

Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*: Feminism or Postfeminism?

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ABSTRAKT

Bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na analýzu románu Angely Carterové *Noci v cirkuse*. Práce popisuje ideologie a teorie prezentované v průběhu dějin feministického hnutí a reakci postfeminismu na pokrytecké způsoby, jak toto hnutí vedlo své bitvy. Tyto znalosti jsou aplikovány v analýze románu pro zdůraznění Carterových skrytých názorů v moři feministických konceptů a ustanovit, zda je jejich cílem zesměšnit feminismus nebo se s ním ztotožnit.

Klíčová slova: Feminismus, Postfeminismus, Feministické hnutí, Osvobození žen, Angela Carterová, *Noci v Cirkuse*, román, historická fikce, analýza literatury

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis focuses on the analysis of Angela Carter's novel *Nights at the Circus*. The thesis describes ideologies and theories presented during the history of the feminist movement and the reaction of postfeminism to the hypocritical ways the movement has fought its battles. This knowledge is applied in the analysis of the novel to highlight Carter's hidden opinion regarding the women's movement in order to determine if their purpose is to relate to it or make fun of what it has become.

Keywords: Feminism, Postfeminism, Feminist movement, Liberation of women, Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, novel, historical fiction, analysis of literature

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“Es wird schon gut.”

— Michael Täuber

I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

Feminism has played a big role in the fight for women's suffrage and is still relevant up to this day as we continue to strive for better conditions for all genders and sexual orientations. *Angela Carter* uses *Nights at the Circus* to battle universal patterns that have been used for centuries by the patriarchal society which continues to exploit people. Furthermore, she expresses her political stance through satire and irony which distance themselves from the original purpose of feminism and aims for overall social change.

Firstly, the thesis will mention what feminism is in the first chapter, how it started, its long-lasting history and the reasons for it to have such a big impact. It is also necessary to mention feminism in Britain since Carter wrote *Nights at the Circus* during her time living in London and might have been influenced by it greatly. We will briefly mention the three main branches of feminism which are going to be Liberal, Marxist and Radical feminism that influenced the movement's coverage of other topics like class, economy and the social sphere.

The second chapter is going to cover postfeminism and its point of criticism towards feminism and their double-sided nature that leaves out a whole spectrum of people. It will mention the negative sides of postfeminism that might have helped women to conform to certain beauty standards thanks to the rise of consumer culture. Moreover, this chapter will cover the fight for the normalization of sexually oriented topics that have been taboo and shine light on the racism that was not covered by feminism.

The last chapter of the theoretical part introduces Angela Carter as a skilled writer of various styles from fairy tales to postmodernism. Fairy tales have had a deep impact on Carter and are always interpreted in her writings in some form to bring a deeper meaning to the subversion of universal identities and practices. We have stated her lasting impact on feminism and support for women's suffrage despite her not being open about it.

The final part of the thesis will concentrate on the analysis of the novel based on the information gained from the previous parts. The analysis will look deeper into the hidden parts of Carter's political messages and differentiate if they belong into the ideologies of feminism or postfeminism. It will examine the use of postmodern techniques and the carnivalesque as a potential gateway to understanding the differences in Carter's feministic aims.

I. THEORY

1 FEMINISM

Feminism has been a big part of our history and has reshaped our society for hundreds of years. It is no surprise that feminism has found its way back into today's world and continues to push boundaries. Nowadays, feminism has become an extremely controversial topic discussed by many specialists trying to reflect where the world went wrong during its course of actions. Many writers use feminist theories to motivate women to help find themselves in these chaotic times of consumerism and oversexualization of both genders. Feminist literature used to be a form of protest against the politics of the male dominated world and often acknowledged the dire need for change. This part of the thesis will concentrate on the beginning of feminism and its impact on the world during its history. It will shortly mention the history of feminism in Great Britain since **Angela Carter** wrote *Nights at the circus* during her time in Britain and thus might have influenced her writing.

1.1 History of feminism

Women have had it rough since the beginning of ancient times, always viewed as creatures who must be led by a firm hand so that they cannot be lured by evil intentions. The Bible created the portrayal of women as sinners that will bring doom to the world if not put into restraints and is the main source for women's suffering: "Of the woman came the beginning of sin, and through her we all die. Give the water no passage; neither a wicked woman liberty to gad abroad. If she go not as thou wouldest have her, cut her off from thy flesh, and give her a bill of divorce, and let her go."¹ There was never room for their feelings or wishes because they would be seen as misbehaved or corrupt. When women fought against these stubborn ideologies during the peak of Christianity in America, it ended with countless women accused of witchcraft and were burned at the stake during the Salem witch trials. Just like Joan of Arc, the holy woman, was burned at the stake for heresy², hurting the religious ego of many Bishops for being strong-willed and taking religion into her own hands by wearing male attire³. In the end, she was not holy enough to be spared of such a vile closure to her trial. Joan of Arc has been recognized as a symbol for women's struggle and was praised for her persistence and virtue by the mediaeval feminist **Christine de Pizan**⁴.

¹"Ecclesiasticus 25," KJVAAE Bible YouVersion, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://www.bible.com/bible/546/SIR.25.KJVA>.

² Craig Taylor, *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 22-23.

³ Sarah Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Postfeminism* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 191.

⁴ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 191.

After all that, it is no surprise that women would once have had enough and demanded changes. This led to one of the biggest reforms for women during the 16th century, they were finally able to get an education⁵. Women could now fend off for themselves, they would often write about their hardships and then publish it among their allies, which would later help many women find common ground. This further fuelled the early feminist movements and angered the men. One of the greatest feminist writers during the 18th century was **Mary Wollstonecraft** with her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* that was published in 1792⁶. Even though it was not remembered for its original purpose, and that was to describe the rough life of a woman in the 18th century, it was remembered for her colourful description of her history, her suicide attempts, and unfulfilling relationships⁷. Her book connected many women and helped them realise that they are not alone in this male dominated world and that one day they will be listened to. Since then, many strong feminist writers emerged to support other women around the world and continued to further study their possibilities to acquire equal opportunities in life. This opened the doors for modern feminism.

Women now were aware of what they should be allowed to have in their lives and that they wanted to be treated equally. Nevertheless, it still didn't change the fact that women would have to marry a man to be secured in life and to even have a chance to demand more and be treated better than less fortunate sisters. Novels by **Jane Austen** or **Virginia Woolf** perfectly picture the inner fights young ladies had to face when it came to big decisions like who to marry and if they should listen to their heart, even if it meant losing everything and not get a chance at life. If they chose to listen to their parents, they would at best end with a prominent male that is well off, but they would have to live with someone that wants nothing more from them, than for the wife to behave accordingly and provide children. It is no surprise that domestic violence and abuse of marital rules were a common practice in the 18th century since at that time it was enforced and approved by the English law and the church⁸. This led to countless women living in fear and disharmony, often being punished for their spouse's jealousy, insecurity, or untrustworthy nature. **Wendy Moore** describes one successful case from the 18th century regarding Mary Eleanor Bowes, who was deceived into a marriage with a fortune-hunter that beat her up with whips or candlesticks and often threatened her with knives. Finally, after 8 years of fear she decided to go for a divorce,

⁵ Margaret Walters, *Feminism: a Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2005), 9.

⁶ Walters, 30.

⁷ Sarah Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 15.

⁸ Wendy Moore, "18th Century Domestic Violence," *Wonders & Marvels*, March 12, 2009, <http://www.wondersandmarvels.com/2009/03/18th-century-domestic-violence.html>.

backed up with all the necessary evidence to win the case. This upset the husband, who kidnapped her in fear of losing everything and threatened her with a pistol. Mary was rescued after 9 days and later won the case; she was given back her fortune as well as the custody of her children⁹.

During these hard times, there were not that many women lucky enough as Mary to be set free from their torture. It often led to the wife being imprisoned for many years if she refused to return to her husband after being denied the divorce¹⁰. With every defeat, women would get up stronger and more driven to gain freedom. This led to a debate about women's rights in the 1860's where two men, **John Stuart Mill** and **John Ruskin**¹¹, presented two extremely different perspectives on the oppression of women. Ruskin's ideology worked with the separate sphere theory which in his eyes meant, that women were there to aid the men that are the doer(s)¹². Mill's ideas were more on the rational side than Ruskin's and understood how women were traditionally oppressed by society. He confronts the standard idea of men being superior to women because they are physically weaker as an absurd way of thinking and should not give anyone power over another group of people¹³. Mill also concentrates on the general way of how society oppresses women and treat them as slaves¹⁴. If we take Mill's ideology into account, there is something to it since as mentioned before, women would lose all their property when stepping into a marriage, everything would belong to the husband, the head of the family. This gives man power over his wife, he could manipulate her into things she would not normally do or correct her bad behaviour just because she must bow down to her spouse since that is expected from her and not doing so would lead to serious trouble.

Like every human being, it is natural for us to carry our burden and there was no difference when it came to women of our past. There were many tea rooms and salons since the 1650's¹⁵ where women would talk about literature, politics and science and it is where first war strategies were created to gain their rights. One of the most famous salons was the *Chambre Bleu* (Blue Salon) in Paris during the 17th century, created by **Catherine de**

⁹ Moore

¹⁰ Elizabeth A. Foyster, *Marital Violence: an English Family History, 1660-1875* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17.

¹¹ Gamble, *The Routledge Companion*, 17.

¹² Gamble, *The Routledge Companion*, 17.

¹³ Gamble, *The Routledge Companion*, 17.

¹⁴ Gamble, *The Routledge Companion*, 18.

¹⁵ Walters, 16.

Vivonne, marquise de Rambouillet¹⁶. The Chambre Bleu was an inspiration for the salon in London, opened by **Elizabeth Montagu** in 1750, which led to the creation of one of the first feminist groups called the *Blue Stockings Society*, derived from the blue stockings worn by ladies during the day. Wealthy and well-educated women would gather, sometimes even selected men were invited, and would advocate for rational conversation that would promote moral improvements for gender differences¹⁷.

During the start of the 19th century, women began to be politically active thanks to the labour movement¹⁸. Sadly, for now it was only the privileged class that was listened to and had the power to change things, often not considering lower classes and less heard voices from the slums. The true feminist movement started in the second half of the 19th century, where it finally had an impact on society and brought forward changes in people and the law. It is the first wave of feminism and it concentrated on various fields from law, politics, employment to education. In 1856, over 25,000 women signed a petition to support the idea that a married woman should be able to own her fortune, which led to the creation of *the Matrimonial Causes Act* in 1857 that, for now, mainly focused on all the criteria for a divorce¹⁹ and in 1870 finally gave women the right to own their earnings and inherit property²⁰. All this opened up questions about double standards in society regarding prostitution and the demand for men to leave the reproductive system for women to handle and allow them to use birth control. It also was the beginning of the suffrage movement for women to finally be able to vote. This stirred the pot in many countries and led to decades before women were finally given the chance to completely integrate into society. The idea of women being able to vote was pushed from the table many times since the 1870's, the largest number of votes for suffrage was in 1873 where 153 men were in favour²¹. For the United Kingdom, it was the year 1928 when women were fully able to vote²² and 1919 for the United States of America²³.

The word feminist was first used in 1895²⁴ a year after the word 'new woman' was coined by Sarah Grand to describe the new generation of women that fought for their

¹⁶ DK, *The Feminism Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained* (New York: DK Publishing, 2019), chap. 1.

¹⁷ DK, chap. 1.

¹⁸ DK, chap. 1.

¹⁹ Gamble, *The Routledge Companion*, 19.

²⁰ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 21.

²¹ Walters, 73.

²² Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 27.

²³ Walters, 73.

²⁴ Gamble, *The Routledge Companion*, 23.

freedom and a better future²⁵. The Suffrage movement had two branches, the calmer group created by **Millicent Fawcett** in 1897 the *National Union of Woman's Suffrage Societies* (*Suffragists*), on the other side, we had the *Woman's Social and Political Union* (*Suffragettes*) established by **Emmeline Pankhurst** in 1903, which was the militant faction that would turn to vandalism, smashed windows, launched arson attacks and if arrested would go on hunger-strikes²⁶. During World War I. feminism came to a stand-still and women went to being nurses, tending for their male counterparts that were hurt during the war or worked in factories to support their families. Women strove for bigger opportunities at work and in society. They never had a chance to be even close to a leadership position since it was usual for women to work in retail or factories. Sewing, cleaning, and cooking was their daily cup of tea and an unmarried woman was expected to work only until she got married. Nevertheless, they were paid only a fraction of what a man would get on their salary²⁷. Society made a big gap between what a male and female job is and it was impossible for a woman to step over this border. There was a slow change after the year 1945²⁸ that created a new theory that saw women as a social construct created by the male dominated society.

The second wave of feminism started in the 1970's, often called the Women's Liberation Movement²⁹, that questioned the old feminism of equal rights and compared it to the new feminism of liberation that should be more revolutionary and collectivist³⁰. **Simone de Beauvoir** made it clear in her book *The Second Sex* (1949) that a woman is moulded into the *Other*³¹ gender according to male fantasies and myths that have been created throughout history³². Psychoanalysis, Biology, and Marxism are according to de Beauvoir leading factors that helped consolidate the idea of the feminine being as a construct to unify women through the male's point of view and thus leaving out any room for equality³³. This attitude leads the second wave that brings forward questions of why should biology determine the gender and why is it possible that one gender is superior to the other and dictates how, why and when a woman should feel, how she should lead her life and their purpose in life.

²⁵ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 26.

²⁶ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 324.

²⁷ DK, chap. 3.

²⁸ DK, chap. 3.

²⁹ DK, chap. 4.

³⁰ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 29.

³¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), xxi.

³² Beauvoir, 22.

³³ Beauvoir, 38-52.

The Second Wave feminism also concentrated on the question of sexuality and idealized femininity that emerged in America. Into the picture came talks and statistics about domestic violence and rape, there were multiple attacks on the pornographic industry, feminist **Andrea Dworkin** accused it of oppressing women and supporting violence against them³⁴, they show a woman's sexuality through male needs that do not take into account that women experience sexuality completely different and that what is arousing for men can be disturbing for women.

The Feminine Mystique (1963) written by **Betty Friedan** explores the unhappy women in American households³⁵ and uncovers the female version of the American Dream, where women endure another wave of suppression into the ideal housewives that would take care of the whole household, her children and hard-working husband³⁶. Commercials and magazines would support the idea of an idealized housewife, often pressuring women into thinking that they are not good enough if they cannot cook, clean, sew or sexually satisfy their husband. During the second wave, feminists have lived to see their fights for contraception bear fruit, during the 1970's it was possible to finally acquire contraception for free³⁷. The Third Wave came around the year 1992 thanks to **Rebecca Walker** and her article in *Ms. Magazine: Becoming the Third Wave*³⁸. Walker's focal point in her article is the recognition of the unchanging fact that the fight for equality with men is far from over and will continue throughout the times of postfeminism³⁹. Transgender feminism emerged during the Third Wave and discussed the way biology limits the discourse around gender and points at the fact that it is used to socially dominate the sexes, which was not limited to women only but any embodiment that did not work according to standard categorizations⁴⁰.

1.1.1 Feminism in Great Britain in the late 20th century

Great Britain is one of the countries where feminism has a long history with a significant impact on the politics of the past. Many feminist ideologies and theories took root here and continued to spread around the world. The **Pankhurst family** started the Suffragettes during their life in Britain and were active fighters for women's rights throughout their history, Dr.

³⁴ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 276.

³⁵ Walters, 102-4.

³⁶ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 207.

³⁷ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 208.

³⁸ DK, chap. 6.

³⁹ DK, chap. 6.

⁴⁰ Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, *Third Wave Feminism: a Critical Exploration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 59-64.

Pankhurst drafted the *Women's Disability Removal Bill* in 1870 and Emmeline Pankhurst's daughter Christabel was interested in the fight of American Suffragist *Susan B. Anthony*⁴¹. Liberal, Marxist and forms of radical feminism⁴² were present during the time Angela Carter lived in Britain and wrote *Nights at the Circus*. Marxist feminism in Britain revolved around understanding patriarchy and its ways of dominating women not just in the family hierarchy, but in the economy that they lived in as well. Radical feminist on the other hand sees men as the primary source for women's oppression and consider women as a class similarly to the working class, that should take back control of their reproductive system⁴³. That is why in 1970, the first *Women's Liberation Conference* adopted certain demands that they would want to achieve such as: equal pay and opportunities as well as education, free contraception and the chance to have an on demand abortion⁴⁴. These demands were later extended into broader topics that would include financial or legal independence and the need to end discrimination against lesbian women⁴⁵.

Many associations and unions were created in need for equal opportunities for women in social and personal spheres as well as fairer treatment for single mothers⁴⁶. Also, during these times is when women of colour started to finally open up about their hardships and made it clear that what was raised by the white feminists as a problem, came crashing down on feminists of colour many times heavier because of the relation of gender, class and sexuality⁴⁷. **Margaret Thatcher** was the prime minister during this time and many feminists feel like she has done nothing to support the women's movement⁴⁸ since some social policies during her administration did negatively affect women⁴⁹. Feminists of that time would probably say the same about Margaret Thatcher as **Hadley Freeman** wrote in one of his articles about Thatcher in *The Guardian*: "Thatcher is one of the clearest examples of the fact that a successful woman doesn't always mean a step forward for women... She wasn't a feminist icon and she wasn't an icon for women"⁵⁰.

⁴¹ Walters, 75-7.

⁴² Harold L. Smith, *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 191-2.

⁴³ Smith, 191-2

⁴⁴ Smith, 195

⁴⁵ Smith, 195

⁴⁶ Smith, 192-3.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Evans, *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms Neoliberalism, Intersectionality and the State in Britain and the US* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 49-50.

⁴⁸ Evans, 158.

⁴⁹ Smith, 202.

⁵⁰ Hadley Freeman, "Margaret Thatcher Was No Feminist," *The Guardian*, April 9, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/09/margaret-thatcher-no-feminist>.

1.2 Feminist movements

Throughout the lifespan of feminism, we have come across differing beliefs that work with or against the general purpose of the women's movement. Most of the time they expanded already existing beliefs into more specific criteria such as economics, sexuality, education, and politics in order to have an easier time identifying the issues. These beliefs created movements that had their own techniques to get their point across. We can identify three main movements, from which other ideologies have come forward to voice their problems.

1.2.1 Liberal Feminism

The movement with the longest history is Liberal feminism. It formed at the roots of the feminist movement with Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill arguing for the need of a social reform that would give women the same opportunities as men⁵¹. The movement was inspired by the core values of Liberalism and transformed its ideologies to fit the women's movement by pointing out the lack of legal rights that would support the idea that women work on the same principles as men⁵². Liberal Feminist have fought for equal rights, better work, and educational opportunities along with the acceptance of women in social clubs⁵³. *The National Organization for Women* (NOW) was created by **Betty Friedan** and 27 other people in 1966 at the *Third National Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women* and additional 21 people have signed at the *NOW Organizing Conference*⁵⁴ after the disappointing failure of the *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission* to take sexual discrimination seriously⁵⁵. NOW was one with the liberal traditions of feminism and wanted to "bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men" as described in their Statement of Purpose from 1966⁵⁶. As many other organizations, NOW is still active to this day honouring their founders⁵⁷.

⁵¹ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 239.

⁵² Sally J. Scholz, *Feminism: a Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), 15.

⁵³ Scholz, 14-5.

⁵⁴ "Honoring Our Founders and Pioneers," National Organization for Women, accessed January 31, 2021, <https://now.org/about/history/honoring-our-founders-pioneers/>.

⁵⁵ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 25.

⁵⁶ "Statement of Purpose," National Organization for Women, accessed January 31, 2021, <https://now.org/about/history/statement-of-purpose/>.

⁵⁷ "About the NOW Foundation," National Organization for Women, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://now.org/now-foundation/about-now-foundation/>.

1.2.2 Marxist Feminism

As Liberal feminist see the problems in gender discrimination, Marxist feminists see the culprit in class divisions⁵⁸ despite having similar views as liberal feminist when it comes to patriarchy. Liberal feminists see capitalism as a system working on voluntary exchange whereas Marxist feminists see it as a system that allows exploitation and power relations⁵⁹. Women are being exploited through their unpaid labour by selling their reproductive systems because they have nothing else or better to offer on the marketplace⁶⁰. Either they will face harassment in a low paid job with a minimal chance of growth, or they will be exploited through domestic labour to please men⁶¹. Women are not paid for their domestic labour⁶² even though it is expected of them to do their job for the wellbeing of the family.

Capitalism supports the system of classes due to its imbalances and contradictions that allow wealthy property-owners to take advantage of the lower classes⁶³ that scramble for every last penny to survive. Since employees only paid minimum for the labour and not for the actual energy and amount of work that has been done to profit from the work of others and get their money's worth⁶⁴. It is no surprise that under such conditions Marxist feminists see women as a class in some sense, thanks to their identical experience and the fact, that their domestic work is not being recognized as real work and are being alienated by many factors similarly as to the lower classes⁶⁵. **Friedrich Engels** helped lay out the understanding of women's oppression through Marxist mechanics in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), where he helps understand how changes in society and capitalism impacted the structure of families where men became powerful thanks to their accumulated wealth, that made it possible for them to take over the household and dictate rules⁶⁶. Marriage is viewed by Marxist feminists as one of many supporting pillars of patriarchy that allows men to exploit women economically, sexually as well as mentally, by giving women the man's surname in order to erase their integrity.⁶⁷

⁵⁸ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 244.

⁵⁹ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: a Comprehensive Introduction* (Colorado: Westview press, 1989), 41.

⁶⁰ Tong, 41-2.

⁶¹ Tong, 51-3.

⁶² Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 245.

⁶³ Tong, 42.

⁶⁴ Tong, 41-2.

⁶⁵ Tong, 43-4.

⁶⁶ Tong, 47-51.

⁶⁷ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 244.

1.2.3 Radical Feminism

Even though Liberal and Marxist feminism might have similar visions and ideologies, this does not apply for Radical feminism. It has set its roots early on in the first wave of feminism, where the Suffragettes led by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1905 took a more vigorous stance to fight against men and patriarchy⁶⁸. But it was not until the 1960s-1970s that radical feminism has started to have its own form thanks to the creation of the Woman's Liberation Movement (1967-1968)⁶⁹ and many new groups like the Redstockings (1969)⁷⁰, Radicalesbians (1970)⁷¹ and National Black Feminist Organization (1973)⁷². According to Bonnie Kreps you could divide the Women's Liberation Movement into three segments that they concentrate on: a socialist economic revolution, integration of women into society and opposing sexism on the base of gender⁷³. The black and lesbian/gay feminist elevated the movement onto another level, by pointing out the struggles of being visible within the movement⁷⁴ and challenging sexual ideologies that could threaten a man's place of power in society⁷⁵.

What radical feminism has brought to the movement is consciousness raising, which is a group gathering where women could talk about issues regarding sex-role stereotyping, share and analyse their experiences as well as help understand that these issues are common among women and are a social predicament⁷⁶. After talking through the points, they would start with the real purpose of consciousness-raising groups which consisted of studying and writing literature on discussed topics, creating projects, and organizing speak-outs to highlight certain topics⁷⁷. The Woman's Liberation Movement, similarly to NOW, is still active to this day continuing to fight against discrimination, protect equal rights and help bring a change to society⁷⁸.

⁶⁸ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 23; 324.

⁶⁹ Carol Giardina, *Freedom for Women: Forging the Women's Liberation Movement, 1953-1970* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 173.

⁷⁰ "About Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement," Welcome to Redstockings, accessed January 24, 2021, <http://www.redstockings.org/index.php/about-redstockings>.

⁷¹ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 28.

⁷² Kayomi Wada, "National Black Feminist Organization (1973-1976)," BlackPast, December 29, 2008, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/national-black-feminist-organization-1973-1976/#sthash.T9Lj8kTA.dpuf>.

⁷³ Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone, *Radical Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1973), 238-9.

⁷⁴ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 27-8.

⁷⁵ Koedt, Levine, and Rapone, 246-58.

⁷⁶ Walters, 120.

⁷⁷ Koedt, Levine, and Rapone, 280.

⁷⁸ "About," National Organization for Women, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://now.org/about/>.

2 POSTFEMINISM

Just like any other movement, even Feminism has its other side that looks at the world from a different, more critical perspective. This gave birth to Postfeminism, that can be viewed as the Feminism of the postmodern era, or feminist ideologies that go deeper and denounce feminism for what it has become. Thanks to the new era for women, unheard voices emerge from the lower classes and women of colour that were unable to voice their own opinions before since old Feminism only fought for equality between gender, and for decades, continued to ignore problems that came with sexuality, race and class. Postfeminism took in people that did not fit the standard of society, loved the same sex, hated feminism for their ignorance or just plainly did not agree with new emerging scientific theories that revolved around a male dominated construct. The objective of this chapter is to go into detail why Postfeminism sees Feminism as a failure when it comes to helping women, how it affected the growth of the women's movement and how it influenced women around the world. It will go through the various aspects that are criticized by Postfeminism and explain the reasons for it to be so.

2.1 History of postfeminism

The word Postfeminism was firstly used by media in the 1980's in connection with the liberation from the old ways of feminism that have been outdated⁷⁹ and serve no purpose for the new era of women. Postfeminism mostly criticizes feminism for its lack of understanding, that gender is not all that binds a person. Feminism completely leaves out the importance of race and class. Two key factor that make it nearly impossible to help women of colour, homosexuals, transgender people and even the men since they are suppressed by more than one construct. The biggest part in the creation of Postfeminism is the fact, that feminism started to create a type of agenda for women victimization together with the creation of a New Age goddess and open hostility towards homosexuals⁸⁰. Susan Faludi portrays Postfeminism as a backlash in the sense that It is a pseudointellectual, ironic criticism of feminism without any harmful intentions, she sees that in a world of media it is easy to influence women to become postfeminists since it is trendy, not because they have achieved equality, but simply because they do not care about the matter anymore⁸¹.

⁷⁹ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 44.

⁸⁰ Gamble, *The Routledge Companion*, 39.

⁸¹ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 84-6.

Many authors that are interested in the new emerging wave agreed that Second Wave feminism stopped celebrating women for their strength and pictured them as victims that were imprisoned in a patriarchal system where men were to be blamed for everything⁸². Postfeminists saw that it was important to start focusing on debating the differences and not just how to reach equality⁸³. Postfeminism asked women to decide for themselves what they should do about their lives and not let feminism push them around and restrict them into a certain frame of behaviour and looks⁸⁴. Susan Faludi is the opinion that feminism brought up this sense of crisis over unnecessary topics through media outlets, that made it seem like worldwide issues⁸⁵. Faludi questions feminism in her book *Backlash* (2006), what it had done for women and lists actual issues that have become more problematic during the past years. In her book she mentions issues like wage differences that are nearly as big as half of what men earn, vast number of women stuck in typically female positions because others would not want to hire them, women with college diplomas earning less than men without high school, no family-leave or childcare programs for women that want to eventually have a family and settle down, women's reproduction is in greater danger than in the waves before⁸⁶.

Even though women were now able to choose for themselves and have moved on from past issues, Germaine Greer sees Postfeminism as a new age marketing trick to lure women into another form of oppression by letting them believe they can have it all through consumerism, entice them with pills, medications, surgeries, fashion, and other unhealthy things that would help them believe they have a well-balanced life⁸⁷. Thanks to how open feminism has become it was clear that some strange branches of it would appear, raunch feminism, bimbo feminism or even babe feminism, all that really had nothing to do with gaining equality but believe that good feminism leads to great sex⁸⁸. This new wave brought a false idea of freedom that secretly told women how to feel about themselves, luring them into conforming to narrow-minded beauty standards presented in ads and magazines⁸⁹.

⁸² Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 46-8.

⁸³ Nicola Rivers, *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave: Turning Tides* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 16.

⁸⁴ Rivers, 19.

⁸⁵ Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 54.

⁸⁶ Faludi, 5.

⁸⁷ Gamble, *The Routledge Companion*, 42.

⁸⁸ Genz and Brabon, 65.

⁸⁹ Christina Scharff and Rosalind Gill, *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 39-40.

Sophia Phoca sees that consumer culture uses self-preservation as a concept to sell products that should help users fight off signs of physical deterioration and decay to help preserve the body and feed this idea of greater value when the body fits the standard of beauty, youth and fitness to then fulfil their sexual drive⁹⁰. The fashion and cosmetic industry were successful by exploiting real needs and fears that people had connected with fulfilling their ambitions and sexuality⁹¹. Even to this day, men have a twisted understanding of female sexual desires and needs thanks to the pornographic industry that in the eyes of feminism is the main source of women's oppression since it objectifies the female body⁹² and turns women into passive bodies that are always ready to sexually satisfy men⁹³. But during the times of postfeminism, new views of this matter appeared and brought a more open-minded perspective, where women use erotica and porn to gain sexual empowerment⁹⁴. This opened up a pro-sex movement, which brought do-me feminism into play that portrayed women as sexually active and desirable by being accepting and frequent use of irony to create space for playfulness and ambiguity⁹⁵. Some anti-porn feminists like Andrea Dworkin called for legal action against porn to stop supporting violence against women but there were pro-pornography feminists who were against this idea since it could make it harder for women to explore their sexuality⁹⁶ and could lose a source for sexual pleasure and confirmation of their sexual identity⁹⁷.

In connection with the media a new wave of power feminism was created during the 1990's that concentrated on younger teens and was called Girl Power⁹⁸. It was used as a slogan by the Spice Girls and encouraged younger girls to take back their femininity by promoting individualism and female independence as well as advocating young girls to take back their girliness in style and fashion⁹⁹. Even though this empowerment was accepted with mixed feelings, some argued that this girl power advertised women objectification even if its sole purpose was to fight against it by going against the ideology that the fashion industry helps objectify women and is the gate to a patriarchal power construct¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁰ Sophia Phoca and Rebecca Wright, *Introducing Postfeminism* (Duxford: Icon Books, 1999), 74-5.

⁹¹ Phoca and Wright, 75.

⁹² Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 297.

⁹³ Phoca and Wright, 81.

⁹⁴ Evans, 166.

⁹⁵ Genz and Brabon, 91.

⁹⁶ Phoca and Wright, 82-3.

⁹⁷ Genz and Brabon, 94.

⁹⁸ Genz and Brabon, 76.

⁹⁹ Genz and Brabon, 76-7.

¹⁰⁰ Gamble, *The Routledge Companion*, 212.

Postmodernism added more strength to patriarchy by creating ideologies predominantly from a male perspective and positioned the male gender as the superior one. Postfeminists and feminists questioned many ideologies and theories created during postmodernism, such as Freud's theory of the penis envy where women are firstly drawn to their mothers, but realize they lack the penis and are then drawn to their fathers in order to gain their paternal phallus that women desperately want¹⁰¹ or Jacques Lacan's phallogentrism where women and men are built by the same patriarchal system¹⁰². Sigmund Freud was under constant fire for his narrow-minded view, going as far as to state that masculinity and femininity is determined by just the lack or presence of a sex organ, which was later argued by postfeminists that gender is physically constructed rather than predetermined by biology¹⁰³.

Racism and discrimination against homosexuals went hand in hand with masculine dominance and were topics that postfeminists started to point out more as time went on. This led to many discussions among white feminists on how to fight for women with colour that live in colonized countries and were dominated by a mostly male construct¹⁰⁴. Women of colour had issues with that since it left out any cultural conditions that would form a worldwide unified sisterhood¹⁰⁵. Furthermore, it was criticized that white feminists are racist themselves and often do not allow the most victimized and oppressed women to speak out for themselves and often leave them bitterly disappointed and resentful¹⁰⁶. Postfeminism also started to challenge male writers and the way they oversexualize women and use feminine clichés in their writings, also artists and writers examined the influence of language regarding sexuality, gender, race, and class¹⁰⁷. Even if postfeminism fully emerged during the times of postmodernism it was not created by it, but it helped postfeminism to get more traction and grow into areas that desperately needed a change in the ways people thought about issues that plagued women. Postmodernism and its many studies in gender, psychology and sexology helped better understand the differences between men and women, which drastically transformed the purpose of feminism in general and called for a more relatable movement that would go beyond equality.

¹⁰¹ Phoca and Wright, 22-3

¹⁰² Phoca and Wright, 44-5.

¹⁰³ Phoca and Wright, 24-5.

¹⁰⁴ Phoca and Wright, 116-17.

¹⁰⁵ Phoca and Wright, 117,

¹⁰⁶ Walters, 114.

¹⁰⁷ Phoca and Wright, 161.

3 ANGELA CARTER AND NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS

To be able to analyse Angela Carter's novel it is necessary to know the story and the style in which it was written. Since Angela Carter was in some sense a feminist herself, her writing style was influenced by the women's movement and her many interests together with her experience with gender stereotypes as a young girl. It is unclear if Carter wrote *Nights at the Circus* as a postfeminist novel to scrutinize feminism for its lack of understanding and blindness to the broader picture of what really is important for women, or if it was written in a purely feminist way to show off women's independence and perseverance. The aim of this chapter is to understand the impact of Carter's experiences in her life on her writing style and feministic tendencies as well as her contribution to feminism. Furthermore, it will introduce the plot of the novel and present the main protagonist Fevvers and her counterpart Jack.

3.1 Angela Carter and her version of feminism

An author's life can be reflected in their work and this is valid for Angela Carter. She had indulged herself in fairy tales since her childhood, from the first time she read her brother's collection of **Grimm's** fairy tales and the story of *Alice in the Wonderland* from **Lewis Carroll**¹⁰⁸ up to her translating **Charles Perrault's** fairy tales¹⁰⁹. These and many more authors were great inspiration to her own tales and non-fiction publications where she gave free reins to the fantastical and surreal. Despite the influence of **Gabriel Garcia Marquez's** magic realism and his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, magic was usually used by Angela as a sinister and uninvited interloper in her fictions, that was until *Nights at the Circus* where magic became part of the ordinary and not as a frightening intrusion into daily life¹¹⁰. Carter published her first story in 1965 called *Shadow dance*¹¹¹, after that she continues with eight more novels, a collection of short stories and children stories as well as many publications for radio and movies¹¹². She had a prolific journalist career, writing a substantial amount of newspaper reviews and essays, after her experience as a reporter¹¹³.

¹⁰⁸ Edmund Gordon, *The Invention of Angela Carter: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 20.

¹⁰⁹ Linden Peach, *Macmillan Modern Novelists: Angela Carter* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1998), 2.

¹¹⁰ Robert Ellis Hosmer, *Contemporary British Women Writers: Texts and Strategies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 74-5.

¹¹¹ Hosmer, 67.

¹¹² Helen Stoddart, *Angela Carter's Nights at the Circus* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3.

¹¹³ Stoddart, 3.

Carter created *The Sadeian Women: An Exercise in Cultural History*, a non-fictional book from 1979, where she writes about Marquis de Sade and discusses gender stereotypes of pornographic literature¹¹⁴, that might reflect on some of her experiences in her younger age¹¹⁵. It also examines the femininity created by Hollywood, the building tensions in a relationship between a mother and her daughter and the mystification of motherhood¹¹⁶. Even though Carter herself never really wanted to be categorized into a specific style, most of her publications fit in some sense into a broad variety of styles, for example: gothic, magic realism, fairy tales, fictional history, romance fiction, science fiction and other ones that are not that prominent or only use some of their elements.

Her writing is secretly filled with political agendas, like *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and *Heroes and Villains* (1969) that both portray life of young women in a patriarchal world¹¹⁷ where they try to find their own identity as women and break sexual taboos¹¹⁸. Moreover, *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) is another work filled with political undertones, depicting fairy tales like the Red Riding Hood in a raunchier and more sexualized version where girls discover their sexuality¹¹⁹¹²⁰. Carter worked on her own fairy tales, which started under the title *Feminist fairy tales*, but were called *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* in the end¹²¹. It was inspired by tales from various cultures like Russian or Chinese and are filled with supernatural creatures, sexual knowledge, and harsh humour with a female protagonist in the lead¹²². Carter's writing is subversive in that sense, that she does not bother with the politics around sex and women's sexuality, she rather pushes the boundaries of its identity by playing outrageous games with the concept of women exploring their sexuality and breaking gender myths through sexy, funny, and frightening scenes¹²³¹²⁴. Carter strived for social change, which was visible through her socialist and libertarian tendencies, even though when it came to feminism, she rather participated from the shadows¹²⁵, giving support through her writing. She died of cancer in 1992.

¹¹⁴ Pamela L. Shelton, *Feminist Writers* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1996), 88.

¹¹⁵ Gordon, 30.

¹¹⁶ Gordon, 254.

¹¹⁷ Peach, 71.

¹¹⁸ Gordon, 31.

¹¹⁹ Gordon, 71.

¹²⁰ Gordon, 268.

¹²¹ Gordon, 398.

¹²² Gordon, 399.

¹²³ Hosmer, 67.

¹²⁴ Gordon, xii.

¹²⁵ Gordon, 215.

3.2 Introduction of *Nights at the Circus*

Nights at the Circus is a novel published by **Angela Carter** in 1984 during her life in Britain and is the eighth in her series of novels¹²⁶. The novel was flooded with positive feedback from critics and the public and eventually won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1985¹²⁷ and was named the best winning novel in 2012, two decades after Angela's death¹²⁸. Many agree that this novel was the peak of her writing career and is one of her most dramatic novels to be¹²⁹.

The novel is set in 1899 on the verge of two centuries and the beginning of heated debates about women's suffrage in Victorian Britain¹³⁰. The Victorian era plays a big role in the portrayal of women and prostitution since it brings out a very restricted view on gender identity and class division. The novel is divided into three parts, similar to a classical three-act structure¹³¹, each part named after places the characters travel to as the story progresses and reaches its climax. We start in London where we learn about Fevver's childhood and rise to fame from a brothel as a winged aerialiste, after that we travel to Petersburg and learn about Captain Kearney's circus and the life of the people in it before we land in the icy wastelands of Siberia, where Walser is brought back to reality by a tribe shaman.

Throughout the story we see development in the relationship between Fevvers and Walser, who is a sceptic American journalist that wants to uncover her real identity. Instead, he unknowingly falls in love with her as he is being swept off his feet by the newfound excitement in his new life that he is experiencing thanks to her. Fevvers is a humanized, bold and upfront character that rather than victimizing herself, uses her sexuality to her benefits. **Sarah Bannock** found some resemblance in Fevvers character with how Édith Piaf lived and some of her quirks¹³². The fantastic and surreal in the novel uncovers the love for fiction along with a political desire to challenge women's representation, born from the emerging feminism of the mid-1960s, thus helping establish new possibilities in gender politics¹³³. It not only proves patriarchy's apprehension to feminism, but also helps bring out the freaks¹³⁴.

¹²⁶ Peach, 2.

¹²⁷ Peach, 3.

¹²⁸ Gordon, 353.

¹²⁹ Stoddart, xii.

¹³⁰ Gordon, 324.

¹³¹ Stoddart, xi.

¹³² Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton. *Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997), 206-12.

¹³³ Stoddart, 70.

¹³⁴ Stoddart, 55.

II. ANALYSIS

4 ANALYSIS OF NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS

Angela Carter made an incredible breakthrough in her writing career with *Nights at the Circus*. Even if the book was criticized by feminists for not being feminist enough and supporting postfeminism, it was widely celebrated for its fresh breath of air that it brought upon the question of gender identity. The novel brings a twist to postmodern literature by contrasting its disorderliness with the linear materialistic world that is being controlled by limiting social constructs created throughout a male dominated history. She recreates the idea of a feminine or masculine person and supports the idea of people being fluid. A woman can be very feminine on the outside thanks to her attire and appearance, but she can be very masculine on the inside thanks to her sheer determination to succeed in her life and dominate the world that tries to restrict her. But this change is not limited just for women, Carter portrays the need for men to open up to this possibility as well and accept change within themselves. A newly formed woman needs to appear at the brink of a new century in order to have the power to crack even the hardest illusion men have bewitched themselves with to be able to accept that even they can be full of emotions and softness, which can be liberating for them and the tightly knitted societal standards.

4.1 Chaos and fragmentation

At first glance, the novel creates the impression of being a chaotic story that is told by at least two narrators, accompanied with Fevver's bubbly explanation of her story and the rational thinking of Walser that tries to keep his composure no matter what Fevver's throws his way. This is one of Carter's specialty, locking the reader into her form of narration and time without their knowledge, making them yearn for another page to quench their curiosity about what is fiction and what is fact in this story. We are so intrigued that we completely lose track of time in the story, what feels like days is in reality a few hours. Distortion of time and breaking the linear flow of narration is strongly associated with postmodernism¹³⁵, which plays a big role in *Nights at the Circus*. Fevvers is such a strong personality, that she seems to overpower the real narrator and strings the story to her rhythm, jumping from taking over the flow to a complete stop to eat a nice meal to satisfy her hunger from all that talking, which in some sense disrupts the progression of the story and brings chaos. This chaos unknowingly helps the reader to forget the idea of Fevvers being a hoax and just accepts the reality that is created in the book. One is so intrigued by Fevvers explosive and

¹³⁵ Stuart Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 124.

human character that you want her to be real, just for the fresh gust of wind she brings to the world of fiction in the postmodern era by being a strong and dominant woman that defies attempts to be objectified by patriarchal structures. In the end it makes us root for Fevvers as we are being allured by her voice, even “Walser had become a prisoner of her voice”¹³⁶ as she “lassooed [sic] him with her narrative and dragged him along with her before he'd had a chance to ask Lizzie if”¹³⁷.

Furthermore, the fact that time as we know is irrelevant in the novel, breaks some of the boundaries that we have to the natural state of our world and thus we do not expect the novel to be anything similar to what we perceive as normal life. Despite being in some sense desensitized from reality, we can still recognize real social structures and political struggles that were active during the novels creation as mentioned in the first half of the thesis. Although *Nights at the Circus* is perceived as a feminist novel, Carter never really associated herself with any group or social movement, nevertheless, she still strove for social change more than being recognized as a social warrior. She concentrated on changing the traditions that plagued gender identity and brought awareness to it¹³⁸, which was in a way her form of striving for social change. She was a socialist at heart thanks to her mother, but perceived feminism as part of it¹³⁹. She is her own kind of feminist, because she goes about things her own way, similarly to her writing style. She uses everything at her disposal, from political struggles of 1980s Britain such as Margaret Thatcher's administration and Thatcherism¹⁴⁰ up to historical events that have not happened yet in the timeline of the story like the Bloody Sunday of 1905 in St. Petersburg and the nearing threat of Communism¹⁴¹.

There is one thing that keeps the narrative grounded and connected to reality and that is Walser's notebook. Today's journaling is in a similar vein to keeping a notebook. People keep them to organize their thoughts and feelings in order to stay grounded and control their emotions or manage their time. The notebook Walser owned is his only way of keeping up with Fevver's strong and alluring personality that he has trouble dealing with. He writes all his thoughts about her, his additional questions to not forget them or things he wants to check up later just to confirm his theory. It is as if Walser believes that his notebook is his trump card against Fevvers since there are all the facts that could confirm her being a hoax. But

¹³⁶ Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus* (London: Vintage, 2006), 47.

¹³⁷ Carter, 67.

¹³⁸ Gordon, xii.

¹³⁹ Gordon, 73.

¹⁴⁰ Stoddart, 8.

¹⁴¹ Carter, 111.

without the notebook, Walser's character falls into chaos and so does his scepticism because of his dependence on it. Similarly, to how history and social norms or rules are written in books and people have to abide by it, even though all that was set in stone by privileged people who had the upper hand and do not know what is best for the world, only for their personal gains. Without the notebook, he cannot tame his emotions as if he does not know how to behave outside the lines of his writings, because he was never challenged by his life to deal with what he feels:

Her wings throbbed, pulsed, then whirred, buzzed and at last began to beat steadily on the air they disturbed so much that the pages of Walser's notebook ruffled over and he temporarily lost his place, had to scramble to find it again, almost displaced his composure but managed to grab tight hold of his scepticism just as it was about to blow over the ledge of the press box.¹⁴²

Fevvers strong aura does affect the notebook (Walser's scepticism) on some occasion by rustling its pages just by the breeze of her lashes¹⁴³, writing into it with her "fine, firm, flowing Italic hand"¹⁴⁴ or by thrusting her leg on the knee where the notebook is and scattering it to the floor¹⁴⁵ casting Walser of his equilibrium. It is not only Walser that is being thrown of balance but to the novel as well. Thanks to its slow progression from London to the bustling circus in St. Petersburg, where emotions get out of control for most of the characters up to the disconnected lands of Siberia, where reality does not seem to have any power. It is in the white wastelands of Transbaikal that we experience the time deformities similar to the one happening in the dressing room in London, where Walser grows a beard as if he was there for months. The tribe, thanks to its social uniqueness, experiences time at a different pace than standard society would. Therefore, it is no surprise that for the tribespeople "winter had gone on for two or three months already"¹⁴⁶, whereas for Fevvers and the others it is only about a week that the train crashed and lost Walser in the wreckage¹⁴⁷. But it is this place most disconnected from reality and western history where Walser is able to refurbish himself from within and see things he couldn't because of his reliance on predefined societal structures and gender identities.

¹⁴² Carter, 15.

¹⁴³ Carter, 53.

¹⁴⁴ Carter, 90.

¹⁴⁵ Carter, 96.

¹⁴⁶ Carter, 316.

¹⁴⁷ Carter, 322.

4.2 Intertextuality and personas

The use of various accessible sources, references or medias is called bricolage, which is something that Carter uses in her writing style and that pops up around her quite frequently. She talks about using bricolage briefly in her interview with **John Haffenden** in *Novelists in Interview* (1985) in connection to her usage of western Europe as some sorts of scrapyard of resources from which she is able to create all sorts of new things for her novels¹⁴⁸. Not only does she use politics and bricolage to her advantage, but intertextuality as well. *Nights at the circus* is filled with references to a distinct amount of works from other artists no matter if it is written, painted, or sung. We have biblical references to Lucifer¹⁴⁹, Fevvers ironically uses *Moby Dick's* opening line 'Call him Ishmael'¹⁵⁰ to describe Walser¹⁵¹ in the first chapter. We also have a reference to **Shakespeare's** King of the Fairies from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*¹⁵², which is referenced many times even indirectly. Furthermore, we can find references to paintings like **Henry Matisse's** *Luxe, calme et volupté*¹⁵³ that shows a scenery of naked women on the French Riviera, its name is taken from **Baudelaire's** poem¹⁵⁴, he is mentioned in the novel as well¹⁵⁵. Walser's series of interviews with Fevvers are for the title Great Humbugs of the World, which can be a reference to greatest circus owner **Phineas Taylor Barnum** who wrote a book about deceptive marketing called *The Humbugs of the World*¹⁵⁶.

Moreover, Fevvers is the replica of the most famous actress Mae West that was the embodiment of a sex goddess whom everyone made absurd stories about, just because of what a sensation she was. Carter wanted Fevvers to have Mae West's extraordinary talent of controlling the audience's reaction towards her¹⁵⁷, which is portrayed by Fevver's ability to take over the narrative and stay dominant in situations. Carter also mentions Mae West's unique walking style as if she is saddle-sore¹⁵⁸, where Fevver's walking style is described as

¹⁴⁸ John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985), 92.

¹⁴⁹ Carter, 31.

¹⁵⁰ Carter, 6.

¹⁵¹ Stoddart, 13.

¹⁵² Carter, 73.

¹⁵³ Carter, 43.

¹⁵⁴ Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Henri Matisse, Luxe, Calme Et Volupté," Smarthistory, November 20, 2015, <https://smarthistory.org/henri-matisse-luxe-calme-et-volupte/>.

¹⁵⁵ Carter, 41.

¹⁵⁶ Philip B. Kunhardt, Philip B. Kunhardt, and Peter W. Kunhardt, *Barnum: an Illustrated Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 47.

¹⁵⁷ Haffenden, 88.

¹⁵⁸ Haffenden, 88.

an unhorsed Valkyrie¹⁵⁹. Mae West used to wear a peroxide blond wig for her roles¹⁶⁰, whereas Fevvers bleaches her own hair platinum blond. Even the way Fevvers is described seems to reflect Mae West's larger-than-life personality¹⁶¹. There are some very personal characteristics of Édith Piaf in Fevvers. Fevvers was similarly to Piaf brought up in a brothel under the wings of the prostitutes living under the same roof, providing them with love and care¹⁶². They both have an undying love for champagne, which could be Fevver's victory toast as the Goddess of Victory was often painted with a cup¹⁶³. Piaf loved the colour blue and violet, which was her lucky colour¹⁶⁴ and that counts for Fevvers as well, she carried her lucky violets everywhere until she lost them during the train wreck¹⁶⁵.

As mentioned in the first half of the thesis, Carter has a long history with fairy tales and that does not change with *Nights at the Circus*. Mix in mythical deities and you have a collage of fantastical beings that support the fabulousness and magical feel of the novel. We have the Sleeping Beauty and the Wiltshire Wonder¹⁶⁶ as the child of the King of the Fairies in the brothel of Madame Schreck. All of the women, including Fevvers, in the brothel are metaphors for the way's women are being objectified by men: The Sleeping beauty as a passive woman that does not object to men, Wonder as the small fairy depicting infantilization¹⁶⁷ or Fanny four-eyes as objectification of the body pictured as a second pair of eyes instead of nipples. Fevvers thanks to her wings should portray freedom of choice, which men like to steal from her, like the Grand Duke wanting to turn Fevvers into a toy in a cage, even Madame Schreck tries to take away Fevver's freedom by making her wings unusable: "Get in a man to block up all the chimneys immediately!"¹⁶⁸. In some sense, Fevvers sells out her wings in order to gain freedom, taking advantage of capitalism but in return losing herself in it. And only then do we really see that without her wings, Fevvers would be an ordinary woman struggling like any other to come by in life. This initially points at the fact that women would rather be prostitutes and sell themselves in order to survive.

¹⁵⁹ Carter, 175.

¹⁶⁰ George Eells and Stanley Musgrove, *Mae West: a Biography* (New York: Morrow, 1982), 11.

¹⁶¹ Eells and Musgrove, 12.

¹⁶² Bristow and Broughton, 208.

¹⁶³ "Nike. Facts and Information on the Goddess Nike," Greek Gods & Goddesses, February 9, 2017, <https://greekgodsandgoddesses.net/goddesses/nike/>.

¹⁶⁴ Bristow and Broughton, 208.

¹⁶⁵ Carter, 266.

¹⁶⁶ Carter, 66.

¹⁶⁷ Stoddart, 87-8.

¹⁶⁸ Carter, 65.

Naturally, Fevvers is connected to many mythical beings, beginning with Helen of Troy as the main reference to her hatching from an egg as well as Fevvers being similarly to Helen the embodiment of erotic desires and beauty¹⁶⁹ since Fevvers was “intended to be seen, not handled”¹⁷⁰. Not on one occasion do we read about fantasies regarding Fevvers like when the Prince of Wales “meditates upon the erotic possibilities of her ability to hover and the problematic of his paunch vis-à-vis the missionary position”¹⁷¹. During her time in the brothel, she embodied the Greek goddess of Victory since she, too, is in possession of wings and a sword. Under Ma Nelson’s suggestions Fevvers was “the spiritual flagship of her fleet” and the “living perfection”¹⁷² of the statue of the Winged Victory of Samothrace in Louvre that originally seemed to have been sitting on the bow of a ship¹⁷³. This strongly resonates with the idea of Ma Nelson being the admiral of a ship¹⁷⁴ and being the portrayal of Admiral Nelson who sailed on a flagship called HMS Victory to fight the Battle of Trafalgar¹⁷⁵. Fevvers was described as the angel of death by Mr. Rosencreutz who wanted to sacrifice her on the 1st of May to gain immortality. On that day we celebrate the arrival of spring by building maypoles for fertility¹⁷⁶, which Mr. Rosencreutz expresses as a phallic symbol: “Maypole, phallus, lingam”¹⁷⁷. Fevvers reads in the newspapers and tells Walser that Mr. Rosencreutz is in fact a politician that is against women’s right to vote and sees them “too pure and rarefied to be bothering their pretty little heads with things of *this* world, such as the Irish question and the Boer War”¹⁷⁸, which indirectly points fingers at **William E. Gladstone** who wrote a letter to Prime Minister Samuel Smith to decline another reading of the *Women’s Suffrage Bill* in the House of Commons¹⁷⁹.

Contrast between the mythical side of Fevvers and her human side helps undermine the standards by which the western world objectifies women and determines gender norms.

¹⁶⁹ Mark Cartwright, “Helen of Troy,” Ancient History Encyclopedia, January 27, 2021, https://www.ancient.eu/Helen_of_Troy/.

¹⁷⁰ Carter, 13.

¹⁷¹ Carter, 17.

¹⁷² Carter, 40.

¹⁷³ Cécile Martet and Laurel Bouye, “Canvassing the Masterpieces: The Winged Victory of Samothrace,” The KAZoART Contemporary Art Blog, August 29, 2019, <https://www.kazoart.com/blog/en/canvassing-the-masterpieces-the-winged-victory-of-samothrace/>.

¹⁷⁴ Carter, 34.

¹⁷⁵ “HMS Victory,” National Museum of the Royal Navy, accessed February 22, 2021, <https://www.nmrn.org.uk/hms-victory>.

¹⁷⁶ “UK May Day History and Folklore,” BBC News (BBC, April 30, 1998), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/special_report/86133.stm.

¹⁷⁷ Carter, 89.

¹⁷⁸ Carter, 90.

¹⁷⁹ William Ewart Gladstone, *Female Suffrage: a Letter from the Right Hon. W.E. Gladstone, M.P. to Samuel Smith, M.P.* (London: J. Murray, 1892).

Furthermore, if Fevvers was not born as a regular human and her parents are unknown, there are no means to anchor her via ordinary concepts of a patriarchal society¹⁸⁰. This also makes Fevvers the one and only of her kind, there is no right or wrong way to live life and all her experiences are unique to her which Lizzie voices out: “You never existed before. There's nobody to say what you should do or how to do it. You are Year One. You haven't any history and there are no expectations of you except the ones you yourself create.”¹⁸¹

4.3 Duality: Fiction vs Reality

We can see throughout the story that Carter likes to play with dualism. On one side we have a powerful personality full of wonder and mystery like Fevvers and on the other side we have a calm and rational person that is not fully complete like Walser. Fevvers thereby represents postmodernism for its departure from the grand narratives (Enlightenment or Marxism) and materialistic objectification of previous social constructs created through history¹⁸². On the contrary, Walser with his need to ground Fevver's portrayal of herself and rationalizing everything around him on the basis of gender myths and social constructs, even his own feelings towards Fevvers, represents the materialistic thinking of Marxism and Capitalism. Furthermore, we have the loving Lizzie as a fiery Marxist Feminist that constantly retorts to Walser's objectifying opinions, Fevver's stepmother that took her in after finding her abandoned in front of the brothel, and on the opposite, we have Madame Schreck that had her own freak show and would take advantage of women in order to gain wealth.

Not only are the characters opposites, but Fevvers own character is completely different during her performances, where she is elegant, well composed, and feminine thanks to her costumes, whereas in the dressing room, she is more manly and vulgar with a big appetite and very chaotic according to all the garments and stockings laying around the room. Even the life in the brothel or the circus works on duality, a house full of educated suffragist women by day and women of pleasure without an identity by night or excellent entertainers during the shows that bring joy with a tragic life outside the spotlight that would bring one to tears. This reminds us that things are not always as we picture them to be since they may

¹⁸⁰ Magali Cornier Michael, “Angela Carter's ‘Nights at the Circus:’ An Engaged Feminism via Subversive Postmodern Strategies,” *Contemporary Literature* 35, no. 3 (1994): pp. 492-521, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1208693>.

¹⁸¹ Carter, 232.

¹⁸² Sim, 19-30.

be manipulated in order to make us see only a part of it or it could be influenced by our own emotions and opinions, clouding the reality behind an illusion:

The luxury of that place had been nothing but illusion, created by the candles of midnight, and, in the dawn, all was sere, worn-out decay ... the gilding on the mirrors was all tarnished and a bloom of dust obscured the glass so that, when we looked within them, there we saw, not the fresh young women that we were, but the hags we would become, and knew that, we too, like pleasures, were mortal.¹⁸³

Carter shapes a utopia, where even though not everything is ideal, it still supports women to outgrow themselves and men learn to bring out their sensitive feminine side, where even the Strong Man shows his weaknesses and accepts that he is a coward¹⁸⁴. It is a world where women can turn into the “new women” of the 20th century, after the men turn into “new men” by accepting a fluid gender mindset and ditch outdated patriarchal understandings of society. If women were unable to liberate themselves until now by trying to change things that are deeply rooted in society, they need to transfer their powers into changing the people that are blind to the differences and teach them that there are other ways to go about things. Men need to realize that the wellbeing of women affects them too, no matter how high they portray themselves on the ladder of society and that by giving women and other communities the same opportunities as them will allow society to grow and prosper in ways that patriarchal society cannot.

The more you had to offer in a capitalistic society, the better of a position you could get at your job, which in some sense was real for the circus as well. However, the circus offered in some sense a fair treatment for their workers since Walser did not have anything to offer because he had no experience with anything related to a circus. He had to live at the bottom of the chain like the other clowns and make fun of their miserable lives that will eventually lead to Buffo’s insanity, almost killing Walser during a show where he pretends to be a human chicken¹⁸⁵. The clowns live in inhumane conditions, where: “Despair is the constant companion of the Clown” since they turn to this job “when all else fails”¹⁸⁶. It shows how desperate people were for a job that would earn enough money to feed their family, often having to abandon their human side and plummet themselves into the darkness of capitalism that feeds of the pain and suffering of the lower class, which is portrayed in the

¹⁸³ Carter, 54.

¹⁸⁴ Carter, 194-5.

¹⁸⁵ Carter, 205.

¹⁸⁶ Carter, 137.

scene where the higher class visits the circus and blindly laugh at a clowns road down to insanity and no one disrupt it “for the show must go on”¹⁸⁷. Not everyone could be a sensation like Fevvers, even if she did not have wings, she could still be a good aerialist and had way more to offer to the circus, hence her high position and luxury she could get. She did not need the circus for survival due to her already existing fame that she built up by herself.

But in general, women were not really allowed to do much and had minimal education, they did not have anything special to offer and even if, there was already a man that for reasons unknown, was more suitable for the position. Women had to turn to humiliating methods to be able to get a better position. They had to endure endless working hours for almost no money, work as servants to the men and do their dirty work. Women were more often than less used as tools for men’s erotic satisfaction in exchange for better working conditions or salaries. Even today, the position of a secretary is more connected with women and still holds the stigma in some countries that a woman is probably in a sexual relationship with her manager if she has good working conditions or gets a raise. There is no surprise that some women would turn to prostitution and take advantage of such circumstances. Mignon’s life somewhat took a turn for the better when the Colonel saw she had something to offer, and he could profit from it but dropped her and the Princess quickly when they did not want to go with him anymore. He even turned his back on Fevvers by informing her she would not see a single penny from him since she is breaking the contract by not continuing with him. Some men sadly cannot be changed even if they experience their biggest loss in life by making an opportunity out of everything and burn bridges with people that he cannot profit of anymore like with Fevvers, a true capitalist at heart:

She was so shabby that she looked like a fraud and, so it seemed to the Colonel, a cheap fraud. Nevertheless, he gleefully exclaimed: "Breaking your contract?" Fevvers' head snapped up. "Wot, no cash?" "No cash," stated the Colonel with spiteful joy. "And, according to the small print, if you break your contract now, before we get to Yokohama, let alone Seattle, you forfeit the entire sum due for your performances in Petersburg. "Ho, ho, ho!" he boomed, his spirits quite restored.¹⁸⁸

Or perhaps it is the desperate need to have progress and continue working like the machines during the industrial era that made the Colonel behave like this, considering that if you do not move forward with the industry you will be lost in the shadow of the factories and

¹⁸⁷ Carter, 208.

¹⁸⁸ Carter, 328-9.

scramble for every penny before you are completely swallowed up by the excruciating conditions industrialization brought upon their people. These were the times of exploiting the weak for one's own survival and personal gains by using child labour and making people slaves to their wages. It is very different from how the Victorian era is portrayed as a remarkable empire with an overwhelming work force that moves the country forward. But this era is the one that cornered women into submission. They choose prostitution rather than slavery, not because they were seduced by it, but as a result of the inhuman circumstances they lived in¹⁸⁹, similar to the murderesses in the Siberian prison. Prostitution in the end gave women more options in life than marriage and was in some sense liberating. It allowed women to express themselves without restrictions and gave them the power to exploit men by offering them what their sexuality desired, which they were ashamed for and wanted to hide it.

4.4 Upside down and Inside out

Nights at the Circus is not inherently a fight between men and women like we would expect from a feminist book, it is more about the realization of how life treated them differently thanks to the divergent roads they had to take. Normally, the story would be the other way around, the man would be prominent with luck on his side saving the poor woman from her demise, but here we have Fevvers being the center of the novel and she is the one saving Walser on a few occasions. She is his knight in shining armour: "But, later that afternoon, the Strong Man beat Walser to a pulp and only the intervention of the aerialiste saved him"¹⁹⁰. Fevvers seems more mature and rounded when it comes to life, she has learned what fear is and knows what she holds dear, her hardships gave her experience that allowed her to gain confidence in her own self and is more than happy to teach others about her road to success by uncovering the darkness in her life. No matter what others might think of her, she is content with how life has turned out for her and makes the best of it. Carter herself mentioned in the interview with **Haffenden** that even though Fevvers loses a bit of herself in every encounter with a crazy man, like Mr. Rosencreutz and the Grand Duke, or Madame Schreck as a witch, in the end she comes out strong and true to herself¹⁹¹.

¹⁸⁹ Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 13-5.

¹⁹⁰ Carter, 193.

¹⁹¹ Haffenden, 89.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have Walser, a good reporter thanks to his rational thinking and talent with words but without a personal essence since he never really learned much about himself, at least not until he met Fevvers or when he lives with the Shaman. At the time of the interview in the dressing room, Walser was a shell without much substance, even though he had experienced many things that had shaken up his world, they did not do much change to his inner self. He was left unfinished, because he did not have his world shattered to pieces by circumstances that he had no power to control like Fevvers did. Thus, life throws him a curveball that gives him a second chance to make himself complete by wiping his memory clean from the prejudice of the patriarchal society that has been engraved into him and turn him into a tabula rasa in order to be rebuilt:

All his previous experiences were rendered null and void. If those experiences had never, heretofore, modified his personality to any degree, now they lost all potential they might have had for re-establishing Walser's existential credibility - except, that is, his credibility as a dement.¹⁹²

He becomes the object of his own incompleteness, he in some sense turns into what he is most sceptic about, things that do not make sense or are not completely true. He consecutively undergoes humiliation to be broken down, to then be able to be put together and turn into a person that can experience life in its truest form without any illusion and perceive himself subjectively. As Carter mentions, Walser undergoes systematic humiliation that comes with life¹⁹³, and it is not done by anyone else like it would for women in a patriarchal world. In fact, Fevvers is there for him during those times and even though she has a hard time being true to her admiration for Walser, she is never the one that supports the humiliation he has brought himself into but acknowledges the need for Walser to experience it on his own account to truly learn from the struggle. According to Yeandle, turning Walser into a blank slate and making him into a new person by the help of the Shaman is a way for Carter to question the way we acquire knowledge and how that helps create identities¹⁹⁴.

In the end, it is Walser himself that got him running for Fevvers around the globe, if not "to the ends of earth"¹⁹⁵ which in "the very "heroicness" of his extravagant gesture, he

¹⁹² Carter, 298.

¹⁹³ Haffenden, 89.

¹⁹⁴ Heidi Yeandle, *Angela Carter and Western Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 94

¹⁹⁵ Carter, 183.

had ‘made a fool of himself’¹⁹⁶ during the process. This might be his punishment for trying to fit Fevvers into a category that would make her normal and thus objectifying her. It is unordinary for a woman to have so much power in a patriarchal society as to be able to control the way people portray her. Fevvers is able to stay a subject by choosing the way people objectify her, only letting them look and not allowing them to handle her¹⁹⁷. By taking her story into her own hands, she puts herself into the position of authority¹⁹⁸, no matter how much Walser tries to objectify and rationalize her existence. His voice is silenced just as it would be with women’s voices in reality¹⁹⁹.

The only think that seems to have power over Fevvers is expensive jewellery and furniture that ultimately brought Fevvers into the palace of the Grand Duke, where she would willingly plummet herself into his vile hands despite her gut feeling screaming to run²⁰⁰. Fevvers in the end manages to run away and proceeds to rip off her diamond jewellery and gives them to Little Ivan for his granny²⁰¹. She is done with the weakening power that materialism has over her since men seem to be taking advantage of it repeatedly. Maybe her upbringing in the brothel has clouded her mind since sexual pleasure in exchange for money was a standard transaction and Fevvers would take advantage of it on multiple occasions, just like with the Grand Duke. Fevvers expected sexual pleasure and sex to be what men would want from women, hence her reaction during the encounter with Mr. Rosencreutz:

'You may take me exclusively by the rear entry, oh, great sage, due to my feathers!' I warned him hastily, though I question in my mind his dislike of the orifice, and, even then, as in a flash of understanding, it comes to me that his idea of sex-magic and my own might not concur.²⁰²

Fevvers mostly felt maternal love, whereas men loved her only for what she could offer, it being her body or prestige. This is why the Colonel wanted Fevvers in his circus, he saw her as “his star”²⁰³. He spread absurd rumours about Fevvers just to bring attention to the circus, which in the long run was the reason for the train wreck. His false story about Fevvers being in a relationship with the Prince of Wales reaches the outlaws living in the snowy desert of

¹⁹⁶ Carter, 133.

¹⁹⁷ Michael, 492-521.

¹⁹⁸ Michael, 492-521.

¹⁹⁹ Yiğit Sümbül, “Womanliness as Masquerade: Tracing Luce Irigaray’s Theory in Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*,” *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 4, no. 2 (June 2015): pp. 71-79, <https://doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v4i2.434>.

²⁰⁰ Carter, 216-27.

²⁰¹ Carter, 226.

²⁰² Carter, 94.

²⁰³ Carter, 197, 215.

Transbaikal where they decide to derail the train in order to take Fevvers hostage until she promises to send Queen Victoria a letter about the unjust that is happening to the outcast men²⁰⁴. The Colonel's own greed brought doom to his circus and shattered his dream of being the first circus to fully go around the world. Even after all that, he did not seem to take accountability for what he had done and only sees the money he could wring out of the situation: "by whatever means were available to wherever the newspaper might be alerted to the stunning fate of Colonel Kearney's Circus and credit could be obtained to start the whole thing up again"²⁰⁵.

4.5 New women

Fevvers is being portrayed as the "new woman" that has the power to help other women to turn their life over and set men on their course to being hatched anew and become the "new men" that can help pave a new way for society in the wake of a beginning century:

Surely he'll have the decency to give himself to me, when we meet again, not expect the vice versa! Let him hand himself over into my safekeeping, and I will transform him. You said yourself he was unhatched, Lizzie; very well -- I'll *sit* on him, I'll hatch him out, I'll make a new man of him. I'll make him into the New Man, in fact, fitting mate for the New Woman, and onward we'll march hand in hand into the New Century²⁰⁶

Even if time wears her out and she starts to lose herself in her emotions she is still adamant at not being the one to jump into a man's embrace, not because she does not want to be loved, but because she wants a man to fight for her and deserve his place by her side. Only after he accepts his wrongdoings in trying to objectify her and learns to cut himself loose from the chains of patriarchy will he be able to open his eyes to things that really matter. It is not about finding things that are wrong about Fevvers, it is about accepting the differences and give them opportunities to bring out their strengths. People that respect each other can bring out the best in people even if they stumble along the way like Fevvers. Thanks to the reflection in Walser's eyes is she able to regain her strength because she is indeed real and not fictional. Walser himself is finally able to open his eyes to the truth and allows his feeling for Fevvers to fully bloom, he is finally able to see that Fevvers indeed has no belly button²⁰⁷.

²⁰⁴ Carter, 272-4.

²⁰⁵ Carter, 325.

²⁰⁶ Carter, 334.

²⁰⁷ Carter, 347.

In connection to relationships and marriage even Fevvers states her opinion on what it can do to one's personality and uncovers the idea of sexual love:

My being, my me-ness, is unique and indivisible. To sell the use of myself for the enjoyment of another is one thing; I might even offer freely, out of gratitude or in the expectation of pleasure -- and pleasure alone is my expectation from the young American. But the essence of myself may not be given or taken, or what would there be left of me?²⁰⁸

It only leads to the loss of one's identity by being pushed into "prostitution to one man instead of many"²⁰⁹ and having to do unappreciated domestic labour without being paid for it as it was expected from a wife. Carter herself struggled in her marriage even though she hoped for it to be her ticket to happiness, because she would be able to leave her helicopter parents²¹⁰. But Fevvers is not here to be trapped in a relationship, she will take it onto another level by creating a relationship based on respect that allows both sides to gain from the relationship what they need without any expectations or set rules on how the relationship should work. If there can be a bound relationship based on marriage, why could there not be an open or intimate relationship solemnly based on sexual love and personal satisfaction.

Not only do we talk about marriage in this chapter, but Lizzie discusses with the Escapee the concept of a soul and human nature. She expresses that we cannot excuse one's behaviour because it is in his nature. We need to realize that one is not inherently born good or bad but is altered by the construct created from history that supports certain behaviours. If capitalism supports the exploitation of unfortunate people, it is natural that someone will take advantage of that and behave in such means that will allow him to make the best of it like Colonel. But people of lower classes do not have the power to defend themselves like wealthy people do because they lack resources. They unwillingly suffer because there is no other choice for them, just like the clowns in the circus that want to support their family and survive.

Similarly, as with the women in the prison of the Countess. Circumstances of the society they live in pressured them to murder to gain freedom from the vile clutches of marriage where they were stripped of their identity as a human being. They did not decide to murder because it was convenient for them like with the Countess in order to gain wealth but to survive. Only thanks to her high status was the Countess able to keep an upper hand

²⁰⁸ Carter, 333.

²⁰⁹ Carter, 21.

²¹⁰ Gordon, 48-67.

and build the prison called House of Correction and pretend to be a Samaritan that will help the murderesses to atone for their sin. In the end it is love and compassion of the warden that sets the prisoners free and not the Countesses' objectification of the women as murderesses.

One could compare this to how the social system made women feel oppressed as they were being objectified daily, either as a wife, mother, daughter or even murderess without considering that they are as much human as their masculine counterparts. This metaphor of the prison could also be used to describe how lower-class women felt about higher-class women taking the lead in feminism without taking into account other factors like class, race or sexuality besides gender, which is the main point Postfeminists criticize feminism for. For us without us. Wealthy women had the privilege to lead a fight against men and mostly be unharmed by its effects on the community, whereas if women of lower classes, black women or lesbian voiced out their struggles, they could lose their job, become an outcast or even lose social benefits if they had any. Their destiny was in the hands of women that might not think twice about the secluded and lonely life women of lower classes had to suffer through being slaves to their own gender.

Another thing Carter pokes fun at is the fact that feminists fight objectification by objectifying men, going into such lengths as to choosing to distance themselves from men completely. This is portrayed through the women that escaped from the prison who decide that the best way to live from now on is to create a female only utopia, after being mishandled by men. The irony here is the fact that they need men to extend their communities life, thus still being bound to men in one way. Even Lizzie pokes fun at this: "What'll they do with the boy babies? Feed 'em to the polar bears? To the *female* polar bears?"²¹¹ or will they mishandle them to keep the female utopia alive and thus not be any better than men. The novel clearly shows that this is not the way Carter thinks feminists should go about since you cannot completely cut the ties between men and women if we want humankind to continue to exist, they rather should restructure the system that oppresses women and gives men the power to oppress²¹².

Nevertheless, the "new woman" was firstly a journalistic invention at the end of the 19th century that revived the interest of debating women's position in marriage and the troubled construction of their own sexuality which was later on replaced by the suffrage campaign²¹³.

²¹¹ Carter, 284.

²¹² Michael, 492-521.

²¹³ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 260.

This is in some length portrayed in the novel through Fevvers by taking advantage of her sexuality and being comfortable in her own body but ultimately seeking only pleasure from a man. Ironically, it is again going to be a journalist that will shine light on the stories of women and help turn the tides of society for women to help them gain their own wings.

5 FEMINISM OR POSTFEMINISM

It is evident that Carter played her cards right since *Nights at the Circus* gives so much material for discussion even thirty years after its release. Many have examined this novel back and forth, pondered over the various meanings certain genres might have in the novel and questioned her use of postmodernism as her medium to get her point across since it abandons the need for progress²¹⁴ which she is evidently against. It has been stated numerous times that Carter's feminism is depicted in the ways she debunks western myths regarding gender identity and male-dominated constructs, but some experts have stated the fact, that her feminism goes beyond gender and picks at other aspects regarding social constructs²¹⁵.

Carter's use of the picaresque seems to have a satiric tone²¹⁶ that she weaves into her narration to go beyond feministic dilemmas by criticizing their double-sidedness and lack of self-realization via sarcasm and irony to help express her postfeministic views. She does it indirectly to either stay away from the actual fight but still be a part of the movement as she snipes from the sideline²¹⁷, or to avert any possibility to attack her on that account since feminists were sensitive to criticism. Michael states that Carter's use of postmodern carnivalization allows her to show her more provocative feministic aims by uncovering concerns of current feminists²¹⁸. She further emphasizes the connection of Carter's carnivalization to the use of the carnivalesque of Menippean satire to openly express political indications²¹⁹. Carter opened up about using allegorical ideas by depicting Mignon as post-war Europe by making her frail shoulders carry literary and musical references²²⁰. In some sense it might be shown in Mignon's story where she is sent from one person to another to be exploited and mishandled just like Europe during the wars that left the land scarred and sceptic of a brighter future. She also uses the picaresque to send her characters on a voyage to discuss philosophy of the world which is used in satire in connection with other devices²²¹. These can be exaggeration as represented in Fevver's grand personality and the underplaying of her character by showing her not so appealing sides and even the mockery of the female utopia that cannot really separate itself from men. Satire and allegory can go hand in hand

²¹⁴ Stoddart, 31-4.

²¹⁵ Stoddart, 88.

²¹⁶ Stoddart, 63.

²¹⁷ Gordon, 215.

²¹⁸ Michael, 492-521.

²¹⁹ Michael, 492-521.

²²⁰ Haffenden, 87.

²²¹ Robert C. Elliot, "Satire," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed March 13, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/art/satire>.

to make one's argument even stronger thanks to its many layers which can help cover feminism and other social struggles in the novel. For example, *George Orwell's Animal Farm* is an allegory for giving animals human traits like that of taking over the farm to help depict the power relations in their society and this helps support it as a satire on the Russian revolution²²².

Nights at the Circus and many of Carter's novels are there to entertain and instruct²²³ either the feminist movement, individual people, or whole communities to re-evaluate familiar narrations to provide an upgraded portrayal of existing identities²²⁴. Nevertheless, there is more to what makes the novel seem like a satire of 20th century feminism in Britain which reinforces the novel as postfeminist literature. She shows the irony of using restrictive means against women, who used violence to set themselves free from an aggressive relationship, by keeping them in a prison that leaves no room for atonement even if that is the sole purpose. This showed the double standard of the *Contagious Diseases Acts* of the 1860s that approved of inhumane handling of prostitutes in order to lessen the spread of venereal diseases among soldiers and men by putting them into a "lock hospital" against their will²²⁵. Feminists put a blind eye to the situation and the act was repealed in 1886 by the help of prostitutes and *Josephine Butler*, who in the end still believed that prostitution supported violence against women²²⁶. The blame was pushed onto the women who provided the services instead of the men that sought out prostitutes and thus were the main reason for the rapid spread of the diseases. Furthermore, this resembles the philosophy of the Siberian prison that punishes the women and not the men. The Countess keeps a blind eye to the real problem, yet still thinks she is being helpful but ultimately supports the oppression of women from her high position. The prison could be a representation of the old penitentiaries called the Houses of Mercy where they would rehabilitate prostitutes as they were "fallen women", drug addicts, alcoholics, people with syphilis or tuberculosis²²⁷. Moreover, they were later known for their restrictive regime with

²²² Michael Shelden, *Orwell: the Authorized Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 369.

²²³ Haffenden, 87.

²²⁴ Nicola Pitchford, *Tactical Readings: Feminist Postmodernism in the Novels of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 109.

²²⁵ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 26.

²²⁶ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary*, 26, 199.

²²⁷ WalesOnline, "Prostitution, 'Wild' Working Classes... and Double Standards in the House of Mercy," WalesOnline, February 27, 2017, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/prostitution-wild-working-classes-double-12567243>.

harsh condition and solitary confinements, where they would shave the inmate's heads and feed them only with bread and water²²⁸ just like in the Siberian prison.

Feminists would claim men as monsters for their restrictive nature in marriage but do the same to their own kind by being against anything new that tries to bring progress to the movement. If this strategy has not worked for decades, why do feminist still believe that the concept of pushing blame onto someone else would bring equality, if they themselves paint men as the other gender and thus objectify them. Lower class men had to keep their families alive, living under excruciating conditions and sometimes had to lose themselves in the game like the clowns in the circus. It is hypocritical to put all men into the same bag as feminist would do but at the same time not wanting it to be done to women. This is shown through Lizzie's opinion on every man throughout the story. She puts Walser onto the same level as the Grand Duke for his skepticism of Fevvers uniqueness. To compare a sceptic to a textbook example of an abuser and rapist goes beyond the rational. On the other hand, Lizzie is very critical of Fevver's choices and only sees her useful if she can financially provide for the feminist struggle:

Unless you plan to sell yourself in print, I can't see any profit in all this, try as I might. And perhaps it is a sign of moral growth in you, my girl ... that you pursue this fellow only for his body, not for what he'll pay you. Inconvenient as your acute attack of morality might prove in the long term, should it become chronic, as far as the financing of the struggle is concerned.²²⁹

Fevvers would be recognized as a woman of higher class thanks to her luxurious life despite the fact that the most influential women in her life were mostly prostitutes. These were the lowest of all people during the Victorian era. They were not even recognized as human beings, not even the feminist movement recognized prostitutes as one of their own and would denounce them similarly to higher class women. This created a rift between women, whereas feminists still felt like they are being oppressed and slaves to the freedom of others. Feminists accused postfeminists of ignoring the probability of one's freedom directly linking to another one's oppression²³⁰. Carter mocks this by showing Lizzie's restrictive nature when she feels oppressed by Fevver's decision to find Walser²³¹. She decided of her free will to follow Fevvers because she felt obliged to as her mother, but no one dictated to her the responsibility

²²⁸ Cole Thompson, "History of the Inwood House of Mercy," My Inwood, October 23, 2015, <https://myinwood.net/house-of-mercy/>.

²²⁹ Carter, 334-5

²³⁰ Gamble, *The Routledge Companion*, 42.

²³¹ Carter, 332.

to do so. It was not Fevvers who decided to be Lizzie's daughter since a new-born child does not have the ability to decide. Lizzie put herself in the role of a mother and with the help of the prostitutes set Fevvers on the track of self-sacrificial trials to ultimately use her for their feministic agendas. Sadly, Fevvers did not know any better as she was thought from a young age what the nature of the patriarchal world can be like.

The irony in using prostitutes as a main influence on the "new woman" would be unacceptable by feminists as they are against porn and anything sexual that could in some way support the idea of violence against women as previously mentioned. Besides *Butler*, *Dworkin* was very adamant in this opinion and regarded anyone pro-porn as pseudofeminists or going as far as calling them collaborators²³² because it goes against feminist ideology. Moreover, Carter portrays the prostitutes as more aware of their position in society and economy²³³ and are able to take advantage of their sexuality and use it to gain economic freedom. Fevvers is not a prostitute but is self-aware in a similar fashion and knows how to bend the patriarchal mentality of capitalism to her favour.

Carter mocks radical feminists for their need to remake representations of female mythical beings and archetypes in order to retake their female power and turn it into something positive²³⁴, which is pictured in the plethora of personas (the Goddess of Victory, Helen of Troy, Venus etc.) Fevvers depicts throughout the story that have been pushed upon her by her female caretakers in the brothel or people that pray on her. At times it seemed obsessive to go as far as to paint her white and turn her into a symbol of women power by making her a living statue. There is nothing empowering about not being able to move and express yourself since you are at the mercy of others. In the end, these feminists by day made Fevvers differences into a sensation and took advantage of her as a commodity that would be worth spending money on just to see her. They exploited her through unpaid labour, even as a small child, just like the man that they despise so much. Only when Fevvers learned to use her wings and gain freedom was she able to slowly distance herself from all the personas and recreate her own self into a woman that would help make the best of her life. Even so, Lizzie was mad at Fevvers for not wanting to take advantage of a situation purely for financial gains in the name of the female struggle. Lizzie contradicts herself by going against

²³² Gamble, *The Routledge Companion*, 240.

²³³ Michael, 492-521.

²³⁴ Pitchford, 131.

her own feministic beliefs where she detests patriarchal capitalism that supports social and economic exploitation.

Moreover, Carter uncovers the fact that feminists fight for a better future without having a plan on how to do it since it is “perhaps safer to not plan ahead.”²³⁵ because “tomorrow never comes ... to pin your hopes upon the future is to consign those hopes to a hypothesis, which is to say, a nothingness. Here and now is what we must contend with”²³⁶. If Lizzie is content with the state of her life, she would not be part of the feminist struggle to begin with and criticize men for their dominating powers in society. Feminists still break their heads over the past from which they seemingly have not learned that you cannot get far without having a plan of actions. This could be one of the reasons why the novel is set during the Victorian era, besides its turning point of the century, because that is where the feminist movement got stuck even if they won the rights to vote. Even Thatcher wanted to get back to Victorian values²³⁷ thus moving Britain back in time, even though those values have proven to be anything but constructive.

All this shows the fact that *Nights at the Circus* is anything but feminism even though at first glance it can fool one, just like Carter intended, and not only with Fevvers wings or virginity. Carter makes us believe that we are being led to an artificially constructed ending, a romantic happy ending like Lizzie suggest that would in normal circumstances result in marriage: “Don't you know the customary endings of the old comedies of separated lovers, misfortune overcome, adventures among outlaws and savage tribes? True lovers' reunions always end in a marriage”²³⁸. We are led to believe this since we have the typical aspects of a romantic build-up in a novel:

- a) Fevvers and Walser meet and are intrigued by each other,
- b) Walser goes to work at the circus and spends more time with Fevvers which thickens the plot,
- c) then we have a dramatic train crash where both realise their feelings after losing one another,

²³⁵ Carter, 334

²³⁶ Carter, 282-3.

²³⁷ Stoddart, 11.

²³⁸ Carter, 333.

- d) we reach the climax during Fevver's self-sacrificing journey to save Walser from the tribe where we start to question ourselves if she indeed seeks love from him,
- e) and finish off with them reuniting in what seems to be a happy ending.

In the end, we are mocked by the narrator through Fevver's laughter for believing that the novel would lead to a typical artificial ending where Fevvers would throw herself into Walser's arms and elope. What we do not see is Carter progressing towards a satisfactory relationship, where both parties have a mutual exchange. This provides them satisfaction, regardless of it being from pleasure or love. Thus, this novel can serve as a satire on true love and happy endings.

Carter wants to disrupt the vicious circle which feminists are stuck in where they normalize certain thinking patterns which sets them back from their goals and slowly undermines their own credibility and strength. After all, this realization of an endless fight within the same patterns is what prompted the creation of postfeminism within the women's movement²³⁹. Feminists accused postfeminists of working on the principles of postmodernism by undermining fixed gender definitions and deconstructing certain authoritative practices and paradigms²⁴⁰, which Carter does by creating a masculine female that is self-aware and masquerades her femininity in order to fight societal standards. She creates a man that would offer himself into the hands of a woman or turn a man into an understanding and sensitive character that does not demand anything from a woman. She is going beyond feminism to portray her postfeministic views through the novel as an overall supporter of social change.

²³⁹ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical dictionary*, 50-4.

²⁴⁰ Gamble, *The Routledge Critical dictionary*, 298.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the thesis was to familiarize ourselves with the ideologies and beliefs of feminism and postfeminism which have influenced *Angela Carters* writing of *Nights at the Circus* in order to identify its true purpose. The main focus was to analyse the novel with regard to its feministic or postfeministic aims to subvert the dominating male voice which Carter masterly incorporated through the use of various styles, mainly the postmodern carnivalesque that carries satirical undertones of irony and mockery. Carter uses these devices to push feminism further beyond its boundaries to express her more critical views of the feminist movement in order to help find a more suitable way in which the movement could progress.

Firstly, we have described the history behind the feminist movement across its waves and during the late 20th century in Britain since Angela Carter wrote the novel during that time. We briefly touched upon the three main branches of feminism: Liberal, Marxist, and Radical feminism that go deeper into the matter of women's oppression through class divergence and economic exploitation. The novel includes many ideologies of Marxist feminism since Lizzie is an active feminist and critic of the exploitative nature of capitalism. It is through her political views that we are able to identify Carter's satire of 20th century feminism in Britain that mocks the repeated patterns feminists are stuck in. Furthermore, we introduced postfeminism as the new feminism of the postmodern era or criticism of the current feminism. We have stated its possible purpose as a form of backlash that accuses old feminists of being stuck in the phase of self-victimization and radicalization against sexuality. This part also mentioned the potential negative influence postfeminism might have had on women, by making them accept consumer culture and unnecessary beauty standards offered by the ever-growing market of beauty enhancements. Additionally, the thesis introduced Carters work and fondness of fairy tales including her mastery of various genres. These give her writings numerous layers which can be interpreted differently depending on the person and style it is being observed from.

The analysis of the novel has discovered many techniques used by postmodern writers to give their work dimensions outside the usual interpretation of their work. Yet it is through the devices of postmodernism that Carter goes a separate way from feminism since they regarded it in a negative light. Carter heavily uses distortion of time and narration in order to silence the usually dominating male voice to give space for women to finally express themselves. This is done through Fevvers strong and dominating personality that takes over

the narration in order to get her story across and make the reader question her reality. The carnivalesque representation of the story gives Fevvers room to mimic her womanliness as to gain power in a male dominated society controlled by the exploitative nature of capitalism. She is able to excel at the games of pleasure by taking her sexuality into her own hands and being true to herself. Fevver's womanliness plays a game of dualism with her more masculine side which is the true depiction of her character. This throws the male voice as portrayed by Walser off his equilibrium since her personality does not correspond with the usual identity of a woman. Carter breaks the standard knowledge of identities carried throughout history to show a more fluent way in which people could incorporate other aspects besides gender.

Not many see Fevvers as a postfeminist just because of her close relationship to her feminist mother but it is through her that Carter illustrates her postfeministic views. Fevvers tends to go against the flow of feminism by embracing the possibilities capitalism can offer. She is independent and does not need the change of the mass to be able to take advantage of her opportunities in life. Moreover, she uses artificial beauty and mimics her womanliness in order to be a step ahead of the game at the expense of her true personality which only certain people are allowed to see. She is not playing the victim card to feel better about herself, instead learns from her experience with men and uses this knowledge against them. It is her understanding of pleasure as a possible transaction that helps her gain superiority and the capability to detach it from her real needs as a woman. This allows her to keep her me-ness without having to settle for less since even a relationship works on the basis of mutual transactions in order to keep both parties satisfied.

In summary, Carter intended for this book to be multi-layered and confusing at times to demonstrate how influential certain thinking patterns are on the way we picture the world around us. At first glance the book seems to be in tone with the feminist movement thanks to the expectation of it being associated with feminism and how loud certain feministic ideas resonate in the novel. Even though Carter does agree with many of them, her socialistic aims supports the idea of going beyond gender and history just like postfeminist hoped to.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NOW The National Organization for Women