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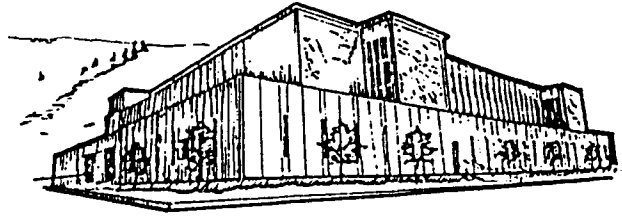
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IMAGINING EMPOWERMENT:  
A DISCOURSE OF BETRAYAL IN ANGELA CARTER AND TOM SPANBAUER

by

Jon Robert Adams

B.A., Montana State University--Bozeman, 1990

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English Literature  
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1994

Approved by

*Kerissa Stewart*  
Chair, Thesis Committee

*J. C. Murray*  
Dean, Graduate School

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Imagining Empowerment: A Discourse of Betrayal in Angela Carter and Tom Spanbauer

Director: Veronica Stewart 

This thesis explores two recent literary texts in relation to their ability to imagine empowerment for heretofore oppressed and silenced voices and sexualities. Both texts dismantle traditional Western philosophical thought in order to envision a narrative space for the liberation of the female and gay male voices. However, both revisions fail to create or offer an alternative model for society, because the dominant discourse continues to assert its power in these texts.

The first chapter discusses elements of form in Angela Carter's The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, demonstrating specifically how Carter adopts traditional binary oppositions to re-work them and reveal their status as mere ornament. The binarisms Carter unworks include the arbitrary divisions between reason and the imagination, male and female, and masculine and feminine constructs.

The second chapter focuses on the protagonist's journey in Carter's novel, concentrating on how he works as a lens through which to examine the possibilities of feminine empowerment. Desiderio enters several societies on a quest for Albertina, the feminine "other" with whom he has been paired. As an aspect of his unconscious desires, her character represents something Desiderio has lost. The chapter centers on the failure of Carter's imagined liberation of the feminine by demonstrating how the societies she creates re-enact and re-enforce patriarchal domination.

Chapter three switches to an analysis of Tom Spanbauer's novel, The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon, concentrating on the narrative strategy woven throughout the text. This strategy, the killdeer game, enables the narrator, Shed, to conceal the true nature of the story he tells from his audience. The object behind such a narrative strategy seems to emanate from a desire to expose the audience to traditionally taboo subjects without inviting their malevolent judgment. Shed's concealment of the truth has the effect of allowing discursive space for the heretofore oppressed and marginalized voice of the gay male. This expression, however, over-exaggerates its ultimate freedom. The dominant discourse of the status quo eventually silences these marginalized discourses, highlighting Spanbauer's failed vision of empowerment for oppressed voices.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . . 1

Chapter 1 . . . . . 10  
The Templates of Desire: Elements of Form in  
Angela Carter's The Infernal Desire Machines  
of Doctor Hoffman

Chapter 2 . . . . . 35  
Desiderio's Quest: A Search for the Feminine  
and Female Liberation

Chapter 3 . . . . . 59  
The Killdeer Game: Deceit as Narrative Strategy  
in Tom Spanbauer's The Man Who Fell in Love With  
The Moon

Conclusion . . . . . 89

## Introduction

In her recent keynote address to the second annual "Theoretical Approaches to Marginalized Literatures" Conference, Amy Ling expressed her belief that fiction prohibits no possibilities. In fact, she believes that the lack of boundaries in fiction draws us to the genre in the first place. Some romantic tendency within me makes me want to embrace Ling's sentiments, want to believe that the world of fiction exists outside the limitations created by "reality," but my examination of The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman by Angela Carter and The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon by Tom Spanbauer brought quite the opposite conclusion. Both of these contemporary novels remain deeply entrenched in social realities by failing to imagine systems different than those propagated by the dominant discourse.

This failure to imagine what might be termed a utopia forms the basis of my title. I feel betrayed by the fictions of these two authors whose work mirrors power relations as they exist in society. Despite the fact that Carter and Spanbauer uncover the oppression lodged in traditional Western philosophical formulations and therefore strive to unwork the constructs, both authors revert back to the same configurations and finish with the triumph of the dominant discourse. In other words, my sense of



betrayal after reading these works stems from my belief that the authors found the core of the problem of oppression, but failed to re-vision, re-work, or dismantle it. Even a recognition that perhaps revolution was not the goal of these two authors only leads me to believe that anything is not possible in fiction. This thesis explores the possibility that the power of the dominant discourse is so firmly established in Western thought that no alternative model exists, for patriarchal structures pervade every thought we ever have. In which case, Ling is wrong and my romantic notions are wrong. Fictional possibilities may be far more limited than either of us imagine.

An exploration of the power of the dominant discourse, of the limits fiction encounters in an attempt to subvert it, ushers in a discussion of the source of oppression in Western culture. Traces of dominant and oppressed binarisms reveal themselves in Friedrich Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy. In his treatise, Nietzsche states that ". . .the continuous development of art is bound up with the Apollonian and Dionysian duality,"<sup>1</sup> indicating that the opposition between the two deities in the Greek theogony initiated the development of art upon lines of the accepted and the excluded. In the tradition of Sophocles, Nietzsche believes, the Greeks developed a drama of tragedy that emphasized a character's lack of power against the decrees of the Gods, despite that character's knowledge or strength.

Oedipus' destruction, for example, emphasizes the necessity of submission to the will of the gods. Nietzsche states in addition that Oedipus, "through his extraordinary sufferings, ultimately exerts a magical, healing effect on all around him, which continues even after his death."<sup>2</sup> According to Nietzsche, the figure of Oedipus and the moral of his story entrenched tragedy in the Greek minds as the pre-eminent form of drama. The Oedipus tragedy involves breaking "the holiest laws of nature."<sup>3</sup> This transgression goes against the Apollonian desire for order. The Greek appreciation of the story emphasizes the importance of Apollonian attributes in Greek society.

Nietzsche believes the portrayal of character in Greek drama began to offer a challenge to Apollonian order. He first sees this occurring in Aeschylus' Prometheus. In this play, Aeschylus presents Prometheus as a "double personality,"<sup>4</sup> incorporating both Dionysian and Apollonian natures. In Aeschylus' play, Nietzsche sees the beginning of a shift from the tragic, associated with Apollo, to the comic, associated with Dionysus. Euripides contributed further to this shift by frequently focusing on Dionysian attributes. Although Dionysus had long figured in Greek drama, Nietzsche feels Euripides offered a revised version of traditional tragedy in an attempt "to construct a new and purified form on the basis of [a traditionally] un-Dionysian art, morality, and conception of the world."<sup>5</sup> This revised version of Dionysus failed to recognize the

god's power, which Nietzsche feels Euripides himself understood and expressed in the story of Dionysus' triumph in The Bacchae. However, Euripides' attempt to restore Dionysus to his traditional role in tragedy failed because of the introduction of Socratic thought. Nietzsche believes Socrates took up the notion of the revised Dionysus and used it to claim central power for Apollonian order, morals, characteristics, and virtue. This claim placed Apollo above Dionysus. The result was the birth of a new form of tragedy and the binary division between Apollo and Dionysus that persists in Western thought.

The tension between the Apollonian and the Dionysian emerges in Carter and Spanbauer's texts through their protagonists. Both Desiderio and Out-in-the-Shed have Dionysian attributes, for both have myriad identities, both attempt to subvert prescribed desires, and both connect with aspects of the feminine. In addition, both characters sit in opposition to characters or groups representing Apollonian order. Desiderio's pursuit of his desired object, Albertina, puts him in opposition to the Minister of Determination's goal to eradicate desire. The Minister, stoic and austere, represents Apollonian attributes in the text. Similarly, Shed and his "family" constantly define themselves in opposition to Mormon values. The Mormons uphold Nietzsche's "holiest laws of nature," and condemn Shed's transgressions, which mirror those of Oedipus.

Carter and Spanbauer use the Dionysian attributes to give voice to prohibited discourses as elaborated by Michel Foucault in "The Discourse on Language." Both Carter and Spanbauer appear to reflect Foucault's notions about power struggles in society. In her book, Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body, Jana Sawicki correctly reads Foucault's power as dependant upon resistance.<sup>6</sup> Carter and Spanbauer's texts offer resistance to the dominant discourse in their attempts to liberate desire, to speak of taboo, to engage in prohibited discourses. Sawicki says "Foucault's post-structuralism [entails] the search for a true identity as a basis for universal emancipation,"<sup>7</sup> and this search forms the starting point for both Carter and Spanbauer's texts.

Because Desiderio and Shed either fail to obtain a true identity or repress their true identity out of fear of it, their attempts at liberation fail. However, previous scholarship on both texts neglects this failure, concentrating instead on the liberating aspects of these texts in relation to female and gay male voices. Since each of the texts take issue so strongly with traditional Western thought, it seems all the more urgent to explore reasons why such attempts at unworking the status quo fail. While these authors seem to propose an overturn of the rudimentary structures of philosophical discourse and societal construction, no working model for change appears in their texts. My work forges new ground on Carter, for

previous critics do not engage the idea of feminine empowerment, do not read Desiderio as linked to the feminine, and often do not fault Carter for creating fictional societies that mirror patriarchal domination. Similarly, critical approaches to Spanbauer foreground the positive portrayal of unsanctioned sexualities in his text, failing to take into account that those voices are left with little legitimate room for discourse.

The importance of entering upon discussions of failed visions of empowerment cannot be stressed fervently enough. New works by women and gay writers tend to excite the imagination by their mere presence. This enthusiasm may blind us to the fact that these works often perpetuate stereotypes and continue the oppression of marginal voices. My criticism does not aim to dismiss these novels as inappropriate material for women or gay activists. I mean only to suggest that each contribution by members of oppressed communities needs to be evaluated on the way it situates itself in relation to the status quo. Discussion of texts should proceed, not out of blind eagerness to read and teach something new by a woman or a gay man, but through a heightened awareness of the mechanisms of oppression.

In my first Chapter, "The Templates of Desire: Elements of Form in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, I discuss Carter's attack on the foundations of Western philosophical thought. Carter introduces this commentary

through the use of an epigraph decrying the static nature of definition and through a series of paired oppositions that expose the ornamental nature of binary structures in Western thought. Specifically, Carter creates paired characters who initially appear to represent one or the other side of a direct opposition, but then goes on to meld their characteristics so that neither can be clearly associated with one or the other side. Carter especially pursues the arbitrary opposition between reason and the imagination and the social constructs between gendered representations of males and females.

My second chapter, "Desiderio and the Quest: A Search for the Feminine and its Liberation," focuses primarily on the search for an identity which incorporates masculine and feminine aspects. The chapter builds on the pairing between Desiderio and Albertina established in my first chapter to show how Albertina figures as an element of Desiderio's unconscious desires, and as such, represents something that has been lost to him. Desiderio's search progresses through societies that can be viewed as offering a different perspective on female social roles. In these roles the text examines modes of possible female liberation. Each of these societies emerges as ultimately debilitating for women, reflecting and re-enacting patriarchal domination.

My thesis moves to an examination of Spanbauer's text in the third chapter, entitled "The Killdeer Game: Deceit

as Narrative Strategy in Tom Spanbauer's The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon." This chapter examines Shed's method of re-telling the story. This method, equated with the Killdeer game he learns in his childhood, features an attempt on Shed's part to lead the audience away from the truth of the story he relates in hopes of exonerating his or his loved ones' involvement in the taboo activities that take place. This fictional deceit allows for his free expression about hitherto oppressed sexualities. Shed uses the Killdeer narrative strategy throughout the text, only to demonstrate how the game repeatedly fails to conceal the truth, fails to protect Shed from harsh judgment by his audience. The failure of oppressed voices to imagine and assert a discursive space for themselves emerges as the real truth of the text, which is poignantly portrayed in the image of the drag queen Shed, who imagines himself to be invisible as he tells his tale.

## ENDNOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," in The Philosophy of Nietzsche, trans. Clifton P. Fadiman (New York: Random House, 1937), 167.
2. Ibid., 221.
3. Ibid., 223.
4. Ibid., 229.
5. Ibid., 243.
6. Jana Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body (New York: Routledge, 1991), 24.
7. Ibid., 7.



Chapter 1: The Templates of Desire: Elements of Form  
in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor  
Hoffman

In "The Discourse on Language," Michel Foucault points out that society attempts to "cope with chance events," particularly the "dangers" associated with oppressed persons and repressed behaviors, by "control[ing], select[ing], organiz[ing] and redistribut[ing]" power through language. Foucault argues that our overwhelming "will to truth" generates "rules of exclusion" or prohibitions through sexual and political taboos that seek to eliminate the "violent, discontinuous, querulous, disordered"<sup>1</sup> nature of discourse. In his discussion of these rules of exclusion, Foucault includes a study of binary oppositions in Western philosophies, like reason/madness and truth/falsehood, revealing the power relations at work in these oppositions, as well as their arbitrariness. In Angela Carter's novel, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, Dr. Hoffman's desire machines generate imaginative embodiments of desire that threaten the dominant discourse of reason and truth in both the Minister of Determination's city, and the entire world through which the narrative traverses, endangering the sanctioned way in which reality is defined in the society. A battle rages between the Minister's static sense of reality and linear

time and the chaotic, discontinuous, and therefore mad illusions created by Doctor Hoffman's machines. Carter's text posits a condition in which binary oppositions seem to be at war with one another, but the boundaries between these opponents gradually blur, revealing the extent to which both dominant and oppressed discourses are formed by desire.

Doctor Hoffman's machines introduce chance events of "actualized desire"<sup>2</sup> into a "thickly, obtusely masculine" city (IDM 15), breaking down the arbitrary structures formed by masculinized reason to exclude or repress elements of the other that threaten its ordered appearance.<sup>3</sup> The Minister of Determination, who identifies so closely with these social structures that he "become[s] the city" (IDM 28), represents a dominant discourse of reason and truth that values its time-honored means of ordering reality. In a conversation with Hoffman's sensual Ambassador, the Minister affirms the extent to which "societal structures" function as "works of art," imposing "symmetry" as a means to "resolve a play of tensions which would disrupt order" (IDM 35). Carter's text disrupts conventional order on several levels, opening up a play of tensions between the discourses Foucault identifies as included and excluded elements of cultural constructs. In the process, her work exposes the degree to which neither discourse exists completely outside the cultural structure, for as Foucault

suggests, concepts of reason and truth are defined over and against the elements of suppressed discourse; the dominant discourse cannot exist without its cultural taboos. Moreover, as the narrator, Desiderio, notes, excluded discourses cannot be kept "outside" the city because they live in the "minds" of the people, hidden on an unconscious level (IDM 12).

In one of three epigraphs, Carter suggests the way form functions in her text: "Remember that we sometimes demand definitions for the sake not of content, but of their form. Our requirement is an architectural one: the definition is a kind of ornamental coping that supports nothing." This quotation, taken from Ludwig Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, warns the reader that all definitions, whether formed by the Minister or Doctor Hoffman, work as artificial "coping that supports nothing." Carter's text plays with a relationship between form and content in which the meanings we attach to things are less relevant than the forms used to devise meaning. Our desire for significance, or as Foucault argues, our will to know ultimately places itself at the "disposal of the signifier."<sup>4</sup> By re-introducing tension between the binary oppositions that Western civilization uses to keep the status quo intact, Carter's text exposes the forms and structures of social order as empty signifiers created by desire. Her novel posits several characters, including

Doctor Hoffman and the Minister, as representatives of directly opposed discourses. By giving various oppressed discourses a powerful voice, her text refuses the "rules of exclusion," and in that sense, disrupts sanctioned notions of truth and reason. At the same time, however, her novel suggests that suppressed discourses, however chaotic they may appear at the outset, have an order of their own, a form of their own that also emanates from an overpowering desire for architectural design. As Foucault says, "where there is desire, the power relation is already present."<sup>5</sup>

The most apparent power struggle at the outset of Carter's novel emerges in the war between reason and the imagination, represented in the battle between the Minister of Determination and Doctor Hoffman. According to the Minister, "The Doctor ha[d] invented a virus which causes a cancer of the mind, so that the cells of the imagination run wild" (IDM 22). Hoffman transforms people's desires into something tangible, materializing them and thereby "modif[ying] the nature of reality," so that "hallucinations [flow] with magical speed in every brain" and "chaos supervene[s]" (IDM 17). The corporealization of human desires, manifested in myriad forms, foments what Sally Robinson refers to as an "epistemological revolution,"<sup>6</sup> by which the "city was no longer the conscious production of humanity; it [becomes] the arbitrary realm of dream"

(IDM 18). In short, the concretization of desire hitherto existing only in the imagination, generates chaos, madness, and folly.

Battling against this revolution, the Minister of Determination, along with his police force, attempts to sabotage the Doctor's machinations. The Minister strives to preserve conventional divisions between reason and chaos, to keep the madness excluded from his dominant discourse and reinforce the status quo. He and his secret police attempt to eradicate anything that is not identical to its name. The assumption underlying his actions suggests the extent to which he values naming as a means to control reality. The Minister believes that no play should exist between the sign and that which it signifies.

In order to reduce play between the sign and the signifier, to eliminate Hoffman's effects, the Minister gives Desiderio, one of his employees, the job of locating and destroying the Doctor and his machines in hopes of restoring reason to the society. To carry out his assignment, Desiderio journeys through six imaginary social constructs until at last he comes to Hoffman's castle. At the castle, Desiderio realizes that consummation of his desire for Albertina, the desire which, at least in part, propels him on his journey, entails languishing in perpetual copulation with her, and he decides to murder her. In one fell swoop, Desiderio kills Doctor Hoffman

and his daughter, the war ends with the Minister's triumph, and the text, his story, can be actualized. In a sense, then, a consummation of his desire would have prevented the actualization of this text.

The war between Doctor Hoffman and the Minister of Determination serves as the governing framework of the novel, but it is by no means its only architectural design. Another form the text reveals involves a pairing of characters who seem, at least initially, to function as binary opposites. The text repeatedly represents and subverts traditional constructs of binary oppositions as they function in Western philosophy, the "ornamental coping" that generally keeps the status quo intact. The Minister of Determination and Doctor Hoffman, representing opposite sides of a binarism like the opposing factions they lead in the War on Reason, constitute one such pair. Carter first presents the two as associated with reason and chaos respectively. The Minister, "the model of efficiency" (IDM 15), concentrates only on things which can be demonstratively proven, for he "never in all his life felt the slightest quiver of empirical uncertainty," and he has "not one shred of superstition in him" (IDM 22). The Doctor, on the other hand, focuses on making human desire tangible, for which the "unreality atom" (IDM 23) temporarily becomes the only antidote the Minister can develop.

Hoffman and the Minister also signify other binary oppositions. The Minister represents conventional concepts of the real, only wishing to deal with things that are tangible, things whose names agree with them perfectly. He insists on a direct correlation between the sign and the signified. He represents Western thought, which, according to Foucault, "has seen to it that discourse be permitted as little room as possible between thought and word."<sup>7</sup> The Doctor, on the other hand, revels in creating the imaginary. His machines free people from linear time and fixed identities by creating clocks that run backwards and by altering nameplates above the doors daily, as if the people in residence could change identities with each new day. The Minister seeks to preserve civilization as he knows it and keep its laws intact. The Doctor, on the other hand, shows little respect for civilization and its laws by destroying the Cathedral, the city's "greatest" monument, with a dazzling display of "pyrotechnics" (IDM 29), and by causing "statistics for burglary, arson, robbery with violence and rape" (IDM 21) to soar perniciously. By transforming desire into tangible forms, the Doctor provides a view of desire as counter to societal constraints, almost wicked, including, according to Robert Clark, "the desire to dominate, to punish, to wound, to destroy."<sup>8</sup> The Doctor's machinations are responsible for creating "fanged sparrows," who "plucked out the eyes of

little children" (IDM 19). Yet the Minister, although opposed to the concretization of imaginative desires, complicitly incites violence through his attempts to counter the Doctor's effects. The Minister's persistent questioning of the reality of things raises the "superstitious fear" of the citizens, at one point inciting a "riot which began when a man snatched a baby from a perambulator and dashed it to the ground because he complained that its smile was 'too lifelike'" (IDM 18-19).

When the tactics of both the Doctor and the Minister manifest themselves violently, the text begins to reveal how Carter works through their opposition, uncovering their opposition as "ornamental coping." The fact that both practice science, however archaic, equates them in methodology and attention to detail, as evidenced by the Minister's determined approach to rid the city of all illusions by burning them to ascertain whether or not they are real. The text reveals just how congruous the Doctor and the Minister become when Desiderio reaches the castle and meets the Doctor whose environment, much to Desiderio's surprise, is orderly, not chaotic: "Here, everything was safe. Everything was ordered. Everything was secure" (IDM 197). The perfect view Desiderio sees on the outside of the castle he finds re-created on the inside, where "nothing could possibly be fantastic" (IDM 198) and where "the one discordant note . . . was the embalmed corpse of



his dead wife he kept on a bergere settee in [a] white-walled room" (IDM 200). When he finally gets to see the Doctor's laboratory, Desiderio feels it belongs to "medieval pseudo-sciences" saying:

it was the laboratory of a dilettante aristocrat of the late seventeenth century who dabbled in natural philosophy and tried his hand at necromancy, for there were even martyri- zed shapes of pickled mandrake in bottles on the shelves and a mingled odour of amber and sulphur filled the air. (IDM 204-5)

The Doctor's austerity and discipline smacks of everything Desiderio and the reader associates with reason, in short everything already associated with the Minister.

Ironically, Desiderio's categorization of the Doctor's lab as "medieval" echoes exactly the sentiments Desiderio expressed concerning the Minister: "in the last resort he was reduced to the methods of the medieval witch-hunter" (IDM 23). The Minister's witch-hunting seems as arbitrary as the Doctor's concretized desires, for in an effort "to stop them begetting images" he orders all the mirrors to be shattered, failing to realize that the fragments only produce so many more reflections. In addition, Desiderio believes

the Minister, out of desperation, intend[s] to rewrite the Cartesian cogito thus: 'I am in

pain, therefore I exist,' and base his test upon it for, in cases of stubborn and extreme confusion, [he] operated a trial by fire. If it emerged alive from the incineration room, it was obviously unreal and, if he had been reduced to a handful of ash, he had been authentic. (IDM 22)

The passage indicates just how arbitrary the Minister's "science" had become. Sally Robinson discerns an additional similarity between the Doctor and the Minister in their ideological stances, which she says "are quickly seen to be complicit in the same ideological agenda: they both position Man as an imperialist subject whose desire gives free reign to exploitation and domination."<sup>9</sup> Robinson's comments hit on the precise mode of Carter's unworking of the opposition--they appear to be operating in counter directions; however, they adhere to the same androcentric framework, attempting to position themselves in absolute authority over their respective domains. They even share some of the same methodologies and attributes. Their similarities reveal the ornamental status of the binary opposition.

Carter's text also pairs Desiderio and Hoffman's daughter, Albertina, but the difference unworked between them centers on gender. The text reworks the construction of male and female in this congruity. Initially, Desiderio

and Albertina appear as opposites with Desiderio presented as male and Albertina presented as at least stereotypically feminine, though not always humanly female. Desiderio receives his commission from the Minister to seek out and destroy Doctor Hoffman precisely because Desiderio does not ". . .surrender to the flux of mirages . . .[or] abnegate [his] reality and lose [himself] forever as others did" (IDM 11-12). Desiderio appears to be "disaffected" (IDM 12) because he claims that he makes his "own definitions and these definitions happened to correspond to those that happened to be true" (IDM 13). Despite his preference for masculinized order, his "admiration" (IDM 28) for the Minister and for the Ancient Egyptians "universally approved" pose, which they "stayed in . . .for two thousand years" (IDM 12), Desiderio proves to be quite affected by the Doctor's machinations. In fact, he is "one of the first people in the city to notice" (IDM 15)--presumably, those who fail to notice remain the most unaffected. By the time Albertina, in the guise of the spectral woman, reappears in Desiderio's dreams, it seems as if the Doctor's machines have begun to break down the arbitrary structures formed by reason, ushering forth elements of the Other previously excluded or repressed on the basis of the threat they pose to ordered appearances. Albertina serves as an aspect of the Other for Desiderio, a manifestation of his repressed or unconscious desires,

for upon her repeated appearances in his dreams she becomes the object of his quest and its actual purpose. Hoffman's destruction takes a back seat to his obsession with Albertina. The journey on which Desiderio embarks, ostensibly in pursuit of Hoffman, foregrounds other manifestations of Desiderio's desires, including his attraction to the male ambassador; a black swan; the dead woman, Mary Anne; a phallic mother figure in the River People community; a bearded lady and a gun-slinging equestrienne whose hermaphroditic status remains a possibility; the acrobats of desire who repeatedly penetrate him; the Count; and, the priapic figures of the centaurs who rape Albertina in front of a helpless Desiderio. These desires figure as repressed discourses, and as Desiderio learns from Albertina in the centaur episode, they are, in part, his desires: ". . .she told me that, according to her father's theory, all the subjects and objects we had encountered in the loose grammar of Nebulous Time were derived from a similar source--my desires; or hers" (IDM 186). Rejected by the dominant discourse and characterized as taboo, these discourses make up that which Foucault claims the production of discourse attempts to "disarm" because of their "links with desire and power."<sup>10</sup>

Albertina's connection to the other manifests itself in her always stereotypically feminine form that shifts through myriad shapes. Throughout each of her shape-changes

(the glass/spectral figure, the black swan, the androgynous male ambassador, the boy Lafleur, the madame of the House of Anonymity, her naked self, and "Generalissimo Hoffman" (IDM 192)), the only recurring sign of her identity seem to be a piece of jewelry with her name carved on it and her eyes. Although she appears to be transformed, her name provides some stable identity, a point which ironically aligns her with the Minister's means for comprehending reality through a naming process.

For Sally Robinson, Albertina's fluid nature typifies the feminine, unworking traditional philosophical binarisms:

. . . woman provides the means toward freeing philosophical discourse from its reliance on a masculine authority, precisely because that woman-figure cannot be pinned down, [because it] exists in an unstable movement between all binary oppositions.<sup>11</sup>

In Carter's text, this "woman-figure" serves an important function. Albertina appears as a non-idealized, or not stereotypically defined, woman only once, while naked with the centaurs (and even this shape can be seen as a stereotypical view of the vulnerable female who is raped but nonetheless survives--evidence that Albertina always figures as Desiderio's desires); at all other times she appears as some ideal of the feminine that Desiderio, who represents masculine desire, chases in hopes of attaining

sexual union with her. Albertina's shape-shifting, her fluidity, accords her the ability to escape being captured by the male, unworking or subverting not only masculine and feminine stereotypes, but also male domination, the typical end of the power struggle between male and female. Moreover, Albertina's myriad shapes represent various forms of desire, the modulations that form assumes. Her appearance shifts around like so much "ornamental coping."

Although always human and male, Desiderio's appearance changes somewhat like Albertina's, further evidence that appearances may be more important than content in Carter's text. Moreover, through Desiderio, Carter also disrupts stereotypical notions of the masculine gender, thus creating tensions between both the male/female and masculine/feminine binarisms. For Desiderio, changes are always a matter of outward, external appearance and costumes--his changes have to do with deceptions, manipulations, falsehoods, secrecy, etc. When Albertina changes, she appears to physically become the new character, whether figure, animal, male or female--she seems to possess a multitude of identities. She is impossible to pin down, indicating a strength Carter grants to the fluidity of feminine nature, and withholds from the male figure Desiderio. This strength, however, emerges as problematic because Albertina owes her fluidity to male desire, whether it be Desiderio's, the Count's, the centaurs', or even her father's.

Desiderio's mixed-blood ancestry assists in his identity transformation, making it possible for him to look like an Indian while living with the River People. As he continues his journey, Desiderio disguises himself to acquire a different identity:

I passed myself off as the peep-show proprietor's renegade nephew. My new identity was perfect in every detail. I tailored my hair and moustache to new shapes and threw away my Indian clothes, putting on instead some dark, sober garments which came with my new identity. (IDM 96)

Beyond the River People and the peep-show, Desiderio's identity changes with each society, from the hood and tights that reveal only the penis in the House of Anonymity, to his sheer nakedness with the centaurs. In each case, he chooses an identity that helps him blend in with other characters or with the society he enters. He goes along with the dominant discourse at hand.

However, just as Albertina always appears as stereotypically feminine, although not always female, revealing the multi-faceted nature of cultural definitions of the feminine, Desiderio appears to deconstruct monolithic concepts of masculinity. In Carter's construction of gender, according to Sally Robinson, masculinity comes to be affiliated with strength: "For Carter, gender is a relation of power, whereby the weak become 'feminine'

and the strong become 'masculine.'"<sup>12</sup> Perhaps these distinctions do not emerge as fixed as Robinson suggests, for Desiderio and Albertina both seem to blur the boundaries of essentialist concepts of the masculine and feminine in Western Culture. Moreover, Albertina typically enjoys much more power than Desiderio because she knows the workings of her father's machines, and because she serves as the decoy to draw Desiderio to the castle where his eroto-energy can be harnessed to propagate the Doctor's experiment. Desiderio becomes the dupe, not the man in control.

The only male character Desiderio appears stronger than is Lafleur, who turns out to be Albertina, leaving the question of whether or not Lafleur ever had a penis open for conjecture. Of the two men he kills in the castle, one is the Doctor whom he does in "unintentionally" (IDM 216) by overturning his wheelchair, and the other a "harmless technician" he stabs "in the back of the neck just as easily as you please while he gaped open-mouthed at the splintered wheelchair" (IDM 218). Desiderio also kills the Black Pimp with a gun from a relatively safe distance. Powerless to assist Albertina as the centaurs rape her, Desiderio exhibits no real brute male strength. Instead, he empathizes and "suffer[s] with her for [he] knew from [his] own experience the pain and indignity of a rape" (IDM 176), and this shared experience connects



him with feminine vulnerability. All the reader knows about Desiderio's penis involves his circumcision: ". . .the nuns had [him] tidied up in that way" (IDM 84). Desiderio never mentions its size. However, he consistently notices the penises of other men. The Alligator Man's was "perfectly normal" (IDM 111), while in his g-string, Mohammad's, "throbbed like a sling full of live fish" (IDM 118). Desiderio makes special mention of large or unusual penises. The Count's "was of monstrous size;" (IDM 129) and the white centaur males "was that of a horse rather than a man" (IDM 179). Presumably Desiderio's penis cannot compare in size to those of the Count or the centaurs, a source of great consternation among males, but more importantly, his repeated accounts of male genitalia strikes a peculiar note in relation to typical male heterosexual constructions. Even though Carter creates a male character in Desiderio, she uses him to disrupt traditional categories of phallic power, which Carter's text reveals as abusive domination over others through recurring rapes perpetrated against Desiderio by the Acrobats of Desire, against Lafleur by the Count, and against Albertina by the centaurs.

The deconstruction of stereotypical masculinity that Desiderio's character offers, accomplished through his connection to stereotypical notions of feminine weakness and vulnerability, foregrounds his own feminine attributes which Carter stresses through a homoerotic theme woven

through the text. Desiderio desires Albertina when she appears in male form as the Ambassador, saying he/she "throb[s] with . . .erotic promise" (IDM 36), and calling the Ambassador "the most beautiful human being [he had] ever seen" (IDM 32). Desiderio admits that his rape by the Acrobats of Desire is "against [his] will," though only so far as he is "conscious of [his] desires" (IDM 115), indicating that his homoerotic attractions may be repressed in the same way which discourses about such desires are repressed and excluded in Foucault's comprehension of cultural systems. Furthermore, Desiderio voluntarily copulates with a female only once, and she sleeps through the entire experience unaware that it occurred (IDM 54).

Desiderio's other sexual union, with Mamie Buckskin, remains problematic because "she admired passivity in a man" (IDM 109), so the reader remains unaware if Desiderio has any choice or active role in the union. In addition, Mamie has "the bosom of a nursing mother and a gun, death dealing erectile tissue, perpetually at her thigh" (IDM 108), leaving open the possibility that Mamie is a hermaphrodite, which appears more convincing when one examines the company with which Desiderio travels. They participate in a freak-show, complete with an Alligator Man and a Bearded Woman. The role of an equestrienne may seem a bit boring for such a motley crew, even if she does

shoot well, whereas a hermaphroditic equestrienne would appear to fit right in. More important, however, Desiderio's attraction to Mamie Buckskin foregrounds Desiderio's inconsistent desire. He alights at random on male, female and gender questionable objects; he is attracted to all, and all reciprocate on some level. In this way, Desiderio's desire functions to dismantle the binarism between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Carter's text allows sexuality to operate on a continuum with desire, specifically desires hitherto repressed and excluded, taking precedence over preconceived notions of appropriate gender roles established by sanctioned cultural imperatives.

By using conventional binarisms as an architectural prop only to unwork their forms, Carter displays their status as mere ornament, as artifice. She proves that seemingly opposed conditions actually share characteristics despite their divisions, and that the structures we assign to systems of thought, reason, and belief are arbitrary. By exposing the arbitrariness of our discourses, Carter introduces the notion of chance into discourse, a notion Foucault says "we must accept" because of attempts to make the sign equal the signified:

[Western thought] would appear to have ensured that 'to discourse' should appear merely as a certain interjection between speaking and

thinking; that [discourse] should constitute thought, clad in its signs and rendered visible by words, or conversely, that the structures of language themselves should be brought into play, producing a certain effect of meaning.<sup>13</sup>

For Foucault and Carter, discourse entails more than a simple equation between thought and language. Discourse actually occurs in the rupture between thought and language, represented in this text by the embodiments of unconscious desires, outside of conventions meant to convey meaning--the names of the Minister's actualities can never truly agree with themselves as objects. By breaking down the conventions of Western thought, Carter's text supports Foucault's idea of the transient nature of discourse as reiterated by Robinson:

What is important in [Foucault's] work on power and knowledge is the idea that power relations are mobile, and that they take historically specific paths based on current notions of "truth," "normality," and their opposites. These paths, the trajectories of desire as they constitute knowledge and power, are always to some extent contradictory and unstable. To put it another way, in more concrete terms, the current truths about what constitutes "Woman" are crossed by contradictions that, if put into

play, work to deconstruct this essentialized figure and its construction within a binary opposition.<sup>14</sup>

Robinson's "concrete terms" argument concerning the idealized "Woman" can also be applied to the idealized "Man" that disassembles the male hero on a quest for his Dulcinea. By exploring the trajectories of desire in relation to the paths of power constructs, Carter breaches accepted prohibitions, as iterated by Foucault, in the dominant discourse.

The Count remains the only character who seems to be functioning in a mode that escapes the breakdown of oppositions. The Count's desires seem so rampant and mal-aligned that even Doctor Hoffman fears them, for Hoffman sends Albertina, in the guise of Lafleur, to watch his every move. Desiderio does not know quite what to make of the Count, alternately saying, "He reminded me of the Minister" (IDM 124), and "This man might be the Doctor himself, under an assumed identity!" (IDM 126). But, in reality, this "connoisseur of chaos" can be neither, for he

witnessed the eruption of Vesuvius when thousands were confined alive in molten lava. [He] saw eyes burst and fat run out of roast crackling in Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Dresden. [He] dabbled

[his] fingers in the blood beneath the guillotine  
during the Terror. (IDM 122-23)

His apparent presence during historical cataclysms links him up with Mendoza, the time traveller and former colleague of the Doctor, the man responsible for introducing the Doctor to the sciences that produce the desire machines. Interestingly, the Count does not appear in the text until after the peep-show proprietor, the man Desiderio and the Minister previously believed to be Mendoza, dies in the avalanche that destroys the travelling freak-show. Despite his distinction from every character and his seeming autonomous status of wickedness, the Count introduces his own paired opposition through the Black Pimp, "a black of more than superhuman inhumanity, in whom I sense a twin" (IDM 127). The Count fears a rivalry with his "nemesis" (IDM 156), but must also desire it, for the ship that he, Desiderio and Lafleur travel upon wrecks on the coast of Africa where the Black Pimp rules tyrannically over a nation of Amazon women who comprise his army. The atrocities both members of this pair commit against their subjects bring to the fore Robert Clark's wicked desires of domination, brutality and destruction cited above, indicating that society perhaps celebrates these desires, provided they are appropriately masked. The destruction of these two characters in the same scene foregrounds the notion that even repressed desires, when liberated, take

on the appearance of patriarchal norms of domination, that they are not wholly sanctioned desires. More important, the liberation of these desires allows for their expression within certain limitations. In other words, repressed discourses have a form of their own, a form that delineates the extent to which they can be expressed within a social context. The Count serves as an example of the interlacing of power relations in discourse, for a hierarchy of exclusion and prohibition functions within suppressed discourses.

## ENDNOTES

1. Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," in Critical Theory Since 1965, eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee, Florida: Florida State University Press, 1986), 148-162, 149, 151, 158.

2. Angela Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 11. All further references to this work appear in the text.

3. In Foucault's "Discourse on Language," he argues that "we must accept chance as a category in the production of events." Carter's text seems to accommodate this idea through the "marvellous shapes formed at random in the kaleidoscope of desire" (IDM 13).

4. "The Discourse on Language," 158.

5. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 81.

6. Sally Robinson, Engendering the Subject: Gender & Self Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 78.

7. "Discourse on Language," 157.

8. Robert Clark, "Angela Carter's Desire Machine," Women's Studies 14 (1987): 147-161, 155.

9. Robinson, 99.

10. "Discourse on Language," 149.



11. Robinson, 21.
12. Ibid., 77.
13. "Discourse on Language," 157.
14. Robinson, 15.

## Chapter 2: Desiderio's Quest: A Search for the Feminine and Female Liberation

Angela Carter's The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman features an epistemological crisis in which the Doctor invents a means to corporealize human desires, "modif[ying] the nature of reality" (IDM 22). The Doctor's opponent, The Minister of Determination, seeks to curtail the illusions, in effect to govern desire by fitting it into acceptable categories. In his efforts, the Minister represents the dominant discourse which, according to Foucault, "can do nothing but say no"<sup>1</sup> to desire, for he "did [his] best to keep what was outside, out, and what was inside, in; [he] built a vast wall of barbed wire round the city" (IDM 12). The Doctor's machinations prove too powerful for the Minister of Determination and his police force, and the effects of Hoffman's desire machines emerge in every landscape through which the narrative traverses.

Desiderio, the narrator of this historical battle, seems the perfect person to relate this tale, for he claims an objective perspective unaffected by the dementia that surrounds him. Desiderio claims this immunity because he makes his "own definitions and those definitions happened to correspond to those that happened to be true" (IDM 13). Ostensibly, he goes on a mission for the Minister to locate and destroy Hoffman: "And so I made a journey through space

and time, up a river, across a mountain, over the sea, through a forest. Until I came to a certain castle" (IDM 13). However, Desiderio's mission quickly takes a back seat to his desire for Hoffman's daughter, Albertina, who initially appears as a feminine glass or spectral figure in Desiderio's dreams. As a figure from his dreams, Albertina, in her myriad though always feminine form, represents Desiderio's unconscious desires, which he pursues throughout the text. Desiderio's pursuit of Albertina situates Carter's novel in the "modern quest pattern" as defined by Joseph Boone:

. . .the outward-bound voyage to confront the unknown that by definition constitutes quest narrative simultaneously traces an inner journey toward a redefinition of self that defies social convention and sexual categorization.<sup>2</sup>

Desiderio's "outward-bound voyage" centers around his search for Albertina, who represents some repressed part of himself, a part that the Minister would probably despise.

Her construction as a projection of his unconscious desires situates Albertina as the "other" in this text, as defined by Jacques Lacan and iterated by Jacqueline Rose:

Subjects in language persist in their belief that somewhere there is a point of certainty of knowledge and truth. When a subject addresses its demand outside itself to another, this other

becomes the fantasied place of just such a knowledge or certainty. Lacan calls this the Other--the site of language to which the speaking subject necessarily refers. The Other appears to hold the truth of the subject and the power to make good its loss.<sup>3</sup>

Albertina, as the object of Desiderio's desire, simultaneously represents the truth of Desiderio as subject and the power to reconcile him with the loss of that truth. Ironically, Albertina could be said to embody some "truth" because she passes the Minister's reality test--her name always seems to agree with her, regardless of her form. Albertina's appearance in myriad stereotypically feminine forms indicates that the truth Desiderio seeks lies in his own feminine, hitherto lost to him through repression, for as Lacan suggests, "the woman might be other."<sup>4</sup>

Desiderio's desire for his own repressed feminine emerges in his name. Mary Anne, the somnambulist, mistakenly tells Desiderio that his name means the desired one. However, in Italian, his name translates in the active sense of desire, meaning "he who desires."<sup>5</sup> If Doctor Hoffman rewrites the Cartesian cogito to read "I desire, therefore I exist" (IDM 211), then Desiderio seems to be the object of the Doctor's machinations: desiderio ergo sum.<sup>6</sup> David Punter offers an anagrammatic reading of Desiderio's name, suggesting it contains the "desired I," but also the "desired O." Though Punter attributes this

O to what he calls "the zero" or "the thanatic impulse,"<sup>38</sup> the "desired O" also suggests Desiderio's desire for the other, that which Lacan often equates with the feminine. His name, then, reveals his role in the text, and belies his own belief in his immunity from Hoffman's desire machines. In fact, Desiderio's desire shapes his adventures, "a series of marvellous shapes formed at random in the kaleidoscope of desire" (IDM 13); his desires form novelistic discourse.

As Desiderio's unconscious desires for his own repressed feminine take shape in Carter's text, his personal quest raises issues concerning the ways in which females, and stereotypical notions of the feminine, are determined and how they function in power relations. According to Shari Benstock, the feminine signifies all that is "lost, overlooked or denied," the "traditionally, culturally coded norms and expectations" which she refers to as "woman-in-the-feminine." For Benstock, the patriarchy constructs the woman-in-the-feminine to "[mirror] its fantasies and ease its fears."<sup>8</sup> Carter's text seems to suggest that Desiderio's narrative works as a lens to examine the construction of woman-in-the-feminine and the potential of different social roles for females as a means of liberation and/or empowerment. The imagined societies Desiderio enters explore different loci of power for women, including motherhood, sexuality, language, matriarchy and brute strength, sometimes exploring a combination of them.

More important, however, Carter's text demonstrates how each of these loci of power fits into a patriarchal construction in which women do not escape ideological formation, representation, or objectification. Each of the societies is easily dismissed by the patriarchy, represented by Desiderio, effectively "eas[ing] its fears."

Before Desiderio embarks on his quest for his feminine, he encounters the somnambulist Mary Anne and consummates a sexual union with her. She represents the unconscious through her connection to sleep, dreams, and water, where she ultimately meets her death. Through her, Desiderio penetrates to the unconscious, to the site of the engagement of his desires, effectively placing himself in opposition to the Minister and his plan to eradicate desire. Appropriately, after being accused of Mary Anne's murder, Desiderio escapes from authorities by climbing out of a chimney, an act that symbolizes his rebirth into the unconscious realm of imaginary relations.

After spending an undiscerned amount of time in an unconscious state, Desiderio awakes to the rescue of the River People. The river, as a metaphor for transport through the unconscious or the imaginary, which Lacan connects with both the feminine and the subjective,<sup>9</sup> symbolizes the nascent stages of Desiderio's new identity. Desiderio's journey up the river symbolizes his move into the unconscious, as indicated by his regression to state of emotional immaturity. His romantic involvement with

a nine year old girl and his gullibility during this part of his quest suggest this regression. In addition, the river symbolizes a search for origins. Appropriately, Desiderios finds himself in the midst of a people to whom he bears a striking ethnic resemblance. Despite any unformed or forming consciousness however, Desiderio recognizes that "the river people had evolved or inherited an intricate family system which was theoretically matrilinear though in practice all decisions devolved upon the father" (IDM 80).<sup>10</sup> In theory, the society is matrilinear because the mother adopts the man married by her eldest daughter as her son. Social empowerment for women exists in the River People community because the women adopt their daughter's husbands, instead of the daughter being subsumed within the husband's family.

Although it appears to offer an alternative to a traditionally male-oriented patriarchy, Desiderio learns that the River People society nonetheless follows traditional society, for the men still make the decisions which the women must obey. For instance, unmarried girls and pregnant women cannot leave their boats, and whenever the boats approach areas of civilization, women must go below deck. These rules, designed to protect and safeguard the purity and ethnicity of these people, actually serve to limit the space within which women can maneuver as individuals. The women have no economic freedom since they are barred from participation in the River People's

business, which "consist[s] of the marine transportation of goods," and which is "enjoying a boom" (IDM 74). The River People's rules value ethnic preservation above the women themselves. The River People society appears to offer matriarchy as a substitute for male dominance yet it imposes laws which suppress women.

In addition to its failed potential as a matriarchal society, the River People's community also explores women's empowerment through sexuality, which Desiderio witnesses first hand. When she visits Desiderio nightly, Aoi proves very adept in her manipulations of his penis. Aoi's grandmother, Mama, with her enlarged clitoris oozes sexuality, doling out pleasure as readily as she dishes up plates of food. Her enlarged clitoris allows for quick orgasm, as quick as the male, and like the most insensitive of males, she walks away from the sexual experience as if nothing ever really happened. Robert Clark says Carter creates a new ideology concerning sexuality where "in place of the idea that women should beware of men and pretend to have no sexuality of their own, Carter's version represents the woman enjoying her own sexuality and using this as a power."<sup>11</sup> Her enlarged clitoris aligns Mama with male sexuality, which has the power of the phallus. With that power she resembles Sigmund Freud's pre-Oedipal belief that mother has a penis and Lacan's phallic mother. In Lacan's imaginary realm, Desiderio desires the phallic mother, but fears she may castrate him. He is in a



symbiotic relationship with her, unable to differentiate himself from her. This lack of self-differentiation equals a lack of power for Desiderio as evidenced by the fact that while he enjoys a sexual relation with Mama she busily plots his demise, dupes and deceives him. Moreover, Desiderio's fear of castration moves out of the imaginary realm, materializing itself in the real, for a knife is substituted for the fish in doll's clothes that Aoi usually brings to bed with her. The knife poses a real threat, though it symbolizes Desiderio's fear of castration, and precipitates Desiderio's escape from the River People society. This escape parallels an oedipal move out of Lacan's imaginary realm into the Symbolic, an entrance into language as a split-subject made possible by the fear of castration that separates him from a symbiotic union with the mother.

Desiderio's symbiotic relation to Mama creates his vulnerability to the women's ploys, and he nearly becomes their victim. They plan the banquet feast in honor of his marriage to Aoi without letting Desiderio know he will feature as the main entree. The River People wish to consume Desiderio's flesh in a cannibalistic ritual in order to obtain his knowledge of language. Nao-Kurai unwittingly ruins the women's attempt to destroy and consume Desiderio by relating a creation narrative to Desiderio. Desiderio, meanwhile, remains "certain" (IDM 88) that Nao-Kurai does not remember who he speaks to. In Nao-Kurai's

story, ancestors of the River People's tribe consumed a snake because he possessed the ability to make fire. The River People desire Desiderio's language, they wish to enter into the Symbolic. According to Benstock, the Symbolic "is an interpretive order governed by an unconscious structure . . . [which] rules through the phallic signifier."<sup>12</sup> The phallic signifier is assigned meaning and endowed with power when one moves out of the Imaginary and into the Symbolic realm, i.e. acquires language. For Benstock, the realm of language functions as arbitrary site of patriarchal power.

The text supports the argument that the River People have failed to enter patriarchal or phallic language.<sup>13</sup> Their language sounds like "a kind of singing," which cannot be transcribed except in "music[al] notation" (IDM 70), and no particular exists, only a universal for "all man" (IDM 71). The structure of their language indicates that no subject differentiation exists. In other words, the River People exist in Lacan's Imaginary realm. Yet even within this system a hierarchy of development manifests itself. Nao-Kurai possesses enough of the standard dialect of the region to communicate with Desiderio, and since they "mix more with the shore people," the men "[adopt] a rough version of peasant manners and peasant dress." Their appearance and manners are not as "outlandish" as the women, who exhibit "stiff, exact gestures": "all women moved in this same, stereotyped way, like benign automata,

so what with that their musical box speech, it was quite possible to feel they were not fully human . . ." (IDM 73). The image Carter creates resembles the mechanical ballerina in young girls' jewelry boxes, her precise movements accompanied by a repetitious musical sound without words. Carter repeatedly categorizes women as "benign automata" in this text, portraying them as less than fully human or representing them as no more than idealized images of femininity. Nancy Fraser speaks about such constructs as patriarchal inventions: "femininity [is] a patriarchal construction that function[s] to confine women to a separate sphere and to inhibit [women's] full development as human beings."<sup>14</sup> Carter's benign automata, like the jewelry box ballerina, are not women; they represent an ideological formation of the feminine. They smack of Benstock's woman-in-the-feminine that patriarchy creates to satisfy its fantasies, but also to easily keep women under control. Even though the River People's society suggests an ideal feminine empowerment through the concretization of the phallic mother, the system functions basically the same as a patriarchal system. Its suppressed and idealized women perpetuate patriarchal structure.

Idealized and suppressed women also constitute the norm for another episode in Desiderio's quest in *The House of Anonymity*.<sup>15</sup> While incarnating the phallic mother resulted only in a system of continued repression for women, *The House of Anonymity* imagines the possibility of

empowerment by removing individual identity from males while simultaneously cashing in on male desire.<sup>16</sup> The House of Anonymity offers pleasure to men only if they pay for it, removing individuality from them with the clothing they wear: "masks, or hoods, completed our costumes which were unaesthetic, priapic and totally obliterated our faces and our self-respect; the garb grossly emphasized our manhoods while utterly denying our humanity" (IDM 130). This imagined society relegates male identity to the vision of their penises, removing all other difference, including their faces. If men wish to engage in sex at all, they must forego their humanity. The House of Anonymity, as an imagined construction which mirrors actual brothels, aspires to be a society where women capitalize on male desire for economic or financial independence.

However, the attempt to gain women's economic independence by catering to male desire ushers in the issue of the commodification of women. The real issue at stake in The House of Anonymity involves capital, a resource that seems unlimited to the Count. Rather than gain power from this situation, the women in The House of Anonymity appear as no more than projected images of male perception, of the male gaze. The House of Anonymity presents woman-in-the-feminine as objects of fantasy, specifically the Count's desires, which find expression in the lowest terms of sexuality: bloodlust, cruelty, and animalistic representations of human sexuality. When Desiderio and

the Count enter the "Bestial Room," Desiderio notices that the women exist as mere figures, devoid of any identity, making it difficult for him to think of them as real women at all:

This ideational femaleness took amazingly different shapes though its nature was not that of Woman; when I examined them more closely, I saw that none of them were any longer, or might never have been, woman. All, without exception, passed beyond or did not enter the realm of simple humanity. (IDM 132).

The passage hearkens back to both Fraser and Benstock's arguments. These figures exist only as representations of women, and they are quite literally confined to cages. The fact that one of them burns like a "life-like construction of papier mache on a wicker frame" (IDM 134), and that all of them disintegrate at the impact of the bullets of the Determination Police not only indicates their unreal status, but also demonstrates that they can be easily dismissed by patriarchal powers in an effort to ease its fears. The passage also suggests a stereotypical vision of "woman," as evidenced by the word "ideational"--perhaps women were never women at all, but rather some expressed or desired male idea of woman.

The configuration of stereotypical notions of "woman" echoes the idea voiced by Desiderio in the River People community. A society where sex ostensibly exists entirely

at the discretion of women prevents women's escape from suppression, for the "ideational" form emerges from the male. Along similar lines, Sally Robinson asserts that "particularly seductive narratives . . . [function] to recontain women within a metaphorical figure of Woman, used . . . to bolster masculine self-representation."<sup>17</sup> Carter, then, in relating a narrative episode that highlights female seductive powers, chooses the perfect attire for her male characters--suits that reveal only their penises, the symbol for the phallic power they retain despite the obliteration of the male identity this new society seems to seek.

From societies accentuating the possibilities of female sexual power, Desiderio travels to Africa and a society that explores the physical power of women. The African society removes from women their ability to experience pleasure through ritual cliterodectomies, providing an opposition to the House of Anonymity and the River People community where sexual pleasure was an area of focus. In Africa, the women comprise the army. In this imagined construct, women hold a small modicum of power because they represent the physical might of the people, but they must give up compassionate, mothering care to achieve it. To alleviate this discrepancy, and effectively destroy the women's natural predilections, the authority in the society, the Black Pimp, forces the women to devour their first born child in hopes of producing militaristic

inclinations. In the African society, forcing the women to commit infanticide successfully launches a female army, yet a man and not a woman holds authority. Perhaps this is the case because the society exists as a projection of male, specifically the Count's, desire. However, the society also offers a subversion or distortion of original goddess cultures and the idea of Amazon female cultures. Male leadership reflects patriarchal culture, not cultures women would devise for themselves.

Instead of enjoying real power through strength, the women in this society serve as a means to the ends of the Black Pimp who rules them. His tyrannical abuse of power includes the grotesque disfigurement of women, characterized by bleeding bite marks, missing nipples, toes, fingers, teeth and even eyes. Ritually and brutally circumcised, the women learn to thrive on abuse and live without pleasure. These "images of mutilation and castration advertise . . .the elements of violence at the heart of the patriarchal family unit" that, though appearing to offer an alternative to, the African society actually emulates.<sup>18</sup> Desiderio learns that the control exercised by the male chief, the Black Pimp, re-enacts the scenario of cultural history, the death of matriarchal goddesses, religions, cultures:

I burned all their former idols as soon as I came to power and instituted a comprehensive monotheism with myself as its object. I allowed

the past to exist as a series of rituals concerning the nature of my omnipotent godhead. I am a lesson, a model, the perfect type of king and of government. I am far more than the sum of my parts. (IDM 162)

The women constitute the parts of which he speaks. These women had a society of their own which was conquered and devoured, with the earth mother goddesses destroyed, much like western religion's destruction and replacement of original goddess religions.<sup>19</sup> The African episode imagines a power for women through physical strength, but places an abusive man in power and rejects the positive characteristics of compassion, mothering, and sexuality for women.

In yet another demonstration of how woman-in-the-feminine is easily dismissed by the patriarchy, the African society loses all cogency when Desiderio assassinates the Black Pimp. The imagined power of the women, granted them as a function of male desire, disintegrates upon the loss of male leadership. The ensuing chaos enables Desiderio and Albertina to escape and enter Nebulous Time, the home of the centaurs, an imaginary landscape which features nurturing, housekeeping, and mothering as the primary duties of females. Nebulous Time symbolizes a return to nature, to the forest, to a romantic or classical ideal of pastoral life complete with gathering and subsistence agriculture. The connection to the natural



also connotes nature-worship religions and mythologies, yet the religion of the centaurs seems strangely like a parody of patriarchal Christianity. In *Nebulous Time*, Desiderio and Albertina come to learn that the centaurs created their culture based on the worship of the Sacred Stallion. They believe their form, half human, half horse, to be the lowest form of horse-hood and therefore castigate and abuse themselves in hopes of re-incarnation as horses rather than centaurs. They decree their own abuse, replete with ceremonial tattooing and flaying, to atone for the sins of their fathers which deemed it necessary that they be incarnated in inferior form. Their obsession with the horse prevents them from understanding their human halves, but even their identification of themselves as animals cannot spare them from participation in human patriarchal systems.

Instead of empowerment from the emphasis on stereotypically feminine nurturing qualities, the female centaurs are oppressed: ". . .the womenfolk were tattooed all over, even their faces, in order to cause them more suffering, for they believed women were born to suffer" (IDM 172). The necessity for female suffering relegates them to a station lower than that of the males, demanding harsher justice for their transgressions, especially adultery.<sup>20</sup> The hides of unfaithful wives become the bed cover for the husband and his new wife, and serve as a reminder of the transgression. The male centaurs view

their wives as possessions and treat them accordingly, keeping the secrets of the religion from the females. Instead of participating in religious ceremonies, the females take on the role of "devotees" (IDM 176). One of the main tasks of the devotees involves cleaning up the sacred bowel movements the centaurs make during religious ceremonies. Quite literally, the wives clean up the shit left by their husbands and male children. This model of male authority over religious practice not only mirrors the Black Pimp's montheistic institution in Africa, but also Christianity's hierarchical organization where women may only serve as help-mates. In fact, in Nebulous Time, the men are so involved with religious ceremony and practice that the women must conduct all household and agricultural duties.

The centaur's system re-enacts patriarchal perceptions of the feminine. Motherhood, for example, as one important role of the centaur females, "is the a priori condition of femaleness."<sup>21</sup> Patriarchy perpetuates ideals of the feminine in mythology. These ideals figure prominently in artistic representations. The female centaurs represent cultural history as mythical beings. They symbolize notions of art with their tattooed flesh. And, as nurturers and caretakers, the female centaurs foreground images of femininity. Even as such, they are "ritually degraded and reviled" (IDM 176), suggesting that women's connection to cultural history, art, and images of femininity all

perpetuate the suppression of women. Even Albertina's rape by all the centaur males, passed off by her as an emanation of her desires, "reflects a patriarchal misogynistic culture [that] constructs femininity as passive and masochistic."<sup>22</sup> The female centaurs serve as accomplices to the crime by restraining Desiderio from assisting Albertina; passivity is connoted in the females' complicity with the rape. By refusing to help Albertina, and by preventing her from receiving assistance, the females demonstrate passive acceptance of the realities of sexual violence. The overwhelming resonance of traditional patriarchal constructions of the feminine in *Nebulous Time*, finally, presents no options for feminine empowerment.

Albertina and Desiderio escape from *Nebulous Time* by once again escaping death. However, Desiderio realizes this time that escape becomes possible only as a function of Albertina's desire, as if realizing for the first time how the Doctor's desire machines work and have been working all along. His travels, then, reveal Carter's belief that woman-in-the-feminine, as a patriarchal construct, emerges through the social roles allotted to or assumed by women. Desiderio's narrative provides a lens through which the reader views Carter's ruminations about feminine dis-empowerment in patriarchal systems. His escape from each formulation foregrounds, at least in part, Carter's rejection of the imagined societies as debilitating for women. The quick rejection of imagined alternative female

powers parallels Benstock's idea that traditional expectations of women exist and are perpetuated to ease patriarchal fears of women's power.

The existence of so many unsatisfactory and incomplete options for feminine empowerment in Carter's text also reveals the fragmentation of women's power in Western Culture. None of the societies suggests a unification of all the options for empowerment so the only alternative left in the novel for unity with the feminine involves a resolution of male and female, the union between Desiderio and his lost feminine, Albertina. The two end up at Hoffman's castle where the Doctor presents Desiderio with the ultimate construct of desire for physical union between males and females--perpetual copulation, sometimes instigated by the administration of drugs. Hoffman harnesses the eroto-energy generated by unending sex to run his desire machines. In a horrific realization that the completion of his quest, the connection to his lost feminine, to Albertina, entails languishing in perpetual sexual intercourse, Desiderio kills both the Doctor and Albertina, fulfilling his original mission.

Albertina's death symbolizes the death of Desiderio's opportunity to connect with his unconscious desires, and asserts Lacan's belief, as iterated by Benstock, that "desire can never be fulfilled."<sup>23</sup> Desiderio then becomes the symbol of patriarchal male society, the writer of his-story, fulfilling the wishes of the Minister of

Determination. Desiderio, unwilling to connect to the unattractively presented feminine side, represses his desires. However, in a recognition that unfulfilled desire never fully disappears, Albertina repeatedly returns to Desiderio "unbidden," in his dreams. Perhaps she (and the reader) only exist in Desiderio's dream throughout Carter's text.

## ENDNOTES

1. "The Discourse on Language," 83.
2. Joseph Boone, "Male Independence and the American Quest Genre," in Feminisms, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 961-987, 962.
3. Jacqueline Rose, "Introduction II" in Feminine Sexuality, trans. Jacqueline Rose, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1982), 32.
4. Jacques Lacan, Feminine Sexuality, trans. Jacqueline Rose, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1982), 153.
5. Ricarda Schmidt, "The Journey of the Subject in Angela Carter's Fiction," Textual Practice 3 (Spring 1989): 56-75, 57.
6. Robinson, 99.
7. David Punter, "Angela Carter: Supersessions of the Masculine," in Critique (Summer 1984): 209-222, 213.
8. Shari Benstock, Textualizing the Feminine: On the Limits of Genre (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), xvi.
9. See, Jacques Lacan, Feminine Sexuality.
10. Desiderio's summation of the power structures in the River People community indicates his distance from the event and his return to it as narrator, for most likely

he did not recognize this structure initially, but rather, realized it existed only after having escaped. The dichotomy between what appears initially to Desiderio and what he recalls as narrator serves to raise questions concerning his reliability in narration.

11. See, Jacques Lacan, Feminine Sexuality.

12. Benstock, 9.

13. The fact that the River People appear to exist in a pre-Symbolic realm, yet exhibit patriarchal domination seems contradictory. However, Desiderio's distortion in his re-telling of the experience again assists in alleviating discrepancies. First, Desiderio's fear of castration catalyzes his shift out of a symbiotic relation with Mama and into the Symbolic. Only after this shift, near the end of the episode, is Desiderio able to view the patriarchal structure, i.e., only in retrospect. Second, the River People do possess a language. That language appears pre-Symbolic only through Desiderio's recollection of it. The River People merely wish to incorporate Desiderio's translation abilities into the whole tribe. Some of the men, including Nao-Kurai, already possess some of Desiderio's "standard tongue" (IDM 70).

14. Nancy Fraser, "Introduction," in Revaluing French Feminism, eds. Nancy Fraser and Sandra Lee Bartky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 1-24, 5.

15. I acknowledge that I skip over the entire "Acrobats of Desire" chapter in this analysis. I do so primarily

because Albertina does not appear in that chapter, except as an image of Hoffman's Ambassador that Desiderio sees in one of the peep-show proprietor's machines, and therefore his desire for her, as propulsion for his quest, seems somewhat diverted in that scene.

16. I execute a shift in analysis at this point from dealing primarily with a concretization of Lacan's imaginary realm to a socio-historical perspective that concentrates on representations of the female form as related to economics and social status. This shift seems appropriate given that Desiderio's escape from the River People community parallels a move out of the Imaginary and into the Symbolic, into the site of patriarchal power, the source of such socio-historical perspectives.

17. Robinson, 79.

18. Palmer, Paulina, "From 'Coded Mannequin' to Bird Woman: Angela Carter's Magic Flight" in Women Reading Women's Writing, ed. Sue Rose (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987): 179-205, 184.

19. See, for instance, Camille Paglia Sexual Personae (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), or Susan Griffin, Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980).

20. For instance, punishment for adulterous females consists of flaying to the point of death, whereas for the same crime, males must eat their own penises. Presumably, the males die from nausea due to their aversion



to meat, but their punishment fails to guarantee their deaths in the same way as the females surely meet theirs--in the system, the punishment for equal crimes is not equal. The inequality of the justice system mirrors the centaur's entire social structure. Whereas all the centaurs are tattooed and all impose self-suffering, the worse lot of these always falls to the females.

21. Robinson, 114.

22. Schmidt, 59.

23. Benstock, 18.

Chapter 3: The Killdeer Game: Deceit as Narrative Strategy  
in Tom Spanbauer's The Man Who Fell in Love  
with the Moon

I called the game killdeer because of the bird.  
Heard my mother tell a customer once that she  
liked the killdeer bird because killdeer played  
a trick on you. Trick was, killdeer acted like  
her wing was broke so that fox or coyote would  
follow her away from her nest . . .I was alot  
like that bird.<sup>1</sup>

The first section of Tom Spanbauer's novel, The Man  
Who Fell in Love with the Moon, introduces a narrative  
strategy that permeates the entire text. The protagonist,  
Out-in-the-Shed, referred to as simply Shed throughout  
the text, not only tells the reader the story of the  
killdeer bird, but also gives his interpretation of the  
bird's ruse through one of his childhood games. According  
to the story, a perfectly healthy bird feigns injury to  
draw would be ravagers away from its nest, acting out a  
false appearance in order to deceive. Shed interprets  
the game as a means to be invisible, to hide self, to  
conceal the truth about self from others. As narrator  
of the text, Shed begins with the statement "If you're  
the devil, then its not me telling this story" (MFLM 3).  
Shed's refusal to take immediate responsibility as author

of his narrative reflects his concern with audience, with audience participation in the text, his fear that the listener, or the reader, as it were, intends to do him harm.

Shed's status as a subject torn between the "me" and the "not me," occurs during his rape by Billy Blizzard:

I was looking down at Billy Blizzard's red boots. I was thinking about the dead horse in the street when he spread me open. I was thinking about that day that Ida and my mother were fighting in the mud and the sheets were bright with sun. Was thinking about Not-Really-A-Mountain looking down at me and those red boots. Was thinking about the devil. How I hadn't told him my name. How he had found me anyway. Had found me and was splitting me up the middle--two parts from that time on always trying to get back together again, forever trying, me and not me. (MFLM 40)

Shed does not tell the devil, represented here by Billy Blizzard and his red boots, his name, following the advice given him by his supposed mother, Buffalo Sweets: "I was never to answer to my name because it might be the devil asking" (MFLM 3). As narrator, Shed points to this event as the catalyst behind his split identity. However, through the simple act of re-telling the tale repeatedly at the Solo Lounge, Shed reveals how the game of killdeer fails him in the rape scene, as well as in the narrative as a

whole. Before the rape, Shed does not speak a word. He was, for all intents and purposes, without language. Even though Shed refuses to tell the devil his name, even though he plays the killdeer game, Billy Blizzard finds and rapes him.

The failure of the killdeer game to conceal Shed from Billy Blizzard foreshadows the end of the killdeer game, or at least the end of the reader's participation in it, which occurs when we learn the contents of Ida's diaries near the end of the text. The diaries unveil the truth, show the "me" Shed seems so intent on hiding, and reveal the real atrocity of Shed's rape as an incestual attack on the part of his unwitting father. Our knowledge of the contents of Ida's diary alters the way in which we approach this text. If we were not the devil before we read Ida's journals, the knowledge of the truth, as Shed knows, may change us into devils, i.e. into hostile readers. Because Ida's diaries uncover the truth behind all Shed's stories, they allow a glimpse into the extent to which Shed practices killdeer in his re-telling of the tale, the extent to which deception plays a structural role in this narrative. Nearly every aspect of the text figures as part of the game. Our return to the text armed with stark truths provides a different reading of Shed's narrative. This return to the text to re-interpret Shed's tale parallels Shed's own re-telling of the tale to the audience at the Solo Lounge, who appear to have heard it

before: "If you're the devil, then it's not me telling this story," I say. "That's it, that's how the story begins," a woman says (MFLM 353).

A return to the text reveals Spanbauer's attempt to reverse dominant and oppressed discourses. Spanbauer turns a typically oppressed sexual discourse into the central and sanctioned discourse within his text. This narrative technique mirrors Michel Foucault's discussion of the dominant discourse's attempts to formulate discursive space for oppressed discourses:

. .it was truly necessary to make room for illegitimate sexualities, it was reasoned, [to] let them take their infernal mischief elsewhere: to a place where they could be reintegrated, if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profit. The brothel . . . seem[s] to have surreptitiously transferred the pleasures that are unspoken into the order of things that are counted.<sup>2</sup>

Spanbauer creates a scene where the oppressed become the dominant voices. The whorehouse, complete with its illicit sexualities as prescribed by the dominant discourse, works as the center of the action and the dialogue in this text. Instead of Foucault's "triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence,"<sup>3</sup> Spanbauer endows the oppressed discourse with a powerful voice. Spanbauer enhances the power of the oppressed through the character of Ida Richilieu who

serves simultaneously as proprietress of the Indian Head Hotel, the town mayor, and the town historian by transcribing all the events of Excellent, Idaho into her infamous diaries. Her position as a dominant force could not be more emphasized. However, through her connection with the brothel, with usually silenced sexualities, Ida also harbors an undeniable link to a subjugated discourse, a link that eventually allows the Mormons to destroy her. Ida's destruction and the collapse of forbidden sexualities as legitimate trade in Excellent, Idaho, not only re-establishes the true dominant discourse, but also breaks up the deception that gave the reader reason to think that Ida represents the dominant discourse. Spanbauer's characterization of Ida and the Indian Head Hotel as powerful social institutions proves to be an aspect of the text's killdeer game, a futile attempt to cover up the reality that oppressed voices must define themselves in a subordinate and dependant relation to the dominant dicourse, not over or above it.

Another aspect of the killdeer game that reveals itself upon a return to the text involves the role that taboo plays in distracting the reader from reality. If the killdeer game involves feigning an injury in order to protect loved ones, Shed seems to accomplish that deceit at the Solo Lounge. He appears wounded, a blind and crazy old drag queen. In fact, however, he functions as the strongest character in the tale he relates, the only one

who survives. His appearance works as only one aspect of his deceit, for his narrative fails to relate all the facts as he knows them from the beginning. Instead, Shed creates a seductive story outside the boundaries of traditional sanction--a story of taboo. The audience wants to hear the tale again and again, a reaction that Foucault claims as typical of persons who perceive themselves to be within the dominant discourse:

There was a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex . . . [a] multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail.<sup>4</sup>

Shed obliges the dominant discourse's request to re-tell, to re-iterate, his tale. Perhaps his embellishments become numerous, but the reader has only this one re-telling with which to work. Shed constructs a story guaranteed to get the attention of his audience because of its taboo nature.

Shed relates the dynamics of a family, which includes Dellwood Barker, Ida Richilieu, Alma Hatch and him, a family that believes itself "better than any Mormon family" (MFLM 325). While Shed's "family" figures as the dominant discourse in the text, they define themselves in opposition

to Mormon family values, which more closely represent dominant social values. Shed's family follows none of the prescribed notions of family in society at large. They do not engage in monogamous relations. Shed is born out of wedlock, and instead of being reared into a value system sanctioned by the world, he matures in a setting that engages in illicit sexualities for the purpose of profit. In addition, this supposed family engages in mixing and matching sexual relations with one another. Shed frequently spies in upon Ida and Alma naked in bed together. Despite their unspoken relationship, Ida and Alma both engage in sexual liaisons with Dellwood Barker, and Shed has relations with Dellwood and Alma. The reader becomes enraptured by the tale of sexual freedom, by lesbian and gay liaisons, by the supposed incestual relation between Dellwood and Shed, by the powerful sexual demands of Alma, who sees what she wants and takes it, by the strange way this "family" acts out the relationships between its members, but this is all part of the killdeer game. Shed frees himself to relate the tale in a manner of his choosing, and he chooses not to reveal the truth, the "me." Instead, he draws the audience away from the nest, away from the real taboos that are broken in the text. Only when he completes his story and allows Ida's diary to reveal his true relation to Ida can the reader penetrate the game of killdeer Shed plays throughout the text.

After we read her diaries, Ida emerges as the character



for whom Shed has put up the greatest defense through deceit. Initially, the reader interprets Ida as a positive role model for Shed. The community of women at Ida's Indian Head Hotel provide a safe space in which Shed matures. Ida serves as Shed's chief educator, teaching him how to read and spell, providing him with her form of language as a means to navigate the world.<sup>5</sup> In return for his room and board, and a portion of the monies earned, Shed works for Ida as a male prostitute catering to the desires of men from all around the area interested in same sex encounters. In this role, Ida appears as Shed's benefactress, as a benevolent surrogate mother. She teaches Shed to read and saves his money for him, demonstrating an apparent concern for his future. Since the text leads us to believe that she adopts Shed out of the goodness of her heart, all of her actions in response to him seem to generate from a large dose of humanity, rather than legal or moral obligations. She poses as a liberal woman, allowing and even encouraging his sexual orientation, which society usually frowns upon.

However, after the revelation of the contents of Ida's journal, this image of her figures as part of the killdeer game, as part of Shed's desire to lead would be ravagers away from his loved ones and the truth about his erotic attractions to his own mother. Shed recalls Ida's bath time and his own desire to be close to her while she bathed, to smell her fragrances, to note the arrangement of her

women's things on the dresser, to watch her:

She was a woman--full-smelling of sulphur springs or places on the earth deep with topsoil. The curve of her arm down to the black hair in her armpits, down to her breasts, always gave me a feeling. Her dark, round, big nipples slapped at my heart same way the black hair at her woman's hole did--slapped at my heart when I saw her, smelled her. (MFLM 51)

As long as Shed remains unaware of Ida's identity as his biological mother, his response to her seems to be a normal expression of heterosexual male desire for an attractive woman. However, when the reader discovers that Ida is actually Shed's biological mother, our interpretation of this scene changes.

In retrospect, Shed's desire for Ida, along with his voyeurism and the comfort he experiences by sleeping with her, smacks of Freud's description of the male child's initial sexual attraction to his mother:

The little boy may show the most undisguised sexual curiosity about his mother, he may insist upon sleeping beside her at night, he may even force his presence upon her while she is dressing or may even make actual attempts at seducing her, as his mother will often notice and report with amusement--all of which puts beyond doubt the erotic nature of his tie with his mother.<sup>6</sup>

As a child, Shed does not know that he is attracted to his mother. However, as narrator, Shed knows the truth, so when he chooses to keep that truth hidden from the reader, he allows himself the chance to tell his lust for his mother without any restrictions or guilt. Ida tricks Shed by keeping his identity a secret, and Shed, in his turn as narrator, tricks the reader into a full appreciation of his longing before we realize its incestuous implications.

Shed's "sexual curiosity" about Ida, expressed previously only in terms of viewing her and her things, manifests itself physically one evening while he and Ida sleep together. Ida suddenly jumps out of bed, awakening Shed as she yanks back the covers to gaze at the size of his erect penis. From that point on, Ida refuses to allow Shed to sleep with her under the pretense that she cannot sleep with an erection in the room, leaving the reader to wonder how she has ever slept in all the years of her employ! Shed's narrative reveals no qualms about having an erection in Ida's presence; the text passes no judgment on or condemnation of this event. However, Shed's deferral of the knowledge that Ida is his biological mother indicates that he fears judgment on account of his erotic attraction to her. His method of telling the story, in relation to the killdeer game, appears to serve the purpose of protecting himself from the reader's judgment concerning an acknowledged taboo, even though Shed did not know he

was engaging in incestual desires at the time. Ida, on the other hand, needs no such protection from Shed, for she knew all along that Shed was her natural son, and felt compelled to repress his incestual desire, to prevent a re-occurrence of such events between herself and Shed. Despite her otherwise liberal sexual activities in Spanbauer's text, Ida perpetuates a sexual taboo in this scene.

Ida's desire to curtail sexual encounters of an incestual nature between her and Shed appears respectable. However, her agreement to the sexual encounter between Shed and Alma points to an image of Ida which does call for Shed's protection through the killdeer narrative strategy. When Alma arrives at the Indian Head Hotel, she demands to sleep with the half-breed boy in the shed she has heard so much about. Her announcement shocks everyone in the brothel, because Shed never before engaged in sex with women, and Ida always reserved the right to choose his clientele. With the exorbitant amount of money Alma offers for the encounter Ida cannot help but allow the transaction to occur. Once the reader becomes aware of Shed's biological connection to Ida, Spanbauer's revision of the mother's function in male sexuality assumes some problematic attributes. As mother, Ida arbitrates Shed's education, provides his linguistic system, and polices his sexual desires as well:

"You're never to find a customer yourself," she

said. "Or even act like you're interested. Even if you are. No matter how wild and uncontrollable that injun dick of yours gets, first thing is scrutinizing," Ida said. "Then after scrutinizing, it'll be me, Ida Richilieu, and only me, who decides upon the customer, and when and where." (MFLM 59)

It seems only appropriate that as proprietress of the Indian Head Hotel Ida reserves the right to define how her employees behave. However, Ida knows she is Shed's mother, so her materialistic uses of Shed's sexuality and her decisions about the who, when and where of his sex life, seem incompatible with accepted notions of what constitutes proper mothering, and Shed must certainly be aware of these problems as he re-tells the story. His choice to defer recognition of her as his biological mother indicates his desire to protect her from accusations against her methods as mother.

Inappropriate as it may seem, Ida's greed sanctions the liaison between Shed and Alma, from which Shed emerges obsessed with Alma. When Shed first encounters Ida after his fateful night with Alma, he cannot maintain his composure and breaks down like a blubbering baby. Ida seems to understand Shed's predicament, and offers what appears to be a Freudian interpretation of the event: "Consider the source, Shed . . . your mother is dead, and she will never come back" (MFLM 71). Ida's explanation

emphasizes that Shed has indeed attached himself to someone besides her, besides his mother, though he, as well as the reader, is unaware of his biological relationship to her at that point in the narrative. More important, Ida indicates that Shed loves Alma because of her connection to a mother figure, and her essentially Freudian reading of his obsession with Alma determines how he will perceive all women from that point forward. Ida creates a situation in which Alma embodies or personifies the mother from whom Shed must separate in order to gain emotional maturity and individuation:

The human individual has to devote himself to the great task of detaching himself from his parents, and not until that task is achieved can he cease to be a child and become a member of the social community.<sup>7</sup>

Shed responds rather fiercely to the cultural imperative that he detach from the mother figures in his life. After gathering this advice from Ida, he flees Excellent to visit his secret valley on Not-Really-A-Mountain--the spot where Billy Blizzard purportedly killed his supposed mother, Buffalo Sweets. Shed draws a circle, stands within it, and announces: ". . .I was free of woman's hole . . .I had pulled my head out. I had pulled my dick out. I was free, unencumbered" (MFLM 73). His response suggests that the incident with Alma allows him to make a conscious decision about his role in homosexual encounters, which

figure prominently in the next episodes of his story.

Shed's affirmation of his freedom from woman's hole accompanies another vow that underlies his movement through the rest of the text. Shed says that, "if, in fact, a man needed a woman, then I'd make a part of myself that woman for me" (MFLM 73). The assertion appears to be a vow of celibacy from heterosexual activities, but it also expresses a desire to assume the role of woman for himself, to allow some part of himself to become woman. The only way he knows of achieving this identity comes through a search for the meaning of his Indian name, which he pronounces to the white women as a means to "say something big to them, something that after saying it, nothing could be the same" (MFLM 74). At this juncture, Shed recognizes the potential power in his name, but as yet it remains an unrealized power, for he does not know its meaning. The possibility that Shed's Indian name contains power just proves to be another aspect of the killdeer game, for its real meaning, which we learn from Ida's diary, does not imbue him with power at all. Instead, it exposes the narrative killdeer game this narrator plays throughout the text.

In a search to ascertain the meaning of his name, Shed leaves Excellent and the Indian Head Hotel. The part of Shed's tale that recalls his search for the meaning of Duivichi-un-Dua illumines yet another killdeer game Shed uses in his narrative structure, this one to protect

himself from blame for ruining his supposed father Dellwood Barker. Even though the reader learns through Ida's diaries that Shed bears no biological connection to Dellwood Barker, Barker serves as the primary father figure in Shed's life. From Barker, Shed learns one of the many meanings the text gives his name. Barker connects it to the Indian meaning of Berdache. Barker spells Berdache for him and offers his own definition: "holy man who fucks with men" (MFLM 5). Dellwood provides a new language for Shed, a linguistic role that equates him with Ida, revealing his status as father figure. But unlike Ida, Dellwood Barker demonstrates an understanding of the words he defines that goes beyond just simplistic definition into multiple and connotative meanings of words as well as the word's relation to social issues. The simplistic nature of Ida's definitions becomes apparent when compared with those offered by Dellwood Barker. For instance, Ida defines forever as merely "always" (MFLM 5), offering a synonym for the word, not a full definition. She defines excruciating as "too painful" and says "sometimes that's good" (MFLM 11), yet offers no explanation as to why. Barker, on the other hand, relates multiple meanings of words, interpreting them through abstraction, rather than synonyms. He defines scrutinizing as "touching what you're looking at with your eyes" (MFLM 13), giving vision a personified quality that involves the use of the imagination. For the word "penetrate," Dellwood offers three different definitions



which hint at both simple association and connotations of the word. For Dellwood, penetrate "means putting your dick in a hole, or discovering the inner contents or meaning of, or entering by overcoming resistance" (MFLM 25).

Concerning the word Berdache, Dellwood tells Shed:

. . .if you were Berdache, folks figured that, since you weren't like most men, and you weren't like most women, that you were something different altogether, meaning somebody special, not bad. Berdache were looked up to as spiritual leaders and healers . . .did everything the men did, did everything the women did too, and sometimes even became a second wife to a man if the Berdache thought the man was worth it. (MFLM 129)

In relating his understanding of the Berdache to Shed, Dellwood Barker not only provides Shed with information that appeals to his presumed Indian identity, but also provides insight to Shed's sexual nature, enabling Shed to discern his own power and to remain free of women as he wished to be. While Barker's definitions open up knowledge for Shed, Ida's symbolic system limits understanding in the same way she keeps the secret of Shed's true identity. Dellwood Barker proves to be a concerned father figure, interested in assisting Shed's growth and development, providing an alternative to Ida's stifling and controlling role as mother.

When Shed finds a picture of his supposed mother,

Buffalo Sweets, in Dellwood's bedroll, he thinks that Dellwood is his biological father. Believing Dellwood to be his natural father, Shed temporarily puts his desire for this man in check. However, Shed rather quickly surrenders to his own lust for Dellwood despite his concern with the possibility that having sex with his father constitutes taboo. In relating his narrative, Shed concentrates on the incest taboo in relation to Barker, where no forbidden sexual encounter, apart from homosexuality, really occurs. According to Foucault, his audience would want to hear more and more about taboo sex, and by speaking about his encounter with Barker as though it were taboo, Shed avoids the truth, drawing the audience away from the "me" Shed who actually destroys an innocent man. By engaging in sexual relations with Dellwood, the character Shed thinks he rejects the dominant discourse and breaks social prohibitions (which obviously do not exist as prohibitions in this text). The narrator Shed, however, knows the truth, knows that he was raped by his father, Billy Blizzard, knows a less significant taboo is broken in the scene with Dellwood Barker.

The boy's sexual relations with his supposed father prove more meaningful to Shed than any previous intimacies, because Dellwood has something to teach Shed about himself and his powers. Dellwood Barker's greatest contribution to Shed's identity occurs in the sexual acts the two consummate together at Buffalo Head, for Shed begins to

see sex as a means to heal others and himself. This process, referred to as "Moves Moves" by Dellwood, connects Shed to his supposed Indian identity. Dellwood says: "Moves Moves is the way you'd say it in tybo. Don't know the Indian word for it. What Moves Moves is, is sperm retention--that is, having orgasm without ejaculating" (MFLM 131). In Moves Moves, a person retains all the energy wrought by ejaculation, storing and directing it into the person who needs to be healed.<sup>8</sup> Dellwood and Shed practice together until Shed perfects the technique, which later enables them to save Ida's life.

Another lesson Dellwood teaches Shed centers around a story about the Wild Moon Man who lives at the bottom of a lake. Whenever the moon is full, the Wild Moon Man comes to the surface to snatch men down to the depths of the water. While below the surface, the Wild Moon Man teaches his captive how to breathe water instead of air. If the captive fails to trust the Wild Moon Man, he drowns. If, however, the captive learns to breathe water, the Wild Moon Man "teaches [him] many secrets about the true power of being a man" (MFLM 130). Dellwood locates this power in "the place that's as female as a man can get," and says "you find your natural power through your asshole, not your dick . . . By receiving a man into you, by receiving a man like a woman . . . what you find . . . is the beautiful warrior in yourself who knows both sides." (MFLM 130)

Dellwood relegates power to the receiving man, the penetrated man, mirroring the theory of the penetrated man Frank Browning offers in his book The Culture of Desire:

The act of being penetrated requires some release of power over the self. The penetration of the self--not merely the body, but the gestalt of body, mind, spirit, and memory--is, by almost any definition, an entry into the most private and sacred zones of individual identity.<sup>9</sup>

Although Dellwood spews his theories of power to Shed while they have sex, Shed plays the role of the penetrator in this scene. Not until the lunar eclipse, after Shed and Dellwood have both returned to Excellent, does Shed take on the role of the penetrated man. When he does so, he agrees with Dellwood: "Secret is when you're open, when you're moon reflecting light, the sun is yours, everything's yours" (MFLM 209).

This scene differs greatly from his previous experience of forced penetration by his father Billy Blizzard, for Shed opens himself to receive Dellwood in a caring relationship. He begins to identify with women, lumping himself with "Alma Hatch, Ida Richilieu, Gracie Hammer, Ellen Finton, those females," (MFLM 209), a quasi-fulfillment of the role he sought before leaving Excellent. Shed realizes his connection to Dellwood moves him out of the realm of the acceptable. He knows "you [don't] fuck your father" (MFLM 124), so his sexual

relations appear to break this taboo. Browning asserts that "only by acknowledging and searching out that framework of taboo, and then by entering into its violation . . . is there the possibility of shattering the self and gaining rebirth."<sup>10</sup> Shed's entire experience with Dellwood during the lunar eclipse mirrors Browning's idea of rebirth. Shed believes himself to have become woman, the only part of woman his masculine side should ever need.<sup>11</sup> However, his ability to achieve all of this potential remains part of the killdeer game strategy, for Shed, the narrator, knows that he has not broken the incest taboo by sleeping with Barker. All of this power is transitory, ending when we read Ida's diary. A concentration on the incest taboo protects Shed from guilt concerning Dellwood's demise.

When Shed and Dellwood attempt to save Ida's life using Moves Moves, Shed tells Dellwood that he believes him to be his father. This knowledge ruins Dellwood. He flees Excellent, pursued by Sheriff Rooney, after having run Reverend Helm and Sheriff Blumenfeld, through ear to ear with a bayonet. Instinctively, Shed knows Barker has left Excellent to travel to Buffalo Head to die, so he follows him there. Upon his arrival at Buffalo Head, Shed encounters a Dellwood completely unfamiliar to him. Dellwood mistakes Shed for death, puts his hand into the fire to grab a red hot coal, and begins dancing while he relates his "human-being story" (MFLM 313). As part of this story, Dellwood relates how Shed's acknowledgment

of their supposed biological relations unmade him:

"The truth," Dellwood said, "--that's what I told Shed to do. Tell the truth, I said.

"You are my father, Shed said. I am your son.

"The truth.

"What a fool I've been.

"As soon as I heard those words, I was no longer the story I was telling myself. The world was no longer something I was thinking up." (MFLM 316)

Shed convinces Dellwood to attempt Moves Moves to prevent the death Dellwood insists is at hand, but Dellwood only ejaculates all over Shed and dies in his arms. Unlike Shed, Dellwood cannot live with the knowledge that he transgressed a sexual taboo. But Shed's revelation of his biological relationship to Dellwood comes out of Shed's own confusion about his identity. Shed withholds this information while re-telling the story, in an act of playing killdeer, to highlight his own innocence, to keep us from condemning the way in which he harms an innocent man with false information.

After his initial rendezvous with Dellwood at Buffalo Head, Shed continues on his journey to "to find what [his] name meant," although the meaning "wasn't as important now that [he] had found Dellwood Barker" (MFLM 136). However, instead of returning to Dellwood Barker, Shed

continues the attempt to make a connection with his supposed Indian identity. This action creates a separation with the father figure, a separation that parallels the split with mother that has already occurred. According to Freud, a child must disconnect with both parents before he can function as an autonomous being in a social community. Shed's search to discover the correct translation of his Indian name emphasizes his hope to find a social community among the Indians. Shed's over-identification with Native American culture also works as part of the killdeer game, the art of deceit that Shed practices upon the reader. As the presumed son of Buffalo Sweets, the Indian woman who pretends to be Shed's mother, Shed appears torn between Ida's white world and his own Native American one. In reality, the reader learns later, Shed embodies a virtual microcosm of heteroglossic ethnicity with Ida as mother and Billy Blizzard, the son of ethnically ambiguous Bigfoot, as his father. Under the misconception that he hails from Indian ancestry, Shed travels to the Indian reservation to learn the meaning of Duivichi-un-Dua. His entry into Bannock territory confounds his attempts to learn the translation of his name because the Bannock tell him his name comes from the Shoshone language. This discovery reveals the false presumptions on which Shed's entire search has been predicated. In fact, Shed has no certain Indian heritage. The closest approximation of Shed's name, given to him by Owlfeather, suggests that Shed's name means a

"boy's boy" (MFLM 161). Shed deceptively lets this translation stand until the revelation of the contents of Ida's diary when her letter informs his audience, as it once informed him, that Duivichi-un-Dua actually means "boy child of a boy father" (MFLM 346). Although "boy's boy" serves as a close approximation to the real translation, it connotes Shed's sexual orientation more than his parentage.

By hiding the meaning of his name, Shed deceives the audience into the belief that his name prophecied his sexual orientation as much as the test Ida used to determine his "human being sex story." According to tradition, shortly after a child's birth, adults place the child on its stomach on the floor with a feather and a bow within reach on one side and a basket and a gourd within reach on the other. Whichever side the child reaches toward determines the gendered-role the child will assume in adult sexual relations. The feather and the bow signify the male; the basket and the gourd the female. A boy reaching for the male articles foreshadows heterosexual male sexual behavior, whereas a male reaching for the female articles indicates that the boy will adopt a feminine attraction to men. Shed reached for neither the right side nor the left side, but reached for a feathered boa about Ida's neck instead. Regardless of the tonal resemblance to the male articles, Shed's attraction to Ida's boa foreshadows his taking of the female role in sexual relations, as well as his



attraction to feminine articles manifested in his drag attire.<sup>12</sup> By letting his audience believe he was decreed from birth to be homosexual and appear before them in women's clothes, Shed enables himself to escape their judgment, a maneuver that allows the "not me" to continue telling the story, and the "me" to remain hidden, invisible.

The final episode about the Wisdom Brothers and "Open Season" reveals a new aspect of the killdeer game. The Wisdom Brothers, as blacks, know the killdeer game and how to play it. They act the part Ida desires them to act when she invites them into her establishment to drink with all the tybos, or white folk: "'Madam Full Charge' . . . Homer said . . . 'We never done this before, but if she say go, we better go!'" (MFLM 244). Behind her back, however, they discuss how they know their actions will get them killed: "'Hallelujah, we dead men. This town's g'wan to be lynching them some niggers for sure!'" (MFLM 248). They are used to making themselves appear wounded and subservient because of their skin color, for this invisibility protects them against the dominant powers. Ida, on the other hand, emboldened by their presence, feigns strength, not injury. She declares "Open Season" on Sheriff Rooney and the Mormons without recognizing that they ultimately hold, and will not hesitate to use, the power to destroy her and her business. By believing that her narrative discourse has power, she calls doom down upon herself. To maintain her place in the discourse, Ida must

not threaten the powers that be.

In addition to Ida's fateful attempt to reverse the principles of the killdeer game by pretending to a power she does not really have, the presence of the Wisdom Brothers introduces another aspect that figures into Shed's ability to play the game. Blind Jude functions like a prophet, like Tiresias, who, though blind, can see, can know things that sighted people do not know. Blind Jude helps Shed see the importance of Ida Richilieu in his life. His blindness proves only a physical barrier, for he knows things about Shed without ever having seen him. Shed also becomes blind near the end of the text. He figures as the blind prophet, the one who sees, the one who knows, the character who reveals the truth. His blindness is the injury which he does not have to feign. That injury, combined with the knowledge of experience, allows him to draw the audience, the would be ravagers away from the nest because ultimately he controls the narrative, he knows the facts, and the audience is blind.

Perhaps this knowledge of the truth of the events precipitates Shed's belief in his emancipation, which he expresses through the words of a Wisdom Brother's song near the end of the text: "Sing the jubilee; everybody free. / Welcome, welcome, 'mancipation" (MFLM 355). However, Shed's idea of emancipation emerges as highly problematic. Although he believes he can become invisible and disappear from the law whenever he wishes, in fact,

the audience knows his game. The rape by Billy Blizzard reveals that the killdeer game does not protect him from being detected by the devil, a fact that Shed acknowledges after his first sexual encounter with his supposed father, Dellwood: "Truth was, sooner or later, I knew the devil was going to know" (MFLM 125). The revelation of Ida's diaries shows the truth of Shed's identity, for all, including the devil to realize. The audience sees the "me" and sees through the "not me." Shed's "me" presents himself as a "crazy old drag queen" (MFLM 352). No one would want to hear, nor would likely believe, the same story told by an ordinary man, for their interest is piqued by his novelty. Their morbid curiosity both fascinates them and makes them afraid of Shed, and their fear becomes his only power: "They are afraid of me," (MFLM 352) he acknowledges. They are not afraid of "not me." The contents of Shed's unusual story justify the fear of the audience, but their fear alone gives Shed no real power over them. Shed still feels the necessity to play the killdeer game in order to be invisible. He must hide himself and the twins from Sheriff Rooney. Rooney possesses a warrant for Shed's arrest on the charge of kidnapping the twins who became wards of the state at the time of Ida's death. The audience members in the Solo Lounge use their positions of power within the dominant discourse to jeer at Shed, calling him "faggot" (MFLM 352).

In light of the power still held by the dominant

discourse, Shed's supposed emancipation appears as farcical as his attempts to become woman by donning her clothes. He believes himself to be woman, but anatomically he is not her. He says "Secret of woman's hole is open so it don't hurt," (MFLM 209) when in reality a woman need not consciously open her vagina during sex. His "secret of woman's hole" has more to do with anal sex than vaginal sex. He expresses the belief that woman's hole is a power "we're all stuck in" (MFLM 352), which belies any emancipation whatsoever. To be stuck denies the possibility of being free. The negative sentiments expressed by him about female sexuality and being born of woman show his failure to become woman or connect in a positive way with his own femininity. His emancipation is a ruse; his images of woman, motivated by his unattained desire to become her, reflect a negative, nihilistic, fatalistic misogyny. By appearing in drag, by portraying himself in a mothering role in relation to Ida's twins, Shed tries to continue the game of killdeer, to deceive, to keep his audience from a knowledge he blatantly gives away: "If you run after that damn killdeer bird long enough, it always leads you back home" (MFLM 351).

## ENDNOTES

1. Tom Spanbauer, The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon (New York, Harper Perennial, 1991), 12. All further references to this work appear in the text.

2. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, 4.

3. Ibid., 5.

4. Ibid., 18.

5. However, the chief factor in Shed's acquisition and use of language appears to be his rape by Billy Blizzard and the death of his supposed mother Buffalo Sweets, before which he did not utter a word.

6. Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 333.

7. Ibid., 337.

8. James Walker offers an actual account of the Native American concept of Moves Moves:

The information I got from Finger clears up much that was obscure, especially relative to Taku Skanskan. Remember that I said that I could not give a translation of skan which is the shamanistic term for Taku Skanskan, and that according to the best information I had, skan meant the sky. I so translated it with the approval of several Indians, each and all declaring that skan was the sky and was also

a spirit that was everywhere and that gave life and motion to everything that lives or moves. Every interpreter interpreted Taku Skanskan as "what moves moves," or that which gives motion to everything that moves. From the information given by Finger, it is evident that his concept of Taku Skanskan, or skan, is a vague or nebulous idea of force or energy. Recalling attempts of other Oglala to define the word I am now surprised that this did not appear to me before talking with Finger.

I find it interesting that Walker's account deals with the Oglala tribes, in a book written about Lakota myth, whereas Spanbauer mentions only the Shoshone and Bannock tribes as possible origins for Shed. All this indicates to me that the concept of Moves Moves must be rather pervasive in Native American culture. See James Walker's Lakota Myth (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 9.

9. Frank Browning, The Culture of Desire: Paradox and Perversity in Gay Lives Today (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), 87.

10. Ibid., 88.

11. As part of his oath to free himself from woman's hole, Shed includes an oath that ". . .if, in fact, a man needed a woman, then I'd make a part of myself that woman for me" (MFLM 73). Since the only part of woman a man

might ever need would be her "woman's hole," (MFLM 51) and since this seems the very aspect from which Shed aspires to escape, it is highly unlikely that anatomically he could serve the part of woman's hole for himself, auto-penetration remaining an exceedingly improbable event regardless of penis magnitude. Therefore, Shed's statement indicates a desire to be woman, or to have at least part of himself become her. His movement throughout the text from the scene of his making the oath then appears propelled, at least in part, by his wish to become woman, a desire that seems realized upon his penetration by Dellwood.

12. Another aspect of the Killdeer game figures in Shed's re-telling of the "human being sex story" prophecy. When Shed reaches for Ida's feathered boa, he actually reaches for his biological mother. Ida re-tells the story emphasizing how tickled she is that Shed reached for a feminine article that nonetheless had a masculine sounding name. In reality, Ida most likely was tickled because the baby Shed reached for his real mother. This information, however, is kept from the reader as Shed tells the story, just like Ida kept the information from anyone who happened to listen to her.

## Conclusion

In the nascent stages of this thesis, I noticed similarities between The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman and The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon, which range from narrative strategy to character and plot development, to the failure of these texts to imagine empowerment for the feminine and gay male voice. It seems that both Carter and Spanbauer desire to create discursive space for hitherto marginalized voices. Both authors attempt to create such space through the narration of their respective protagonists. Desiderio and Shed both relate tales that liberate and explore hitherto oppressed desires. In another similarity, Desiderio and Shed appear as unreliable narrators of their respective tales, and in both cases their narrative tactics serve to conceal, at least temporarily, the nature of oppressed desires. In the introduction, Desiderio claims he "remember[s] everything perfectly" (IDM 11), yet by the time he begins the first chapter, he "cannot remember exactly how [the madness] began" (IDM 15). Shed admits that "a crazy old story by a crazy old drag queen should only make you wonder" (MFLM 352), inviting skepticism concerning the truth of the narrative he tells.

Unreliable as they may be, the narrators of these novels become the vehicle for the reader's experience of



them. Through the relation of their respective tales, both narrators introduce questions about their identities relating to their names. Desiderio learns from the somnambulist Mary Anne that his name means he is the desired one, yet the name actually translates in the active sense of desire, meaning he desires. Shed, on the other hand, has both a tybo or white name, Out-in-the-Shed, and an Indian name, Duivichi-un-Dua. Over the course of his story, Shed learns two different translations for his Indian name, "boy's boy" and "boy child of a boy father." Each of the translations somehow reflects Shed's role in the text—the former reflects Shed's homosexual role, while the latter indicates his origins. Shed also carries the title of Berdache, which elevates Shed to the role of a sacred medicine man. Shed moves through the text in an attempt to discern the meaning, or white man's translation, of his Indian name. This movement indicates a sort of journey for Shed, as if discovering the meaning of his name will lead to an understanding of his identity. Though Desiderio does not overtly seek to know the meaning of his name, his interactions with other characters vacillate between both meanings of his name; he embodies the difference between being the "desired one" and functioning as "he who desires." The shifts in episodes serve to defer the significance of Desiderio's name, for each episode adds a new dimension to the potential of his character in relation to desire. Shed also alternately serves as

desirer and desired. As Ida's only male prostitute, Shed services the desire of many a male customer and the one female, Alma Hatch, willing to put up the money. At the same time, Shed's desires for Ida, Alma and Dellwood Barker determine his actions throughout the text.

Their status as desired beings places both Desiderio and Shed in a position vulnerable to male rape. Desiderio is repeatedly penetrated by the Acrobats of Desire; Billy Blizzard nearly splits Shed up the middle in a violent act of anal penetration. These homosexual rapes disturb the identity of these characters and complicate their definitions of desire. Desiderio admits that his penetration, though seemingly against his will, may have been part of his unconscious desires. Shed, on the other hand, develops a need to find an identity after his rape by Billy Blizzard. The rape splits him into two parts, which he never again can reunite. One of those parts of self, the "not me," narrates the entire story.

Each of these texts, ends with the protagonist's decision in relation to both identity and desire. Though Desiderio offers no comment concerning what he has learned of desire, his travels showcase myriad, fantastic desires. The revelation of the contents of Ida's diaries, on the other hand, reveal to Shed, and to the reader, the incestuous nature of some of his desires. His attempt to hide those desires throughout the bulk of his tale affects and in some way distorts our reading of the text.

Moreover, each tale ends with an unromanticized description of desire that enables each protagonist to assert a new identity. Both protagonists reject desire on some level, possibly because of the shock associated with the revelations they experience. For Desiderio, this shock is a realization that fulfillment of his desires involves perpetual copulation with Albertina, the object of his desire, a realization that both "awe[s]" and "revolt[s]" him (IDM 214). This repulsion generates his death blow to Albertina and the Doctor and signifies both the triumph of the dominant discourse and the repression of his desire. Shed's shock comes when Doc Heyburn reads Ida's diaries. Like Desiderio, Shed's shock occurs quite some time before the supposed narration of the story in which the reader participates. And like Desiderio, Shed's shock ends in revulsion. Shed's narration suggests he becomes sexually inactive, perhaps signifying his rejection of any sexual desire. Disenchanted by the places they have come to occupy in his memory, Shed concludes that Dellwood and Ida, the man and woman he loved most in the world, actually had no room in themselves for him because "neither one of them could hear any story but their own" (MFLM, 351).

In another recognition by which he appears repulsed, Shed realizes the failed nature of his desire to become woman. Shed speaks of himself as a woman: "A woman's got her pride." This self-reference makes the drag queen appear

as a pitiful, "crazy" character (MFLM 352). Earlier in the text, he vowed to free himself from woman's hole, if necessary to become a woman for himself. However, at the end of his tale he announces his own failure at this attempt, saying that "truth is, the world is, Mother Earth is, woman's hole. Truth is, we're all stuck in that hole" (MFLM 354). In The Sadeian Woman, Angela Carter points out that such descriptions of woman's hole resemble the kind of gendered iconography found in graffiti art:

The prick is always presented erect . . .it points upwards, it asserts. The hole is open, an inert space, like a mouth waiting to be filled. . .Man aspires, woman has no other function but to exist, waiting. The male is positive, an exclamation mark. Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing, that only becomes something when the male principle fills it with meaning.<sup>1</sup>

Though Shed claims some form of emancipation, he remains staunchly committed to the belief that woman's hole, the zero devoid of meaning, traps him, and the contradiction therein belies his belief in freedom. Moreover, Shed connects woman's hole with the earth, a literary device that Carter claims

poeticises, kitschifies and deparicularises intercourse [through images] such as wind beating down corn, rain driving against bending trees,

towers falling, all tributes to the freedom and strength of the roving, fecundating, irresistible male principle and the heavy, downward, equally irresistible gravity of the receptive soil . . . Any woman may manage, in luxurious self-deceit, to feel herself for a little while one with great, creating nature, fertile, open, pulsing, anonymous and so forth. In doing so, she loses herself completely.<sup>2</sup>

Shed emerges as a victim of the self-deceit to which Carter refers. His desired female self, represented by his drag queen costume only dubiously connects him to "great creating nature," because, finally, connections to nature are not about woman at all.

Shed's costume, his ruse of womanhood, hides the reality of his gender as much as his declared emancipation covers up the stark reality of his entrapment in the system. Both texts, then, end with a triumph of the dominant discourse. Desiderio saves the day for the Minister's masculinized order. He becomes a historian and relates a supposedly authoritative tale. On the other hand, though Shed enjoys the freedom to dress in drag and tell his story to an audience that fears him yet "always want[s] more" (MFLM 353), he still figures as the object of jeers from the crowd, and he must hide himself from Sheriff Open Season Rooney. He tells the story in hopes that the narration will allow him to "[forgive] the story--[forgive] the

devil--himself, herself--for the darkness it took to see the light" (MFLM 351). Though Shed may be beginning to see the light, he has not completely forgiven the story, for he still feels the need to re-tell it.

The rejection of desire on the part of both protagonists symbolizes the return of the dominant discourse to the position of supremacy. My sense of betrayal comes from the fact that Carter and Spanbauer seem to suspend the over-arching domination of the status quo in order to allow for a discursive space for oppressed discourses. However, these authors fail to transform that discursive space into an imagined empowerment of oppressed voices, indicating to me that the power of the dominant discourse extends into the world of fiction; that it is entrenched in our signifying systems of language. To overcome this domination entails the transformation of our systems of language and thought. Until fiction finds a way to alter these systems, there are limits to the possibilities in our fictive and real worlds.

## ENDNOTES

1. Angela Carter, The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 4.
2. Ibid., 8.