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MANIFESTATIONS OF THE GROTESQUE IN ANGELA CARTER'S *LOVE* AND *WISE CHILDREN*

por

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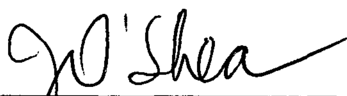

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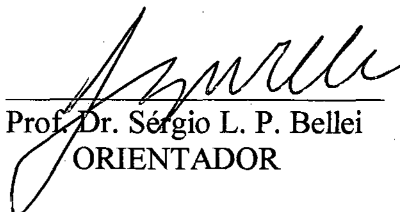

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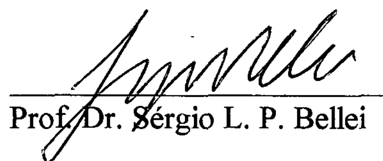

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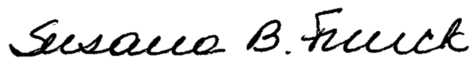

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To Camila and Philippe

Myth deals in false universes, to dull
the pain of particular circumstances.

Angela Carter

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ABSTRACT

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LOVE AND *WISE CHILDREN*

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This dissertation aims to investigate the employment of the grotesque, according to the theories proposed by Wolfgang Kayser and Mikhail Bakhtin, in two novels of Angela Carter: *Love* (1971) and *Wise Children* (1991). The first chapter characterizes the "tragic" grotesque, as it is viewed by Wolfgang Kayser, as well as the "comic" grotesque, based on the study of Mikhail Bakhtin. In the chapter which follows the theoretical guidelines of this work, there is the analysis of *Love*. The focus of analysis is on the tragic life orientation of the protagonist of the novel, based on the detailed analysis of her behavior, which reveals a commitement to the tragic grotesque, as it is described by Kayser. The tragic romantic love motif in *Love* is also based on the parody of a traditional romantic plot, with overt association to Edgar A. Poe's *Annabel Lee*. In the analysis of *Wise Children,* which constitutes the third chapter of this dissertation, the comic tone employed by the novel's narrator is identified with the "comic grotesque", as it is defined by Bakhtin. The emphasis is on two aspects of the "grotesque realism": the grotesque laughter, and the grotesque body. From this perspective, there is the suggestion of a modification in the employment of the comic grotesque, i.e., in Carter the use of the grotesque reflects the ambiguity inherent of contemporaneity, which does not include the assurance of transformation present in the Bakhtinian interpretation of the grotesque. The conclusion calls attention to the fact that the two types of grotesque identified by Kayser and Bakhtin suffer modifications, in Carter, which demonstrate the changes brought out by the contemporary narrative employment of the grotesque.

Nº de páginas: 82

RESUMO

Esta dissertação tem como objetivo investigar o emprego do grotesco, segundo as teorias de Wolfgang Kayser e Mikhail Bakhtin, em dois romances de Angela Carter: *Love* (1971) e *Wise Children* (1991). O primeiro capítulo caracteriza o "grotesco trágico", de acordo com a definição proposta por Wolfgang Kayser, bem como o "grotesco cômico", a partir do estudo de Mikhail Bakhtin. A seguir, analisa-se *Love,* tendo como foco de análise a trágica perspectiva de vida da protagonista do romance, a partir da descrição detalhada de seu comportamento. Neste capítulo, fica claro que o tipo de grotesco utilizado prioriza o grotesco romântico, ou trágico, assim descrito por Kayser, através da paródia do tema do amor romântico/trágico que está comprometido com o texto autênticamente "Romântico" de Edgar A. Poe. No terceiro capítulo apresenta-se a análise de *Wise Children* identificando-se o tom cômico empregado pelo narrador com o "grotesco cômico", assim descrito por Bakthin, focalizando-se basicamente em dois aspectos: o riso, e a velhice. A partir daí, sugere-se que houve uma modificação no emprego do grotesco cômico, ou seja, em Carter o uso do grotesco cômico reflete a ambigüidade inerente ao seu tempo, e não mais a certeza de transformação presente na interpreteção Bakhtiniana do grotesco. Na conclusão, chama-se atenção para o fato de que uso dos dois tipos de grotesco identificados por Kayser e Bakhtin sofrem modificações, em Carter, que servem para demonstrar as mudanças sofridas pelo emprego contemporâneo do grotesco na narrativa.

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INTRODUCTION

I. DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Angela Carter published nine novels throughout her literary career. Her first novel, *Shadow Dance* , was published in 1966. Carter won the John Llwellyn Rhys Award with her second novel, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), and the Somerset Maugham Award for her third novel, *Several Perceptions* (1968). *Heroes and Villains* (1969) was published before *Love* (1971). As Lorna Sage points out in her critical study, most of Carter's work published in the sixties may be grouped around "images of decay and boredom and disillusion"(22).

Angela Carter's work began to receive public acknowledgement with the publication of *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), a re-reading of traditional fairy-tale motifs. Her revisionary writing, published during the seventies and eigthies, reveals her concern with the constructions of social life.

Carter also produced a lot of non-fictional material. She worked as a correspondent for *New Society* during the period in which she lived in Japan from 1969 to 1972 (Sage, 24). In *The Sadeian Woman: An exercise in Cultural History* (1979), she dicusses the *Marquis de Sade*'s view of sexuality, arguing that female sexuality is not only a question of gender but of relations of power. In *Notes from the front line* (1983), Carter discusses her political position as a feminist-socialist woman writer. Her fictional and non-fictional work as a whole leaves no doubts about her awareness of the discussion of language brought about by structuralist and post-structuralist theories, which show that oral and written discourse help to produce and sustain

our view of the world; in this area she is much indebted to the works of Barthes and Foucault. Her feminist-oriented point of view becomes then a mixture of her own experience as a woman and her interpretation of the theories. In her own words:

> I can date to that time and to some of those debates and to that sense of heightened awareness of the society around me in the summer of 1968, my own questioning of the nature of my reality as a woman. (NFL, 70)

Carter's concern with the questioning of the "nature of reality" is obvious, especially in the novels published during the late seventies and mid-eigthies: *The Passion of New Eve* (1982) and *Nights at the Circus* (1985). These novels also reveal the influence of Jorge L. Borges on her work. She is fascinated by 'magical realism', with its overlapping of "the fantastical and the documentary" (Sage,33).

Although there is not much published critical work on Carter yet, research on her work has been a favorite for grant requests in England (forty in 1995); her work has also received considerable attention abroad. Some of the reasons of the interest in Carter's work are her contemporaneity, her departure from the mimetic quality of most novels by women in mid-century, and her use of deconstructive narrative strategies for political purposes, such as feminism and Gender theory.

Her last novel, *Wise Children*, was published in 1991, a few months before the writer's death in February 1992. In the period that separates the publication of *Love* (1971) and *Wise Children* (1991), Carter published both fictional and non-fictional works which witnessed narrative changes, evident in the later work. Her work becomes increasingly complex and unorthodox as she adopts many of the literary traditions and reworks them into new and unusual forms. Among such re-readings of the tradition are the picaresque

and the gothic genres, the fairy tale and popular narrative plots, the uncanny and the grotesque, together with an extensive use of intertextuality. My purpose in this dissertation is to investigate the treatment of the grotesque in Carter's fifth and ninth novels (*Love* and *Wise Children* respectively).

The theme of the grotesque has already been investigated in some of Carter's short-stories (Lokke, 1988). *Love* and *Wise Children* are taken here as potentially opposed representations of this theme. But, before examining these types of grotesque, I would like to define the concept of the "grotesque" as it is embodied in the present work.

I. 1. The Grotesque: a literary category

Despite the ongoing discussion of the grotesque as an artistic genre, contemporary critics like Geoffrey Harpham, Philipp Thomson and Elisheva Rosen[1] agree that the first attempt to define it in terms of its characteristics as an aesthetic category was made by Wolfgang Kayser in 1957, when he published *Das Grotesque: seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung.* (*The grotesque in Art and Literature* trans. by Ulrich Weisttein, IUP. 1963). In his study, Kayser reviews

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[1]Rosen comments on Kayser's book: 'Un livre donc qui s'impose par la richesse de sa documentation et la riguer de son argumentation, comme incontournable point de départ de toutes les recherches contemporaines sur le sujet'(p.111); Thomson writes that "...it was not until the appearence in 1957 of the book by the late German critic Wolfgang Kayser *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, that the grotesque became the object of considerable aesthetic analysis and critical evaluation" (p.11); and Harpham refers to Kayser's study as having "inaugurated the current line of grotesque studies"(p.12).

the historical origins of the grotesque as a word and as a style in ornamental art, as well as the word's further accumulated meaning. Kayser focuses his analysis mainly on the German paintings and literature from the 18th century onwards.

Another meaningful attempt at defining the grotesque as a literary category is Mikhail Bakhtin's study of the work of Rabelais, published in 1965[2], as *Rabelais and His world* (trans. Héléne Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1968). Bakthin analyses *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua,* comparing the grotesque images depicted in the texts with historical accounts of the popular comic culture of the Middle Ages.

Kayser's and Bakhthin's studies have one point in common. For both theorists, the grotesque is always strucured as opposed to a "natural" , socially legitimated image or norm. For Kayser, the deviant structure of the grotesque is charged with terrifying fear which provokes paralysis. On the other hand, for Bakthin, the unnofficial structure of the grotesque, which puts the high, the serious, and the official on the same level with the low, the comic and the popular, enables a new type of social organization which regenerates and modifies the established order.

Nevertheless, both propositions are examples of a tradition which upholds the belief in a unified and unique system of thought to explain the world. Kayser's work is informed by a Christian oriented point of view, whereas Bakhtin's is informed by a Marxist or socialist one. Therefore, their studies arrive at different conclusions

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[2] Bakthin's work on Rabelais was only published in 1965 , almost thirty years after its production because he was politically persecuted. See Yara Frateschi's introduction to the Portuguese translation of Rabelais' *Gargantua*.

about the function of the grotesque and, more importantly, these conclusions are proposed as the only valid ones.

I would like to emphasize that, because we cannot study Carter out of the cultural context in which she lived and wrote, my dissertation also takes into consideration more recent discussions about the subject, as well as some theoretical assumptions about postmodernism.

I. 2. The "Postmodern" manifestation of the grotesque in the work of Angela Carter

The discussion of the postmodern as the artistic manifestation of the contemporary historical moment involves a great number of critical discourses. Similarly to what happens to the lack of definition of the grotesque as an aesthetic category, contemporary thought rejects any attempt at categorizing postmodernism. This caution involving a definitive conceptualization of the postmodern is in itself one of the basic characteristics which permeates contemporary thinking. There is a certain self-conscious attitude towards any kind of generalizing theory, and contemporary theorists are aware that the question involving postmodernity can not be answered from one single point of view. Contemporary fiction is somehow affected by such theoretical concerns.

To many contemporary critics, the debate about a post-modern age starts with a discussion of the characteristics of the artistic manifestations produced during the so called 'modern' period. Artistic works of that period, it is believed, are informed by a way of thinking that definitely cannot be accepted today.

The inclusion of Carter's work into the literary production of the post-modern era is unavoidable. Current

criticism perceives different characteristics in contemporary literary works, such as Angela Carter's, when these works are compared to previous ones, as for example the use of intertexuality, a formal characteristic of the works of the current "post-modern" era.

For postmodern theorists, it has become almost impossible to think about the present without a redefinition of the traditional, all-encompassing systems of thought. Maffesoli ascertains 'la fin des grands récits de réference'. In his view, these systems (Marxism, Functionalism, Freud) could help us to understand social life. The end of these 'master-narratives', already suggested by François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) provoked the appearance of the incertitudes which marks contemporaneity.

Whether termed self-conscious or self-reflexive, contemporary fiction employs narrative techniques which reveal the epistemological basis of postmodernity, which is irrefutably based in the acknowledgemnt of the end of the 'master-narratives', i.e., discourses which helped us to explain the world. In Linda Hutcheon's words,

> postmodernism is a phenomenon whose mode is resolutely contradictory as well as unavoidably political... In general terms it takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement.(1)

Hutcheon's view of postmodernity exemplifies the difficulties involving the characterization of postmodernism. Frederic Jameson's theories of the postmodern agree with Linda Hutcheon's; however they point to current preoccupations with the epistemological question of posmodernism. He argues that,

> if we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of the present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a

> coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectiveness is undecidable.(6)

Thus, my analysis proposes a reading of the two novels of Angela Carter based on somewhat dated theories about the grotesque, vis-à-vis the study of their narrative characteristics as derived from the postmodern milieu.

CHAPTER I

VERSIONS OF THE GROTESQUE

I. 1. Kayser and the "Romantic" Grotesque

Kayser starts his study with the identification of the origins of the word 'grotesque' and its further accumulated meaning both as a noun and as an adjective. According to the author, the word has its origins in the Italian word *grotta*, which means cave (19). Kayser suggests that from the moment the underground caves of Nero's palace were excavated in Rome, around the end of the fifteenth century, the word grotesque began to be used to designate the type of ornamental art that decorated the frescoes of the palace. Grotesque, adopted to name a style in decorative art, was soon used as a synonym for the dream of the painters, or *"sogni dei pittori"*. According to Kayser,

> By the word grottesco the Renaissance, which used it to designate a specific ornamental style suggested by antiquity, understood not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one- a world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separated from those of plants, animals, and human beings, and where the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid.(21)

In his description of the primitive grotesque images, Kayser emphasizes the 'ominous and sinister' elements in them, sugggesting that they defy some "laws". Hence, in his view, this 'defying of laws' implies the pre-existence of an aesthetic system which excludes the grotesque 'unrealistic'

forms of representation.[3] Harpham points out that:"... in terms of the center, [the grotesque] had no subject, yielded no meaning, and represented things that were not, nor could be, nor had ever been"(32). Kayser's conception about the grotesque includes the 'sinister' and the 'unfathomable' as basic characteristics of the term.

The development of his analyses reveals that he is oriented towards the tragic meaning of the grotesque. This is Kayser's verification of the meaning attributed to the word in the beginning of the 18th century:

> The first instance of such usage in the German language refers to the monstrous fusion of human and nonhuman elements as the most typical feature of the grotesque style. The same monstrous quality, constituted by the fusion of different realms as well as by a definite lack of proportion and organization, is also attested in early French usage of the word.(23)

This statement reveals that Kayser insists on the inclusion of the "monstrous" element in his description of the grotesque. The Kayserean perspective relies basically on the reaction caused by the "monstrous" qualities of the grotesque image. The essence of Kayser's conception of grotesque is defined by the "the monstrous fusion of human and nonhuman elements"(24) which, depicted in the grotesque image, generates a terrifying response. When Kayser explains Montaigne's definition of the grotesque [4], he pressupposes that lack of organization and deformation are the basic aspects of the grotesque image. For Kayser, Montaigne "followed an impulse inherent in the word itself"(24). In

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[3]In his research about the grotesque G. Harpham suggests that it was originally a kind of marginal art which defied the 'art of the center' by not using its mimetic forms of representation.

[4]Montaigne calls his essays as 'grotesque and monstruous bodies pieced together, without distinct form, in which order and proportion are left to chance' (Kayser:24).

his remarks about Montaigne's work, Kayser also suggests that he was the introducer of the grotesque in literature (24). According to him, the grotesque, as an artistic mode, inspires a type of representation of the world based on the terror inspired by the undecipherable and the unfathomable.

The Kayserean definition of the grotesque depends on what he calls the "sinister overtones", the terrifying feelings provoked by the "deformed" grotesque image. According to him, "the grotesque is the estranged world"(188). Kayser suggests that the understanding of the grotesque demands a transformation of *our world*. As the Kayserean grotesque is dominated by fear, his conception of it permeates his idea about life. He, thus, dismisses any interpretation of the grotesque which is not based on fear.

Kayser finally sees the grotesque as: " AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD"(188). For Kayser, the overcoming of the experience of the grotesque is obtained through a simple dismissal of what it may or may not represent. The "mystery of Life" suggested by the grotesque "... opens the view into a chaos that is both horrible and ridiculous"(53). The fear provoked by the grotesque, moreover, inhibits any type of action and leads to paralysis. In Kayser's words, "the grotesque totally destroys the order and deprives us of our foothold"(184).

Kayser discusses one specific meaning attributed to the French usage of the grotesque in the seventeenth century. He observes that the range of meaning suggested by this French usage, which "merely elicits a carefree smile, seems to have shorn the word of its essential qualities"(28).

Despite his rejection of the meaning attributed to the French usage of the word in the seventeenth century, it does contribute to the development of the genre. According to Richelet's Dictionnaire Français of 1680, the "grotesque" was defined as an adjective which meant "something

pleasantly ridiculous" (27). This meaning was partially inspired by the characters which performed the *Commédie dell'Art*. Kayser cannot conceive of an interpretation of the grotesque which is based on its comic aspect. Nevertheless, he admits that "this new definition of the grotesque had a considerable impact on the further development of the concept" (28).

He also sugggests that it was adopted by artists from that time forward. Kayser states that Rabelais was the first to use the grotesque in what he calls "the loss of substance" sense of the word. As Kayser excludes versions of the grotesque which do not reinforce its tragic meaning, he criticizes many of the attempts at theorizing about the grotesque which appeared during the pre-romantic and romantic eras. One of the examples of Kayser's criticism of the romantic view about the grotesque can be found in his discussion of the German theoretician F.Schlegel:

> One aspect is definetely lacking: the abismal quality, the insecurity, the terror inspired by the desintegration of the world. The speaker regards the "confusion of fantasy" as a pleasant confusion. (73)

Schlegel interprets the grotesque from a pre-romantic conception which does not exclude its comic aspect. But the romantic conception of the grotesque, in general, does not consider only the comic aspect of it. In fact, according to Bakhtin, the romantic conception of the grotesque enlarged its meaning, as it emphasized the "infinite inner depth of the individual self" (38). This romantic *discovery* could not be accepted by Kayser because it implied a possibility of action in the face of the "estranged world", and not only mere paralysis and revulsion which is provided by the tragic interpretation of the grotesque.

In his conclusion, Kayser also includes madness as "one of the basic experiences of the grotesque which life forces

upon us"(184). He considers the mad, or the insane person, to be taken over by "an impersonal force, an alien and inhuman spirit" (184) which, for him, embodies the essential elements that constitute the grotesque: "the ominous overtones". He concludes: "Madness is the climactic phase of estrangement from the world"(74).

In conclusion, as Kayser's study is limited to the repulsive impression provoked by the "sinister" elements which form the grotesque image, it leaves many gaps which become visible whenever the grotesque is interpreted from a more encompassing perspective, i.e., one that takes into consideration the ambivalent aspect of the grotesque, such as for example the Romantic and the Bakhtinian perspectives. Seeing both its tragic and its comic features, these views do not dismiss the ambivalent nature of the grotesque. They agree that this artistic genre upholds contradictory reponses, and not only fear, as it is stressed by the Kayserean interpretation of the grotesque.

I.2. Bakhtin and the "Comic" Grotesque

Bakthin starts his study by explaining why he chose Rabelais as one of the sources for the development of his theory about the grotesque. According to Bakhtin, Rabelais' system of images as well as his artistic conception is based on the popular culture of the Middle Ages, which represented an alternative to the "official" culture of the Renaissance. For Bakthin, the idea of "official " culture involves a pre-determined type of ideology which restricts the communal, utopic dream of equality to all. For him, this dream is shared by all the peoples over the centuries.

Bakhtin affirms that the existence of a unified system of comic images in medieval culture provided a temporary feeling of well being among people. This system survived only through the literature of the Renaissance. More specifically, it survived in Rabelais' work, as it contains a "non-official-character" that has been resisting canonization. Therefore, the author insists, it "cannot be approached along the wide beaten roads followed by Europe´s literary creation during the four hundred years separating him from us"(3).

Bakthin also suggests that the discussion around the inclusion of the grotesque within an aesthetic category can not be solved "out of the scope of analysis of the popular culture of the Middle Ages and of the literature of the Renaissance" (45). He comments that the origins of grotesque images are to be found in the "ancient art of all people" (27).

For Bakthin, the scope and the importance of comic culture for medieval people were considerable. There was no celebration without the intervention of comic elements such as, when, for example, queens and kings were elected "to laugh" during the festivities (4). These elements, as

Bakthin points out, were instrumental in defining the "official" as opposed to the "non-official" world:

> All these forms of protocol and ritual based on laughter and consecrated by tradition existed in all the countries of medieval Europe; they were sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials. They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year. If we fail to take into consideration this two-world condition, neither medieval cultural consciousness nor the culture of the Renanaissance can be understood. To ignore or to underestimate the laughing people of the Middle Ages also distorts the picture of European culture´s historic development.(5-6)

It is Bakthin's contention that the comic way, in which medieval rites and festivities were celebrated, made it possible for the people to equate their lives (as it offered a possibility out of the *status quo*) with the "official", serious ideology prescribed by their feudal form of government. From this perspective, laughter becomes an indispensable aspect of the medieval view of life. Carnival is one of the most prominent rites which characterizes the medieval system of viewing the world. According to Bakhtin, medieval carnival made possible "a second life" for the people:

> In the framework of class and feudal political structure this specific character could be realized without distortion only in the carnival and in similar market place festivals. They were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance .(9)

As Bakhtin defines the function of medieval carnival, he stresses its function as a form of resistance to the "official" types of festivity:

> On the other hand, the official feasts of the Middle Ages, whether ecclesiastic, feudal, or sponsored by the state, did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life. On the contrary, they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it. The link with time became formal; changes and moments of crisis were relegated to the past. Actually, the official feast looked back at the past and used the past to consecrate the present. Unlike the earlier and purer feast, the official feasts asserted all that was stable, unchanching, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political and moral values, norms and prohibitions.(8)

The medieval conception of laughter, as it is defined by Bakthin, defies the *status quo* by restoring a place for laughter within the feudal governmental system. Excluded from the official ceremonies, laughter had to be tolerated during carnival.

In his analyses of the formal aspects of the popular language of carnival, Bakthin also shows that the notion of laughter, which is the organizing principle of the whole system of comic images that constitute the popular culture of the Middle Ages, is a very peculiar one, as it seems to defy established categorization:

> Let us say a few initial words about the complex nature of carnival laughter. It is, first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people . Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival´s participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, buries and revives.(11-12)

The central point in the Bakhtinian interpretation of medieval laughter is its ambivalence as mockery and self mockery. The mocker is included in the process of mocking as a part of it. From this perspective, the Bakthinian reading of medieval laughter points to its importance as having not only the capacity to change the order of things, but also to offer a way out of this order.

Bakthin explains that from the Renaissance on, the popular, unauthorized version of medieval laughter almost perished, since it began to be expressed only by literary texts. He describes the images depicted in Rabelais' work, such as: "... images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life" (18) to be 'exaggerated and hypertrophied'. These images form the essence of the unified system of images of the popular comic culture which Bakthin denominates as Grotesque realism. In his view:

> In grotesque realism, therefore, the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people. As such it is oppposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthy , or independence of the earth and the body.(19)

Along with laughter, Bakhtin points to another important element in the display of medieval culture: The conception of the human body. From this view, the human body is perceived as a healing between the community and life as a whole. Bakhtin praises all the natural aspects related to the human body, which signify life or natural functions. Bakhtin clarifies his definition of "grotesque realism" when he explains the function of the human body, one of the constitutive elements within the system of images of medieval culture:

> The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development, or more correctly speaking, two links shown at the point where they enter into each other. (26)

Bakthin sees the grotesque body as having a function which is similar to the function of laughter: it defies the official system of ideas and offers another possibility based on a "new order".

Bakthin notices that the structure of the human body within the grotesque system of images is based on a type of hierarchy which is opposed to any other official or authorized artistic image, i.e. any other form of artistic representation of the human body found out of the unified system of the culture of the Middle Ages. The grotesque depiction of the human body, for Bakthin, is characterized as:

> the unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire bodily world in all its elements. It is an incarnation of this world at the absolute lower stratum, as the swallowing up and generating principle, as the bodily grave and bosom, as a field which has been sown and in which new shoots are preparing to sprout. (26-27)

For Bakthin, Rabelais' depiction of the grotesque body suggests a reversal of values. By the depiction of aged human beings and of natural physical acts, Rabelais attempts to emphasize the ambivalent transformations of

life. Therefore, the natural activities of human life can not be depicted in a stable and finished way. In this conception, human life belongs to a whole system of life which is integrated with natural life. But, from the Renaissance onwards, as Bakhtin explains, the popular "duality" of viewing the world became more and more repressed, as the unilateral, dominant ideology decided to impose its serious tone on the culture, abolishing the playful and joyful character of the popular festivity from public ceremonies. Bakhtin's work attempts to recover the traditional view of the depiction of the human body, as opposed to the "official one". In addition, he offers a new possibility of hierarchical order that comes out of the popular culture itself. In fact, he inverts the order, offering a new possibility of organization. By the definition of the characteristics of what he calls "grotesque realism", Bakhtin throws new light on the discussion, already proposed by Kayser, about the term grotesque, in the history of aesthetic discourse. In his view,

> Grotesque imagery (that is, the method of construction of its images) is an extremely ancient type; we find it in the mythology and in the archaic art of all peoples, among them, of course, the Greeks and Romans of the preclassic period. During the classic period the grotesque did not die but was expelled from the sphere of official art to live and develop in certain "low" nonclassic areas: plastic comic art, mostly on a small, scale... Finally, in the wider range of humorous literature, related in one form or the other to festivals of carnival type, we have the "satyric" drama, the ancient Attic comedy, the mimes, and others. During the period of late antiquity grotesque imagery attained its flowering and renewal; it embraced nearly all areas of art and literature. Under the influence of the art of eastern peoples a new kind of grotesque was formed, but aesthetic and artistic thought developed along the lines of classic tradition; therefore, grotesque imagery was

> not given a consistent definition nor was its meaning recognized in theory. (30-31)

Bakhtin insists that it is very important to distinguish between the different ways of interpreting life which began to be used during the Renaissance. For Bakhtin, the Romantic definition of grotesque deviated from its original character. The Romantic interpretation of the Grotesque added a new character to the genre. It is Bakhtin's contention that, during the pre-Romantic and the Romantic era, the grotesque reappeared embodied with a new meaning: " It became, as it were, an individual carnival, marked by a vivid sense of isolation. The carnival spirit was transposed into a subjective, idealistic philosophy" (37). Nevertheless, Bakthin praises this romantic "discovery" as a very positive one:

> This *interior infinite* of the individual was unknown to the medieval and the Renaissance grotesque; the discovery made by the Romanticists was made possible by their use of the grotesque method and of its power to liberate from dogmatism, completeness, and limitation. The *interior infinite* could not have been found in the closed and finished world, with its distinct fixed boundaries dividing all phenomena and values. (44)

According to Bakhtin, in the romantic grotesque the world transforms itself into an "exterior world", alienated and hostile to human understanding. It becomes terrible. Therefore, the only way towards a mediation between the external world is through subjective, individual understanding. Bakhtin affirms that the images of this type of grotesque:"... usually express fear of the world and seek to inspire their reader with this fear"(39). The madness motif is also characteristic of the romantic grotesque. In Bakhtin's words:

> ... the theme of madness is inherent to all grotesque forms, because madness makes men look at the world with different eyes, not dimmed by "normal", that is by

> commonplace ideas and judgments... In folk grotesque, madness is a gay parody of official reason, of the narrow seriousness of official "truth".It is a "festive" madness. In Romantic grotesque, on the other hand, madness acquires a somber, tragic aspect of individual isolation. (39)

Bakthin affirms that the principle of laughter, characteristic of the regenerative grotesque, suffered a basic change in essence. In the Romantic grotesque laughter almost disappears, it "was cut down to cold humor, irony, sarcasm. It ceases to be a joyful and triumphant hilarity. Its positive and regenerating power was reduced to a minimum" (38). This change in the tone of laughter provokes other distinctions between the original character of laughter in the popular grotesque and the function of "atenuated humor" in the most recent, romantic grotesque.

The analyses proposed by Bakhtin make a historical revision of the theories about the Grotesque. Bakhtin reviews almost the same theoretical material which had previously been analyzed by Kayser. However, from his analysis, it becomes clear that Kayser's analysis of the grotesque was influenced by the studies and literary works produced by the Romantics. In fact, Bakthin dedicates some pages of his study to demonstrate Kayser's "romantic" orientation. He obviously does not agree with Kayser's conclusions. As he puts it, Kayser: "... bases his deductions and generalizations on the analysis of romantic and modernist forms, and it is the latter which, as we have said, determines his concepts" (47). Bakthin defines the type of grotesque described in Kayser's work as being

applicable "only to certain manifestations of modernist form of the grotesque; it is no longer completely adequate for the Romantic period and entirely inapplicable to the preceding stage of development" (40). Bakthin rejects Kayser's definition of fear as the fundamental characteristic of the grotesque world. For him, Kayser's definition "does not entirely apply to the romantic grotesque and even less to the antecedent forms of it" (42). The fear described by Kayser is in fact the opposite of the Bakthinian description of the grotesque world dominated by laughter. The basic difference between the two conceptions arises from the contrast between Fear and Laughter. On the one hand there is Fear, which is the central element of Kayser's conception and generates his theory of the grotesque. Fear as derived from the Kayserean interpretation of the grotesque terrifies and creates silence, honouring a system of values which reduces the meaning of life into an "official" version. On the other hand, Laughter generated the Bakhtinian democratic idea of the grotesque, in that it liberates and creates a "new order", favoring a comic/cosmic dimension of life as more satisfactory than the classical reduction of the meaning of life in official versions. In a sense, one can say that the Bakthinian interpretation of the grotesque is much more positive than the Kayserean one, as it offers a new possibility of resistance to the *status quo*.

The Kayserean one does not offer a way out of the *status quo*. It reinforces what is already established: Fear, which is the basis of the Kayserean conception, does not motivate any kind of movement or progression. It paralyses.

I believe that the characteristics of the grotesque, as proposed by the above discussion of the fearful and unresponsive character of the grotesque image provided by the Kayserean point of view, in contrast with the positive and regenerative response stressed Bakhtin, can be used as a means to read the two novels of Angela Carter which are the focus of this analysis. However, as her work is inserted within a contemporary milieu, her depiction of grotesque images becomes contaminated by contemporary narrative features which transform the tragic and the comic readings of the grotesque suggested by Kayser and Bakhtin.

CHAPTER II

LOVE: A GROTESQUE RE-READING OF THE TRAGIC-ROMANTIC LOVE MOTIF

Angela Carter's fifth novel, *Love*, was written in 1969, but it was published only in 1971. Lorna Sage argues that *Love* forms along with *Shadow Dance* (1966) and *Several Perceptions* (1968) Carter's Bristol trilogy. In her view, these novels produced during the 60s are

> in a sense realist texts -- except that you have to remember that reality has been infiltrated by fiction, so that these novels that represent it have the extra density of fiction squared. (22)

In *Love,* what Sage calls 'the extra density of fiction squared' becomes apparent especially through Carter's use of canonized romantic characters. Annabel and Lee form the romantic couple of *Love*. The theme of tragic romatic love is thus suggested by the interxtextuality with, among others, Edgar A. Poe's tragic-romantic poem *Annabel Lee* (1827).

The idea of reviewing the theme of tragic romantic love is suggested by the author herself. In the 1987 editon of *Love,* Angela Carter added an afterword in which she declares that she wrote the novel inspired by a 19th century work,

Adolphe[1]. Written in 1816, *Adolphe* is the story of a love relationship between a man, Adolphe, and a married woman, Ellenore, who dies after she has been despised by her lover. Despite the author's macerations, the similarities between the two plots do indeed indicate the possibility of reading *Love* as a "kind of modern day, demotic version of *Adolphe*" (113) set in the historical context of the late sixties, with its redefinition of cultural values, such as male and female relationships, love, sex, etc. The grotesque manifests itself through the tragic-oriented point of view of the novel's narrative-voice, which permeates the female protagonist's life trajectory.

Nevertheless, the serious, tragic tone of the narrative is mixed with the autobiographical, overtly self-conscious tone of the afterword. It implies the author's use of a peculiar feature of contemporary fiction: the mixture of styles. In the afterword, the author makes comments on what has happened to the characters after Annabel's death. The literary text is thus self-consciously presented as a fictional work, rather than being presented as an imitation of real life.

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[1] ... I first got the idea for *Love* from Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe,* I was seized with the desire to write a kind of modern day, demotic version of *Adolphe,* although I doubt anybody could spot the resemblance after I macerated the whole thing in triple-destilled essence of English provincial life. (113)

Annabel's introspective way of behaving, as well as her tragic death, makes one think of her as a typical romantic character who is generally dominated by a feeling of excessive, distorted, and unrestrained love. The predominant feeling in her life, however, is unrestrained fear rather than exaggerated love. In fact, there is in the novel the predominance of the romantic mood: the novel's narrative voice seems to have incorporated the tragic romantic tone of an original Romantic heroine's tragic life, which echoes Poe's female protagonist in *Annabel Lee*. But the similarities between Annabel's tragic life and that of a traditional romantic character suggest that the theme of romantic love is being reexamined from the perspective of the 20th century. The effect of the grotesque is then achieved through this transposition in time, as the romantic relationship between Lee and Annabel appears to be illegimately appropriated by the 20th century setting. In addition, this reexamination also calls attention to the notion of totality inherent to the romantic plot, with a beginning, a middle and an end. In this context, the acknowledgement of a fragmented world is what produces the effect of the grotesque.

This overt inter-relationship between originally romantic texts and Carter's novel reinforces the possibility of reading *Love* as a re-examination of the theme of romantic

love transposed to a 20th century milieu which has no more "Master-narratives" to help to explain it.

In Poe's poem there is no anachronical appropriation of a theme, as in Carter´s work. The romantic tone of Poe's text is characteristic of his cultural background. In *Annabel Lee*, the speaker is deeply disturbed by the premature death of his lover. Thomas O. Mabbot, for example, sees *Annabel Lee* as "a poem of young love, unconquered and unconquerable" (468). *Love* can thus be read as a parody of Poe's tragic-romantic theme.

The physical similarities between Carter´s female protagonist, in *Love*, and the protagonist in Poe's poem, in the canonized version of *Annabel Lee*(1849), are striking. In the poem, Annabel is a a very young "*maiden*". Carter's Annabel is also very young, "she was eighteen" (31). Like Poe's idealized female protagonist, Carter's Annabel is also a virgin, as the narrator affirms: "As he [Lee] guessed, she was a virgin" (15). But, in Carter, the tone is one of mockery rather than of seriousness; the effect produced by the novel is one of grotesque juxtaposition.

Annabel's final suicide attempt reveals that her lack of opportunities originated from her tragic view of reality. Thus, her radical act can be compared to the acts of a typical romantic character who suffers from unrequited love. The grotesque here is achieved through a parody of the

romantic heroine's overdramatized death as a result of disappointment in love.

The original version of romantic love attributes to the person who suffers from unrequited love radical, exaggerated attitudes. A typical example of an authentic 18th century romantic attitude is the lover's suicide, such as in Goethe's *Werther* (1774). Roland Barthes, in *Fragmentos de um discurso amoroso* (1977), analyzes the discourse of the protagonist of the novel, Werther, as well as his actions, from the perspective of this original romantic character's extreme attitudes towards love. Werther kills himself due to unrequited love. The death of the *romantic heroine* in *Love* is caused by her inaptitude to understand what she thought love meant; as her unreasonable view of reality suggested, she would be able to understand it by having "normal" sex with her husband and her brother-in-law. In addition, her suicide also reveals her decision of not coping with the image that her husband has made of her.

In Poe's poem, the narrative voice is shocked with the unexpected death of his lover. He cannot find a rational, logical explanation to his lover's premature death, as can be perceived in the fourth stanza of the poem:

> The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,
> Went envying her and me:-
> Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,
> In this kingdom by the sea)
> That the wind came out of the cloud, chilling

And killing my Annabel Lee.

Although the speaker in Poe's poem is aware of the fact that there are no plausible explanations for premature deaths (as all men know, in this kingdom by the sea), he cannot forget his love. As he gives himself over to his memories, his reason starts to fade. His suffering becomes so intense that it can only be relieved by the romantic belief in eternal love after the physical death of the lover:

> But our love it was stronger by far than the love
> Of those who were older than we-
> Of many far wiser than we-
> And neither the angels in Heaven above
> Nor the demons down under the sea
> Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
> Of the beautiful Annabel Lee:-
> For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams
> Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
> And the stars never rise but I see the bright eyes
> Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
> And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
> Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride
> In her sepulchre there by the sea-
> In her tomb by the side of the sea. (1849)

Poe's *Annabel Lee* describes the internal conflict of a romantic speaker desperately trying to suppress the loss provoked by the death of his lover. Although he is haunted by memories almost all the time, he seems to enjoy this, as he cannot efface them. His memories are pleasurable and horrible at the same time: they reveal the contradictory feelings aroused by the pleasure of remembering and the horror of acknowledging the loss of his lover. According to

Maurice Bowra , Poe's work has a peculiar romantic characteristic:

> In his devotion to a supernatural world, he carried the Romantic desire for a "Beyond" to a new limit. No other Romantic was so thorough as he in the rejection of the phenomenal world, or so literal about the goal of his desires. For him the other world exists only after death, and his poetry is largely directed to it. (188)

Bowra's insight offers one possible interpretation for the romantic tone of *Annabel Lee*: the impossibility of actualization of the emotional relationship described by the speaker of the poem, caused by the unexpected death of the romantic heroine. This interpretation suggests the notion of totality inherent to the romantic plot. Carter's contemporary *Romantic heroine* Annabel's willingness to commit suicide criticizes this notion, subverting such a genuine romantic attitude. Nevertheless, her death signals the romantic "closure" for the emotional relationship between the protagonists of the novel.

The tragic-romantic tone of *Love* is highligthted by the setting which surrounds Annabel. She is fond of originally Romantic settings, as for example the "eigthteenth century planned" park in which she is described in the opening of the novel:

> She preferred the Gothic north, where an ivy-covered tower with loaded ogive windows skulked among the trees. Both these pretty whimsies were kept securely locked for fear of the despoliation of vandals but their presence still performed its original role, transforming the park

> into a premeditated theatre where the romantic imagination could act out any performance it chose amongst settings of classic harmony or crabbed quaintness. (2)

As Annabel's world view is based on outdated romantic settings, she is unable to deal with *real life.* Her fondness for the romantic atmosphere leads her to paint the walls of Lee's bedroom. Before Annabel went to live with him it was "a white, empty room" (15). Annabel's drawings have transformed it:

> The walls round him were painted a very dark green and from this background emerged all the dreary paraphernalia of romanticism, landscapes of forests, jungles and ruins inhabited by gorillas, trees with breasts, winged men with pig faces and women whose heads were skulls.(7)

It is acknowledged that one of the uses of gothic settings in original gothic novels is to evoke an atmosphere of fear (Brendam, 6). Annabel's fondness of Gothic settings emphasizes her introspective personality, as well as her characteristics of an anachronical romantic heroine. This image helps to create a gothic effect in the novel, that is analogous to the one in the work of Poe. Thus, the effect of the grotesque is achieved through another subverted use of an original romantic feature.

In his study of the grotesque, Kayser mentions Poe's work. For Kayser, Poe used the grotesque to "describe a concrete situation in which chaos prevails" (79). The gaps on the Kayserean Christian-oriented theory become

recognizable when one takes Poe's *Annabel's Lee* as an example. It is not *'chaos'* which prevails in *Annabel Lee,* but an unfulfilled desire for love which develops into an association of love with death.

Kayser's remarks reveal his restricting view of the nature of the grotesque, as he cannot accept the ambiguity which is an inherent quality of the grotesque image. The limitations in the Kayserean definition of the grotesque become apparent when he dismisses Victor Hugo's acknowledgment of the ambiguity of the grotesque image:

> Nothing that is inherently sublime or grotesque is fused in a 'beautiful' or 'dramatic' structure; rather the grotesque consists in the very contrast that ominously permits of no reconciliation. (59)

The Kayserean grotesque emphasizes the exclusion of the ambiguity suggested by the grotesque image, i.e. an image which is serious and comic at the same time. In *Love,* the ambiguity is not completely excluded, although Annabel's unreasonable actions which develops into her tragic death signals the prevalence of the tragic grotesque. In Kayser, the total exclusion of the ambiguity is peculiarly described in the Kayserean definition of madness. As Kayser discards the ambivalence of the grotesque image, he also discards the denouncement of the *status quo,* which is provided by the experience of madness. Annabel's madness reflects the emotional instability provoked by the redefiniton of male

and female relationships which characterizes the late sixties ambiance of the novel.

The explicit appropriation of anachronical characteristics such as the gothic-romantic setting, the love relationship between Annabel and Lee, and the over-empahsis on Annabel's romantic characteristics suggest that *Love* can be interpreted as a grotesque re-reading of the theme of tragic romantic love. The main characters can be read as grotesque versions of some traditional characters. The similarities between these versions result in the unveiling of an ambiguous notion of the grotesque, which is based on a subtle comic vein. The author's criticism of "English provincial life" becomes apparent when one compares Carter's characters to traditional ones. In addition, the prominence of the Kayserean grotesque in *Love* is challenged by the novel's typification of characters.

The overt association between the name of Carter's central female character in *Love* and the romantic heroine of Poe's poem in *Annabel Lee*, as I argued earlier, implies a representation of Carter's Annabel as a grotesque *'romantic heroine'*. A less explicit association can be also made between Carter's Annabel and Constant's tragic romantic character, Ellenore. Ellenore dies because she is not loved anymore. The radical attitude taken by Annabel reinforces the tragic grotesque and reveals Annabel's inappropriate

insertion into a 20th century which has lost it certainties and become fragmented.

Like a gothic-romantic heroine, Annabel's world view is limited by her senses, as her responses are based on what she feels. Moreover, the fact that she does not read also serves to emphasize that her highly, abnormally developed senses are an unusual exaggeration which helps to define her casting as an anachronical romantic heroine.

Annabel's introspection also contributes to her casting. Romantic heroines are usually shy and do not speak much; they are usually described by someone else. This is the case in *Adolphe.* Lorna Sage argues that in the narrative voice of *Love* Carter adopted "the supposedly male point of view" (25). The type of narration in *Love* is a parody of this genuine 19th century character's depiction. The stress on Annabel's introspection is so exaggerated that it becomes "comic", especially because it forms the essential quality of her madness. On the other hand, the serious tone of her introspection also reveals that the novel's narrative voice is not denying the serious tone of an original romantic heroine. From this perspective, Carter's employment of the grotesque is manifested by the ambivalence of the scene, which both affirms and provokes thought on culturally acknowledged motives. In addition, it suggests the

ambivalence inherent to the definition of the grotesque itself.

Annabel's madness is basically described in terms of a self-consuming introspection. The terrifying feelings derived from her unreasonable interpretation of the world are so intense that they prevent Annabel from even talking to anyone about them:

> She suffered from nightmares too terrible to reveal to him ... Sometimes, during the day, she stopped, startled, before some familiar object because it seemed to have just changed its form back to the one she remembered after a brief, private period impersonating something quite strange, for she had the capacity for changing the appearance of the real world which is the price paid by those who take too subjective a view of it....and she saw, in everyday things, a world of mythic, fearful shapes of whose existence she was convinced although she never spoke of it to anyone...(4)

Her thoughts seem to be an example of the Kayserean perspective of the grotesque, in which the terrifying element which provokes paralysis is always present. After meeting Lee, Annabel experiences a new sensuality. The description of Annabel after she started living with Lee reveals that her introspective way of behaving was not a consequence of her relationship with him. However, as Lee was her first sexual partner, she is stimulated by a different kind of sensory experience. As they hardly talked to each other, their physical relationships become their only way of communication. What Annabel sees and feels

becomes, then, more important and almost vital to her. Annabel uses her sexuality as the only way to make some sense of her relationship with Lee. The modification in the employment of an original romantic heroine's attitude, which replaces a highly developed sensibility by a kind of "sexual sensibility", exemplifies Carter's employment of the grotesque, as the change affirms the romantic tradition and subverts it simultaneously. Therefore, the ambivalence inherent to the grotesque is maintained.

The way Lee and Annabel meet each other contributes to creating an atmosphere of the traditional theme of romantic love. The first encounter between Annabel and her husband is narrated as if it were a mere accident of chance:

> Her room-mate at the hostel took her to a party on New Year's Eve. Annabel sat by herself in a corner and looked, first at some old magazines she found on the floor and, next, at the figures before her in the candlelight. She saw a series of interersting conjunctions of shapes and one or two disturbing faces and then she went to sleep. She woke up again because she was cold.
> It was so late that all the lights were out.. .Annabel was so cold she arbitrarily selected one boy and went to lie down beside him to keep herself from freezing.
> 'Whom have we here?' he said in the morning. (17)

This incident reveals that Annabel was not even able to see Lee's face when she first met him. After this incident, however, Lee brought her to his house. As in the traditional romantic love affairs, he fell in love with Annabel "at first sight". The anachronical reference to an original

romantic motif becomes so explicit then that the images become comic. Her inability to perceive life coherently is manifested by this concrete blindness: she is unable to have any coherent vision of either herself, or Lee. This initial lack of sight foreshadows the future lack of communication which is going to constitute Annabel and Lee´s relationship. Moreover, through this scene, the theme of 20th century forms of falling in love is comically questioned. On the other hand, as the serious tone of the narrator's voice is affirming the traditional tragic/romantic tone, Carter's version of the grotesque depicted in this scene differs from the Kayserean description, as it does not exclude the ambiguity inherent in the grotesque image.

The comic character of Carter´s narrative becomes more evident in scenes and images involving Lee and Buzz, rather than Annabel. At the time Lee and Annabel met, for example, he was having an affair with a married woman. The narrator´s ironic comments on the affair suggest the comic tone of the scene:

> Anyway, she was a great convenience for him; he took a certain pleasure in coupling with the wife of a man who taught him ethics; she left most of his evenings free; and he felt with a puritanical sense of satisfaction, inherited from his aunt, that he was learning something important about the middle class. (18)

Lee's point of view reveals the ambivalent character of his concerns. The comic effect produced by his revelation shows

both his incomprehension about the double life of the bourgeoisie, and Lee´s lack of acknowledgement of his own double-life.

The affair is brought to an end when the woman asks Lee about Annabel. His answer reveals that Annabel's introspection contributes to keeping his "freedom from responsibilities"(14), as all his emotional relationships before Annabel were based on coolness and detachment. It also foreshadows the choice he expects to make when his brother arrives:"'She's got funny eyes,' said Lee. 'I quite like her, if you want to know. She doesn't say much. And she'll probably have to go when my brother comes home, anyway'"(21).

Two months after they were living together, Lee's brother, Buzz, returns from North Africa and moves back in with Lee and Annabel. Contrary to Lee's expectations, Annabel does not go away when Buzz arrives, although on his arrival Buzz strongly reacts against her presence in their home, menacing Lee with a knife. Before her arrival, Lee and Buzz used to live by themselves. They are orphans since they were very young and when their aunt, the woman who brought them up, died, they moved together and started to live on their own. Buzz´s first agressive reaction against Annabel shows that he fears she may interfere with the one-to-one relationship between Lee and himself. Similarly to Annabel,

Buzz has an abnormal behavior, and this abnormality brings them together. Like Annabel , Buzz steals. Besides that, in Lee's own words: "'He's a freak'"(6). Buzz, Lee, and Annabel find themselves in a strange kind of emotional relationship.

In one of her last arguments with Lee, in which she tells him she has had sex with Buzz, she suggests that Lee and Buzz have had sexual intercourse :

> 'Once', said Annabel, 'I came home and found you and Buzz together on the floor, curled up in each other's arms like happy puppies.'
> We've been like cowboys and Indians to each other, we must have been fighting. But Lee was discomfited to find she could reflect and enlarge upon his thoughts. She paid no attention to him. She invented her own connections between the past and the present.
> 'He didn't even take his clothes off', said Annabel who had no sense of the ridiculous. (98)

Annabel's highly developed sensibility enables her to perceive that something is going on between Lee and Buzz. Lee's answer suggests that he and Buzz were probably having sexual intercourse when she saw them on the floor. Lee's changing names also hints to the homossexual relationship between the brothers. As the narrator explains it:

> Neither he nor his brother carried through life the name he had been born with. Lee had undergone three changes of forename, from Michael to Leon to his own choice of diminutive borrowed from some now forgotten Saturday morning cinema Western, Lee, and he arrogantly retained the last name into adult life for he was not ashamed of his romanticism. The aunt who cared for both of the boys changed his name to Leon, for Trotsky...
> Buzz, however, had renamed himself. At four years old, he selected this mysterious monosyllable from the credits of a television cartoon film and after that he

> insisted it was his own name and his only name; he refused to answer to any other and he soon acquired it permanently. (9)

As Lee keeps to himself the name of an American western hero, he transforms himself into Buzz's *hero.* Buzz considered himself to be the son of an American Indian. His physical appearence helped him to confirm his hypothesis. Buzz was tall with " straight, coarse, sooty hair, high cheekbones and sallow complexion" (12).

Lee, on the other hand, was physically very different from his brother. Buzz and Lee were brothers only on their maternal side. Lee´s father died when he was very young. His mother went mad after his death, and Buzz was born from one of her "short-term" relationships, as the novel´s narrator explains:

> Lee was an honest orphan; his father had been a railwayman killed in the course of duty but after her husband's death, the wife had gone on the game and Buzz was fathered by an American serviceman who left behind him nothing but a crude, silver-ring decorated with a skull and crossbones. Buzz created an authentic savage from his shadow. He became convinced the man had been an American Indian... (11-12)

Lee's name choice, therefore, implies that he accepts the idea of being his brother's *hero,* or rather his romantic hero, as Buzz used to call his brother Alyosha, the name of the original romantic character in Dostoyevisk's *The Brothers Karamozov* (1879-80). The appropriation of this traditional literary character suggests Carter's use of intertextuality, a typical feature of postmodern fiction. In

addition, it emphasizes the self-conscious aspect of postmodern narrative as the main characters in *Love* reveal their overt intention not to perform an imitation of a real person's life.

Lee's physical description achieves the effect of the grotesque as it both fails and succeeds at approximating his physical description to that of a typical romantic character. It succeeds because it implies an analogy between Lee's physical qualities and the physical description of a typical romantic hero. But, in spite of this, it fails as it includes contemporary details which give a comic tone to a basically serious description of a Billy Bud that has, nevertheless, a missing tooth:

> Lee looked like Billy Budd, or a worker hero of the Soviets, or a boy in a book by Jack London. He was of medium height and sturdy build; his eyes were blue and looked like the eyes of a seafarer partly because of the persistent slight reddening of the rims due to a chronic slum-child infection he did not shake off as he grew up. His hair was the colour of hay, his complexion fresh and only the lack of a front tooth took away the suspicion he might be simple-minded for it gave his gapped but dazzling smile a certain ambiguity.(12)

Like Annabel, Lee is also described in comparison to other acknowledged literary characters. As they are inserted into the atmosphere of the problematic sixties, they do not succeed in forming any kind of interactive relationship, except for the destructive "folie à deux" of the relationship between Annabel and Buzz. Carter's use of the

tragic grotesque is then manifested through this illegitimate appropriation of originally romantic characters, i.e., they lose their "identity" as they are inserted in an anachronical milieu.

The conflicts which characterize the novel´s protagonists' point of view are based on puritanical, bourgeois values. Lee and Buzz, as well as Annabel, were raised under such mores.

Some months after Buzz's arrival, Annabel was taken home by her parents. Her parents did not agree with their daughter's version of "free" love. Besides her distaste for the idea of returning to her parents' home, Annabel also demonstrates a typical, fearful reaction when she meets them at Lee's. She shivers when her parents find her sleeping with Lee, in his bed. Annabel does not want to be separated from Lee. She is, nonetheless, taken away from him.

Annabel's parents reveal a hypocritical attitude in preventing Lee and Buzz from seeing her. As they find out that Lee possesses a graduate degree, they try to impose their "official" version of love upon Lee and Annabel, which included a legal, religious wedding ceremony. However, they do not completely succeed in imposing it. The novel's narrator explains their agreement to their daughter's marriage:

> When her parents discovered that Lee was a graduate, in spite of appearances, they decided he might be a rough diamond and became a little more conciliatory but they refused to let him see her unless he married her ... (29)

Annabel's parents' willingness to conform to bourgeois mores contributes to the grotesque tone of the narrative, as the parody of the angry father's original reaction is not taken seriously. The irony becomes apparent in Annabel's mother's own words: 'Oh, my darling', ... 'It's not what I would have wished for you'(36).

Lee's principles are another element which helps to characterize him in terms of a parodic version of the romantic hero, who is generally marked by strong virtue. His "virtue" is depicted in terms of his ambivalent attitudes towards his acknowledgment of his aunt's puritanical values. On the one hand, he is violent and hits Annabel,.and on the other hand, he decides to take care of her, i.e., he does it only out of duty. Carter's employment of the grotesque is then represented through the affirmation and subversion of a traditional romantic attitude, as it maintains the ambivalence inherent in the grotesque.

Lee and Buzz were raised by an aunt because their mother went mad and died during their childhood. Their mother's madness represents a contrast to the rigid bourgeois mores of their aunt. Her unreasonable behavior is characterized by

her unrestrained sexuality. Her madness expressed itself in public performance:

> When Lee attained the age of reason and acquired his aunt's pride, he was glad his mother had gone mad in style. ... She progressed to unreason via no neurotic back alleyway nor let any slow night of silence and darkness descend upon her; she chose the high road, operatically stripping off her clothes and screaming to the morning:'I am the whore of Babylon'.(10)

Their mother's madness was not introspective as was Annabel's. Unlike Annabel, Lee's mother's madness was not detected during her childhood. There are no references to her behavior in childhood or in adulthood. Her madness was apparently provoked by her husband's death.

As Lee does not understand Annabel's introspection, he tries to find out a motive in her madness by drawing a parallel between his mother's madness and Annabel's. After Annabel's second suicide attempt, Lee remembers his mother's madness as foreshadowing Annabel's tragic end:

> intermittently he saw the face of his mother as it had looked after she had been dipped in the petrifying well of madness.(55)

Annabel's madness was provoked by more complex causes which had probably been affecting her ever since she was very young. Her view of love is closely related to her fear of life. According to her disturbed mind, Annabel based her view of love on "a set of pornographic photographs"(4) her brother-in-law gave her. Annabel identified herself with the 'young woman' in the picture:

> Annabel comforted and reassured by these indifferent arrangements of bizarre intersecting lines, became convinced they told a true story. For herself, all she wanted in life was a bland, white, motionless face like that of the photographic whore so she could live a quiet life behind it, because she was so often terrified when the pictures around her began to move, as she thought, of their own accord and she could not control them.(4)

Annabel's "notion of love" confirms her incapacity to understand it, as it is based on her usual unreasonable life perspective. Despite his rationality, Lee also fails in his attempts to understand love, and so does Buzz. Love is thus what lacks in their relationship.

The absence of love among the characters in the novel is challenged by the attitudes of Lee and Buzz's aunt, who decides to raise them after the acknowledgemet of their mother's madness. According to the narrator, Lee's aunt was a hard working person,

> a remarkable woman, a canteen cook and shop steward who worked her fingers to the bone to support the two boys and inculcated in them a sense of pride and a certain critical severity which, in adulthood, they both expressed sufficiently in their separate ways.(9)

Lee and Buzz´s family have *working-class origins*. The counterpart to Annabel's "Mom and Dad" is the hard-working aunt. The different social class and consequently opposing values represented by Lee's aunt contrast with the bourgeois values shared by Annabel's parents. In response to Annabel's parents' wish for a "white wedding and a church" Lee replies: "My aunt would turn in her grave" (29). Lee's

aunt's view of marriage has become his own. Lee and Annabel's love became *official* by their legal marriage and her parents yielded to Lee's demands. Lee would not have agreed with their conventions. He thought of himself as belonging to a different culture. He praised his *'working class origins'* (21).

Lee's *virtue* is described in terms of the contrast between the bourgeois code, represented by Annabel's parents, and his poor background: Lee has a different "code". His distaste for the bourgeois code becomes manifest when the narrator of the novel explains Lee's opinion about Annabel's cleptomania:

> Lee was horrified to find she stole. She stole food from supermarkets and books from bookshops; she stole paints, ink, brushes and small items of clothing. Her parents were wealthy and gave her a large allowance but still she stole and Lee had always regarded thievery as the legitimate province only of the poor. He thought it morally proper the poor should steal as much as they could but, since money was given only in order to buy things with and so keep the wheel of the economy in motion, then it was the duty of the rich (the hub of the wheel) to purchase as much as they were able.
> Nevertheless, she continued to steal in spite of his stern disapproval and this proclivity proved one of the many things she and her brother-in-law held in common. (27-28)

Lee cannot find an explanation for Annabel's thefts. For him, stealing can only be practiced by those who do not have other means to get what they need. Although he would not do

it himself, he excuses his brother Buzz for doing it due to his poor origins.

As a version of the romantic hero, Lee keeps the original characteristic of being faithful to an ideological project. By denouncing the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, he performs a politically correct act. Carter's manifestation of the grotesque is shown in Lee's characterization, as his lack of *virtue* in relation to his emotional life contributes to the tragic attitude taken by his lover. Lee is not virtuous when he betrays his wife in his own house.

As Annabel is taken home by her parents, the brothers realize that they have become attached to her, they

> felt incomplete without her presence; without any conscious volition of her own, by a species of osmosis, perhaps, since she was so unsubstantial, somehow she had entered the circle of their self-containment.(29)

Although Lee knows she is *unbalanced*, he decides to marry her. After their marriage, and ironically, Annabel becomes more attached to Lee's brother than to him. They soon "became accomplices and then they left Lee out of their plottings for he understood neither of them"(60). As Buzz and Annabel start to get closer to each other, Lee did not interfere in their relationship. He distanced himself away from them and started an affair with another woman.

Lee's lover goes to a party at their home which is organized by Buzz. As Annabel sees Lee and Carolyn making

love on the balcony she decides to commit suicide. She locks herself up in the bathroom and cuts her wrists. Buzz saves her and takes her to the hospital.

After Annabel's second attempt to commit suicide, she apparently chooses to continue to live depending on Lee's love for her. Her first words when she sees Lee for the first time after the incident are: 'I love you'(62). Annabel starts making him feel he is the only one responsible for her life, and Lee does assume the responsibility. Lee acknowledges his wife's madness and decides to take care of her: "... he was racked with pity of her"(66). Following Annabel's doctor's advice, he sends Buzz away. Nevertheless, his attempts to save Annabel are in vain; her history, we are told, "would be brief and tragic"(62). It is as if she is destined to fulfill her role as a romantic heroine.

Annabel becomes emotionally attracted to Lee in a blind attempt to find a meaningful relationship in her life. On the other hand, Lee instinctively recognizes that their union necessitates the examination of his own pressuppositions; he tries to understand Annabel's attitudes. Nevertheless, their ineffectual efforts result in the tragic end of their relationship. Their love affair is thus, in many ways, a parody of romantic love.

After Buzz's departure Annabel starts to change. Along with an explicit declaration of love for Lee, Annabel

decides to work. Her actions reveal that her original fearful perspective of life has changed. Her fear no longer provokes paralysis. In fact, the fears that haunted her seem to have been transformed into a new feeling of self-confidence never before experienced:

> It seemed to her that the concealed shapes which had so long menaced her were casting off their ambiguous surfaces and revealing, not the perfect shapes of fear she had so long suspected beneath them, but soft, interior cores. The world unshelled itself or she unshelled the world and she found, beneath the crust of spiked armour, a kernel of plasticine limply begging to be rendered into forms. (77)

The new transformations in Annabel's life denote a transition from her lethargic behavior to a period in which she begins to behave in accordance with her "mad" mind. She continues to express a highly subjective view of reality. Her acquired self-confidence does not provide her with the means to reasonably overcome the gaps which she had been accumulating since childhood. During this period, her actions could not be considered normal:

> One day, she roused herself sufficiently to go downstairs and put his alarm clock in the dustbin. She said the tick irritated her.(72)

Unreasonableness and lack of logic are the most emphasized aspects which continue to constitute Annabel's behaviour. As she had been separated from Buzz, she misses him and decides she wants to experience sexual love with him. The first time

they see each other after Buzz´s departure, they go out together and go to a bar leaving Lee alone in public:

> In the course of a spirited conversation which expressed nothing but a common need to pass the time, Buzz reached out his hand and grasped a lock of Annabel´s hair. Everybody noticed but everybody went on talking with redoubled vigour. As, entirely without surprise, she turned to Buzz, he drew her towards him by his handful of her hair and kissed her for a long , long time. Then he pushed back his chair and rose; she took his hand and they went out together.(86)

Buzz and Annabel go to his place and have sexual intercourse. Buzz's traumas prevent him from making love to Annabel. He is afraid of "the physicality of women"(94), so they have anal sex. As Annabel perceives the sexual relationship is not enjoyed by Buzz, she becomes disappointed. Her disappointment is redoubled when Lee lies to her about their love-making:

> 'Lee ... tell me ...'
> 'What is it now ? he asked uneasily.
> 'Is that what it 's supposed to be like ?
> 'No,' said Lee in order to hurt her if he could. 'That's what it's usually like, with normal women (99).

Annabel believes in Lee when he tells her she is not like other women. Her disappointment is derived from her restricted view of reality. As she substitutes her initial uncontrollable fear for voluntary sexuality, she expects Lee to understand it. Annabel succeeds in killing herself after this disappointment.

The tragic end of this "love affair" can be taken as a manifestation of the type of grotesque which privileges the terrifying element,as Kayser points out. Annabel's "romantic features" and her madness suggest a motif typical of the tragic grotesque. Annabel's madness cannot be explained in Bakthinian terms, i.e., as a regenerative denunciation of the order of things. Her final suicide reflects a lack of other possible, more positive solutions. Her madness is typically a Kayserean one: the acknowledgement of an inability to change the *status quo* except by the ineffectual gesture of taking her own life.

The prominence of the tragic/romantic meaning of the grotesque, in *Love*, excludes almost completely its comic features, except perhaps for its insistence on the parody of Poe's romantic text. The grotesque features of this novel are restricted to the terrible and the tragic. But they indicated the dark, abnormal aspects of social and interpersonal relations, in a deviant form of behavior which will take a different turn in the later work.

A more ambivalent treatment of the comic meaning of the grotesque, for example, can be perceived in Carter's fictional work published after the publication of *Love* (1971). According to Kari E. Lokke, Carter's use of the grotesque in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) "is more akin to the original, emancipatory Renaissance grotesque called

'grotesque realism' by Bakhtin" (1). The collection of short-stories is constituted by regenerative re-readings of traditional fairy-tale motifs in which more positive endings for the female protagonists are provided. In *The Blody Chamber,* for example, Carter reviews the traditional *Bluebeard* plot. In her revisionary reading, Bluebeard's wife is saved by her mother.

The Bakthinian grotesque has also been identified by Elaine Jordan in Carter's eighth novel, *Nights at the Circus* (1984). Jordan suggests that the protagonist of the novel, Fevvers, is empowered by what Bakthin describes as "carnival's liberating potential" (38).

In the chapter which follows, the analysis of *Wise Children* (1991) illustrates the "comic" manifestation of Carter´s postmodern use of the grotesque.

CHAPTER III

THE "COMIC" GROTESQUE IN *Wise Children*

Following the Kayserean and the Bakhthinian view of the structure of the grotesque, Mary Russso argues that the grotesque "is only recognizable in relation to a norm and that exceeding the norm involves serious risk" (10). For Russo, as well as for Kayser and Bakthin, the grotesque, "emerges as a deviation from the norm" (11) The fictional narratives of Angela Carter abound with clusters of images of the grotesque. In *Love* (1971), as has been previously seen, the prominence is of tragic grotesque images, through an emphasis on the protagonist's madness as deviant behavior, a theme that was already suggested by Wolfgang Kayser and Mikhail Bakthin as one of the privileged themes of the grotesque. According to Mary Russo, Kayser emphasizes the reception of the grotesque as an alien, less bodily experience. In *Wise Children,* however, the prominence is the employment of comic grotesque scenes. My purpose in this chapter is to study Carter's use of the comic grotesque, as defined by Bakhtin, especially in relation to his concepts of 'grotesque laughter' and 'grotesque body' included in his theory of "grotesque realism".

As I argued earlier, Bakhtin suggests that the core of the popular comic culture of the Middle Ages, of carnival folk culture in particular, consists of the "grotesque body" with its social-regenerative characteristics suggesting the renewal of the established social order. In the Bakthinian description of the comic grotesque there is always a suggestion of a 'new' option which inverts and replaces the 'official', 'serious' one. In Carter, however, the use of the comic grotesque emphasizes ambivalence, and juxtaposition, which almost always excludes the possibility of a "new" order to substitute the established one. The opening paragraph of *Wise Children* exemplifies this idea, at the same time that it reveals her employment of the comic tone:

> Why is London like Budapest ?
>
> A. Because it is two cities divided by a river. Good morning! Let me introduce myself. My name is Dora Chance.
>
> Welcome to the *wrong side* of the tracks (1, emphasis added)

From the very beginning of the novel, therefore, the reader confronts the existence of division (or of duplicity) in the fact that London is not one integrated whole. Besides, if there is one "wrong" side, there must be a "right" one to oppose or complement it. But the perspective is clearly defined: the reader is welcomed to follow the

narrative from the margins, through the eyes of Dora Chance, the narrator of the novel.

Dora Chance is a seventy-five-year-old woman who used to be a vaudeville dancer. Her narrative is an "autobiographical" account of her family life, which introduces historical accounts of British society. She and her twin sister, Nora, are the illegitimate daughters of Melchior Hazard, an accomplished Shakespearian actor.

From the beginning of the narrative, the narrator calls herself the "unnofficial chronicler of the Hazard family"(99) and sets out to make fun of the system of legitimacy and illegitimacy in British society. Carter's treatment of the comic grotesque is achieved through a juxtaposition of the so called "legitimate" and "illegitimate" representatives of society. The "legitimate" are the things that have the approval, recognition and authorization of society and/or the law, the "illegitimate" are the things that are not sanctioned by law and/or the values of society. This juxtaposition suggests that the Bakhtinian theory of the popular/comic grotesque which proposes an inversion of the established hierarchical order has become contaminated by the ambiguity inherent in contemporary thought. In Carter, a 20th century writer, the use of the grotesque highlights the contemporary difficulty of choosing between systems of values.

The Bakhtinian grotesque surfaces in the novel through the comic tone of Dora's narrative. The action of the narrative develops within the space of one single day: the day of their multiple birthdays, for Dora and Nora were born on the day Melchior and his twin brother Peregrine turned 25. The events which precede Melchior Hazard's hundredth birthday party, to which Dora and Nora have been invited, are intermingled with the narrative of Dora's and Nora's youth, the "peak period" of their life, when Dora and her sister had acquired fame and glory as dancers. The Chance sisters' form of theatrical perfomance was the "low", comic popular theatre, opposed to the classical, "high", style practiced by the their ancestors. From this perspective, the Bakhtinian view of official and non-official culture is illustrated by the contrast between the "high" style of the Classical Shakespearian theatre performed by the Hazard family and the "low" style of the vaudeville performance by the Chance sisters.

Dora uses the comic tone in the narrative of her family life story, as well as in her own. The description of the narrator's bedroom illustrates her preference for the low, the disorderly and the chaotic:

> This is *my* room. We don't share. We've always respected one another's privacy. Identical, well and good; Siamese no. Everything slightly soiled, I'm sorry to say. Can't be doing with wash, wash, wash, polish, polish, polish, these days, when time is so precious, but take a good

> look at the signed photos stuck in the dressing mirror.(2)

The narrator gives an informal tone to her narrative. She also transmits an idea of intimacy with the reader. One of the central points in the Bakthinian definition of grotesque laughter refers to its ambivalent qualities: the person who mocks is always included in the process of mocking as a part of it. In Bakthin's own words:

> The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it. The wholeness of the world's comic aspect is destroyed, and that which appears comic becomes a private reaction. The people's ambivalent laughter, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it. (12)

The comic tone of Dora's narrative often includes herself as one of the persons to be laughed at in most of the events she narrates, utilizing thus one of the features of the grotesque pointed out by Bakhtin. In the following passage, she describes the things she and her sister buy before going to the party,

> Lovely, shiny stockings and a couple of little short tight skirts in shiny silver stuff to match, that clung on like surgical bandage, and showed off our legs. Legs, the last thing to go. We were modelling stockings as late as the late sixties, I'd have you know; Bear Brand. They had to cut us off mid-thigh, of course, so the wrinkles wouldn't show. For women of our age, our legs still aren't half bad. Nora toyed with a spaghetti-string boob tube in lynx-print Lycra; I thought, maybe something with feathers... Kids gathered round, tittering; the man at the red mullet stall shook his head, sadly. They thought the Chance sisters had gone over the top, at last.(191)

The clothes the sisters try on suggest the comic essence of the scene, as old-aged women are not expected to wear "short tight skirts". The inclusion of the children's and the man's reaction to Dora's and Nora's trying on their new clothes gives the narrative, as well as the narrator herself, a kind of feedback about the unavoidable comic aspect of her clothes. In this case, as in the Bakhtinian explanation of grotesque laughter, the mocker is not excluded from the process of mocking, generating ambivalence.

The emphasis on ambivalence is manifested in *Wise Children* through the unstable story about the genealogy of the novel's protagonists. The family includes four pairs of twins: the narrator and her twin sister, Nora; their father Melchior Hazard and his twin brother Peregrine; their half sisters Saskia and Imogen Hazard; and finally Gareth and his twin brother Tristram Hazard (Melchior Hazard's second wife's sons). The proliferation of doubles is one of Carter's fictional innovations which helps to delineate her contemporary use of the grotesque. In the original idea of the regenerative/comic grotesque proposed by Bakthin there is the inversion of the social order and the 'beginning'of a new one, different from the 'old' one. In Carter, the proliferation of doubles does not offer a 'new' option, it merely adopts multiple repetitions, generating ambiguity and ambivalence. The narrative focus is on the ambivalence

derived from the behavior of both "legitimate" and "illegitimate" representatives of society, and the comic tone in which both are described destabilizes any attempt to decide between the two propositions, therefore neutralizing the regenerating effect of the grotesque. Although there are several re-generations, they are not really regenerations -- a play on words, a technique which is very much employed by Carter here and elsewhere.

The paternity of the "legitimate" side of the family twins proves to be biologically incorrect, although socially accepted and sanctioned by "official" norms. As Dora suggests, Melchior and his twin brother Peregrine Hazard may not be the "legitimate" sons of Ranulph Hazard:

> Speaking of illegitimacy, there was more than a hint of romantic, nay, melodramatic illegitimacy in the Hazard family long before Nora and myself took out first bows. Because Ranulph Hazard, during all his lengthy marital and extramarital career, had produced no issue, as yet, until his wife's transvestite Hamlet met her Horatio's exceptional gift for gravitas, not to mention his athleticism. Tongues wagged. Did Melchior lend an ear ? who can tell, at this distance in time. All the same, he loved his boys.(17)

Thus Ranulph Hazard's "official" twin sons may not be his biological sons. The same happens to Melchior Hazard's "official" twin daugthers: Saskia and Imogen, who are, in fact, his nieces, the natural daughters of Peregrine, Melchior's brother. From the biological perspective, the "official" twin Hazards are, like their 'non-official'

counterparts also 'illegitimate'. In this case, the original subversion of order inherent to the Bakhtinian description of the grotesque is further subverted and thus neutralized by the ambivalent treatment attributed to the question .

The ambivalence inherent to Carter's use of the grotesque is also described in relation to the conflicts which happen among representatives of the same social status. The Chance sisters' biological father, Sir Melchior Hazard, is a legitimate representative of aritocratic British society. As he refuses to acknowledge in public the parentage of his daughters, he is enabled to marry a member of the British nobility: Lady Atalanta Lynde. This woman of title would not have been allowed to marry Melchior Hazard, who became 'Sir' after his marriage, if she or her family had known about the existence of his illegitimate twin daughters. On the other hand, and ironically enough, this noble Lady of British society also hides from her husband the *truth* about his supposedly "legitimate" daughters. Like her husband, Lady Atalanta Lynde also has a love affair. Her twin daughters are, Dora tells us, the biological daughters of Melchior´s brother Peregrine. In this case, the division suggested by the co-existence of legitimacy/illegitimacy, official/non-official is neutralized by a proliferation of doubleness. The repetition of a "non-official" act performed by two "legitimate" representatives of society suggests that

Carter's use of the grotesque provokes a destabilization of the order without a direct inversion of values.

Dora and Nora were told by the woman who raised them, Mrs. Chance, that at the time their mother met Melchior Hazard she worked at the hostel owned by "Gradma Chance". "Pretty Kitty", as she was known, got pregnant and died at childbirth. Mrs. Chance decides to raise the girls and gives them her name. Later, they became publicly acknowledged as the "Chance sisters".

From the biological perspective, all the "legitimate" twins of the Hazard's family have an "illegitimate" paternity. On the other hand, Dora and Nora, the officially acknowledged "illegitimate" pair of Hazard twins' also have their origins called into question. This idea is emphasized in the text through the narrator's questioning of the story about her own mother. The supposedly "true" story about Dora's and Nora's mother is challenged by Peregrine's comments:

> Did you ever see your mother's grave, Dora ?'
> ' What are you trying to get at, Perry ?'
> "I'm not sure', he said slowly. I've got no concrete evidence. But sometimes I used to wonder about your grandma.'
> 'Grandma?'
> 'Her last fling,"' suggested Perry.'Pinning old Melchior down on the mattress and-'
> 'You've got a very filthy mind, I must say, Perrry'.I tucked my tits away neatly into my lynx-print top.
> 'Possible but not probable. Grandma was fifty if she was a day when we came along and she'd have been proud as a peacock, she'd never made up some cock and bull story

> about a chambermaid to explain us away, why should she ?''Just a thought,' he said'. She never talked about your mother. I asked her, a couple of times, but she clammed up. She liked to keep her secrets. I asked her, once, where she came from herself and she said.
> 'Out of a bottle, like a bloody genie, dearie'.(225)

Peregrine's suggestion offers the possibility of questioning the "truth" about Dora's and Nora's origin. The suggestion of the inexistence of the "original" mother can be associated with the Jamesonian idea of the "Simulacrum"(6). To Jameson, in the culture of "similacrum", i.e., in contemporary "late-capitalist" society, aesthetic production "has become integrated into commodity production generally" (x). The aesthetic production generated by this new type of social dynamics is characterized by the recognition of the impossibility of recreating the original situation which originated from the text in the first place. The "simulacrum" becomes then, "the identical copy for which no original has ever existed" (18). The acknowledgement of Dora and Nora's, as well as of all the other pairs of twins' *illegitimate* birth, suggests the impossibility of recovering the origin, the "truth" about the past and indeed about anything. Everything is questioned the minute it is stated in a subversive game with history as fact.

Through this discussion, the feminist contestation of the myth of origins is put forward. As Lorna Sage observes,

> In *New Eve* and *Wise Children*, in particular, Carter speaks the same language as someone like Hélène Cixous. The origin is a masculine myth... The question "Where do

> children come from ? is basically a masculine, much more than a feminine, question. (58)

But even if we abstain from taking a feminist perspective (Carter did not particularly want to be categorized), the comic way in which Carter describes the question of the myth of origins in *Wise Children* exemplifies her awareness of the deconstructive power of questioning master narratives.

The expressive number of identical pairs of twins emphasizes Carter's way of tackling the contemporary question of the loss of the individual, unique self. The similarities which mark the characters' physical descriptions enhance the contemporary concept of the "silmulacrum". In the novel, almost every character has a "copy" that cannot be distinguished from the original. Dora, for example, describes the moment when her sister passed as herself:

> As for Nora/Dora, she kept herself to herself until, she'd had a couple and then she forgot to behave herself and carried on in her usual fashion but by the time she started dancing on the table most of the party was plastered so nobody noticed she was behaving out of character and that´s how Dora got off with the pianist, to my considerable embarrassement in subsequent months.(84)

This emphasis on sameness suggests another feature of the postmodern, as it is viewed by Jameson, i.e., the end of the grand narrative of the self. Jameson argues that postmodern aesthetics is embedded in two hypotheses about "the end of

the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual"(15). The first, is the historicist one. In his own words,

> a once-existing centered subject, in the period of classical capitalism and the nuclear family, has today in the world of organizational bureocracy dissolved.(15)

The second hypothesis, Jameson suggests, is proposed by post-structuralist theory, in which "a centered subject never existed but constituted something like an ideological mirage" (15). Jameson agrees with the historical hypothesis. Despite the discussion about the origins of the "death of subject" suggested by the author, in *Wise Children* the ambiguity caused by the lack of precise definition in the identification of the original performer of an action in consequence of their physical similarities helps to interrogate the proclaimed end of the traditional narrative of the self.

The essence of Bakhtin's theory of "grotesque realism" is based on his definition of the "grotesque body". For Bakhtin,

> In contrast to modern canons, the age of the body is most frequently represented in immediate proximity to birth or death, to infancy or old age, to the womb or the grave, to the bosom that gives life or swallows it up. (26)

In "grotesque realism" the human body is always depicted in two specific ages: in childhood or in old age. The ambivalence, or the grotesque, is generated by the idea of incompleteness and transformation suggested by these images.

The non-official quality of the grotesque body, as it is viewed by Bakthin, lies in the defying of the official hierarchy which encompasses the conception of an adult body as being finished and complete. Bakthin's perception of the grotesque body integrates it within an ideological project which is based on an organic, cosmic view of life.

The main characters in *Wise Children* exemplify Bakthin's idea of the grotesque body, especially in relation to their old-age. There is the narrator herself, her twin-sister, their father and uncle, "Wheelchair" (who was their biological father's first wife and lives with the Chance sisters because she was abandoned by her natural [twin] daughters) and many others.

Besides old-agedness and comic laughter, the characters in *Wise Children* may typify another characteristic of the comic grotesque analyzed by Bakthin. In his descritptions of "grotesque realism", Bakthin includes descriptions of sexual acts, descriptions of eating and drinking, and of defecating as being "positive and affirmative" (19) as they emphasize organic transformations in life. *Wise Children* abounds with images of physical and natural acts. The physical differences between Dora and Nora can illustrate this idea:

> All the same , identical we may be, but symmetrical - never. For the body itself isn't symmetrical. One of your feet is bound to be bigger than the other, one ear

> will leak more wax. Nora is fluxy, me constipated... Her menstrual flow was copiuos to a fault; mine meagre. (5)

Dora's comments impute a Bakthinian grotesque tone to the narrative. It is Bakthin's contention that in Grotesque Realism "Images of the body are offered, moreover, in an extremely exaggerated form" (18). According to Bakhtin, the exaggerated images of the human body in Rabelais illustrate the "universality and the abundance" of the corporal principle.

The degradations of the lower bodily strata and the scatological are also present in the Bakhtinian description of grotesque images. Bakhtin attributes to these images the capacity of regeneration and renewal:

> Degradation and debasement of the higher do not have a formal and relative character in grotesque realism. "Upward" and "downward" have here an absolute and strictly topographical meaning. "Downward" is earth, "upward" is heaven. Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renaiscence (the maternal breasts). (21)

In Bakhtin the images of the lower bodily strata are invested with an ambivalent meaning. The degradations occur to give place to a new type of order: the lower part of the body becomes the beginning for the new type of organization. In Carter, however, there is no such clear suggestion.

The Chance sisters' sexual behavior appears to be inherited from their biological predecessors. Their behavior is the same as the covert behavior of the "legitimate" part

of the family. Melchior Hazard´s non-official daughters are sexually liberated, unmarried girls. Dora, for example, makes love to her uncle (the possibility of Peregrine being Dora´s father cannot be excluded), and her "illegitimate" sister, Imogen, has a love affair with her younger brother Tristram. Thus, the apparent transgressive act practiced by one of the "illegitimate" or marginal character is neutralized by a similar act which is performed by a counterpart on the "legitimate" part of the family.

The novel's closing scene, however, depicts a typical type of Bakhtinian grotesque image. At Melchior Hazard's birthday party, Dora and Peregrine go to an upstairs room in Melchior's house and have sexual intercourse. As I mentioned earlier, it is their birthday too. Peregrine is a hundred years old and Dora is seventy-five. After that, they rejoin the group and Peregrine pulls two babies (twin brothers) out of his pockets and gives them to Dora and Nora. The twins are Melchior Hazard's grand-children, the sons of his son, Gareth, who, we are told by Dora, is a priest and has travelled to the Amazon Jungle. Because the twins are produced by Peregrine right after he has had sex with Dora, they may be taken to symbolize a regenerating force emanating from their post-menopausal and incestous love-making.

According to Bakhtin's conception of "pregnant old agedness", the old body gives place to the new, i.e.,"no longer is there one body, nor are there as yet two. Two heartbeats are heard; one is the mother's, which is slowed down" (26). In Carter's fantastic narrative old and new are merely juxtaposed, since the "old" does not give place to the "new", as the babies are going to be raised by their "mothers" Dora and Nora. But although Bakthin's original perspective is made ambiguous, the image of the pregnant hag lurks in the background.

The ambiguity of the grotesque image in *Wise Children*'s closing scene is emphasized by the suggestion of renewal derived from the emergence of the babies after Dora and Peregrine's sexual relationship. Although the twins may suggest only continuation and sameness, we have no indication that no change will ensue, and for the first time in the history of the Hazards, this pair of twins is composed of a boy and a girl. After all, it is only through its "illegitimate" side that the Hazard/Chance dynasty will continue -- for better or for worse. The low represented by the more popular Anglo-saxon word "chance" takes precedence over the high, represented by its latinate synonym "hazard". Therefore, there is a certain degree of hierarchical social inversion, i.e., life continues on "the <u>wrong</u> side of the tracks"(.1, emphasis added), from where the story is told.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has aimed at discussing the contemporary use of the grotesque in two novels of Angela Carter: *Love* and *Wise Children*. Two basic theoretical studies have served as a starting point for the discussion: Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* and Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World.* The discussion of Wolfgang Kayser's and Mikahil Bakhtin´s views of the grotesque has helped to identify elements of the "tragic" grotesque in *Love* and of the "comic" grotesque in *Wise Children*.

In Wolfgang Kayser's study of 1957 the grotesque is presented as an aesthetic phenomenom which is always associated with fear, and with an emphasis on the "strange and uncanny" reactions it provokes. Thus, the Kayserean grotesque usually responds with fear to the acknowledgement of the established order of things.

In Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1968), the grotesque is characterized as a cultural phenomenom in which the marginal, comic side of popular culture takes precedence over the serious, official culture. In the Bakhtinian perspective of the grotesque, popular laughter is able to generate subversive statements in response to the established order of things. From this perspective, the

Bakthinian grotesque is characterized by an inversion in the hierarchical position of the social order: the 'higher' is replaced by the 'low', thus proposing an inversion of the *status quo*.

Angela Carter's *Love* is characterized by the use of the tragic, Kayserean grotesque, rather than the Bakhthinian, comic one. The novel's female protagonist, Annabel, acts oriented by a tragic and fearful life perspective. She tries to commit suicide very young and fails twice. She succeeds at her third suicide attempt.

In addition to the proliferation of tragic events, the novel's protagonist's madness also points to the characterization of the use of the tragic grotesque in *Love*. For Kayser, the insane is taken up by 'an impersonal force, an alien and inhuman spirit ' which, in his view, embodies the 'ominous overtones' that constitute the grotesque.

The grotesque features of *Love* become evident when we examine the novel's protagonist's life trajectory in relation to that of a typical romantic heroine. There are two suggestions of this possibility. The first one is in the text itself. The name of the novel's protagonists Lee and Annabel, and the "gothic" atmosphere of their failed love relationship overtly remind the reader of Edgar A. Poe's ballad *Annabel Lee*. Poe's *Annabel Lee* describes the feelings of a romantic speaker who suffers because of the premature

death of his lover. Carter's romantic heroine, Annabel, both legitimizes and subverts the acknowledged idea of the romantic heroine, by trying to be faithful to "tradition" and revealing the difficulty involved in changing this process.

The second suggestion is made by the author herself in the Afterword of the 1987 edition of *Love*. According to Carter, *Love* "is a modern day, demotic version of *Adolphe*" (113), an original 19th century romantic novel. From this perspective, the attitudes of the protagonists in *Love* can be compared to those of the authentic romantic protagonists such as the ones of *Adolphe*. The analogy reveals the use of the tragic grotesque, as it was employed by the romantic tradition.

In the Kayserean view of madness, the tragic meaning is highlighted. As Kayser's view of reality has to include fear, the insane or mad one "loose[s] the foothold of reality", feels no fear. For Kayser, the insane becomes unable to re-orient his view of reality, which is based on a fixed, pre-determined system of values that does not admit change.

Bakhtin, on the other hand, conceives of grotesque madness like a "gay parody of official reason, of the narrow seriousness of official 'truth' (39). The Bakhtinian view of life gives priority to the comic meaning of it. The mad one

is enabled to view the world from a different perspective. Seeing it differently, the insane offers a new possibility of organization of life, always based on a new hierarchical system which is not the one proposed by the *status quo*. Almost nothing changes for Annabel. The prominence of the traditional romantic plot is thus Carter's way of provoking the reader.

The Kayserean and the Bakthinian interpretations of madness in the context of the grotesque tend to give priority to one meaning. Each of the meanings attributed to the grotesque in their interpretations presupposes a moral system of values. The giving of privileged status to the comic or the tragic meaning of the grotesque reveals the moral values which foreground one or the other of the interpretations. Prominent in the Kayserean view is paralyzing fear, which inhibits change. From the Bakthinian perspective, there is liberated laughter which provokes change.

In *Love,* there is a tendency towards the prominence of the tragic meaning of the grotesque. In *Wise Children,* the priority is given to the humourous meaning of the grotesque. However, the kind of humourous meaning of the grotesque employed in Carter´s latest novel does not point to the superiority of one meaning upon the other. In *Wise Children,*

the effect caused by a comic grotesque scene, for example, is the same caused by a tragic grotesque image.

In contrast to the tragic tone employed by the omniscient narrator in *Love,* Dora Chance is the comic narrator of *Wise Children.* The comic elements of the narrative have been analyzed in terms of the Bakhtinian concept of "grotesque realism" with its emphasis on the grotesque body (especially old age) and its natural and physical aspects.

Nevertheless, the type of grotesque used in *Wise Children* reveals a substantial modification in the depiction of the comic grotesque as viewed by Bakhtin. In Bakhtin, the grotesque is a well ordered category which changes the official order through an inversion of it: the "low" takes the place of the high and subverts the order, thus suggesting a new order through this subversion.

In *Wise Children* , if there is any subversion, it is rather depicted in terms of the effacement of the frontiers between 'high' and 'low', or between "legitimate" and "illegitimate". This issue has been analyzed in *Wise Children* by the analogy between the attitudes of the protagonists of the novel, more specifically, the analysis of two pairs of twins: a 'legitimate' and an 'illegitimate' one. Dora/Nora, and Saskia/Imogen often behave in the same way. The similarities of their behavior prevents the reader

from acknowledging a subversion of the *status quo.* Nevertheless, the novel's closing scene tends to somewhat revert this reading by hinting at the regenerative aspect of the grotesque, as defined by Bakhtin. Highly ambivalent, playing with well-known concepts and assumptions, Carter precludes any facile categorization. By fusing elements of the grotesque with a number of other literary techniques, she prevents us from occupying any definite and stable reading stance. Carter is, after all, a product of her time with all its trangressive and subversive impetus.

The effacement of frontiers has also been detected in Carter's novel *Nights at the Circus* (1984), which is Carter's penultimate novel published before *Wise Children.* In her study about the female grotesque, Mary Russo analyses *Nights at the Circus* (1984), arguing that the novel presents 'dozens of [other] examples of intertexts from high and low culture'(161). The examples of intertexts found by Russo in *Nights at the Circus* reveal that she believes that the 'intertexts' do subvert the order.

On the other hand, Carter's postmodern use of the grotesque cannot be said to be political in a strictly Bakhtinian sense, for it does acknowledge that there is a difficulty involving the process of choosing between systems of values, as Jameson suggests.

It is Bakthin's contention that the system of images which forms the popular culture of the Middle Ages includes parody as one of its basic components. Grotesque parody may be directed toward the serious tone of official celebrations, such as the sacred ritual ceremony, or the serious literature of the period, which embodies the official ideology.

In *Love*, Carter's 'de-naturalizes' the theme of female madness, through the use of "official" Romantic texts. In *Wise Children* Carter's employment of parodies does not reveal a prominence of any specific "official" text , except perhaps for the Shakeaspearian text. Let's take as an example, the assassination of Melchior and Peregrine's mother by their "legitimate" father. Estella Hazard was assassinated by her husband when she was playing *Othello*. Ranulph Hazard (Melchior and Peregrine's father) played the role of Othello; Estella Hazard played Desdemona and her lover played Iago. Dora's own words summarize her paternal grandmother's "tragic life",

> Cassius Booth played Iago. There is no handkerchief in this story. All the same, her husband killed them both, first her, then him. They'd slipped out together during the first-night party. Old acquaintances. Perhaps, by then Old Ranulph couldn't tell the difference between Shakespeare and the living .(21 emphasis added)

The parody of the Shakesperian text, in this scene, reflects Carter's manifestation of the comic grotesque: the

effect caused by the comic meaning of the grotesque has the same impact of the tragic meaning: it neutralizes change. As in *Othello* , Estella Hazard is assassinated by her jealous husband. But the Shakesperian dramatic effect is lost and deprived of "depth". As the Shakesperian text is mechanically repeated in real life, the two texts (life + art) are just juxtaposed and reduced to sameness.

From this perspective, the juxtaposing of serious and comic meanings of the grotesque neutralizes the possibility of renewal and regeneration described by Bakthin. Frederic Jameson argues that postmodern art has adopted pastiche (17) in the place of subversive parody. In Jameson's own words pastiche is:

> ... like parody, the imitation of a peculiar unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists.(17)

For Jameson, the comic effect originally produced by the use of parody in the past is now neutralized in the postmodern use of pastiche. In the postmodern use, there is only the acknowledgement of the situation which originated its use. Unlike the Bakhtinian interpretation of the regenerating aspect of medieval parody, postmodern pastiche is devoid of any possibilty of regeneration or renewal.

Linda Hutcheon contests Jameson's view that pastiche is the dominant aesthetic form of postmodernism, as she believes that parody is still in use. Her view of postmodern parody is exemplified with reference to the work of Angela Carter. For her,

> many critics, including Jameson, call postmodern ironic citation 'pastiche'or empty parody, assuming that only unique styles can be parodied and that such novelty and individuality are impossible today. In the light of the parodic yet individual voices of Salman Rushdie and Angela Carter, to mention only two, such a stand seems hard to defend.(94)

According to Hutcheon, the structure of parody, as it has been used today by, amomg others, feminist artists suggests subversion , as it both legitimazes and subverts that which it parodies. Hutcheon's analysis of postmodern parody reflects the feminist unambigous political agendas of resistance. Her main concerns are with

> our culture's means of ideological legitimation. How do some representations get legitimized and authorized ? and at the expense of which others ? Parody can offer a way of investigating the history of that process.(142)

This brief and superficial discussion of the political effect of parody/pastiche has served to illustrate the impossibility of a simple and conclusive interpretation of Carter.

Be it as it may, I hope the analysis conducted in this dissertation has been useful for the understanding of the

grotesque aspects in some of Carter's fiction. Whether interpreted as horizontal sameness (Jameson) or vertical subversion (Russo and Hutcheon), elements of the grotesque do play an important role in the fascinating, complex and thoroughly puzzling novels of Angela Carter.

ANNABEL LEE [Edgar A. Poe, 1849]

It was many and many a year ago,
   In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
   By the name of Annabel Lee;-
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
   Than to love and be loved by me.

She was a child and *I* as a child,
   In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love-
   I and my Annabel Lee-
With a love that the winged seraphs of Heaven
   Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
   In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud by night
   Chilling my Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
   And bore her away from me,
To shup her up, in a sepulchre
   In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,
   Went envying her and me; -
Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,
   In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud, chilling
   And killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
   Of those who were older than we -
   Of many far wiser than we -
And neither the Angels in Heaven above
   Nor the demons down under the sea
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
   Of the beautiful Annabel Lee:-

For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams
   Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise but I see the bright eyes
   Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I
lie down by the side
Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride
   In her sepulchre there by th sea-
   In her tomb by the side of the sea.

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