific person, and a stranger, a mere reflection or materialization of the other one's desires at the same time, makes the contradictory quality of the relationship between the lovers she depicts come to the surface.

It is the pícaro's ever-present desire to know more, to discover new lands and worlds, to belong somewhere, to improve his social position and to find a companion. However, for the lovers, the main problem in finding the proper distance from each other in order to be able to come together is tuning out their (mutual) desires and making them compatible. Although Albertina is at first the object of Desiderio's desires, she is perfect: "more savagely and triumphantly beautiful than any imagining, my Platonic other, my necessary extinction, my dream, my made flesh."¹⁷ and in Albertina's words: "Ours is a supreme encounter, Desiderio. We are two such disseminating mirrors."¹⁸ However, as the narrative develops, especially in her father's castle, she becomes more and more distant and repugnant to him, as Tonkin puts it: "Albertina's desire becomes problematic to Desiderio, not when it reveals its propensity for orgiastic masochism, but *when it fails to mirror his own*."¹⁹ [italics mine] Tonkin here reveals the problem of Carter's pícaros potential happy-endings. It is reflection – the image of the lover is always reflected in the eyes of his other and in case this reflection fails to live up to the other's expectations, desire is deferred or even turned against its original source. Once it is clear Albertina's desire is not to be united with Desiderio and share the domestic bliss he longs for, but it is to serve her father in his megalomaniac project, to use and imprison their

¹⁶ *Nights at the Circus* 204.

¹⁷ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 215.

¹⁸ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 202.

¹⁹ Tonkin 81.

mutual desire in order to destroy the City, Desiderio recoils. As he says towards the end of the novel:

All at once I was pitched on the horns of a dilemma, for I was presented with two alternatives [...] I, of all men, had been given the casting vote between a barren yet harmonious calm and a fertile yet cacophonous tempest. Well, you know the choice I made. [...] Old Desiderio asks young Desiderio: ‘And when he offered you a night of perfect ecstasy in exchange for a lifetime’s contentment, how could you possibly choose the latter?’ And young Desiderio answers: ‘I am too young to know regret.’²⁰

Sarah Gamble asserts that in destroying Doctor Hoffman’s castle at the end of the novel, Desiderio “finally discovers a kind of identity – however, he has to live for the rest of his life with the knowledge of the emptiness of the role he has chosen [...]”²¹ On the other hand, as I have already pointed out, Carter’s novels always seem to balance between chaos and order, fantasy and reality and the correct path that maintains this fragile balance is, for her pícaro, not always attainable. After all, as Desiderio’s case demonstrates, “a choice between two extremes is always a hopeless one.”²²

Fortunately, not all of Carter’s pícaros are faced with such extreme dualistic choices as Desiderio and they can happily balance on their tightrope between order and chaos, fantasy and reality, harmonious calm and fertile tempest. In this respect, her last novel, *Nights at the Circus*, is especially mature, where, as Gamble sees it, “[...] Carter drops her habitual mask of irony [...] and is being absolutely serious in maintaining the desirability, as well as the

²⁰ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 207.

²¹ Gamble 113-114.

²² Gamble 115.

perils, of romantic love.”²³ The journey Fevvers and Walser have to undergo is love – and the ability to accept love fully, in order to meet as two adults on an equal footing. After all, as Albertina states: “Love is a perpetual journey that does not go through space [...]. Love creates for itself a tension that disrupts every tense in time.”²⁴ Love transforms all of Carter’s characters. At the end of his account, when Walser sums up his adventure, he starts from the journalistic point of view again but then, after Fevvers’: “Oh!” “Walser took himself apart and put himself together again.”²⁵ Instead of Jack, Walser, a journalist and “an American citizen” he is “Jack, ever an adventurous boy [...]”²⁶ and Fevvers, the cockney Venus, the arealiste is suddenly “Mrs Sophie Walser, who formerly had a successful career on the music-hall stage [...]”²⁷ Fevvers realizes the importance of love and the transformation it can cause for the better when she is lost and desperate in the Siberian forest, observing the change in Mignon after she has been united with Princess: “Can this truly be the same ragged child who came to me for charity those few short weeks ago?’ pondered Fevvers. ‘Love, true love has utterly transformed her.’ When she thought how it was the presence of the other that made Mignon so beautiful, little tears pricked the backs of her eyes for she, Fevvers, was growing uglier every day.”²⁸ Fevvers has to wait yet for her reunion with Walser but after she meets him Lizzie observes: “in the light of his [Walser’s] grey eyes, her [Lizzie’s] foster daughter was transformed back into her old self again, without an application of peroxide, even.”²⁹

As Walser and Fevvers prove, Carter’s characters often have to lose themselves during their journey, in taking on their picaresque disguises and identities, Carter’s pícaros often accept the new role so fully, they lose sight of their former self, only to emerge transformed and more complete at the end of their journey after having been confronted with

²³ Gamble 166.

²⁴ *The Infernal Desire Machines* 202.

²⁵ *Nights at the Circus* 294.

²⁶ *Nights at the Circus* 293-294.

²⁷ *Nights at the Circus* 294.

²⁸ *Nights at the Circus* 276.

²⁹ *Nights at the Circus* 293.

love and the self-abnegation and selflessness it requires. Walser suffers a blow on the head and Fevvers temporarily loses her flamboyance and grandeur after the train accident. *Nights at the Circus* in general is a novel that stresses the importance of communities and ties between people. Although on the surface the circus itself is a collection of outcasts, the characters Carter puts outside of it, such as Madame Schreck, Mr. Rosencreutz and the Grand Duke, are even weirder and more isolated in their greediness and extravagance. Therefore in spite of the circus as a collection of outcasts, Carter stresses their need to come together, have a community and close relationships with each other, such as in the stories of Princess and Mignon and the ignorant strong-man Samson who grows in spirit, matures and longs to belong to someone too. In Sarah Gamble's view *Nights at the Circus* also stresses the importance of relationships, in fact, all of Carter's novels that have been analyzed in this dissertation prove that "the dangers involved in the commitment of self to others are as nothing compared to the isolation experienced by the subject who lives only in and for the self."³⁰ However, this is especially valid in *Nights at the Circus* with "its assertion that forging links with others is a key element in establishing one's existence as independent subject."³¹

Although not all of Carter's novels that have been analyzed here put so much emphasis on the sense of belonging to someone and trying actively to be a part of a community, in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Heroes and Villains* Desiderio's and Marianne's "dark journey of the soul" and their loneliness throughout the journey and at the end of it too point at the same revelation, the need for love, if in a different way. Although Marianne and Desiderio find a sense of identity and are faced with a conclusion of sorts to their story, they have to grapple with a sense of emptiness and abandonment, each in their own way. Nonetheless, in spite of seeing love as a key element of

³⁰ Gamble 191.

³¹ Ibid.

the carteresque picaresque journeying, none of Carter's happy-endings are conclusive, of course. As Gamble puts it: "The picaresque is Carter's favoured form [...], in which the narrative action takes the form of a kaleidoscopic process of endless change and repatterning, and the conclusive act of arrival is postponed for as long as possible."³² The conclusive act of arrival and the outcome of the story and the journey are in Carter postponed indeed and even once the pícaros achieve their destination there is a question hanging in the air: "Where do we go from here?" Fact or fiction, fantasy or reality, happy-ending or abandonment, fight or flight, rule or submission, Carter likes to leave her readers wondering at the end of her novels. So we wonder – does Marianne become the Tiger Lady? What happens to her after Jewel dies? Does she meet Donally again? Does he replace her? Where do Melanie and Finn go from the burning roof of the house containing all their past and memories? What happened to the rest of her family? Is Fevvers' and Walser's a happy-ending indeed? Or is it just another one of Carter's tricks? Does Desiderio meet Albertina again after his death? There are always hidden question marks at the end of Carter's novels and so she keeps her readers on the road even after the journey has ended, wandering in and wondering about her imaginary worlds, the borders between the possible and the impossible, the real and the fantastic. Even if, at the end of their journeys, her pícaros find what they have been, even if unawares, looking for, there is this ever-present danger of losing it again.

³² Gamble 9.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

As the introduction has outlined, the aim of this dissertation has been to analyze Angela Carter's specific uses of the picaresque genre in her chosen novels and to determine what the specifically carteresque features of the picaresque are. The preceding chapters have analyzed Carter's pícaros and their companions, the metaphorical as well as physical movements on their journeys together with their destinations, (happy)endings and the outcomes of her characters' philosophical wanderings. The picaresque landscapes in her novels also share these specifically carteresque features I have hinted at with relation to the plot and the development of the characters. Carter's picaresque landscapes, are as well as the pícaros' quest, motivated by desire. In her analysis of Jewel's and Marianne's relationship in *Heroes and Villains* Sarah Gamble observes that:

in many ways he [Jewel] is her [Marianne's] own unconscious creation [...], made up of everything she most fears and most desires. [...] When she leaves the white tower behind and enters the world of the Barbarians, like Melanie before her she is also entering the world of her own adolescent fantasies. Having been bitten on the leg by an adder, the journey to the Barbarian settlement passes for her literally in a fever-dream, emphasising that this is no straightforward geographical journey, but one which takes the protagonist into the realm of her own erotic imagination.¹

In her observation on Marianne's and Melanie's journey, Gamble also fittingly characterizes the nature of landscapes in other Carter's novels. The journeys, as well as the landscapes in them are very much influenced by extreme poles or borders, so characteristic for Carter's fiction, that the characters encounter on their way from one pole to another – in

¹ Gamble 77.

The Magic Toyshop it is the contrast between the claustrophobic atmosphere of the shabby working class London of the sixties with the un-realistic fantastic setting of Uncle Philip's toyshop, in *Heroes and Villains* it is the two opposite societies: the Professors representing rigid order and military regime and the Barbarians with their fantastic colours and rituals, in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* the novel is divided between the "normal" reality of life in the City and the allegiances to the Ministry of Determination with its rational order and Doctor Hoffman's world ruled by desire and mirages: "I DESIRE THEREFORE I EXIST."² In other words, all Carter's landscapes reflect this dreamy feverish quality, they are Freudian dreamscapes "which map the territory of the unconscious."³ and at the same time contain within them this contradictory polar quality ever-present in Carter's fiction evoking fascination and revulsion at the same time. Moreover, with their feverish dreamy quality the landscapes are not fixed either but are "perpetually fluctuating"⁴ between fantasy and reality, just like Desiderio's journey in *Nebulous Time*. Carter's Freudian dreamscapes reflecting the characters' subconscious desires influence the nature of her picaresque and provide it with a sense of claustrophobia. Although *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Nights at the Circus* do not take place mostly inside buildings like *The Magic Toyshop*, as Gamble observes: "[...] the most important journey undertaken by the narrators is the one that takes them into the interior of their own minds."⁵ Therefore the sense of claustrophobia and confusion is supported by the internal character of the journey which takes the readers into the pícaros' mind and meanders around their subconscious desires.

Sarah Gamble in her introduction to *Writing from the Front Line* attracts attention to the presence of boundaries in Carter's fiction: "Carter's fiction persistently concerns itself with the evocation of boundaries and borderlines, precariously suspending itself at the very

² *The Infernal Desire Machines* 211.

³ Gamble 158.

⁴ Gamble 109.

⁵ Gamble 158.

point at which one state, condition, place or mode merges into another.”⁶ Moreover, “The content of Angela Carter’s fiction [...] tends to be [...] predicated on tension, for she consistently uses it to celebrate borderline states and conditions of being. She is fascinated, for example, by the blurring of gender boundaries; by adolescence, that brief period when the subject is not quite a child, but also not yet adult; with the period of suspension between departure and destination which constitutes a journey; with the moment when the season or the millennium is caught at the instant of change.”⁷ Gamble’s assessment points exactly at the tension in Carter’s work – all her characters are about to do something, to grow up, to mature sexually as well psychologically, to set on a journey or make a life-changing decision. Carter’s tendency to challenge borders and boundaries of all kinds of ideologies and genres also explains her use of and fascination with the picaresque which gives her space for satire, political and social critique as well as “Bildungsroman” motifs where we follow the characters’ growing up and their development into a more mature person thanks to their quest motivated by desire at the end of which lies love and revelation.

As I have strived to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, Carter’s definition of the picaresque is rather loose and she uses the term in its broader sense, containing a character with a quest that sets on a journey. Nevertheless, as Blackburn puts it, she is “orbiting in the picaresque galaxy,” although her “definition” of the picaresque is rather circulating around the term itself without directly targeting it. Her understanding of the genre definitely owes much more to its eighteenth-century interpretations rather than the original sixteenth-century Spain. Yet unlike Smollett’s Roderick Random or Fielding’s Tom Jones, her characters do not get a miraculous ending where everything is suddenly resolved, a wealthy relative found, and the protagonist’s chosen bride as well as a lot of wealth falls into his lap. Carter’s characters have to search hard and experience things on the edge of the possible in order to attain their

⁶ Gamble 5.

⁷ Gamble 6.

“happy-endings” (which are frequently quite open-ended) or to realize why it was deferred, they are “outsiders” but not only in the sense of low origin, they are also emancipated women with wings, adolescent girls locating their (sexual) identity or outright freaks.

In order to make matters even more complicated Linden Peach observes: “Carter’s literary career defies summary and her novels deny, resist and subvert definitions and frames of all kinds – literary, cultural, social, sexual, religious, ontological. [...] they [her novels] are written from the realization that many of the traditional principles which have governed our perception and organization of ‘reality’ have been brought into question by modern and post-modern European and Euro-American thinking.”⁸ Even though Carter’s novels resist all kinds of categorizations and definitions this dissertation has aimed to prove the inherent and considerable presence of the picaresque in her work which has hitherto been neglected in the discussion of her oeuvre. Carter uses the picaresque to challenge literary as well as philosophical and political boundaries and to keep readers wondering about the ongoing process of writing which, just as the pícaro’s journey and its destination, has a beginning and an ending. Carter, however, keeps us on edge till the last moment, as Fevvers complains: “And so our journeyings commenced again, as if they were second nature. Young as I am, it’s been a picaresque life; will there be no end to it? Is it my fate to be a female Quixote, with Lizzie my Sancho Panza? If so, what of the young American? Will he turn out to be the beautiful illusion, the Dulcinea of that sentimentality for which Lizzie upbraids me, telling me it’s but the obverse to my enthusiasm for hard cash? Trudge on, trudge on, girl, and let events dictate themselves.”⁹ And so she keeps her readers trudging on to see how events dictate themselves in the hope that answers will be provided. However, with Carter it is often another question that constitutes the answer and invites readers further into the narrative. Despite the fact that her work subverts various genres and resists frames of all kinds, as this MA thesis

⁸ Peach 7.

⁹ *Nights at the Circus* 245.

demonstrates, Carter had definitely been inspired by those before her, and so she continues to inspire those that come after her, even twenty years after her tragically premature death. As Jacqueline Pearson concedes: “her influence is still discernible on much contemporary fiction, and on those of us who read her so avidly.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Pearson x.

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