Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

Luiz Guilherme Pereira Junqueira

The Construction and Representation of Monsters as Others in Angela Carter's *Nights at The Circus* and Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*

Belo Horizonte

2018

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Luiz Guilherme Pereira Junqueira

Dissertação de mestrado apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Literários da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre em Letras: Estudos Literários.

Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa
Linha de pesquisa: Literatura, História e Memória Cultural
Orientador: Julio Jeha

Belo Horizonte
Faculdade de Letras
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais
2018

Abstract

Anyone who is different from what a social norm establishes can be transformed into a monster. Cultural, religious, political, and sexual differences are often found in artistic representations of monsters. The novels *Sexing the Cherry*, by Jeanette Winterson, and *Nights at the Circus*, by Angela Carter, are aware of the transformations those who are different may suffer. They explore the ways groups that are distant from the standards are turned into monsters and the marginalization they suffer for not adapting to the norms. In this work, I analyze how the monsters in these novels are constructed and characterized as Others, in order to understand how they are used to question norms and other impositions by society. I also analyze the grotesque women that are the main characters of each novel, to understand how their monstrosity influences their representation as symbols of female power and freedom.

Keywords: Alterity, English Literature, freaks, monsters.

Resumo

Qualquer pessoa que difere do que uma norma social estabelece pode ser transformada em monstro. Diferenças culturais, religiosas, políticas e sexuais são frequentemente encontradas em representações artísticas de monstros. Os romances *Sexing the Cherry*, de Jeanette Winterson, e *Nights at the Circus*, de Angela Carter, são cientes das transformações que aqueles que são diferentes podem sofrer. Eles exploram as maneiras em que grupos que destoam dos padrões são transformados em monstros e a marginalização que eles sofrem por não se adaptarem às normas. Neste trabalho, analiso como os monstros nesses romances são construídos e caracterizados como Outros, com o intuito de entender como eles são usados para questionar normas e outras imposições feitas pela sociedade. Também analiso as mulheres grotescas que são as protagonistas de cada romance para entender como a monstruosidade delas influencia sua representação como símbolos de poder e liberdade femininos.

Palavras-chave: Alteridade, freaks, literatura inglesa, monstros.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, professor Dr. Julio Jeha, for the invaluable guidance and patience during the whole process of researching and writing of this work. I also thank him for the opportunity of acquiring abilities that I will carry for the rest of my life.

I thank my mother, Maria Helena, my father, Ailton, my sister, Thaís, my brother-in-law, Pedro, and my godmother, Lúcia, for the continuous support ever since I was born.

I thank my close friends, Allan, Clauton, Felipe, Marcelo, Nathy, and Ronaldo, for their support and for the many times they eased my mind in moments of most anxiety.

I thank my former advisor, professor Dr. Luiz Manoel da Silva Oliveira, without whom I would never have followed this path.

I also thank CAPES, which provided me with a scholarship without which this work would not have been possible.

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Introduction

The perception of what is monstrous changes overtime and within different cultures, though largely monstrosity is located outside a given culture. Beginning with Aristotle (384 BCE – 322 BCE) in *Generation of Animals*, monstrosity is defined as being contrary to Nature. For the philosopher, with monsters "Nature has in a way departed from the type," since they do not happen in the usual order of things. However, he did not believe in the existence of hybrid monsters; rather, he attributed the notion of hybrid creatures to comparisons made with animals, but he did not believe such anomalies could exist because the gestation periods of the animals were different. For him, a monster is that which is deficient or deformed.

Centuries later, Augustine (354 CE – 430 CE) in *The City of God*, approaches monstrous races with suspicion. The belief in some imaginary creatures was so common that even the learned took them for granted. But for Augustine, if there are monstrous races that resemble men, like the cynocephali, they are human: "But whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in colour, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is in some power, part, or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt that he springs from that one protoplast" (117). For the African philosopher, the so-called monsters are not different from men, one of the reasons being that monstrous races also descended from Adam.

Unlike Aristotle, Augustine did not believe that monsters were contrary to nature, since everything that there is, exists according to God's will, even when humans cannot understand His reasons. He ponders:

> But supposing they are men of whom these marvels are recorded, what if God has seen fit to create some races in this way, that we might not suppose that

> the monstrous births which appear among ourselves are the failures of that wisdom whereby He fashions the human nature, as we speak of the failure of a less perfect workman? Accordingly, it ought not to seem absurd to us, that as in individual races there are monstrous births, so in the whole race there are monstrous races. (118)

For the theologian, some of God's actions cannot be understood by humans, and he considers monstrous births to be among these incomprehensible deeds. The existence of monstrous races would be a way of legitimizing monsters, so men know they are possible and do not question the will of their creator. Further on his text, he also identifies another possible reason:

> Yet, for our part, these things which happen contrary to nature, and are said to be contrary to nature (as the apostle, speaking after the manner of men, says, that to graft the wild olive into the good olive, and to partake of its fatness, is contrary to nature), and are called monsters, phenomena, portents, prodigies, ought to demonstrate, portend, predict that God will bring to pass what He has foretold regarding the bodies of men, no difficulty preventing Him, no law of nature prescribing to Him His limit. (432)

Augustine uses monsters as evidence that God can create things that are apparently contrary to nature.

In the epic poem *Beowulf* (c. 700 – 1000 CE), the monster Grendel also has a religious connotation, though not from Augustine's perspective. The poet traces the monster's origin to "Cain's clan" (9). The author of *Beowulf* associates Grendel with the first biblical murderer and his offspring, attributing the origins of monsters to Cain's curse, claiming that many came into existence during his exile.

Michel de Montaigne (1533 – 1592) contributed to the discussion of monsters and monstrosity with at least two essays. In "Of a Monstrous Child", he describes a deformed child he came upon in the street: "Under the breast it was joined to another child, but without a head, and which had the spine of the back without motion, the rest entire; for though it had one arm shorter than the other, it had been broken by accident at their birth; they were joined breast to breast, and as if a lesser child sought to throw its arms about the neck of one something bigger." As early as the sixteenth century, the child's situation foreshadowed freak exhibitions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, since it was being displayed by its relatives in exchange for money.

Montaigne seems skeptical about monsters being portents: "This double body and several limbs relating to one head might be interpreted a favourable prognostic to the king [Henry III.], of maintaining these various parts of our state under the union of his laws; but lest the event should prove otherwise, 'tis better to let it alone, for in things already past there needs no divination." The philosopher raises this point only to object to it, which indicates that people of the time could understand the monster as an omen. He holds a position like that of Augustine, that monsters are not contrary to nature:

> Those that we call monsters are not so to God, who sees in the immensity of His work the infinite forms that He has comprehended therein; and it is to be believed that this figure which astonishes us has relation to some other figure of the same kind unknown to man. From His all wisdom nothing but good, common; and regular proceeds; but we do not discern the disposition and relation.

For Montaigne, monsters are part of the natural order, but humans think they are irregularities because they cannot comprehend God's wisdom.

In "Of Cannibals," the French philosopher ponders about the inhabitants of the New World and if they can really be considered savages. He claims that people tend to consider different cultures barbarous:

> I find that there is nothing barbarous and savage in this nation, by anything that I can gather, excepting, that every one gives the title of barbarism to everything that is not in use in his own country. As, indeed, we have no other level of truth and reason than the example and idea of the opinions and customs of the place wherein we live: there is always the perfect religion, there the perfect government, there the most exact and accomplished usage of all things.

This essay is a response to the reception of said cannibals in sixteenth-century Europe. He puts native Americans in perspective, claiming that their proximity to nature does not make them uncivilized, but purer than Europeans: "We may then call these people barbarous, in respect to the rules of reason: but not in respect to ourselves, who in all sorts of barbarity exceed them". For Montaigne, Americans are noble, and even cannibalism is less extreme than the other forms of death used in Europe.

A reader of Montaigne, Shakespeare (1564 – 1616) wrote *The Tempest* to present a different view about people from other lands than that of the Frenchman. The name of Caliban, the monster in the play, is often interpreted as an anagram of *canibal*, a reference to the cannibals that were believed to live in the New World. The monster himself is presented as a native of the island the play is set in:

> This island's mine by Sycorax my mother,
> Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
> Thou strok'st me and made much of me; wouldst give me

……………………………………

> For I am all the subjects that you have,
> Which first was mine own king, and here you sty me
> In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
> The rest o'th' island. (119)

Caliban is a native who accuses the European Prospero of taking the island from him. He was also forced into slavery by Prospero's magical arts, which is reminiscent of European colonization of distant lands, though the wizard claims he would not have enslaved Caliban if the monster had not attempted to rape his daughter.

Another British subject, Edmund Burke (1730 – 1797) composed *A Philosophical Enquiry* to analyze the sublime, contributing much to what is discussed about monsters in contemporary theory, though monsters are not his direct concern. He claims that

> whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror, be endued with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on any thing as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous. There are many animals, who though far from being large, are yet capable of raising ideas of the sublime, because they are considered as objects of terror. As serpents and poisonous animals of almost all kinds. (53)

Burke postulates that the idea of terror may be caused by any creature that is threatening, independent of its size. Any creature that is terrifying also has the potential of being sublime, which causes astonishment, a frequent emotion of characters that face monsters. He also relates obscurity with bodily forms that cause confusion, the latter being a characteristic of a great number of monsters.

The contemporary philosopher Noël Carroll analyzes the horror genre in *The Philosophy of Horror*. He claims horror fiction can be easily identified by the affect it intends to cause: “Like works of suspense, works of horror are designed to elicit a certain kind of affect. I shall presume that this is an emotional state, which emotion I call art-horror” (15). For Carroll, there are different kinds of horror, art-horror being the specific affect caused only by particular artistic forms. He also declares that, in works of horror, art-horror must be caused by monsters, or by objects that have monstrous attributes.

Carroll claims that monsters are beings not believed to exist according to contemporary science, but that horrific monsters need to be threatening and impure to cause art-horror. The threat posed by monsters may happen in many forms: physical, psychological, moral, social, etc. This is an important clause because without it, monsters would only be disgusting. He bases his explanation of impurity in Mary Douglas’s theories: “Following Douglas, then, I initially speculate that an *object* or *being* is impure if it is categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless” (32). He identifies a few characteristics that makes monsters impure, from the merging of ontological realms to association with objects already considered disgusting by a culture. Categorical indistinction is probably the most common aspect found in monsters. Carroll relates it to their unnaturalness: “In addition, the emphasis Douglas places on categorical schemes in the analysis of impurity indicates a way for us to account for the recurrent description of our impure monsters as ‘un-natural.’ They are un-natural relative to a culture’s conceptual scheme of nature. They do not fit the scheme; they violate it” (34). Monsters must be unnatural also in the universes they are portrayed.

Carroll presents a clear-cut definition of what is monstrous, though he acknowledges the concept has other uses. He claims that “monsters in everyday speech are often thought of in terms of morality” (41), but he disregards this use as purely metaphorical. For the

philosopher, monsters may be morally threatening, but that alone is not enough to characterize a being as monstrous. For Carroll, a serial killer is not a monster, whereas Superman, who often represents an idealized moralism, is. In *On Monsters*, Stephen T. Asma theorizes about the portrayal of psychopaths as monsters. For him, criminals are called monsters when their behavior deviates from what is considered human:

> Often the label [of monster] is applied to those criminals who transcend the usual or traditional motives for violent crime. Sometimes the criminal is difficult to understand because his rageful behavior is so extreme, but sometimes our bewilderment is based on the absence of *any* motive whatsoever. … The label of monster, on the other hand, is usually reserved for a person whose actions have placed him outside the range of humanity. (205)

Emotions are considered by many as the defining trait of humanity, so Asma claims that the lack of some emotions, such as empathy, is often present on those who are described as monsters. Not all murders are described as monstrous, but one that is extremely violent may be.

In *Female Stories, Female Bodies*, Lidia Curti identifies a trend of postmodern fiction written by women: “The monsters that have recently invaded female fiction may be instances of a new freedom, signs of the possibility of bringing them to life, after the times when monsters and doubles, just as witches and freaks, had to be suppressed and repressed” (117). According to Curti, the representation of some monsters in female fiction was paired with the representation of women. In the novels Curti analyzes, monsters were repressed due to their differences, but they seek ways of escaping the burdens society imposes on them. She briefly analyzes Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*:

> With her irony, Carter is here asking for a total suspension of disbelief from the reader as we have seen she does at the end of *Wise Children*, the disbelief

> in this case being tied not so much to the acceptance of the fantastic journeys in clownland as to the overturning of traditional assessments of female beauty, the erasure of stereotypes of the feminine (a political goal of Carter's narrative from the start). (123)

Even though Fevvers's body is often described as grotesque, the protagonist of Carter's novel is attractive. Curti reads Fevvers's body as a possibility of breaking stereotypes of female beauty, though her position as a monster may imply more than that.

* * *

In the present work, I will analyze how the Dog-Woman, Fevvers, and other monsters in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* are created and represented as Others, so I can understand how monsters can be used to question norms and other impositions by society, and the problems this kind of representation may create. Consequently, I shall be able to show my reader that the use of monsters to symbolize what is different carries the ambivalence present in monsters, making it difficult to consider these characters simple symbols of power and freedom. I will argue that though the Dog-Woman and Fevvers are used to question normative and conservative ideals, they cannot completely control their monstrous urges, a problem that is probably based at their own status as monsters. In this work, I mainly use Carroll's definition of monstrosity, which focus on physical and affective aspects, rather than on moral ones.

Nights at the Circus was published in 1984. It tells the story of Fevvers, a trapeze artist that was born with wings. The novel opens with an American journalist named Jack Walser interviewing the winged woman, while he also attempts to solve if her wings are real or not. Fevvers tells the journalist the story of her life, which is full of fantastical elements,

from a woman (herself) that was hatched from an egg to a freak performer that was born with eyes in the place of her nipples. The winged aerialist has lived in several places, all of which can be described as marginal: a brothel, a horror museum, and a circus. Walser, who was attempting to rationalize the artist and her stories, gets entangled in the narrative, ultimately deciding to join the circus as a clown to investigate further.

The novel is set at the end of the nineteenth century and a recurrent theme is that of freaks and how they were perceived by society. *Nights* presents a world that is sad and abusive toward people that are born with bodily abnormalities, though they manage to survive by creating communities and helping each other. Fevvers is in contrast with the other freaks, since she is a strong and independent woman, who refuses to be forced into a subjected position. Whenever she arrives at such marginal places, her actions generally lead the freak performers to freedom and allow a better life to everyone. Because of her strength and of the changes she brings about where she passes, critics have often interpreted Fevvers as a symbol of the New Woman that would emerge in the twentieth century.

Another novel that presents a monstrous, but strong and independent woman is *Sexing the Cherry*, by Jeanette Winterson. The story is mostly set in the seventeenth century, alternating the point of view of the chapters between the Dog-Woman and her adoptive son, Jordan. The Dog-Woman is gigantic, and she is able to defeat half a dozen of soldiers at the same time. A supporter of the king, she gets involved in the English Civil War when the parliament and the Puritans threaten to overthrow the ruler.

Jordan was found in a river by the Dog-Woman when he was a child. He eventually became a sailor, and in the chapters under his point of view, he describes imaginary travels to distant lands. The lands inside his head are full of fantastical elements, and he spends most of his journey in search of a flying princess named Fortunata. During his travels, Jordan comes

across the princesses from the Brothers Grimm's fairy tale "The Shoes that Were Danced to Pieces", which Winterson rewrites, altering the fate of each princess.

In the last pages of the novel, Winterson introduces a section entitled "1990," set in that decade. The chapters are not continuous, being irregularly inserted between the chapters set in the seventeenth century. It presents two new characters that seem a sort of alter egos of the Dog-Woman and Jordan: an unnamed activist, who is combating companies that disperse waste into nature, and a sailor named Nicholas Jordan. The Dog-Woman and the activist have an unexplained connection: the latter dreams about the former, and she believes the monstrous woman lends her power whenever she needs.

Winterson's and Carter's novels present female monsters that are somewhat different from the classical monsters in literature. They are excluded from society and put in marginal positions, but they are not treated as enemies that need to be eliminated by main characters. The Dog-Woman and Fevvers are the protagonists of their own stories, which allows the authors to question norms and criticize the treatment those that are different receive.

In chapter 1 of this thesis, "The Construction of Monsters as Others in *Sexing the Cherry*", I analyze how the Dog-Woman and other monstrous characters of Winterson's novel are created. I focus on their relationship with the English normative identity, claiming that a number of perspectives are presented, most of which invert and question traditional narratives about monsters.

In chapter 2, "Monstrous Performers in *Nights at the Circus*", I analyze the freak characters of Carter's novel in the light of monster theory. My focus is their relationship with the normative identity that treats them as novelties to be exhibited for profit. I also analyze how characters that are not monsters per se become monstrous by their treatment in the text.

In chapter 3, "The Dog-Woman and Fevvers: Monstrous Women as Symbols of Power and Resistance", I analyze how the grotesque main characters of each novel are led to

represent power and freedom by focusing on the time period each novel is set in, the relation of these characters with their own desires, and the relationships they have with the communities they are close to. I also analyze how their condition as monsters creates problems in what they are thought to symbolize.

In the “Final Considerations”, I comment on the benefits that analyzing the characters as monsters may bring about, with particular attention to the reason the Dog-Woman and Fevvers seem contradictory characters in relation to what they are usually assumed to represent.

Chapter 1: The Construction of Monsters as Others in *Sexing the Cherry*

Critics of *Sexing the Cherry* have discussed many aspects of the novel, most of which are related to gender and history. Many describe the Dog-Woman as grotesque or monstrous, while others also touch on the theme of alterity in the novel. In this chapter, I will analyze how monsters are created and portrayed as Others in the novel, so I can understand what the novel has to say about the relation between the norm and the Other. The novel presents different perspectives about monsters, from the most traditional to those that question their positions as such, though at times it fails to move beyond a simple inversion of the power relations.

In "The Taste of Fairy Tale", Natalia Andrievskikh analyzes the role of consumption in *Sexing the Cherry*, claiming that it symbolizes a struggle for power at both the structural and thematic levels. For the author, the structure of the novel itself is grotesque, because it consumes other texts and "grows its cells and tissues" (7) from them. At the thematic level, the text consumes history and fairy tales, presenting new and marginal perspectives about them. One example of text consumption is the appropriation of the Brothers Grimm's fairy tale "The Shoes that Were Danced to Pieces". This was originally the story of a father that kept his daughters locked in a tower, but became a tale of freedom after forced marriages in the novel. Winterson also consumes history, and Andrievskikh claims that she questions patriarchal history by mixing it with fantasy, as is the case with her protagonist, the Dog-Woman, who apparently can change her weight and has a gigantic size.

For Andrievskikh, consumption works as a metaphor for the Dog-Woman's struggle to control language and for her inability to express desire. For the author, the Dog-Woman is unable to experience any kind of oral pleasure, be it from eating, from sexual activities or from language. Whenever the Dog-Woman consumes food, she is worried with etiquette

norms, which creates an ironic contrast with her monstrous body. All the sexual experiences of the character were frustrating to one of the sides. In a passage, for instance, a man asks her to "eat" his penis, which she understands literally, dismembering the man. To Andrievskikh, the Dog-Woman's use of language is limited because she is unable to understand metaphors and because she cannot interact with people without being too formal and without abandoning common sense. This lack of access to oral experiences does not allow the Dog-Woman to take full advantage of her powers as a monstrous woman because she has limited action, which instead turns her into a representation of the female monstrous body that males fear.

In "Gender in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*", Paul Kintzele analyzes the many ways in which the novel represents and disrupts notions of gender. For Kintzele, Winterson explores the tension between two perspectives about gender, the first that sexual identity is a construct and the second that sex is an "ahistorical kernel," unavoidable by a subject, that emerges from the contact with language. Kintzele believes that fruits in the text are used as symbols of sexuality, mainly as a form of sexuality that is Other to England, a nation described as sexually repressed. He understands the grafting of the cherry tree scene as a discussion of the way sexuality arises. Since grafting is artificial, Kintzele takes this as evidence that genders are constructed. The other perspective is evident when Jordan discusses with his mother about the gender of the plant: "I tried to explain to her that the tree would still be female although it had not been born from seed, but she said such things had no gender and were a confusion to themselves. ... But the cherry grew, and we have sexed it and it is female" (Winterson 85). For Jordan, the cherry tree would be female, regardless of how it came to be.

Kintzele also points out that Winterson deconstructs what is traditionally expected from genders. Jordan, for instance, is not a traditional explorer, for he travels not to conquer,

but to find himself. Another example are the stories of the twelve dancing princesses, which subvert what is considered an ideal relationship. They question the idea that men and women are complementary and some of the stories end with princesses married to other women. Contrary to a great deal of fairy tales, the stories do not conclude with marriages, but start right after them. They tell of the princesses' liberation after being forced to marry men they didn't even know.

In "The Power of Monstrous Women", Sara Martin analyzes three different novels that portray monstrous women as protagonists, one of them being *Sexing the Cherry*, but she criticizes it for being androphobic. Martin's objective was to find out whether the novels reflected contemporary feminist challenges to status quo, but she concludes that they do not. Martin believes there are good aspects in these novels. One of them is that all novels celebrate physical difference, even when they are grotesque. She also considers it is good if women write about themselves being monsters, since it is more common that men portray women as so. But she claims the impression she gets from Winterson's novel is negative: "The message that I, as a woman, get . . . from Winterson [is] that all women carry an abusive monster inside ready to burst out when the time is ripe for action" (195). She points out that, whenever a woman gets power in the novel, being a monster or not, she commits acts of violence against men. Though the novel is brims with parody and irony, Martin does not know if readers should sympathize or condemn the actions of characters such as the Dog-Woman. For her, *Sexing the Cherry* conveys the idea that women become monstrous when they have power.

Jeffrey Roessner, in "Writing a History of Difference," analyzes how *Sexing the Cherry* and Angela Carter's *Wise Children* explore and destabilize history, claiming they present a tension between the ways the second and third waves of feminism dealt with patriarchal history. The second wave attempted a complete rejection of patriarchal history,

claiming that it could not represent a female identity. This often resulted, however, in countersexism, not different from what the feminists accused patriarchy of doing. The third wave is like the postmodernist approach to history in the sense that it inserts women into history, but it also attempts to show its limitations.

According to Roessner, postmodernism and contemporary feminism tend to valorize the Other without simply inverting the power structures, but Winterson fails to do that. He recognizes that the grafting scene, in which the Dog-Woman and Jordan discuss the results of the grafting of a cherry tree, portrays gender in a different way, since it promotes a third term, neither heterosexual nor homosexual, but as something that is between them. However, he also claims that this position is not pervasive throughout the novel. Roessner believes that Winterson attempts to naturalize lesbian desire, since all the other forms of union are unattainable or have violent ends.

Though some critics have claimed that the novel attempts to break traditional narratives, Roessner believes it follows another kind of traditional narrative. According to him, there is a tendency in postmodern fiction to replace enlightenment ideals with irrationality. In Winterson, irrationality appears in the form of desire and it is the main theme in the Jordan's chapters. Jordan's quest starts with his desire for Fortunata, which is not a bodily desire, since she is probably not real, but a desire for what she symbolizes: "a symbol for mystical qualities outside language, concept, and time" (Roessner). For Roessner, the problem of this kind of quest is that it transforms women into objects, denying them action, which seems contradictory in relation to what the Dog-Woman is thought to represent.

In "Fiery Constellations", Angela Marie Smith analyzes the novel in the light of Walter Benjamin's materialist historiography. Benjamin's approach is similar in many aspects to the way postmodernist fiction retells history. The philosopher believed it should be told from the perspective of the oppressed class, since its point of view is removed from

official history. He also believed in a constellation of past and present, in opposition to linear time, which would highlight connections that may not be clear in traditional history. Materialist historiography would be closer to storytelling than to novels. For Benjamin, the difference between them is that the former tells history, while the latter explains it. Stories also present multiple perspectives, in opposition to most traditional novels, which are narrated from the perspective of a single character.

Smith notes that Jordan and the Dog-Woman seem like two of Benjamin's archetypes, that of the seaman and of the woman that stays at home, both storytellers. In the case of the Dog-Woman, she retells history from a marginalized perspective, attempting to recover what was left behind in official history. The novel is narrated in the first person, full of marks of orality, also a characteristic of storytelling. There are more than four different narrators in the novel, which allows different perspectives about reality. Some of these characters are at different historical periods, which may be associated with Benjamin's constellation of past and present, since the characters are connected even though they exist centuries apart. The novel also challenges history linearity, interpolating different perspectives and sections that narrate different times.

Smith notes that Benjamin did not consider gender in his theories, but that Winterson does. The Dog-Woman, for instance, is represented as a female historical actor, since the novel presents her as an important figure during the English Civil War. Prostitutes kill many Puritans, which Smith also interprets as historical agency, since they were able to take revenge on those who were attempting to impose their norms. But the critic also claims that the Dog-Woman is limited, because despite all her power and possibility of agency, she is unable to escape many of the norms of her time. The Dog-Woman is very religious, for instance, and a radical defender of the king.

Despite the many perspectives about the role of the Dog-Woman, many critics describe her as grotesque or monstrous, but what are the characteristics that make the character monstrous? Carroll defines monster as "any being not believed to exist now according to contemporary science" (27). One of the characteristics that makes the Dog-Woman a non-existent being in her universe is her weight. In a passage, she is challenged to overweigh Samson, an elephant, in a seesaw:

> I took a deep breath, filling my lungs with air, and threw myself at the seat with all my might. There was a roar from round about me. I opened my eyes and looked towards Samson. He had vanished. His chair swung empty like a summer-house seat, his eyeglass lay in the bottom. I looked higher, following the gaze of the people. Far above us, far far away like a black star in a white sky, was Samson. (Winterson 20)

The Dog-Woman's height also makes her different from other human beings: "When Jordan was new I sat him on the palm of my hand the way I would a puppy, and I held him to my face and let him pick the fleas out of my scars" (21). Even though the character's height is not quantified, it is suggested she is a gigantic woman.

Carroll identifies two other characteristics in monsters meant to cause horror: they are threatening and impure. Though these characteristics are found mainly in monsters from horror fiction, they are also found in monsters from other genres. The Dog-Woman, for instance, is physically threatening:

> I ran straight at the guards, broke the arms of the first, ruptured the second and gave the third a kick in the head that knocked him out at once. The other five came at me, and when I had dispatched two for an early judgement another took his musket and fired me straight in the chest. I fell over, killing the man

> who was poised behind me, and plucked the musket ball out of my cleavage. I was in a rage then. (69)

The Dog-Woman can break bones with bare hands and to survive being shot with minor damage, making her not only threatening, but also contributing to her being fantastic.

Impurity is what makes the audience and characters feel disgust for monsters. Carroll describes several ways in which impurity may be created, one of them being through fusion: "On the simplest physical level, this often entails the construction of creatures that transgress categorical distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine, and so on" (43). The name "Dog-Woman" implies a merging of two ontological realms, that of canines and of humans. Even though her body is not a physical merging of a dog and a woman, the fact that Dog-Woman is not her name, but the way people refer to her, indicates the she is perceived by society as an interstitial being.

But her name is not the only aspect that makes her impure. Carroll claims that "horrific beings are often associated with contamination – sickness, disease, and plague – and often accompanied by infectious vermin – rats, insects and the like" (28). The Dog-Woman is impure through association with disease, too: "I had smallpox when I was a girl and the caves in my face are home enough for fleas" (Winterson 19). Although smallpox was common at her time, both its marks and the fleas that inhabit her body contribute to the impurity clause.

Margrit Shildrick, in *Embodying the Monster*, presents the traditional definition of self: "To be a self is above all to be distinguished from the other, to be ordered and discrete, secure *within* the well-defined boundaries of the body rather than actually being the body" (50). The self is the identity considered the norm. It is thought of as complete and defined, individual. Critics such as Andrievskikh and Kintzele have considered the Dog-Woman's position as an Other, but mainly in relation to gender, since she is a woman in a world controlled by men. But her condition as a monster also makes her an Other. In the fourth

thesis of "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," Jeffrey Jerome Cohen claims that "any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual" (7). Having a different body from the humans considered the norm is enough to characterize a monster as an Other and the Dog-Woman is aware of her position as such: "I had a name but I have forgotten it. They call me the Dog-Woman and it will do" (Winterson 3). The character distinguishes between her and them, where "they" stand for the English she lives with. Nor does she recall her own name, remembering only the nickname her neighbors have given her, an appellation that indicates how she is different by not being completely human.

Another characteristic of monsters is their origin elsewhere: "the creatures come from marginal, hidden, or abandoned sites: graveyards, abandoned towers and castles, sewers, or old houses – that is, they belong to environs outside of and unknown to ordinary social intercourse" (Carroll 34). Superficially, the Dog-Woman may not seem to inhabit the margins, since she lives in the suburbs of London and, in a point of the novel, moves to the court. But Andrievskikh has noted that, even though she lives alongside humans, she does not necessarily connect with them:

> Surrounded by dogs that she breeds to take part in races (hence the nickname), the Dog-Woman is markedly closer to nature than to culture – a distinction often traditionally employed to separate the female and the male spheres. Her repulsive appearance, together with her living conditions (she lives in a hut that she built herself, walks everywhere instead of taking a cab, and feeds off her dogs' winnings), firmly place her on the margins of society. (13)

The Dog-Woman may not be geographically at the margins, but her relationships with other English people put her at a fringe position.

But while some passages put the Dog-Woman as an Other, there are instances in which she is close to the English normative identity. When she first sees a banana, this exotic fruit outrages her: "At this there was unanimous retching. There was no good woman could put that up to her mouth, and for a man it was the practice of cannibals. We had not gone to church all these years and been washed in the blood of Jesus only to eat ourselves up the way the Heathen do" (Winterson 5). The character reacts in the same way the other English at the scene do: with unanimous retching. She also compares men that eat bananas with cannibals, a view that was frequently associated with natives from the New World at the seventeenth century. The Dog-Woman shares the religion with the English, separating herself from those who are not Christian, calling them Heathen. She is also close to other kinds of norms. Kintzele has claimed that the Dog-Woman is an Other because she is a woman, but he also identifies some masculine traits in her: "Winterson endows her main character with many of the traditional, patriarchal attributes of masculinity: she is active, assertive, and no-nonsense; moreover, near the end of the novel she declares that she has a 'flair for enterprise', indicating that she feels quite at home in the male-dominated public sphere". So, even being an Other because of her monstrosity, the Dog-Woman shares characteristics with what can be identified as normative identity.

Theorists have noted that monsters, despite their differences, are not absolute Others. In his third thesis, Cohen claims that "a mixed category, the monster resists any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demanding instead a 'system' allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction), and resistance to integration" (7). This clarifies why the Dog-Woman shares many values with the English, while at the same time not recognizing herself completely as one of them. She is a human, but at the same time, she is different, close to a dog. She is between these categories, refusing to settle easily in either. The way a parson refers to the Dog-Woman tells much about her

position is society: "Singing is my pleasure, but not in church, for the parson said the gargoyles must remain on the outside, not seek room in the choir stalls." In *Monsters*, David D. Gilmore claims that the high middle ages saw a shift in how monsters were perceived:

> Many later medieval churchmen took an acute interest in *monstra* because these creatures had come to represent a metaphorical realm in which God's desire to instruct people was most unambiguously manifested in the form of visual objects. . . . Like the Devil, monsters reflect, then, a monitory tendency, a warning to man, and can have positive uses in pointing out human frailty. (56)

One example of a monster that serves to warn and point to vulnerabilities is the gargoyle. The association, by the parson, of this monstrous creature and the Dog-Woman's body and behavior may point to the role she plays in indicating the numerous evils that afflicted seventeenth-century London. The marks of smallpox on her body are a reminder of the plague and other diseases that were frequent in the city. Her destructive power is like that of war, since she is able to defeat many soldiers alone.

During the passages that depict the English Civil War, the Dog-Woman seems to get even closer to the English identity. In these passages, we see two political ramifications in the English society: The Loyalists to the King and the Puritans. Each side sees the other as an enemy, mainly in the face of religion. The Loyalists consider the Puritans sinful because they challenge the King's divine right. For Puritans, "There is no earthly power but Satan" (Winterson 23). In *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, Richard Kearney claims that one of the ways to define a national identity is to put it against an Other: "Most nation-states bent on preserving their body politic from 'alien viruses' seek to pathologize their adversaries. Faced with a threatening outsider the best mode of defence is attack. Again and again the national *We* is defined over and against the foreign *Them*" (65). The Puritans are not foreign, but in

the Dog-Woman's vision, they are threatening aliens that must be eliminated. Maybe this is the reason, when Puritans are concerned, the Dog-Woman seems more an English monarchist than a monster. Having adversaries helps unifying an identity and this happens on both sides of the war.

A great deal of the criticism the novel has received was due to the female characters' violence against men. During the Civil War, the Dog-Woman attacks and kills several Puritans. Martin has pointed out that whenever women gain power in the novel, they become monstrous, for they commit acts of violence toward men. If previously the Dog-Woman was a monster because of her bodily differences, during the Civil War her monstrosity also acquires moral implications. Roessner has noted, however, that if the Dog-Woman is monstrous because of her actions, the Puritans are too, since "despite their chaste public manner, the Puritans – especially the men –unleash their frustrated sexual desires in grotesque form" (Roessner). Their grotesque behavior is evident in a scene soon after the Dog-Woman kills two Puritans in a brothel. After killing them, she saw a crowd of Puritans entering the place and going toward the corpses: "I looked back and saw that one already had Scroggs on the remains of the bed. He was mounting him from behind, all the while furiously kissing the severed head" (97). Intercourse with corpses is one of the great taboos of society, and it is particular aberrant when it comes from Puritans, who in the novel are presented as extremely conservative in relation to sexuality. The cut off head also works as a symbol of impurity, giving the scene grotesque characteristics.

Monsters are frequently associated with the Other, which a society may consider undesirable. They often are related to taboos and to the breaking of norms and traditions. In the light of what monsters usually represent, the Dog-Woman may seem a very conservative character at first, but that is due to the way Winterson depicts the English Civil War. "Generally discussed as part of a power struggle between the King and the Parliamentarians,

the Puritan Revolution marked a crack in the divine rights of kings to govern. As such, the war can be read as part of a movement toward a more democratic form of government based on civil law rather than divine authority" (Roessner). But while the war is considered a progressive change toward democracy, Winterson seems to have a different perspective about it: "In sharp contrast to such an interpretation, Winterson associates the war with the development of oppressive ideals of scientific objectivity and the sovereign individual" (Roessner). For the author, the Puritan Revolution was one of the bases of the sexual oppression that still leaves marks in Western society today. The Puritans' repressive position toward sexuality in the novel is evident as the Dog-Woman describes a conversation with a Puritan woman: "I heard from his wife that he makes love to her through a hole in the sheet" (23). Aligning the Dog-Woman with a government system considered outdated and with a religion is a strategy to criticize a system that would be restrictive to women for many centuries and a way of resistance to a religion even more conservative. In perspective, the Dog-Woman is an ally of the less normative side of the war.

In the passages of the novel that deal with the Civil War, two clear sides consider the other as a menace to their unity, with violence and attempts of elimination being the main strategy employed by both. Kearney claims that scapegoating is a way of expelling what is different to solidify the harmony of a society:

> Most human cultures have been known to deploy myths of sacrifice to scapegoat strangers. Holding certain aliens responsible for the ills of society, the scapegoaters proceed to isolate or eliminate them. This sacrificial strategy furnishes communities with a binding identity, that is, with the basic sense of who is included (us) and who is excluded (them). (26)

In the novel, the Puritans see the king as an ally of things that are not English: "They said that the King was a wanton spendthrift, that the bishops were corrupt, that our Book of Common

Prayer was full of Popish ways, that the Queen herself, being French, was bound to be full of Popish ways" (22). The Dog-Woman's description of Puritans presents a position against anything that is different from their norm. They want to eliminate influences from the Pope, guaranteeing the dominance of their religion. The reference to the queen being French indicates that she is seen as a threat to their unification of the English identity. The Puritans used the king as a scapegoat; his execution would fix the misuses of religion, allowing society to behave according to God's will. However, for Loyalists, the opposite was true.

For the Dog-Woman, executing the King was to confront his divine right. In her view, this act caused the plagues that overtook London. By the end of the novel, a great fire starts in the city and the character understands this as God's work:

> I did not start the fire – how could I, having resolved to lead a blameless life? – but I did not stop it. Indeed the act of pouring a vat of oil on to the flames may well have been said to encourage it. But it was a sign, a sign that our great sin would finally be burned away. I could not have hindered the work of God. (165)

For the Dog-Woman, the fire served as a way of purifying the sin committed by the Puritans. Her position is very similar to that of scapegoaters, but instead of selecting one individual to symbolize what should be eliminated, the whole city would have to pay. Nor is it clear how much the Dog-Woman contributed to it and at what stage, but Smith has noted that pouring oil into it gave her historical agency, though in a controversial way.

Toward the end of the novel, Winterson introduces a section entitled "1990". Set in that year, the section is not continuous, having chapters set in the seventeenth century interpolated in it. "1990" presents new characters that resemble the other protagonists in the novel. One of them is Nicolas Jordan, a commercial sailor. The other is an unnamed female activist, who is concerned with the dispersal of chemicals into nature. The 1990's character

puts herself in a position of alterity, since she is fighting against many representatives of the dominant power: large factories that disperse waste into nature, executives who envisage only profits, and the U.S. government, which, in the novel, does not support environmental legislation.

Much of what is described about the activist's childhood seems to have shaped the image of the Dog-Woman. She describes her experience with her parents:

> I was a lonely child. My parents found me difficult, not the child they had wanted. I was too intense, too physically awkward and too quiet for them. My best times were outside with our dogs. Parents want to see themselves passed on in their children. It comforts them to recognize a twist of the head or a way of talking. If there are no points of recognition, if the child is genuinely alien, they do their best to feed and clothe, but they don't love. (140).

The description of her relationship with her parents was one of othering: she was not the same as them, to the extent of recognizing herself as alien. She did not receive full love from them, just as the Dog-Woman did not receive full reconnaissance as a member of society, to the point of being compared to a gargoyle. There is a reference to physical awkwardness, the body being one of the most striking characteristics of the Dog-Woman. Dogs are mentioned, which the monstrous woman also bred. There is also a reference to fatness that may be linked to the seventeenth-century character: "I wasn't fat because I was greedy; I hardly ate at all. I was fat because I wanted to be bigger than all the things that were bigger than me. All the things that had power over me. It was a battle I intended to win." The Dog-Woman's size was the characteristic that made her threatening and that allowed her to beat many Puritans. It was one of the things that allowed a marginal character to become an agent.

Initially, due to the many similarities between the Dog-Woman and the activist's childhood, we may think that the Dog-Woman is an imaginary character. But Winterson does

not give an easy solution to their connection. First, the activist thinks the Dog-Woman is a hallucination: "I am a woman going mad. I am a woman hallucinating. I imagine I am huge, raw, a giant" (138). But later, she also describes her relationship as that of an alter ego: "I had an *alter ego* who was huge and powerful, a woman whose only morality was her own and whose loyalties were fierce and few" (142). For Carroll, alter egos are created through a process of fission, which can happen in two ways. In temporal fission, two "categorically contradictory elements" (46) inhabit the same body, but they appear at different times. This is the case of werewolves. The Dog-Woman and the activist, if they really are alter egos, are formed through temporal fission to the point of living in different centuries, but they are still connected. They also share characteristics of spatial fission:

> A second mode of fission distributes the categorical conflict over space through the creation of doubles . . .. Structurally, what is involved in spatial fission is a process of *multiplication*, i.e., a character or set of characters is multiplied into one or more new facets, each standing for another aspect of the self, generally one that is either hidden, ignored, repressed, or denied by the character who has been cloned. (46)

The characters present two different bodies, as the activist describes the Dog-Woman's body as not being her own.

If the characters are located at different times, in different spaces, then, how could they be alter egos? The nature of their connection contributes to the idea that they are. Though their connection is a vague one, it gives the idea of a summoning: "She was my patron saint, the one I called on when I felt myself dwindling away through cracks in the floor or slowly fading in the street" (142). In another passage, the connection also happens in a dream. The effects the "presence" of the Dog-Woman have on the activist are also very telling, since they are reminiscent of Carroll's description of what alter egos represent in

relation to the identity they were created from: "These new facets generally contradict cultural ideals (usually morally charged ones) of normality. The alter-ego represents a normatively alien aspect of the self" (46). And, whenever the activist references the Dog-Woman, she thinks or commits acts of violence against men: "I start at the top end and I pick them up one by one by the scruff of their necks. Their legs wriggle in their Gucci suits; I've got nothing against the suits, lovely material. I drop them into my sack, all screaming at once about calling their lawyers and who do I think I am and what about free speech and civil liberties" (138). Such violent acts were the main point of criticism the novel received, an indication that the influence of the Dog-Woman makes the activist go against morally charged cultural ideals, as is the case with alter egos, as proposed by Carroll.

The relationship between the Dog-Woman and the activist is reminiscent of Shildrick's discussion of touch as a metaphor for the encounter with the Other. For the author, sight is a limited way of perceiving the world, since it puts the self as the main point of view. In touch, it is easier to recognize the Other, since the hand that touches is also touched. Touch is a matter of exchange, not only of perception. The mysterious relationship of the Dog-Woman and the activist is one of exchange: the monstrous body of the Dog-Woman is influenced by the childhood of the activist, while the activist gets power from the Dog-Woman whenever necessary. Shildrick claims that "the reversibility [between perceiver/perceived] is never such that the two participants merge; there is always an excess. The chiasm, the cross-over, is the point of both convergence and divergence; it is not a loss of distinction, but a coming together in difference" (111). Though the activist has an inexplicable connection with the Dog-Woman, they never merge; she always understands the seventeenth-century character as something other than herself, but also constituent of herself. Though the Dog-Woman does not recognize the existence of the activist, the reader discovers

they are connected through the activist's experience, with the possibility of the Dog-Woman being a figment of her imagination.

The chapters told from Jordan's point of view present some monsters and grotesque figures, too, appearing mainly in the rewriting of the Brothers Grimm's fairy tale "The Shoes that Were Danced to Pieces." The original version tells the story of twelve princesses who were locked in a tower by their father. The king finds it strange that every morning the princesses' shoes are worn out and promises to marry one of them to whomever discovers what is happening. An old soldier accepts the challenge and follows the princesses through a passageway, discovering that they secretly meet with twelve princes to dance the whole night. The soldier chooses the oldest princess as a bride, and the others are cursed. What Winterson does is less a rewriting than a continuation of their stories, though there are differences. In Winterson's version, instead of being cursed, the princesses are forced to marry the eleven brothers of the old soldier. Instead of focusing on the rewriting of the fairy tale itself, Winterson gives much attention to what happened to the princesses after their marriage.

Of all the princesses, the one that receives the most attention and the only one named is Fortunata. Initially identified as a dancer, Jordan sees her for the first time in a city where buildings have no floors. People need to use ropes to go to other rooms and Fortunata "put on flat pumps and balanced the yards of rope without faltering" (15). Later, Jordan sees her leaving the building: "She was climbing down from her window on a thin rope which she cut and re-knotted a number of times during the descent. I strained my eyes to follow her, but she was gone." In *The Female Grotesque*, Mary Russo approximates the figure of the female "philobat" to that of monsters and of grotesqueries. The author defines a philobat as "the thrill-seeking individual who habitually leans out into dangerous and 'friendly' expanses away from the zone of security (home base and its familiar objects) … The philobat risks

external danger with a mixture of pleasure, fear, and confidence that the universe will hold her up" (34). A philobat is a person who feels pleasure in engaging in activities that put his/her life at risk. The audience is attracted to them and yet, the performers are under the danger of dying. Female philobats are even more dangerous to men: "What makes these female figures in the air so compelling and dangerous for men is not just their similarity to other women, but rather their dissimilarity from themselves" (44). Russo also claims that female philobats present a virility unexpected in women. In the light of Russo's discussion, Fortunata is somewhat grotesque, since her agility and the dangerous situations she is often found in make her a philobat. Jordan works as the audience, and he falls for her after seeing her from a distance in a dangerous situation. Fortunata also makes Jordan start a quest to find her, though during most of the novel she seems unattainable.

While Fortunata is an Other to women for being a philobat, Roessner believes she is also an Other in relation to Jordan: "Presenting Fortunata as a symbol of an irrational, ungovernable passion, the novel actually perpetuates the mythic use of the desirable woman as an Other to masculine rationality. In so doing, it risks stripping her of a position of agency from which to contest her status as the pursued object". But what complicates Roessner's analysis is that Fortunata is an imaginary character. All of Jordan's voyages happen inside his head and he questions his relationship with the dancer: "Was I searching for a dancer whose name I did not know or was I searching for the dancing part of myself" (Winterson 39)? Later in the novel, he finds an answer: "When I left England I thought I was running away. Running away from myself. I thought I might become someone else in time, grafted on to something better and stronger. And then I saw that the running away was a running towards. An effort to catch up with my fleet-footed self, living another life in a different way" (86). Shildrick believes that the self is formed in relation to an Other, a relationship that traditionally happens through opposition. Jordan's search of the self seems to break that

tradition: he tries to define himself with an Other that is part of himself, an Other that is inside his head. Jordan achieves what Shildrick deems necessary, he recognizes himself as an Other.

Two other monsters appear in the stories of the twelve princesses. The first is a mermaid: "I [the princess] have always enjoyed swimming, and it was in deep waters one day that I came to a coral cave and saw a mermaid combing her hair. I fell in love with her at once, and after a few months of illicit meetings, my husband complaining all the time that I stank of fish, I ran away and began housekeeping with her in perfect salty bliss" (Winterson 48). There isn't much about the relationship of the two and how they related to society, things that are common in the other stories. Her relationship with a monster, however, is one that breaks cultural norms, since both lovers are women. Although this story does not discuss the issue, in the other stories that present lesbian relationships the couples usually are pursued. The monster is not only associated with something that is not accepted by society, but the couple also lives in the margin. The princess tells Jordan that she bought a house and all her sisters live there with her. The couple, however, lives in the well.

The other story in which a monster appears is a retelling of Rapunzel. The dancing princess describes what happened to her husband after they married: "My own husband? Oh well, the first time I kissed him he turned into a frog" (Winterson 52). When she became older, she met Rapunzel, who became her lover and started living with her. In the princess's view, it is not her magical powers that made her a witch: "Her [Rapunzel's] family were so incensed by her refusal to marry the prince next door that they vilified the couple, calling one a witch and the other a little girl." The couple, for breaking a social norm regarding marriage, is put in a position of otherness, while the older woman is associated with a monster. The couple is also forced to live in the margins. According to the princess, the villagers constantly attempted to break into their house, so they constructed a tower with no entrances to live in

peace. The prince, however, broke into the tower and attempted to eliminate the "monster": "The moment she [the witch] leaped through the window, bringing their dinner for the evening, the prince hit her over the head and threw her out again. Then he carried Rapunzel down the rope he had brought with him and forced her to watch while he blinded her broken lover in a field of thorns" (52). The retelling of Rapunzel is close to the original tale in terms of plot; the difference is in the perspective given to the witch and in the relationship she possesses with the heroine. In her view, they were persecuted for being different, for breaking the social rules of marriage. The princess who crossed the border of a social norm was transformed into a monster.

Even though *Sexing the Cherry* presents few characters that are monsters, the relationship between these Others and the norm vary greatly. The Dog-Woman is a monster because of her bodily differences and because the English treat her as such. But despite the differences, a clear distinction between the character and the normative English identity is not possible. Though she is gigantic, she also follows the king. Though she is strong and scary, she is a religious woman that pities the heathen. During the English Civil War, the Dog-Woman acquires a more fixed position in the normative identity x Other relation, and it becomes easier to identify her as a loyalist and as an Other to the Puritans. The war and the need to stabilize the nation make each side grotesque and monstrous to the other, with the elimination of enemies being a path to the unification of identity.

The relationship between the Dog-Woman and the activist is one that is more receptive toward the Other. The 1990's character recognizes that the seventeenth century monster is an Other, but even so she can draw positive aspects that help her in activism. The relationship between the characters is like what Shildrick proposes as the economy of touch, a form of encountering the Other that is more respectful about differences, in opposition to relating with the Other through sight, in which objectification is inevitable.

Fortunata, one of the twelve dancing princesses, is grotesque because she is a female philobat, which, according to Russo, challenges what is socially expected from women. The princess, however, is an imaginary character, and though she works as Jordan's Other, she is also constituent of his self. So Fortunata is a hidden part of Jordan's own identity, a stranger within the character, a part of himself that he seeks, but that always eludes him. Winterson portrays Jordan's identity as incomplete, for he searches for the dancing part of himself during the whole novel, and yet cannot find it. He attempts to recognize himself as an Other, but this Other is inaccessible to him, and his search becomes a foundation of his identity.

The stories of the two dancing princesses that present monsters depict a relation between the monster and the normative identity in a way that is closer to the traditional relation. In the rewriting of Rapunzel, there is an attempt to eliminate the witch. The biggest difference in comparison to the original tale is that the story of the witch continues after the "happily ever after". It is not a happy ending, though. The witch is separated from her lover and never sees her again, but at least she survived the attacks of a society that does not accept her relationship. The story of the relationship between the other princess and the mermaid is very short and only briefly mentioned, but maybe we can infer that the couple was not accepted by society because they live in the margins, just like the other princesses, who escaped their husbands.

An analysis of the portrayal of the relationship between the norm and the Other in *Sexing the Cherry* sheds light in the multiple ways we can understand monsters in contemporary culture. The novel presents multiple interpretations about monsters and how they relate to society, though it creates an inversion, not representing them as simple enemies of humanity. They are not enemies, but they are different, and I believe my analysis highlights the multiple approaches the novel presents to recognize and understand the Other.

Chapter 2: Monstrous Performers in Nights at the Circus

The critics of *Nights at the Circus* have usually focused on the characters of the novel as freaks and on some characteristics that make them grotesque. In this chapter, I will approximate the notion of freaks and monsters, showing that in the context of the novel they may represent the same thing. I will analyze how Fevvers and other grotesque characters are constructed as monsters, to understand how they, as Others, relate with the normative English identity. Most of the characters I analyze are initially found in places where they exhibit themselves, like freak shows, since it seems to them their only possibility of survival. But the novel presents them alternative choices, in which they can find happiness and places in society where they can live even with their differences.

Md Abu Shahid Abdullah's "Fluids, Cages, and Boisterous Femininity" argues that *Nights at the Circus* uses the grotesque and the carnivalesque to challenge patriarchal norms. For Abdullah, Fevvers' eating is a breaking of norms, since she eats for pleasure in a time in which women were expected to mask their hunger. Based on Mary Russo's discussion, he claims that Fevvers' manners are grotesque because of excessiveness, since she gorges and spills food, and burps during her meals. Her manners on the table also have carnivalesque aspects, since she eats food from both high and low cultures. Abdullah describes her eating as a breaking of norms because he claims that during the Victorian period, social classes were thought as well defined and social norms were heavily enforced.

Abdullah also highlights other scenes in which grotesque characteristics are used to subvert norms. He notes that in the panopticon scene, women use bodily fluids, which are abject elements often used to create a grotesque effect, to write notes and establish an escape plan from the prison. The female prisoners use what is usually rejected to attain freedom. Abdullah also notes that the text itself hints at excessiveness in passages that claims that

Fevvers' breasts almost popped out of her corset, or that mention erupting skin, since excessiveness is one of the characteristics that Russo attributes to the female grotesque.

In "Fresh Iconography", Harriet Blodgett analyzes how Carter subverts female iconography in the novels *The Passion of New Eve* and *Nights at the Circus*. According to the author, patriarchal culture creates feminine symbols that are used to reinforce female submission, even when the imagery represents strong women, such as goddesses and other mythical characters. For Blodgett, Fevvers is a subversion of the nineteenth-century image of "the angel in the house: the incredible fiction of a pure, modest, giving, servitor without needs or libido of her own". Fevvers is an autonomous woman, and though she helps others, her main preoccupations are with herself and her desires. Carter also questions what is expected from women during marriages in a scene in which Fevvers asks Walser if a woman's honor is to be found in her vagina or in her spirit. For Blodgett, the novel not ending in marriage is also a form of subversion, since it presents a traditional narrative from lovers that are separated and reunited after hardships. But instead of marrying Walser, Fevvers reveals that her virginity was a fiction.

Abigail Dennis, in "The Spectacle of her Gluttony", analyzes how the many kinds of desire, and their consumption, are important to the construction of power relations in *Nights at the Circus*. Fevvers is the focus of consumption during her presentations, but she also has many urges, often in excessive ways. Dennis claims that food and appetite play a big part in the construction of the normative ideal of women. To the author, during the Victorian period, women were expected to demonstrate lack of appetite. Fevvers, however, shows her excessive appetite, at times even making a performance out of it. Fevvers eats bacon sandwiches in front of Walser, a food that was unbearable to him; she interrupts her narrative many times, all of them to open another bottle of champagne or to eat. She breaks many rules

of etiquette, since she burps and farts during her meals, all the while checking how Walser reacts to her behavior, which renders her eating a performance.

Fevvers's excessive behavior, however, has negative implications. Her urge to acquire jewels and other expensive objects causes her many problems. Dennis relates this to the new social powers women were beginning to acquire during the Victorian period, which, in the case of Fevvers, are used inconsequentially. But Dennis notes that there is a difference between Fevvers's consumption and the male characters', since the protagonist does not satiate her desires at the expense of others. In fact, whenever a marginal character is in trouble, Fevvers does whatever is necessary to help, as in the case of Mignon, who was starving.

The author notes that Fevvers is often described with food imagery, but she is not available for physical consumption. Dennis believes that Fevvers is aware that she cannot escape the male gaze and the objectification that comes with it, since she is both a woman and a freak. Her solution is to make a spectacle of herself, so she can control what of her will be consumed and by whom. She offers her image, but never her self. Even when she has sex with Walser, at the end of the novel, it is only after he has gone through identity loss and encounters himself as a kind of blank sheet, in which Fevvers can create a New Man.

In "Freak Show Femininities," Erin Douglas discusses how freaks were treated as objects in the British Empire and how Angela Carter presents the Freak Show as a subversive space. Douglas claims that the Grand Imperial Tour, the name of the worldwide tour that Colonel Kearney's circus is presenting, works as a representation and justification of imperialism, as it considers the different deviant and abnormal, exhibiting people that break different kinds of norms as freaks. In this context, imperialism would be necessary to gather novelties to be exhibited. For the author, Fevvers's performances, not only on stage, but also as a woman, questions the British identity and normative femininity. Douglas notices, for instance, that

Fevvers seems proud to be Cockney, which would distance her from the normative idea of a British identity. Fevvers's relation to the myth of Leda and the swan is interpreted as a resistance to patriarchy, since, instead of being submissive like Leda, Fevvers uses her wings, part of Zeus' disguise as a swan, to survive and frustrate the plans of people who attempt to imprison her.

Douglas analyzes the spectacle of the Princess of Abyssinia and Mignon as a challenge to heteronormative ideas about communion. She claims that "their spectacles represent pleasure, transformation and happiness of queer desires and relationships" (19) and notes that they present the only extended display of pleasure in the novel. Both characters were victims of vicious men (in the case of the princess, represented by tigers), and both have marks of violence in their skins. They only find freedom and pleasure in each other, which Douglas understands as an inversion of the notion that only heterosexuality is desirable. The author notes, too, that their story is an inversion of traditional fairy tales, which frequently display a heterosexual marriage. For the Princess and Mignon, however, their happiness only starts after they escape their marriages with men (or tigers).

André Pereira Feitosa's "Mulheres-Monstro e Espetáculos Circenses" analyses the aspects that make the characters in three novels, *Nights at the Circus* being one of them, grotesque, and what the implications of being outside the norm are. The characters in *Nights* are mainly grotesque because of their body attributes. Fevvers, for instance, has wings; Albert/Albertina shares both sexes. In Fevvers's case, she is also grotesque due to excess, since she overeats and uses extreme amounts of makeup. Feitosa points out that anything that is different from the norm tends to be marginalized, which is the case with the grotesque characters in the novel. This is exemplified in the settings Carter chose, which are circuses, brothels and freak shows. Feitosa is also attentive to the scientific gaze, represented mainly through Walser, who attempts to understand and categorize Fevvers's body.

In the third chapter of his thesis, Feitosa analyzes how maternity is represented in the novels, claiming that they are grotesque since they do not conform to the norms. For the author, the Virgin Mary is one of the role models for what normative maternity should be, but Carter's novel represents motherhood and family in alternative ways. Fevvers, for instance, does not have a traditional family model, since she claims she was hatched from an egg. The characters that act as Fevvers' mothers seem to be quite the opposite of Virgin Mary: Mama Nelson is a brothel owner; Lizzie is a revolutionary and former prostitute. The notion of traditional family is also broken in the brothel, since it is composed exclusively of women.

Later on in his work, Feitosa analyzes the grotesque aspects of the circus present in the three novels, with special attention to clowns and how they are represented in *Nights at the Circus*. The author creates the term *freak bullying* to describe an event "in which *freaks* suffer aggressions and humiliation that, in some cases, are socially accepted for being inscribed in the context of circus spectacles" (130, translation mine). In the circus context, clowns are the target of freak bullying, since their presentations are "simulacrums of violence" (134, translation mine). In the novel, the clowns' performance frequently consists of an appropriation of traditional imagery, often Christian ones, which renders the performance grotesque. Feitosa also recognizes the clowns as grotesque for other reasons, such as the exaggeration of their figures, the use of eschatological elements in their presentations, and the mixture of ontological realms in their makeups and props.

Daniel Punday's "Narrative Performance in the Contemporary Monster Story" examines how the novels *Nights at the Circus*, *The Satanic Verses*, and *Geek Love* use monsters to comment on storytelling itself. In the case of Carter's novel, Punday argues that Fevvers is used both to comment on the freedom achieved by women in the 20th century and to think about the problems of creating a woman that symbolizes this kind of freedom. Punday begins his text by claiming that in the past, people understood monsters as signs that

should be interpreted, but that by the end of the eighteenth century, this view had changed due to advances in medicine and because of a change in the way of understanding the body, from unified to made of composite parts.

The author claims that readers tend to interpret Fevvers as a symbol of female freedom, but that the clowns in the novel work in contrast to her to question that view. While Fevvers is presented as a whole and symbolic body, clowns have the ability to construct their own identities, possessing fragmentary bodies that at times fall apart. If readers can easily attribute a meaning to Fevvers, this is not the case with the clowns, who literally deconstruct themselves, as in the scene in which their bodies fall apart. Punday interprets this contrast as a criticism on the way we give meaning to monsters.

Yiğit Sümbül, in "Womanliness as Masquerade", analyzes how Fevvers uses mimicry and masquerade to subvert her expected role as a woman and to escape the male gaze. Based on Luce Irigaray's theories, Sümbül defines mimicry and masquerade as a way of transforming subordination into affirmation. With these strategies, women would use womanliness to appear to conform to the standards of femininity imposed on them, but they would subvert it by ironic repetition and exaggeration. In the novel, Fevvers never solves the mystery if she is fact or fiction, which Sümbül claims is an indication that she does not solve if she is performing or being herself. Fevvers is aware that, since she is a freak and a woman, she cannot escape being objectified, so she makes herself an object through her performances to attempt to control her own image. One of the main strategies she uses to subvert her womanliness is through exaggeration, which frequently appears in the vicious way she eats, in her exaggerated behavior and costumes, and even in her size.

Margaret E. Toye's "Eating Their Way out of Patriarchy" presents an analysis of the passage of *Nights at the Circus* that depicts a panopticon of exclusively female prisoners. The author claims that the panopticon works as a metaphor for the condition of women in

patriarchal society: it separates them and makes them work against one another, though it demands their participation, consent, and collusion to do so. The prison fails, however, because women do not engage in the surveillance they were expected to. Though they could not talk to each other, they used food and abject elements to communicate and plan an escape. The prisoners used feces and menstrual blood to write messages, which were passed inside breads. Toye notes two inversions in this process. First, that of the body and blood of Christ, which were used to unite the apostles in the Last Supper. Instead of Christ, the prisoners use their womanly fluid and excess to create a connection. Second, the author interprets the consumption of abject elements as a reversal of capitalist consumption, since what is consumed is not the object, but what was rejected, excreted.

In Carter's panopticon, even the central guard, identified as the Countess P, is female. Toye compares the Countess with Madame Schreck, the owner of a freak museum in the novel: both were women who had power over other women and that exploited them. Just like Schreck, a freak who owned a freak museum, the Countess is a prisoner, since she is in the panopticon for committing the same crimes as the other women: that of attempting to murder their husbands. Toye understands the Countess as a criticism on the role of women in perpetuating patriarchal structures. Even though she is a prisoner, too, the small amount of power she has turns her into a patriarchal figure.

A great part of the critics of *Nights at the Circus* treats the hybrid characters in the novel as freaks, though many of their aspects may also characterize them as monsters. In "Toward Situating the Victorian Freak", Marlene Tromp and Karyn Valerius question the position of freaks:

> If people from different cultures and physical landscapes (e.g., Chinese or Africans) could be exhibited as freaks in the United States and Europe in the nineteenth century simply because they were culturally and socially different

> from Anglo-Americans and Anglo-Europeans, and if people with tattoos or very long hair or nails were (and remain) staples of freak shows, then we must recognize the way in which enfreakment is not just about nature's work but rather is created by the body, plus its context, plus individual choices. (4)

For Tromp and Valerius, being a freak is as well founded in social position as in bodily difference. The authors also note, "Freak exhibitions in the nineteenth century did not offer stable definitions of the freak. Instead, they employed hyperbole, misrepresentation, elaborate costuming and staging, and narrative modes from the fantastic to the sentimental. They paired farce with medical description and scientific theories" (7). Freakishness was also created by many narrative strategies.

In "Freaklore", Joyce L. Huff claims that any body that deviated from the norm could be "freakified." For Huff, freaks were understood in a binary opposition with the normative bodies, which also had their function:

> "Freakified bodies are represented as existing in a binary relationship to the norm. The logic upon which this binary is constructed aligns nonstigmatized bodies with the cultural ideal. What this opposition offers to subjects whose bodies are thus defined as normal is the illusion of freedom from the uncertainties, flux, and grotesqueries of bodily existence. This fiction can only be maintained, however, by the continued and systematic devaluation of the freakified body, for it is only by comparison with stigmatized subjects that "normal" ones appear free". (45)

Huff's discussion about freaks is reminiscent of Shildrick's discussion about monsters: both claim that the Other is used as place of anxiety projection, with the objective of decreasing the sense of vulnerability of normative bodies.

The freak is also like the monster because it complicates the definition of normality: "While there were many gestures that attempted to codify normality and its difference from those at the margins with reference to the freak, the slipperiness of freakery made this reference disruptive and created a threatening dislocation of terms" (Tromp and Valerius 12). While freaks were used to establish the notion of normality, they also disrupted it. Even freaks with aggressive deformations were reminiscent of humans, what could lead the spectator to question what the limits of humanity are.

In her critical text about the novel, Douglas makes some other considerations that may help to understand the characters as monsters. For the author, "emphasizing how bodies deemed abnormal and freaky are read visually, conceptually, and textually as inhuman, freak shows represent how normativity works by excluding minority subjects from human recognition" (4). Douglas emphasizes the freaks' position as something other than human, and as a narrative that must be read. She also points to the marginal aspect of freaks, which works in the same way as the marginalization that monsters suffer. The difference between freak shows and the shows represented in the novel is that "*Nights* queers normative ideas of the freak show because the performers (in the Imperial Tour) draw attention to how audiences do not recognize them as human but rather as imperial products and commodities" (5). The characters of the novel seem aware of their marginal positions, and Carter uses this as a strategy to emphasize how freaks are created.

The freak characters in the novel are not freak because of common body abnormalities, but in many instances, their bodily difference is created with the use of fantastical elements, like Fevvers's wings and Madame Schreck's similarity with death as an incorporated character (she seems made of bones and uses clothes with hoods that cover her face). They are also frequently treated as unnatural, evoking fear on those who look at them. For these reasons and for their paradoxical relationship with normative bodies, I will use

theories that deal with monsters, though I will often refer to the characters as freaks. I do not mean that all freaks in all narratives can be related to monsters, but only that this approximation is possible in *Nights at the Circus*.

In the light of Carroll's discussion about monsters, Fevvers' impurity is created by the process of fusion, the mixture of elements from different ontological realms. She is a mixture of human and bird, as she has a large pair of feathered wings. Her body, however, does not present a perfect mixture, as is evident in her report on the difficulties of flying:

> "you must realise that my size, weight and general construction were not such as to make flying come easy to me, although there is ample room in my chest for lungs of the size required. But the bones of birds are filled with air and mine are filled with solid marrow and if the remarkable development of my thorax forms the same kind of windbreak as does that of a pigeon, the resemblance stops abruptly there and problems of balance and of elementary negotiations with the wind – who is a fickle lover – absorbed me for a long time". (Carter 40)

Her description of her own anatomy highlights how the fusion of ontological realms does not create a new and completely different third term. Though some aspects of her body, like her chest, seem coherent with her wings, other aspects of her body make her human, who does not have the proper structure to fly. She is neither woman, nor bird.

In addition, other characteristics put Fevvers in a position like that of monsters. Feitosa has identified her excessiveness as a contribution to her grotesque aspects:

> Another remarkable aspect of her grotesque figuration is in exaggeration, or in what Russo describes in her theory as excess. For Fevvers, her original feathers are not enough, she adds feathers, colors and a series of devices to shape a colossal body able to capture everybody's eyes. Fevvers becomes a

> spectacle to be admired, an object whose artificiality, though evident, does not overshadow her grotesque aspect supposedly natural: her wings" (89, translation mine)

In the case of Fevvers, her excessive clothing and behavior makes her seem artificial, which further contributes to her impurity by breaking another binary opposition, that of what is natural and artificial. Fevvers considers herself unnatural: "Like Lucifer, I fell. Down, down, down I tumbled, bang with a bump on the Persian rug below me, flat on my face amongst those blooms and beasts that never graced no natural forest, those creatures of dream and abstraction not unlike myself, Mr Walser. And then I knew I was not yet ready to bear on my back the great burden of my unnaturalness" (Carter 30). Fevvers compares herself with monsters and claims she is an unnatural being. For Carroll, the basic characteristic of monsters is not being natural to the fictional world they are presented in.

Fevvers also possesses some threatening characteristics, which are another aspect of the horrific monsters discussed by Carroll. She is so big, Walser has the sensation he could be crushed by her: "As she raised her arms, Walser, confronted by stubbled, thickly powdered armpits, felt faint; God! she could easily crush him to death in her huge arms, although he was a big man with the strength of Californian sunshine distilled in his limbs" (52). Fevvers also offers other kinds of threats, not physical: "Her hairpins had all given away under the tumultuous impulses of her half hundredweight of hair, that now flowed and tumbled all around her, and she had become somewhat flushed, giving her a wild and maenad air. Walser wilted in the blast of her full attention" (78). She can unsettle Walser with her presence and eyes alone.

Critics have noted that Fevvers, like monsters in general, inhabits the margins. The main settings of the novel are all marginal places: a brothel that works like a female community; a museum that exhibits monstrous performers and that works as a brothel; and a

circus. These three marginal places are destroyed or closed during the novel, but almost all marginal characters that inhabit them have happy conclusions, be it with their own effort or with Fevvers's help.

Among the places Fevvers lives, Ma Nelson's brothel challenges the notion of marginal places. According to Feitosa, "contrary to the stereotype of violence and degradation common to brothels, Ma Nelson's academy is a safe, clean, and welcoming place, in which Fevvers grows happy under the care of her prostitute companions that adopted her, in contrast with Madame Schreck's horror museum" (109, translation mine). Fevvers describes the brothel as "well-ordered", "*luxe, calme et volupté*", a place where women were "engaged in our intellectual, artistic or political... pursuits" (Carter 40). Ma Nelson's brothel was a female community in which women could engage in their own affairs, in which they prostituted themselves for necessity, but they could be independent. Though it is a marginal place, it seems an ideal location for women, to the extent it may be better than the center itself.

As Feitosa points out, the brothel is in contrast with Madame Schreck's museum. In this museum, freaks were exhibited in the basement, where they had to stand behind curtains and be exhibited as products, whereas some could be hired as prostitutes. Cohen claims, "The monster is continually linked to forbidden practices, to normalize and to enforce. The monster also attracts. The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint" (16). Schreck's museum serves that purpose, since customers could wear cassocks, a vestment usually associated with religious ceremonies, to engage in sexual acts, and a "ballet-dancer's frock" (Carter 61), a clothing that is usually used by women and that men would probably not wear in public.

Although Fevvers's wings are her main mark of difference, she is frequently described as being someone in whom differences clash. Once, Walser realizes that her voice does not seem her own, while Fevvers notes that her "legs don't tally with the upper part of my body from the point of view of pure aesthetics, d'you see" (41), which indicates that she seems a mixture of two different bodies. In another passage, the journalist questions if she is really a woman, indicating that the borders between genders is not clearly defined in her body. Douglas notices that "The Grand Imperial Circus advertises Fevvers as made out of imperial products and simultaneously suggests she 'is not a woman at all' rather an imperial automaton imitating a human" (17). The advertisement of Fevvers as an automaton creates another fusion, though a narrative one, between human and machine. Tromp and Valerius, too, noted that freakishness was created with narrative strategies. In addition, Rosencreutz describes Fevvers as a being that is in-between many states:

> "Lady of the hub of the celestial wheel, creature half of earth and half of air, virgin and whore, reconciler of fundament and firmament, reconciler of opposing states through the mediation of your ambivalent body, reconciler of the grand opposites of death and life, you who come to me neither naked nor clothed, wait with me for the hour when it is neither dark nor light, that of dawn before daybreak, when you shall give yourself to me but I shall not possess you". (Carter 81)

Fevvers's bodily ambiguities, thus, are related to both her wings and to many other aspects of her body, as well as to the ways other characters perceive her. Fevvers is not only used to question the distinction between humans and monsters, but she destabilizes many different binary oppositions.

Feitosa has noted that freaks, in general, "have a double social function: one of entertaining people, preferably with humor, and the other of reinforcing in them the condition

of being normal" (134, translation mine). Shildrick also recognizes the same function in monsters, that of being used as an Other to reinforce the norm. But she and other authors note that monsters, paradoxically, also confuse the borders between what is normal and what is not. Fevvers is aware that this distinction does not hold:

> "So he [Toussaint] was a connoisseur of degradation and always maintained it was those fine gentlemen who paid down their sovereigns to poke and pry at us who were the unnatural ones, not we. For what is 'natural' and 'unnatural', sir? The mould in which the human form is cast is exceedingly fragile. Give it the slightest tap with your fingers and it breaks. And God alone knows why, Mr Walser, but the men who came to Madame Schreck's were one and all quite remarkable for their ugliness; their faces suggested that he who cast the human form in the first place did not have his mind on the job". (Carter 61)

Toussaint makes an inversion between the perception of performers and spectators. In the novel, freaks are exhibited for their unnaturalness, but their exhibition reveals the observers' own grotesque aspects and vulnerability, as the references to ugliness and to the fragility of the human "mould" suggest.

Women and freaks as the subject of the male gaze is a constant theme in the novel. Fevvers is aware of the gaze from an early age: "As for myself, I worked my passage on Ma Nelson's ship as living statue, and, during my blossoming years, from fourteen to seventeen, I existed only as an object in men's eyes after the night-time knocking on the door began. Such was my apprenticeship for life, since is it not to the mercies of the eyes of others that we commit ourselves on our voyage through the world" (39)? Fevvers is aware that she is objectified by the others' eyes, both for being a woman, since she emphasizes "men's eyes", and for being a freak. But she does not stop at realization, and takes advantage of her position as an object. Sümbül claims that Fevvers performs her womanliness, and identifies her

exaggeration as a strategy of subversion. In one of the first scenes of the novel, Fevvers eats during her interview with Walser:

> She gorged, she stuffed herself, she spilled gravy on herself, she sucked up peas from the knife; she had a gullet to match her size and table manners of the Elizabethan variety. Impressed, Walser waited with the stubborn docility of his profession until at last her enormous appetite was satisfied; she wiped her lips on her sleeve and belched. She gave him another queer look, as if she half hoped the spectacle of her gluttony would drive him away, but, since he remained, notebook on knee, pencil in hand, sitting on her sofa, she sighed, belched again, and continued. (22)

Walser observes Fevvers as she eats, and she turns her eating into a performance, with the apparent objective of scaring him. Her manners do not follow etiquette and her exaggerations are used to subvert what was expected from woman behavior. Dennis claims that "women's eating has been the focus of social and cultural attention to a far greater degree than masculine eating habits, and the female appetite – or, more accurately, the demonstrable lack of it – has long functioned as a crucial signifier of adherence to a traditional ideology of femininity that contributes to women's voluntary self-attenuation" (120). If eating was one aspect of the normative idea of woman, Fevvers challenges it with her "enormous appetite" and eating manners. The "spectacle of her gluttony" and her checking on Walser contribute further to the subversive aspect of her performance, since she is aware of it.

In the first part of the novel, the relationship of Fevvers and Walser is that of the man that focuses his gaze on a woman or freak. Feitosa has noted that Walser also represents another kind of gaze, the scientific one, that attempts "to register and catalog facts and data that are proven truths" (79, translation mine), or, as Douglas has put it, he also represents the media: "Since Walser first meets Fevvers because he wants to write a newspaper article about

her, as a half-bird and half-woman extraordinary creation, *Nights* draws attention to and implicates the media in creating and perpetuating ideas of normalcy" (13). Both science and the media may have the same function of fixing what is considered normal, but in the novel, they fail. The journalist spends the "London" section attempting to solve the matter if Fevvers is fact or fiction, but he gets entangled in her story: "He continued to take notes in a mechanical fashion but, as the women unfolded the convolutions of their joint stories together, he felt more and more like a kitten tangling up in a ball of wool it had never intended to unravel in the first place; or a sultan faced with not one but two Scheherezades, both intent on impacting a thousand stories into the single night" (Carter 40). As Tromp and Valerius have noted, freakishness was also created by narrative, and Fevvers uses it to support her display as a freak. The description of Fevvers's narrative as "joint stories" and "thousand stories into the single night" makes her tale somewhat monstrous, since it is a hybrid of different sources, which also defies categorization.

Traditionally, science is portrayed as a discourse that attempts to scrutinize and categorize monsters, but Carter seems to make an inversion of this relation:

> Walser recalled how the young woman had entertained the curiosity of the entire Royal College of Surgeons for three hours without so much as unbuttoning her bodice for them, and discussed navigation in birds with a full meeting of the Royal Society with such infernal assurance and so great a wealth of scientific terminology that not one single professor had dared be rude enough to question her on the extent of her personal experience. (60)

Nineteenth-century medical discourse put freaks in a subjected position, treating them as anomalies that should be fixed. In "Poor Hoo Loo", Meegan Kennedy analyzes the many aspects about the surgery Hoo Loo, a Chinese man with a gigantic tumor, underwent in London at that time. The man was operated under the eyes of doctors and spectators, who

could not understand any word he uttered during the procedure. Fevvers, on the other hand, seems to have control over what is discussed about her body, and she can give a speech to scientists, without being interrupted. The passage also offers an ironic tone toward medical discourse, since Fevvers was able to entertain them with assurance and scientific terminology, but experience was disregarded.

The matter of Fevvers being fact or fiction runs through the novel. Tromp and Valerius claim this kind of opposition also happened in real freak shows: “Freak shows attracted audiences by inviting the public to engage in epistemological speculation. Was the Feejee Mermaid a fake? Was the bearded lady really a man? Audiences paid for the opportunity to take a look and decide for themselves” (8). Carter seems aware of the profits the clash of fact and fiction could bring, since the Colonel, after hearing about the rumors that Fevvers is an automaton, “beams with pleasure at the consternation this ploy will provoke, at the way the box-office tills will clang in the delicious rising tide of rumour: ‘Is she fiction or is she fact?’ His motto is: ‘The bigger the humbug, the better the public likes it’” (147). In the case of Fevvers, however, the matter of fact or fiction is not only related to profit, but also to her identity and to what is socially possible to her. After Fevvers almost suffers an accident, Walser wonders why the woman used the ladder instead of her wings to return to the ground:

> Walser, half-laughing, half-wondering, almost, yet not quite, convinced himself the woman had been in no more danger than a parrot might be if you pushed it off its perch. And though he was altogether unwilling to believe this might be so, still he was enchanted by the paradox: if she were indeed a *lusus naturae*, a prodigy, then – she was no longer a wonder.
>
> She would no longer be an extraordinary woman, no more the Greatest *Aerialiste* in the world but – a freak. Marvellous indeed, but a marvellous monster, an exemplary being denied the human privilege of flesh and blood,

> always the object of the observer, never the subject of sympathy, an alien creature forever estranged.
>
> ...
>
> As an anomaly, she would become again, as she once had been, an exhibit in a museum of curiosities. But what would she become, if she continued to be a woman? (161)

Walser's considerations emphasize Fevvers's ambivalent position. She is not absolutely different, for if she was, she would be trapped in marginal places like freak exhibitions. Fevvers being a woman offers her numerous possibilities, which works as some kind of inversion, since the combination of two aspects that make her an Other in the male dominated society of the novel is what allows her other possibilities of survival.

Though Fevvers is the most important and most explored freak in the novel, Carter also presents other characters that are monsters or that are like them. Among the freaks in Schreck's museum is Albert/Albertina, "who was bipartite, that is to say, half and half and neither of either" (59). The character is not much explored, but his/her name suggests that "s/he" shares two genders, a process of fusion. Feitosa remarks that the character "corrupts gender fixity, which necessarily has to be grouped into feminine or masculine and perform stereotyped activities of each sex" (90), causing a category confusion that is customary in monsters. After the museum closes, Albert/Albertina can adapt to society as a ladies' maid, though s/he claims "s/he is much confined by female garments all the time" (86), indicating that she could work, but without full acceptance of her difference.

Fanny, "where she should have had nipples, she had eyes" (69). Fanny is also created through a process of fusion, and Shildrick notes that the use of orifices or other parts that are related to the insides add grotesque aspects to a monster. Fanny's body may serve as a reversal of the male gaze, since breasts are often a point of focus. During Fanny's

presentation, Madame Schreck demands, “Look at him, Fanny” (69) and after the character removes her blindfold, Schreck demands again, “I said, *look* at him, Fanny”, which makes her reveal her breasts. In this scene, the observed object becomes that which observes. In the end, Fanny opens an orphanage to take care of “children of operatives killed in accidents on the looms” (86). She can participate in society and resolve one of the problems she faces as a freak: she did not want to be a mother because it was not possible to feed a baby with “salt tears” (69).

Cobwebs was named after the objects that covered her face. The character is also created through a process of fusion, and the association with cobwebs also contributes to her impurity. Walser, for instance, feels both revulsion and enchantment from merely thinking about her name, this paradoxical reaction being an affect caused by monsters, as Carroll explains. Fevvers describes cobwebs as very silent and melancholic, and this seems not to have changed after she left the museum. But Cobwebs became a painter, and “though she had not come out of the shadows, all the same, she had made the shadows work for her” (86). Cobwebs remains a melancholic figure, but she is still able to create and live by her own means.

The Sleeping Beauty is not necessarily a monster, but she became a freak because of her unusual behavior. After her period started, she progressively slept for more and more time, to the point that, when Fevvers met her, she would wake up only for a few minutes each day to eat. But if the character was not a monster due to bodily difference, she may well be one by association. Fevvers refers to her as a “living corpse,” a fusion between the realms of the living and of the dead, the same that creates monsters like zombies. The way Fevvers describes Beauty at the museum points to death: “The Sleeping Beauty lay stark naked on a marble slab and I stood at her head, full spread. I am the tombstone angel, I am the Angel of Death” (70). Though customers could not have sex with the Sleeping Beauty, for “Madame

Schreck [was] loth to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs," they could experience another temporary transgression, that of lying down beside a corpse. The Beauty's ending completely removes her from society. She remains with Fevvers, but each day she spends less time awake and Fevvers describes her awakenings as interruptions, for "her marvellous fate – a sleep more lifelike than the living, a dream which consumes the world" (86). Even though she is completely removed from the "real world", her exclusion is not a negative one. The Sleeping Beauty's fate is reminiscent of some western traditions, as the one found in Christianity that prioritizes metaphysics over the body.

Though Toussaint was not exhibited as a freak, he was a black man who "had been born without a mouth" (55). Feitosa claims, "It is very symbolic to realize that Toussaint is a black man that 'was born without a mouth', in other words, without the right to have a voice and express his opinions" (90, translation mine). Fevvers sees in the character's eyes the results of the marginalization he suffered: "I never saw eyes so full of sorrow as his were, sorrow of exile and of abandonment" (Carter 57). After the museum closed, Fevvers was able to find a doctor to open a mouth in Toussaint and he is described as having become a very eloquent man. When Fevvers tells the black man's destiny, Lizzie remarks that "how it was, as it were, the *white hand* of the *oppressor* who carved open the aperture of speech in the very throat you could say that it had, in the first place, rendered dumb, and–" (60). Lizzie compares Toussaint's bodily difference with the struggles African descendants faced throughout the world after the period of slavery and ironically comments that those who put them on a subjected position were also the ones who freed them.

The Wonder is described as "diminutive" in size, and she seems smaller than a dwarf. When the character was a baby, "she [her mother] cradled me in half a walnut shell, covered me with a rose petal, packed my layette in a hazel nut and carried me off to London town where she exhibited herself for a shilling a time as 'The Fairy's Nursemaid', while I clung to

her bosom like a burr" (65). The Wonder's size as an adult is not described, though her small size as a baby may indicate that she continued to be extremely small. The Wonder spent most of her life being exhibited as a freak, though as a child she was adopted by a family that treated her well. But being treated well did not make the Wonder happy, as she was aware of the irreducible difference between her and her family of "normal" size:

> "I turned, first fire, then ice, in our box as the scenes unfolded before me, for, dearly as I loved my family, there was always that unalterable difference between us. Not so much the clumsiness of their limbs, their lumpish movements, oppressed me; nor even the thunder of their voices, as never in all my life had I gone to bed without a headache. No. I had known all these things from birth and grown accustomed to the monstrous ugliness of mankind. Indeed, my life in that kind house could almost have made me forgive some, at least, of the beasts for their beastliness". (67)

The Wonder recognizes the difference between her and her family, but there is an inversion of the discourse of what is considered normal. For her, humans are monsters and beasts, and she dreams "of a world in miniature, a small, perfect, heavenly place such as you might see reflected in the eye of a wise bird" (68). This inversion puts the Wonder at the center of discourse, allowing her to have a voice. But throughout the novel, characters receive attention in other ways. Feitosa notes, "[T]he narrative of *Nights at the Circus* is interrupted many times by other narratives that focus on the lives of other grotesque characters that inhabit the same space as the protagonist" (71, translation mine). This frequently happens through Fevvers's narrative, and characters have their stories told in the third person. The Wonder's story, however, is a first-person narrative, which offers the possibility that the character speaks for herself.

Madame Schreck owned the horror museum and she is the character that most resembles a monster. Fevvers describes her as “a lady all skin and bone” (Carter 54), and her fingertips were hard, “as if there were no flesh on ‘em” (59). Carroll claims that one strategy to identify horrific monsters is to look at the affect they cause on the positive human characters in the novel. Though Fevvers is not a positive human character, she shudders in Schreck’s presence. She is also described as uncanny and wicked, and compared to a gargoyle. Fevvers claims that Schreck started her career exhibiting herself as a Living Skeleton, a name that suggests a mixture between the realms of life and death. Feitosa notes, “Madame Schreck, many times referred to as ‘Our Lady of Terror’, for representing the reversal of the qualities attributed to the Virgin Mary, is a woman that explores other women, breaking with the stereotyped idea that men are the great villains” (90, translation mine). Schreck is a freak who explores other freaks, and though she is in a position of power, she remains isolated from society, since she also lives in the museum, though in the upper part of it, and other people are afraid of even saying her name. Except for some characters of the Imperial Circus, she is one of the few marginal characters that does not have an ending related to some form of freedom, as she simply disappears after being hanged in a curtain.

The last space that resembles an exhibition that Fevvers passes through is the circus, also a marginal place. The air of the circus, like monsters, is made of a mixture of elements:

> “But the aroma of horse dung and lion piss permeated every inch of the building’s fabric, so that the titillating contradiction between the soft, white shoulders of the lovely ladies whom young army officers escorted there and the hairy pelts of the beasts in the ring resolved in the night-time intermingling of French perfume and the essence of steppe and jungle in which musk and civet revealed themselves as common elements”. (105)

The air is composed of elements from both animal and human realms, a mixture between abject elements and commodities. The circus is also described as a place "constructed to house permanent displays of the triumphs of man's will over gravity and over rationality" (105), with the challenge of human rationality also being a characteristic of monsters, since they challenge categorization. The animals and the clowns that present themselves in this circus work in a similar fashion as monsters and freaks.

Sybil is Colonel Kearney's pig. She does not take part in the circus presentations, but she works as an advisor to him. In many instances, Sybil behaves like a human, being a fortune teller: "she could spell out your fate and fortune with the aid of the alphabet written out on cards – yes, indeed! could truffle the future out of four-and-twenty Roman capitals if they were laid out in order before her and that wasn't the half of her talents" (98). Sybil can write words by pointing letters with her nose, while at the same time working as a fortune teller, a job usually assigned to humans. In "White Wings and Six-Legged Muttons," Timothy Neil analyzes how the use of animals in freak shows and circus presentations turns them into freaks. Neil claims, "These animals themselves cross the boundaries of human/animal when they are taught to take on the postures of humans. When the animal undermined 'natural' animal states and became more 'human', it softened the line between the human and the animal, and between the normative and nonnormative as well" (63). When animals behave like humans, they cross the boundaries of the ontological realms that separates animals and humans, creating a category confusion. Carroll also acknowledges that animals may be portrayed as monstrous:

> The problem with these types of counterexamples [animals as the antagonists in horror movies], which are legion, is that though nominally the antagonists belong to our everyday world, their presentation in the fictions they inhabit turn them effectively into fantastical beings. Ostensibly whales, sharks, and

> men, they acquire powers and attributes above and beyond what one would be willing to believe of living creatures. (37)

Whereas teaching a pig to read fortunes may be a trick, some passages imply that Sybil have attributes common to humans: “Sybil studied the cards for a moment, squinnied again at Walser, appeared for a few moments sunk in thought, then, with her questing snout, she nudged out: *C-L-O-W-N*” (Carter 101). The pig is able to think, which is frequently evoked as the action that separates humans from animals, an indication that Sybil breaks the borders between two ontological realms.

Though Sybil lives in the circus, which is a marginal place, inside it she is in a privileged position, since she lives with Colonel Kearney, who treats her as a human, while some human performers, like the clowns, live in deplorable conditions. Her behavior, on the other hand, is different from that of Madame Schreck, the other freak that was in a position of power. In the end of section two, Colonel Kearney suspects Sybil is trying to help the professor, one of the monkeys, with a new contract: “He [the Colonel] squinted at Sybil ruminatively, assailed by the first doubts of her integrity: that there might be some solidarity amongst the dumb beasts, that they could form a pact of some kind against him, was a disturbing possibility that, hitherto, never entered his mind” (Carter 170). The Colonel clearly makes a distinction between “us” and “them”, though to the reader, this distinction may not be so clear, because the Colonel squints and ruminates. But he ponders if the beasts have solidarity between them, just like the one Fevvers has with the other freaks she encounters.

The “Lamarck’s Educated Apes” is a group of twelve monkeys whose performance is intended to represent a classroom, with one of the monkeys posing as a professor and the others as students. Though the performance itself already breaks the borders between the realms of animals and humans, it has some further characteristics that makes it unnatural.

When Walser first sees the performance, he gets closer to see what is written on the blackboard:

> Walser could make no sense of the diagram chalked on the blackboard yet the chimps appeared to be occupied in transcribing it to their slates. . . . The professor considered, nodded and chalked in another arabesque on the diagram. . . . He [Walser] squinted again at the diagram but could not tease a meaning out of it. Yet there seemed to be . . . Could it be? Was it possible? . . . was there *writing* on the blackboard? (107)

The monkeys can write, a human characteristic that Walser doubts animals could imitate. In their classroom performance, it seems they are learning, since the students make questions in sign language and the professor draws other diagrams to solve doubts.

The monkeys also provide an inversion of the gaze that is cast over freaks. When they realize Walser is watching them, they remove his clothes and put him in the front of the classroom, so they can study him:

> Were they, he pondered, grappling with Darwin's theory – from the other end? Green Hair-Ribbon [a student monkey] returned to her desk and the lesson started in earnest. Walser stood before them, nude and exemplary, and the Professor prodded him in the thorax with his cue, not urgently, making those swift passes of the hands with which they seemed to communicate. Walser wilted under the scrutiny of the eyes of his little cousins twice removed. Squeak, squeak, went the slate pencils. Prod, went the cue; Walser obediently turned round to present the class with his backside. The professor expressed particular interest in the vestigial remains of his tail. (110)

Walser questions if the monkeys are studying Darwin “from the other end”, since Darwin’s theory looks at animals to understand human evolution. The journalist is put at the center and becomes an object to the eyes of the monkeys.

The apes can leave the circus with their own effort, which gives a possibility of action to characters in a marginal position. After stealing and tearing apart his former contract, the Professor proposes a new contract to Colonel Kearney, who exclaims, “The madmen take over the lunatic asylum” (169). The comparison with lunatics, who are imprisoned and kept away from society, further enforces the marginal position the monkeys and the other circus performers are in. The Professor, however, was able to trick Colonel Kearney by adding a clause he signed without reading:

> “Come up to me, bold as brass, after the show – informs me – scrawls a note, dreadful handwriting, dreadful! – informs me they’ve earned a bonus on account of the applause at the end of their act lasted longer’n five minutes. Wrote the clause in ‘isself. I signed it, to my shame. *My* watch put the applause at four minutes ninety-nine seconds precisely. Darned ape won’t listen to reason. Darned ape.” (183)

The colonel relates his position as a human to reason, which is the common point of view, claiming that the apes did not get the correct time. But the monkeys are more logical than Colonel Kearney, as they could easily trick the man after developing a complex plan. They also seem more human than Colonel Kearney, who is described as having many characteristics that are like Sybil’s.

Though they are not monsters per se, the clowns in the novel present aspects that make them resemble monsters. Feitosa claims, “The clown’s body can frequently be seen as grotesque for exaggerating the anatomy of human parts, for inverting traditional behavior, for exploring eschatological aspects and for mixing non-human elements in its forms, frequently

creating monstrous figures" (134, translation mine). Monsters are frequently related to exaggeration, abject elements and mixture of elements, which appear in the clowns. Buffo, who is a species of clown chief, has a mixture of different elements in his costume: "It [his wig] is, in fact, a bladder. Think of that. He wears his insides on his outside, and a portion of his most obscene and intimate insides, at that; so that you might think he is bald, he stores his brains in the organ which, conventionally, stores piss" (Carter 116). Buffo's body is monstrous because it creates a confusion because what should be inside is outside. There is also a reference to piss, an abject element that confers an impurity clause.

In his last presentation, there is a further breaking of borders that makes Buffo even more terrifying:

> For he presented a deplorable sight. His natural skin showed through his matte white in ghastly streaks and runnels and, during his peripatetic carousing, he had mislaid his bald piece so that a mean fringe of coarse, greying hair, spiked with sweat, surmounted a piebald face that seemed, rather than its customary mask-like inhumanity, now hideously partly human. (173)

When aspects of the human appeared on the surface of the clown, Buffo is described as deplorable and hideous. He also causes a different effect on the spectators, who at times, during this presentation, wonder if it really is an act.

One of the reasons the clowns, including Buffo, resemble horrific monsters is because they have threatening characteristics. They may not be physically threatening, but they cause fear: "Little Ivan sneaked a single terrified look at Walser's face all covered with red and white make-up, gave a faint moan and was gone. In all his former life, Walser never frightened children; this child was very much afraid of the clowns, a nervous dread with the seeds of fascination in it" (Carter 97). In this scene, Walser not only causes fear, but there is

also a hint of fascination, what causes the same paradoxical affect caused by monsters: repulsion and attraction.

Among the circus members, the clowns inhabit the most marginal position:

> Clown Alley, the generic name of all lodgings of all clowns, temporarily located in this city in the rotten wooden tenement where damp fell from the walls like dew, was a place where reigned the lugubrious atmosphere of a prison or a madhouse; amongst themselves, the clowns distilled the same kind of mutilated patience one finds amongst inmates of closed institutions, a willed and terrible suspension of being. (116)

The Clown Alley is made of rotten wood and resembles prisons and madhouses. Just like the monkeys, they are trapped and excluded from society there. In the novel, the clowns are somewhat excluded even from the circus community, socializing only between themselves. Feitosa notices how the Alley is in contrast with Ma Nelson's brothel:

> While Ma Nelson's brothel is full of happy women eager for knowledge, sheltered by a maternal figure that leads them to be free and educated people, the men in *Nights at the Circus* are similar to mad men in an asylum, to corpses with death masks waiting some kind of absolution. Clown's Alley is made of frustrated men, lacking dignity and that find in humiliation their only way of survival. (139, translation mine)

There is a kind of inversion at play here. First, because a brothel, a place that usually receives negative portrayals in society's eyes, is transformed into a safe place of learning, while clowns, a profession usually related to happiness, are thrown at a deplorable place and described as frustrated and humiliated. Second, there is an inversion in the power relations of gender. *Nights at the Circus* presents a world dominated by men, but in the circus, this is inverted. All management decisions are taken by Sybil, a female pig. In contrast to the

clowns, Fevvers lives in a luxurious hotel during their time at St. Petersburg. Sybil and Fevvers have the power to help others, as was the case with Sybil and the monkeys and Fevvers, who helps Walser and Mignon, Lamarck's wife.

The clowns' identities in the text are somewhat monstrous, since putting on make-up causes an erasure of the self, in a similar fashion to what an alter-ego would do. Buffo describes what he feels towards his identity after making himself a clown: "'Yet', he went on, 'am I this Buffo whom I have created? Or did I, when I made up my face to look like Buffo's, create, *ex nihilo*, another self who is not me? And what am I without my Buffo's face? Why, nobody at all. Take away my make-up and underneath is merely not-Buffo. An absence. A vacancy'" (122). Buffo claims that, after he became a clown, he became someone else and that his first identity was lost, since there is only absence where it should be. In his thesis, Feitosa mentions Luís Otávio Burnier's "O Clown", in which he claims that "the work of creation of a clown is extremely painful, since it confronts the artist with himself, showing the hidden corners of his self; this is where his profoundly human character comes from" (Burnier, translation mine). Burnier's description of a clown is very similar to the way Carroll describes an alter ego, as another identity that represents "a normatively alien aspect of the self" (46). In the case of Buffo, his clown identity erases his previous identity to the point he forgot his name. But Grok, another clown and close partner of Grik, describes the make-up as an identity that may be put on: "'Sometimes it seems', said Grok, 'that the faces exist of themselves, in a disembodied somewhere, waiting for the clown who will wear them, who will bring them to life" (Carter 122). His description is closer to the notion of an alter ego, who is in contrast with another identity, but that does not necessarily erase it. In the case of Buffo, he is so close to his alter ego that when there is a mixture between his human face and his make-up, he goes mad.

Grik and Grok identities also resemble freaks:

> 'But, as for us, old comrades that we are, old strangers that we are', said Grik, 'why, do I need a mirror when I put my make-up on? No, sir! All I need to do is look in my old pal's face, for, when we made our face together, we created out of nothing each other's Siamese twin, our nearest and dearest, bound by a tie as strong as shared liver and lights. Without Grik, Grok is a lost syllable, a typo on a programme, a sign-painter's hiccup on a billboard–'.

The clowns describe their relationship as that of Siamese twins, which contributes to their monstrous characterization.

Walser also experiences a temporary loss of identity when he puts his make-up on, though his seems a positive one:

> When Walser first put on his make-up, he looked in the mirror and did not recognise himself. As he contemplated the stranger peering interrogatively back at him out of the glass, he felt the beginnings of a vertiginous sense of freedom that, during all the time he spent with the Colonel, never quite evaporated; until that last moment when they parted company and Walser's very self, as he had known it, departed from him, he experienced the freedom that lies behind the mask, within dissimulation, the freedom to juggle with being, and, indeed, with the language which is vital to our being, that lies at the heart of burlesque. (103)

For Walser, putting make-up on makes him experience liberation from his self. He, who is a male and skeptical journalist, a representation of normative identities, experiences freedom in his contact with an Other.

The freaks in *Nights at the Circus* work in a similar fashion as monsters do, but Carter also emphasizes the way they are created. Being a freak in the novel is not only a matter of

bodily difference, but narrative plays a big role in "enfreakment." In the case of Fevvers, the narrative she creates around her own factuality or fictionality is constituent of her identity. The Cockney Venus's identity is never solved, and the novel suggests that if it were, she would be reduced to a common freak performer.

Fevvers seems aware that she cannot escape the male gaze, since she is both a woman and a freak, and so she uses her performances and image to control how people receive her. Exaggeration is the main strategy she employs, and this characteristic is present in her body, clothes, and performances. Her performances are not limited to the stage, and even daily necessities, like eating, have a tone of exaggeration, as is the case in her interview with Walser. The story of her life has fantastical characteristics, which is also a sort of exaggeration to the mind of a skeptical character like Walser, in the beginning of the novel.

In the novel, characters who are different initially do not have many choices to survive in society beyond presenting themselves in places like freak shows and circuses. A great deal of the freaks reports the marginalization and the irreducible difference they feel toward the British, but almost all individual stories have positive endings. Some freaks, for instance, find happiness in what was abandoned by society, such as Fanny, who opens an orphanage, while others learn to live with their personal problems, like Cobwebs, who expresses her melancholy through art. In most cases, the novel suggests there is a possibility of survival for these characters beyond being exhibited as freaks.

Nights at the Circus explores places that treated the Others as commodities, from brothels to freak shows. An analysis of the freaks in the novel shows how they were historically transformed into Others, but it also accentuates how Carter appropriates the tools used to keep freaks in a marginal position and subverts them in order to denounce them and offer these characters better social possibilities.

Chapter 3: The Dog-Woman and Fevvers: Monstrous Women as Symbols of Power and Resistance

Sexing the Cherry and *Nights at the Circus* have several monsters, though the monstrous main characters are the ones that receive the most attention from critics, usually being treated as representatives of female power and freedom. The Dog-Woman and Fevvers, however, are very different characters who at times seem to have opposite personality traits. In this chapter, I will analyze how the period in which each novel is set, how the passion and desires these characters feel, and how the way they relate to the communities built in each novel shape what the characters represent, so I can understand how monsters that are so different can be used to symbolize female power and freedom. I shall then be able to identify the problems this kind of symbolism originates.

Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park analyze the European changes in the perception of wonders, including monsters, from the twelfth to the eighteenth century. The authors claim that during most of the Renaissance, monstrous apparitions were related to religion:

> Important only as the bearer of a divine message – the reason so many monsters died hours after birth, as soon as this had been delivered – it pointed both to events that came before it and to events that were to follow: the sin or sins that had prompted divine punishment and the punishment itself, which could take the form of plague, famine, war, or the like. The monster itself was a paradoxical product of God's mercy, an alert and a warning issued to allow sinners one last chance to reform themselves and avert the catastrophe to come. Because such catastrophes were communal, Christians usually interpreted monsters as signaling not individual but collective sin; it is for this

> reason that they rarely blamed the monster's parents, still less the monster itself. (181)

During part of the Renaissance, monsters were not seen as threats, but as signs and warnings from God. People felt less threatened by them and did not blame them for the various calamities that ravaged Europe.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, which is set during the Renaissance, the Dog-Woman is not explicitly connected to catastrophes or represented as a sign of punishment from God, but some aspects of Daston's and Park's description of the reception of monsters during the period are present in the text. The Dog-Woman herself connects the plague at the end of the novel to divine punishment:

> God's judgement on the murder of the King has befallen us. London is consumed by the Plague. The city is thick with the dead. There are bodies in every house and in a street south of here the only bodies are dead ones. The houses are deserted, their shutters banging open in the night. (Winterson 159)

The character interprets the disaster as the result of collective sin. She also puts herself among those who should be paying for their sins, since she also shares their religion. This also approximates the Dog-Woman with what was thought of monsters at the time, because she believes in and fears God, instead of being in opposition to him. This also helps to explain the relationship the character has with the English. Though her differences are the reason she does not engage completely in society, she is allowed to live among other people. They treat her as a monster, but not as an evil one, since she is also a creature of God. Even during the English Civil War, the Puritans do not persecute her because she is a monster, but because of religious differences. She is more a freak, a *lusus naturae* than a threatening monster like Grendel in the Beowulf tale.

Critics have the tendency of interpreting the Dog-Woman as a subversive character, but she cannot simply be read as a representative of feminism who combats patriarchy. In “Winterson, Bakhtin, and the Chronotope of a Lesbian Hero”, Bratton claims that “she is the literalized representation of what is symbolically grotesque about unconforming [sic] women” (217). But looking at the Dog-Woman against the background of her society reveals that she is far from nonconforming. She fights the Puritans and the repression they represent in the novel, but she was already perceived as a monster by her allies even before the Civil War began. And as discussed in chapter one, she longs for normative aspects of society, condemning what is different from her religion and habits. It seems critics tend to read her as a challenge to norms because of her grotesque body, but her position as a monster also complicates the issue. As a monster, she is ambivalent, she is a conservative that fights conservative ideals. She is a strong woman, but it is doubtful that she should be taken as a symbol and as an example.

The nineteenth-century society represented in *Nights at the Circus* had a different relationship with monsters and other creatures with bodily differences. In this period, freak shows were already established and people who presented physical differences, from disabilities to different ethnicities, were exhibited as curiosities for profit. But Daston and Park claim that in the thirteenth century there were already records of “monsters” being exhibited. After providing a few examples of such exhibitions, the authors claim that “Over the course of the sixteenth century, similar references to the public display of monsters became increasingly common, not only in Italy, but also in Germany, England, and France” (190). Though this kind of exhibition is not the theme explored in *Sexing the Cherry*, there is one scene in the novel in which something that is different is exhibited for money: “Nevertheless, it being daylight and a crowd promised such as we see only for a dog and a bear, I took Jordan on a hound-lead and pushed my way through the gawpers and sinners

until we got to the front and there was Johnson himself trying to charge money for a glimpse of the thing" (Winterson 4). Johnson is exhibiting a banana, a fruit that many of the English at the scene are seeing for the first time. Kintzele analyzes the passage as a clash between the English normative identity and the Other: "The appearance of the banana at the beginning of *Sexing the Cherry* stages, albeit humorously, the confrontation between a social order and its beyond; it establishes the presence of a force that calls the norm into question". The banana becomes a symbol of the Other. The English are attracted to it, but they also feel disgust for the fruit, which brings unanimous ranting at its sight. In the novel, the banana works in a similar way that freaks work in *Nights at the Circus*, not surprisingly, since objects and people from different lands were also exhibited as curiosities in real freak shows and museums.

The exhibition of monsters and people that present bodily differences is the main theme of Carter's novel. Even before Fevvers enters her first freak show, Madame Schreck's Horror Museum, she had experiences performing before other people's eyes. From an early age, she assumed several roles in the brothel, such as the "Cupid", and later the "Winged Victory". She claims she spent seven years posing as the Cupid: "– and for seven long years, sir, I was nought but the painted, gilded *sign* of love, and you might say, that so it was I served my apprenticeship in *being looked* at – at being the object of the eye of the beholder" (Carter 23). Her performances as a child prepared her for the exposure she would be under for the rest of her life.

Fevvers is aware that she cannot escape being objectified by the gaze, and from an early age she learned how to negotiate her position under the eyes of others. Douglas claims,

> Fevvers chooses to sell the spectacle of herself, her consciously performed freakish sexuality, because she is aware that as a woman – and a bird-woman at that – she has no choice but to be the focus of the masculine gaze. By

> creating her own performance, she dictates the terms of the exchange and creates a saleable commodity, gaining some control over both her representation and her financial status. (123)

In the first chapter of the novel, during a performance, her position is not of one that is merely being looked at anymore:

> Look at me! With a grand, proud, ironic grace, she exhibited herself before the eyes of the audience as if she were a marvellous present too good to be played with. Look, not touch.
>
> She was twice as large as life and as succinctly finite as any object that is intended to be seen, not handled. Look! Hands off!
>
> *LOOK AT ME*! (Carter 15).

Fevvers is not merely an object that is under the scrutiny of the audience, she demands that they look at her. She transforms something that would be inevitable into a source of income and fame, ways of ascending socially. She also uses her marvelous characteristics, those of being excessive, grotesque, to portray herself as a rare object, something that should not be touched. She controls what the audience can get from her.

Fevvers has control over her image and is aware that she can raise male desire for her. Through her performances, however, she can reaffirm the distance between her and the spectators and only allows that men chosen by her touch her. The Dog-Woman, who is inserted in a society that still relates monsters to religion, does not negotiate her body as successfully as Fevvers. Bratton has claimed that the Dog-Woman's grotesque body is used to counter the male gaze, but there is a passage in the novel in which a man demonstrates desire for her, though things do not end well for him. The man asks the Dog-Woman to "eat" his penis, which she takes literally and bites "it off with a snap" (Winterson 40). Winterson

does not seem to use the monstrous body as a criticism of the male gaze, but the Dog-Woman's grotesque body is used to counter social norms.

There is a contrast between the Dog-Woman's behavior and her body. In terms of behavior, she attempts to act according to norms, such as eating etiquette: "And then he [Tradescant] bit into his [peach] and spurted the juice right over himself. Cautiously I bit into mine, but in a more ladylike fashion. Jordan did nothing, and I had to remind him of his manners" (17). John Tradescant is described as a noble man, and despite this, he lacks table manners. The Dog-Woman offers a contrast, since she is a gigantic and grotesque woman who attempts to behave like a lady. Andrievskikh has commented on the satirical potential of this contrast, but she also recognizes the problems it brings to analyses of the Dog-Woman as a transgressive character:

> The Dog-Woman's self-referential remarks on her eating habits can certainly be read as implicitly critical of and satirizing the restrictive discourse, yet they also give away her willingness and even desire to conform to these restrictions. This double reading is symptomatic of other tensions inherent in her image, tensions often overlooked by critics who are inclined to view the Dog-Woman as a wholly independent and self-sufficient figure. (18)

The Dog-Woman's comments on her habits are ironic to the reader because it is not expected that a grotesque woman like her will worry about good manners. They are also ironic because they are in contrast with other remarks she makes. She talks as naturally about good etiquette as she talks about abject elements, like sweat: "I could scarcely step outside without sweating off me enough liquid to fill a bucket. These waterfalls took with them countless lice and other timid creatures, and being forced to put myself often under the pump I can truly say that I was clean" (16). Ironically, she is worried with cleanliness, even though she is frequently associated with dirt, such as insects and excrement. But Andrievskikh also recognizes that the

Dog-Woman's willingness to follow the norms is not only related to the creation of irony and to the critique of those norms, but also to the paradoxical elements that are involved in the creation of the character. As discussed in the first chapter, different elements clash in the Dog-Woman because of her condition as a monster. Though she is treated as an Other, her following of the norms blurs the borders between her, a monstrous woman, and the English, who are expected to follow these habits.

While the Dog-Woman breaks norms mainly through her body and the irony Winterson uses in the text, Fevvers uses strategies of performance and exaggeration. Sümbül claims that Fevvers uses the strategy of masquerade as a form of subversion of patriarchal norms. Masquerade works as a superficial image, hiding the true character behind a mask. Strategies, such as exaggeration, may be used as a form of subversion, highlighting that someone is just performing. Exaggeration is one of the defining characteristics of Fevvers, and it is present in the additional plumes in her wings during the performances and even in the descriptions of her behavior: "He [Walser] rejected a bacon sandwich; the strips of rusty meat slapped between the doorsteps of white bread seemed to him for dire extremities of hunger only, but Fevvers tucked in with relish, a vigorous mastication of large teeth, a smacking of plump lips smeared with grease" (Carter 53). Fevvers devours sandwiches that Walser would eat only in extreme situations. Her chewing is vigorous, her teeth are large, and her lips are plump. Everything about the character is exaggerated.

Eating and food are recurrent topics in both novels, though the main characters' approaches to them differ. In her analysis of *Sexing the Cherry*, Andrievskikh claims that "linked through their locus, the functions of orality – eating, sexual pleasure, and expression through language – are symbolically interchangeable" (8). For the author, the way the characters consume food, mainly fruits, is related to other forms of oral pleasure, including sexual pleasure and desire. In the scene in which the Dog-Woman first sees a banana, she

relates it to the male sexual organ: “But I would have none of it and whipped off the cover myself, and I swear that what he had resembled nothing more than the private parts of an Oriental. It was yellow and livid and long” (Winterson 5). The crowd’s reaction to the fruit is revealing of people’s perception of sexuality in the novel: “He lifted it up above his head, and the crowd, seeing it for the first time, roared and nudged each other and demanded to know what poor fool had been so reduced as to sell his vitality”. This and other passages show the general discomfort people and the Dog-Woman felt when looking at a fruit that resembled a penis. This is evidence of the repressed nature of sexuality among the society represented in the text.

The Dog-Woman does not seem to condemn lust, love, and the forms of oral pleasure, but she does not experience them. Andrievskikh notes, “The focus on representations of consumption demonstrates that the Dog-Woman does not experience the pleasures of orality (including verbal expression) and therefore remains passive and isolated both from sensual experiences and agency of language, symbolizing instead the male fear of the female monstrous body” (12). The restrictions the character imposes on herself while eating are read in parallel to the restrictions she has on desire. But while she follows eating etiquette to some extent, her distancing from love and desire is not voluntary: “I am too huge for love. No one, male or female, has ever dared to approach me. They are afraid to scale mountains” (Winterson 31). The Dog-Woman attributes her inexperience in love to her bodily differences. Despite having very conservative ideas, she considers receiving love from someone from the same sex, which is somewhat contradictory in relation to what happens in other stories in the novel that present this kind of relationship. In more than one of the twelve dancing princesses stories, the princesses that fall in love with other women are treated violently and expelled from society. The Dog-Woman also claims that no one has ever

approximated her, but at least one man in the novel shows sexual desire for her, though she does not seem to understand what is happening.

Though in the previous passage the Dog-Woman says both men and women fear her, there is evidence that the character may symbolize gender differences, or even male fear of the feminine, as Andrievskikh has pointed out. All the Dog-Woman's targets are male, as well as all the targets of her alter ego, the activist. The Dog-Woman narrates a memory she has of her father:

> When I was a child my father swung me up on to his knees to tell me a story and I broke both his legs. He never touched me again, except with the point of the whip he used for the dogs. But my mother, who lived only a while and was so light that she dared not go out in a wind, could swing me on her back and carry me for miles. There was talk of witchcraft but what is stronger than love? (Winterson 21)

While her father cannot bear her weight, her mother, who is described as very light, can swing her effortlessly. It is not clear why her mother can lift her so easily, and though there is a possibility of witchcraft, this is another instance of the Dog-Woman's powers working only against men.

In *Nights at the Circus*, the topic of desire is also explored through the consumption of food. Dennis notes, for instance, that Fevvers is described with food imagery: "Her face, broad and oval as a meat dish, had been thrown on a common wheel out of coarse clay" (Carter 12); "It was a sufficiently startling head of hair, yellow and inexhaustible as sand, thick as cream, sizzling and whispering under the brush" (19). Dennis also relates eating with desire, and she understands the description of Fevvers with words related to food as the wish of spectators and observers (such as Walser) to consume her. But the author also claims that Fevvers has desires herself:

> Fevvers's ability to arouse in others the desire to consume her is offset (and perhaps fed by) her own urge to consume – particularly wealth and, as the signifiers of such wealth, fine food and drink (although she is just as appreciative of the satisfaction of hearty, traditionally working-class meals). (117)

Contrary to the Dog-Woman, Fevvers possesses an excessive desire, which she also arouses in other people. Abdullah understands Fevvers's eating as a break of norms: "She essentially turns the very act of eating into boisterous spectacle, defying any expectation of so called 'lady-like' behaviour and not only resisting but breaking out of any sense of patriarchal containment concerning her eating habits" (116). If in the novel the consumption of food is parallel to the consumption of desires, Fevvers breaks another norm, since traditionally women are expected to abandon their own desires in favor of other people, such as their husbands and children.

Fevvers does not repress her desires and attempts to consume them, though she often does this in excessive ways. Carter's description of Fevvers indulging in her own wishes is not necessarily positive. Most of the times in which the character is at risk, it happens because of her excessive greed. In the middle of the novel, for instance, she is invited for dinner by a Grand Duke, who sends her a diamond bracelet. Despite Lizzie's warnings that she should not go because the man had ill intentions, she went to meet the Duke nevertheless: "But Fevvers saw no death in the snow. All she saw was that festive sparkle of the frosty lights that made her think of diamonds" (Carter 184). She accepted the invite out of greed: "Therefore she concluded this punter was prepared to put his money where his mouth was – or, rather, where his mouth hoped to be" (173). It turns out the Grand Duke was luring her to imprison her in a golden cage, which Fevvers barely escaped with the help of her wings and

toy sword. This is not the first instance in which the character's greed puts herself in danger, and the topic is recurrent from the first section of the novel.

Critics have interpreted this excessive greed in many ways. Dennis builds her analysis of such passages on the description of Fevvers as a "New Woman": "Whilst celebrating the idealism and determination of pioneering feminists – the 'New Women' Fevvers represents – the novel paradoxically reminds us of the vulnerability of those ideals, and points to the struggles, internal and external, faced by the movement since its early days, and with which feminists continue to grapple" (117). For her, Fevvers is not only a positive representation of the first wave of feminism, but she also points to the problems those first feminists had to overcome. Dennis also claims,

> Carter is not proposing that women play men at their own game of the unthinking satisfaction of one's own urges – indeed, she emphasizes the dangers of doing so. Rather, she suggests that women, like men, are capable of being corrupted by their own appetites and vices; and that, while women must begin to engage with and pursue their own desire, appetite is a complex and potentially dangerous force to be negotiated with considerable care. (126)

Curiously, Dennis interprets Fevvers as a monster that works as a warning of the dangers of excessive desire, a sign that would fit the Dog-Woman, considering the period in which the latter character lived and how monsters were interpreted then.

Punday's analysis of why Fevvers is a problematic character may also help us understand why the Dog-Woman is also a contradictory woman. He claims, "Contemporary novelists have particularly been interested in problems that monstrous bodies create for the construction of literary narrative" (807). For him,

> What Carter discovers when she considers the meaning of monstrous bodies are specific problems in how narrative represents agency. In particular, *Nights*

> *at the Circus* suggests that there is an inherent conflict between symbolism and the representation of possible character actions. (809)

Punday considers Fevvers a symbol of the female freedom that would come in the twentieth century. For him, Carter uses Fevvers to show the problems of transforming monstrous women into symbols. The winged woman seems free, but she commits sins of excess, which almost kill or entrap her a few times. Fevvers seems to indulge in the same actions the novel condemns. The Dog-Woman works in a similar fashion. She is a symbol of female power, but her actions are not so different from those the novel portrays as the villains. It seems neither of the characters can escape the limitations of their own time.

Some passages in *Sexing the Cherry* suggest the creation of female communities as a way of survival in the male dominated society that the novel presents. When a church is attacked by Puritans, the Dog-Woman notes,

> There was a group of women gathered round the remains of the glass which coloured the floor brighter than any carpet of flowers in a parterre. They were women who had cleaned the window, polishing the slippery fish our Lord had blessed in his outstretched hands, scraping away the candle smoke from the feet of the Apostles. (Winterson 65)

The women who met at the church remain a group even after the violent times of war began and they gather the pieces of glass to reconstruct what was destroyed during the war. The same kind of communities appear in the story of the twelve dancing princesses, who form a group after escaping their husbands. All the women in the novel form these communities after suffering aggression or after society did not let them live according to their wishes.

The Dog-Woman, however, does not take part in these communities. Andrievskikh notes that “notably, she never breaks bread with other women, nor does she have any female friends. I see the Dog-Woman being dangerously isolated from the female community in the

novel and therefore from the opportunity to connect and identify with the collective female experience" (19). Andrievskikh sees the sharing food as an act of community building, and she notes that the Dog-Woman does not part food with other women in the novel. In the instances she eats, she is accompanied by Jordan or by Tradescant, Jordan's mentor. As she watches the women gather pieces of broken glass, her relationship with female communities becomes clear: "At evening, their work done, they filled into the little church to pray, and I, not daring to follow, watched them through the hole where the window had been" (Winterson 66). The Dog-Woman represents a way of fighting male power, but she is not a perfect solution to women. She does not represent freedom, though she is willing to fight for it.

As to the creation of communities of marginalized characters, Carter seems to go on the other direction. Feitosa claims that one of the many topics explored in *Nights at the Circus* is "the sentiment of total helplessness of the grotesque beings, which makes them feel at ease when they are living among others who are also perceived by society as monsters" (107). The grotesque characters in the novel not only feel at easy near one another, but they also congregate. This does not happen only with the freaks, but with many characters that can be described as Others, such as women. The brothel Fevvers was raised in, for instance, was a stable community, in which the prostitutes could live in peace: "I never saw a single blow exchanged between any of the sisterhood who reared me, nor heard a cross word or a voice raised in anger" (Carter 39). In Madame Schreck's Museum, the freaks also help one another:

> Fanny it was who undertook the task of combing it and brushing it for old Four-Eyes was a tender woman with a loving heart. The Beauty's fingernails and toenails kept on growing too, and it was the Wiltshire Wonder's task to trim them, owing to the marvellous dexterity of her tiny fingers. (63)

Later in the novel, Fevvers also takes care of the Sleeping Beauty, carrying Beauty with her after the museum is closed. Blodgett notices the importance of such communities:

> Much more valuable, Carter substitutes for images of male identification images of women's strength through community, a value she has not before especially acknowledged. Thus her whores are not only Shavian intelligent women forced into trade by economic necessity but eminently caring of each other.

The substitution of places traditionally used to please men for communities is used as a form of resistance in *Nights at the Circus*. Instead of being represented as relegated characters, the women and freaks at these places join forces and can survive partially because of their union. This kind of community also appears in *Sexing the Cherry*, but the difference is in the main characters of each novel. While the Dog-Woman is isolated from these communities, Fevvers is part of them. She is essential to the survival of a great part of the characters after these communities disband.

The Dog-Woman and Fevvers are very different characters, but still they represent a possibility of agency and freedom for women. The monstrous women's grotesque bodies are sites for the breaking of norms in themselves, but the characters also do so with their actions. The Dog-Woman fights physically to defend her ideals to prevent the extremely conservative Puritans to achieve power, but her actions during the war risk that she commits the same crimes as her enemies do. Fevvers is aware that she cannot escape being an object due to her conditions, so she exaggerates her performances as a woman and as an artist to attempt to control the audience and those who wish to imprison and possess her. But she cannot avoid indulging inconsequentially in her desires, which often puts her life at risk.

Either novel portrays female power through a monstrous character, but they cannot be used as perfect symbols. The Dog-Woman is strong and autonomous, but she cannot express her desires and is repressed by her own beliefs and social norms, which are like the ideas she fights against. She is also isolated from the other female characters and their communities in

the novel, which reinforces the idea that the Dog-Woman should not be read as an example. The community built by the dancing princesses, for instance, works like a site of resistance and survival, something to which the Dog-Woman has no access, and the character instead fights for old values, which will not change the condition of women. Fevvers is a more liberating character, since she does not engage in violent acts and show concern for the marginal characters that inhabit the same places as she. The aerialist participates in the communities and can bring changes to them. Her problem, however, is that she is not able to mediate her own desires, and concerns about freedom and to what extent that freedom should be used inconsequentially are raised.

I hope my discussion in this chapter contributes to the clarification of the ambivalent position of the monstrous women that are the main characters in the discussed novels. Their grotesque bodies and their portrayal as Others are used to destabilize norms, but at the same time they share characteristics with what they seem to question. This study is relevant because it emphasizes that even though these women may be taken as symbols of power and freedom, their condition as monsters destabilizes any attempt to fix them as such.

Final Considerations

Analyzing *Sexing the Cherry* and *Nights at the Circus* with a perspective that focuses on monsters elucidates some of the controversial points of each novel. Critics tend to take one of two positions when discussing the Dog-Woman and Fevvers: they understand them as feminist symbols that stand against patriarchal norms or as failed representations, which commit some of the same mistakes of the normative characters they accuse. In this work, I proposed a perspective that considers this incoherence a consequence of their representation as monsters. The construction of the Dog-Woman and Fevvers as monstrous women makes them paradoxical characters in both their bodies and in what they may represent. Monsters are interstitial beings; their bodies are a threat to human rationalization and to any attempt to categorize them. In the case of the protagonists of the novels analyzed in this work, their position as monsters seems to influence what we are initially led to believe they represent.

The Dog-Woman is a complex character, and her ambivalence is present in her role at society and in her behavior. From the beginning of the novel, she is treated as a monster, being forced to live in the margins of her own community and not being allowed to engage in all aspects of society. But though she is different from the English and she knows so, some of her traits also approximate her to their normative identity: she is religious and a supporter of the king. She shares the same belief as the people who surround her, which blurs the distinctions between the normative identity and the Other. With the start of the English Civil War, the Dog-Woman took the side of the Royalists. In the novel, the Puritans are extremely conservative, especially regarding their repressive ideals about sexuality. Winterson also highlights the hypocrisy of the Puritans, since they repress their wives, but are regular customers at brothels. The Dog-Woman, thus, allies herself with the Royalists, who also

possess some repressive ideals about sexuality and about what is different from them, to fight a group that is even more conservative.

Monsters usually challenge what is established, but the Dog-Woman goes on the other hand. She supports the king; hence, she defends the established government, the status quo. Roessner claims she allies herself with the Royalists because of the oppressive system that would come, but there are other aspects of the Dog-Woman that suggest she is more than a character that is simply fighting oppressive ideals. Her condition as a monster contrasts with her desires to follow the norms and her behavior regarding her community, a contrast that does not allow a simple reading of the character as a breaker of patriarchal norms. She willingly follows many kinds of rules, such as etiquette, considering this to be the ideal to any person. Contrary to other monstrous characters in the novel, she is distant from the female communities that welcome those who were excluded.

The position of Fevvers as a freak in the nineteenth century is different from the Dog-Woman's position as a monster in the seventeenth. *Nights at the Circus* presents a society that treated different people as commodities, exhibiting them for profit. Among the many themes in the novel, there is that of the gaze cast over freaks, which echoes the male gaze over women. All the monsters in the novel are subject to this gaze, but Fevvers learned to negotiate it for her own benefit. She uses the strategies of masquerade and performance to exhibit a superficial version of herself, while also exaggerating aspects in her costumes and presentations to counter imposed norms.

Fevvers's relationship with the freak and female communities in the novel is different from what happens in *Sexing the Cherry*. Fevvers is part of the communities and she usually starts the actions that promote changes. In *Nights*, the communities are formed in the marginal places women and freaks are allowed to live. Ma Nelson's brothel is one of such communities. Brothels are usually represented as places created to serve men and associated

with degradation, but in the novel, it becomes a safe haven for women. Even in Madam Schreck's museum, which is the opposite of the brothel, freaks get together to ease the harsh conditions they live in.

The grotesque aspects of the monsters in each novel is often referred to by critics, and though I provided analyses to each of them, I also focused on those whose monstrosity is not obvious. This is relevant because it shows that monstrosity is not only a matter of bodily difference, but also of narrative and representation. Sybil and Lamarck's Educated Apes, for instance, seem grotesque because they break the boundaries between humans and animals in unnatural ways. It is not simply a matter of learning to perform tricks as if they were human, but they seem capable of genuinely acting as humans. The description of the clowns in *Nights at the Circus* also makes them somewhat monstrous. Buffo, the clown chief, uses a toy bladder as an outside garment of his clothes. Association with abject elements, in this case, an organ that should be inside the body, is also a way of making something grotesque. Two other clowns, Grik and Grok, also describe their identities as if they were monstrous, since they are connected, like conjoined twins, or maybe alter egos.

Monsters frequently embody what is different from a given culture. They may represent many kinds of difference, from religious to sexual, and they usually are considered threats to social norms and traditions, which causes their banishment. *Sexing the Cherry* and *Nights at the Circus* highlight the transformation of differences into monsters, denouncing the marginalization social norms imposes on those who do not follow its patterns. With this work, I attempted to show the many elements that are used in the creation of the monsters present in these two novels and how the authors subvert some of these elements to criticize the social position imposed on their characters. I also attempted to contribute to the discussion about the controversial aspects of the Dog-Woman and Fevvers by suggesting an

alternative approach to their ambivalences that considers their monstrosity as the source of the impossibility of fixing them as female symbols.

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