

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL**

**"Errant in Time and Space": A Reading of Leonora Carrington's  
Major Literary Works**

**being a thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**in the University of Hull**

**by**

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**December 1997**

**It is a great thing to be errant in time and space ... The frontiers into the unknown are constructed in layers. One layer opens into a fan of other layers, which open new worlds in their turn ... Yes, I am also errant. My roots can find no soil and this is why they are visible. Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door*.**

## Abstract

Part One deals with Carrington's association with the Surrealist movement and looks at her texts as dreams/nightmares. Born in 1917, Carrington arrived in Paris just before her twentieth birthday. The opening chapter deals chiefly with biographical material and creates a context for Carrington's writing within the Surrealist movement. Chapters Two and Three explore Carrington's main stories of this period, examining the stylistic devices that make them dream-texts.

Part Two deals with the major crisis in Carrington's life and writing: her internment in a Spanish asylum. Chapter Four looks at the biographical events that led Carrington to be interned and suggests that her father and his associations with Imperial Chemical Industries had more to do with her internment than is commonly believed (Appendix I includes a transcript of my interview with her Spanish doctor and testifies to contacts with ICI). Chapter Five analyses the "mad" narrative "Down Below", where the repression of Carrington's "playing with language" is exposed through an impressive imagery of death. Chapter Six explores the stories written in New York immediately after release: "Cast Down By Sadness", "White Rabbits", "Waiting", "The Seventh Horse" and "As They Rode Along the Edge". The grotesque female bodies and the pervasiveness of the monstrous distinguish these stories as Carrington's chaotic, "creative" resurrection.

Finally Part Three looks at Carrington's Mexican period, where her writing achieves a voice that, although resonant of previous moments, stops being tragic and becomes revolutionarily comic. Chapter Seven follows Carrington's life in Mexico, where she still lives, from 1942 to the present. Chapter Eight deals with four of her best Mexican writings: the novel *The Stone Door*, the play *The Invention of the Mole*, the short story "The Happy Corpse Story" and an unpublished letter to Remedios Varo (1958) included in Appendix II. Finally Chapter Nine deals at length with *The Hearing Trumpet*.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Professor Angela Leighton for her constant advice, perceptive criticism and kind support throughout this research work. I am deeply indebted to and wish to thank Dr. Angeles de la Concha, who has been a continuous source of encouragement and Professor Marion Shaw who dealt with the practicalities of starting this PhD thesis. I am also grateful to Sir Philip Reckitt Educational Trust and the English department of the University of Hull for the travel grants that enabled me to make necessary journeys for my research.

My thanks, too, to Paul De Angelis, Leonora Carrington's literary advisor, who supplied valuable information and stories published in extant journals. Marina Warner generously gave me her time and shared her wide knowledge about Leonora Carrington's life and writing. To Walter Gruen, for providing Carrington's unpublished typescript letter from his archive in Mexico City and for permission to reproduce it, my thanks. I must record as well my enormous gratitude to Dr. Luis Morales for granting me an interview that will hopefully throw new light on Carrington's Spanish experience.

I wish to thank Paddy Long for her precise and thorough editorial work and to Carol Anderson for the final proof-reading. To Dr Gaele Sobott I am indebted for a remarkable translation of Carrington's letter. Henar and Julia Cabañas, my cheer-leaders and inspiration, also made translations from the French, looked for the game *Pigeon Vole!*, commented on paintings, on stories, on Madrid in 1940, on zeppelins and on more issues than I can record. Finally, I wish to thank my colleague and "*colega*" Ana I. Zamorano for so much that I dedicate this thesis to her.

## Preface

The work of women artists associated with Surrealism has attracted considerable critical attention, but the literary work of English women painters and writers, such as Joyce Mansour, Leonora Carrington or Ithell Colquhoun has not. Of these, Carrington is the only one who enjoys a certain critical status. The reasons for this neglect are varied. Firstly, despite the fact that "the success and influence" of the 1936 London International Surrealist Exhibition "were remarkable" (Alexandrian 1970: 138), contemporary English literature looks at Surrealism as an intrinsically *French "artistic"* movement. Secondly, looking in particular to the case of Carrington, her own eclectic personality, her disregard for her *œuvre* once delivered and her dislike of criticism, has, somehow, exacerbated the reluctance of English feminist critics to tackle her writing.

The first critic to devote attention to Carrington was the American Gloria Orenstein. During the seventies, Orenstein centred her argument on Carrington's writing as that of a "visionary" artist who had anticipated the "new age" movement. She started by including Carrington within her studies of Surrealism and by the end of the seventies she devoted over four articles to Carrington and the occult tradition. Although thorough in her analysis, Orenstein's sometimes "illuminated" approaches failed to gain Carrington a place in the literary canon (in "The Methodology of the Marvellous", for example, Orenstein claims to have been "magically" compelled to meet and write about Carrington after purchasing a Mexican dress). Simultaneously, in France, Germaine Rouvre and Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron published interviews and anthologies of Carrington's stories and plays in French in an attempt to create a debate about the position of women within French Surrealism. Meanwhile, exhibition catalogues published in New York, Paris and Mexico D.F. started to consecrate Carrington as a Surrealist woman painter.

As a result, the number of critical works about Carrington increases considerably during the eighties, although criticism is mainly carried out by American art critics such as Lourdes Andrade, Whitney Chadwick, Janice Helland or Janet Kaplan, who use Carrington's writing to "illustrate" her artistic production. In the literary arena, their

studies culminate in the fine work of Susan Rubin Suleiman, published in the early nineties.

Still, by the end of the eighties, Carrington is largely unknown to critics, academics and the general public in England. She is, however, renowned in France, Spain and Mexico. French academics have dealt at large with Carrington's three-year period in France, which saw the publication of her first writings. In Spain, Carrington's sojourns in Madrid and in the lunatic asylum at Santander have attracted feminist researchers to tackle "Down Below", whilst magazines and periodicals regularly follow her artistic production. Mexico, where Carrington has lived for the last forty years, rightly reclaims her as a Mexican artist and playwright. But still, in England, and within the literary and artistic fields, the word "Carrington" evokes in the general public the figure of Dora Carrington, the painter associated with the Bloomsbury group. Although Angela Carter included Carrington's "La Debutante" in her 1986 anthology *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women*, the great breakthrough came in 1989, with the publication by Virago of Carrington's work in England, introduced by Marina Warner.

The work of Whitney Chadwick brought Leonora Carrington to Marina Warner's attention. Warner's fascination with Carrington was later fuelled by Carrington's charismatic personality. Warner regularly reviewed her exhibitions and, in 1989, introduced the two anthologies of Carrington's short stories and plays published by Virago, where she provides first hand information about Carrington from conversations spanning over two years. In 1991, Virago published Carrington's novel *The Hearing Trumpet* and in 1992, a Serpentine retrospective exhibition led to interviews, a catalogue, newspapers reviews and a BBC *Omnibus* programme about her life and work. Despite the fact that, since then, critical attention to Carrington is rapidly increasing, there is not yet a monograph on Carrington's literary production and the various articles are scattered in sometimes obscure periodicals.

The critical works of Orenstein, Chadwick, Suleiman and Warner present a fascinating picture of Carrington's persona and writing. Her life, as Suleiman tells us, "would make a wonderful movie" (Suleiman 1994: 89). Her writing, all of them agree, is unique in that it is immaterial yet political (Chadwick 1991: 33), in that she writes



about enchanted landscapes (Warner 1989a: 21) with the aim of achieving spiritual transformation through them (Warner 1989b). In her language, sometimes forcefully crazy, sometimes wickedly comical, Suleiman has heard a "manic laughter" (Suleiman 1990: 178) masking seriousness. This is the overall picture of Carrington that has endured into the criticism of the nineties.

Whilst I subscribe largely to these critics' portrayal, I feel there are areas of Carrington's life and writing that need further attention. Thus, whilst I have dwelled briefly on Carrington's relationship with Max Ernst, I have emphasised her relationship to Remedios Varo. I look at the now forgotten complete text of *The Stone Door* (a celebration of her friendship with Varo) and provide reasons as to why Carrington "amputated" the text for the 1989 Virago edition. Her internment in the Spanish asylum is also an area where I attempt to throw new light and with that purpose I interviewed Dr Luis Morales, her doctor at the asylum.

My argument about Carrington's writing is developed along three parts that mark three moments in Carrington's literary journey: an interest in the writing of dream narratives (mainly the stories written in France) is followed by a concern with madness, death and the grotesque (the "Spanish" writings), finally culminating in the celebration of change, movement and laughter in the last period (the Mexican writings). There is substantially less criticism in these last two periods, so my analysis increases in detail with each part. I have begun each of the three parts with a biographical introduction, in order to provide factual information (some of it new) and to establish a framework to my subsequent interpretation in the two remaining chapters of each part. Although set within the framework of dreams, death and nether-realms, my interpretation pays attention to Carrington's changing concerns rather than to pre-established theories. I have tried to interpret the short stories, plays, novels and letters without imposing an unnatural order on them, and so not disturbing their essentially disordered, enchanted and rebellious nature.

This thesis, then, aims to reassess, amend and enlarge previous critical studies. It brings together biographical material, feminist theory and critical readings of the texts in

the hope of reclaiming a place for Leonora Carrington in the history of English literature.

**PART ONE**  
**THE NIGHT/MARE IS MY DREAM**

*I've always had access to other worlds.  
Everybody has access to other worlds  
- we all dream.*  
*Leonora Carrington, Omnibus interview 1992*

## Chapter One

### Carrington, Surrealism and Women

#### Carrington arrives in Paris<sup>1</sup>

Leonora Carrington's arrival in Paris in 1937 occurred in the midst of "a vigorous propaganda campaign aimed at 'the internationalization of surrealist ideas'" (Alexandrian 1970: 119) led by André Breton and Paul Eluard, which started in 1935 and lasted until 1938. During these years, members of the Surrealist movement were also absorbed in political concerns, most of them having previously been active members of the Communist Party. From the year 1934 onwards they fought, ideologically, against the rise of Fascism. Both factors, the energies members spent on the "internationalization" of their ideas and their intense political activity, served to lower the number of publications and exhibitions during the years 1935-8. However, their meetings at cafés in Paris and a prolific artistic collaboration between them continued to take place. Carrington reminisces:

then Hitler was becoming a menace ... I moved to Paris. There was the group of Surrealists who got together in Saint-Germain-des-Prés at ... the Flore - to talk about helping get people out of Germany ... It was a kind of paradise time of my life, but with appalling political undertones, of course... (De Angelis 1991: 36)

Leonora met the painter Max Ernst in 1936, at a dinner party organised by Ursula Goldfinger, a fellow student at the Ozenfant school of painting in London. This was to be a crucial turning-point in her life.

Before moving on to recount her life with Ernst in France, I think it necessary to describe briefly her family background. Leonora was born on 6 April 1917 in Clayton Green, near Chorley, Lancashire. Her Irish mother, Maureen Moorhead, came from the region of Moat, in southern Ireland, and was the daughter of a country doctor and a spinner of tales. Maureen's brother Harry was a friend of James Joyce. Through this branch of the family she was related to Maria Edgeworth. Leonora's English father, Harold Wilde Carrington, was a shrewd businessman who sold the family textile business to become a major shareholder of Imperial Chemical Industries, and he also

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Carrington's works are by date and page only.

had a reputation as an eccentric. The Carringtons had three sons and one daughter: Pat, Leonora, Gerard and Arthur. Carrington told De Angelis that she resented, in her childhood, having been born a girl: "there were things that I wasn't supposed to do because I was a girl: biting, kicking, scratching my brothers, screaming - fighting in general. My brothers were abominable at times" (De Angelis 1991: 33). In 1920, the family moved to Crookhey Hall in Lancaster. Although they moved again in 1927, when Leonora was ten, the home remains in her memory, and surfaces as "Crackwood" in her later writings, also appearing in such paintings as *Crookhey Hall* (1947), *Inventory* (1956), *Country House* (1957), and *Red Cow* (1989):

First we lived at a house called Westwood, then Crookhey. Bit by bit my family kept changing houses. The house was getting bigger, you see - huge. Instead of having two servants, you had ten servants. Yes, and a chauffeur. (De Angelis 1991: 33)

Strict Catholics, the parents sent the three boys to Stonyhurst College, a Jesuit institution in the north of England. Leonora began a Catholic instruction under Father O'Connor, an amateur astronomer, and at this time she became fascinated with stories of miracles. A French governess also entered the Carringtons' household as well as Mary Kavanaugh, "Nanny". Nanny, the daughter of a prison warden, entered the household at sixteen and she filled Leonora's vivid imagination with crime stories and with Irish and German folktales of the unearthly. When she was nine years old, Leonora attended for a year the first of two convent schools, Holy Sepulchre, in Reading, established in a castle built by Henry VIII. By this time she was fascinated by the lives of saints, whose metaphysical experiences she wanted to emulate. She says now:

I decided, you see, that I was going to become a saint. I probably overdid it ... I liked the idea of being able to levitate. (De Angelis 1991: 33)

Leonora was expelled on account of expressing little interest in the regular curriculum. The bishop of Lancaster, a friend of the family, interceded on her behalf, so that she could enter St Mary's, in Ascot (she says now, "I hated it"), where she stayed for one year. Fascinated since the age of three with painting, she showed hardly any interest in other subjects. She continually asked questions for which the nuns had no satisfactory reply, such as "Who said that two and two is four?" This led the nuns to suggest that she

was mentally deficient. Her apparently illegible handwriting, her teachers discovered, made sense when reflected in a mirror. Once again, she was expelled:

They said they didn't think that I collaborated ... Then my family kept me for a while, but reluctantly, because my mother was set on fishing around on how to civilize this character. (De Angelis 1991: 33)

Following her expulsion from St Mary's in Ascot, her father organised a family council over which he presided and it was decided to send her to Mrs Penrose's Academy, "in the Piazza Donatello", Florence. Nine months of art studies there left an indelible mark on the fourteen-year-old developing artist: "The paintings she discovered in the Uffizi affected her profoundly, and continue to do so" (Warner 1991: 16). Fantastic medieval paintings of religious scenes, the Apocalypse, the Christian martyrs, depictions of cruelty and the monsters in Flemish painting confirmed for her the existence of other worlds and the artist's ability to apprehend them:

And then I got appendicitis. I was operated on in Bern. We went back to England.

Then they decided to send me to Paris, where I was expelled from a French finishing school. I only lasted a couple of months. So then my father said, Well, you'll have to go somewhere really tough. So I was sent off to Miss Sampson's in Paris, and I had a little room over a churchyard, a graveyard. I didn't like it, so I escaped at night. (De Angelis 1991: 34)

Her mother dreamed of a royal wedding for Leonora. In 1934 Leonora, aged seventeen, attended (under protest) the London season balls, viewed the Ascot races from the Royal enclosure, and was introduced into society at the Ritz Hotel. Carrington fictionalised this event in the short story "The Debutante" (1937-8). In "The Debutante", the protagonist tells her best friend, a hyena, that she has to attend her coming out dance, "What a bloody nuisance" (1989a: 44). She then proposes to the hyena that she take her place. "Practically the same size" (1989a: 45), the only problem is the hyena's face. Finally they decide to murder a maid: "we'll pounce upon her and tear off her face" (1989a: 47). The hyena attends the ball wearing the murdered maid's face as a mask. By the end of the story, when the guests complain about the stench, the hyena says:

"So I smell a bit strong, what? Well, I don't eat cakes!" Whereupon it tore off its face and ate it. And with one great bound, disappeared through the window." (1989a: 48)

In literature, the hyena has traditionally been used to describe powerful women: Bertha (Rochester's mad wife) is described by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* as a "clothed hyena". Horace Walpole remarked that Mary Wollstonecraft was "a hyena in petticoats" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 31). In both instances the hyena is a powerful figure dressed as a gracious lady. It is Carrington's choice of associating herself with a hyena, her desire to be identified with it, which is, therefore, most meaningful. The hyena is the embodiment of her rebellious nature. Conspiring with the hyena in "The Débutante", and transforming herself into it, enables her to fight back against institutions and conventions. The young woman's debut in the fiction comes on "the first of May 1934" (1989a: 44). Carrington's real life presentation at court occurred precisely on that date, and now she proudly recounts her behaviour at the time. She recalls "going through the season" and how she felt that she did not fit into the feminine role assigned to her. At Ascot, much to her disappointment, she was allowed neither to bet nor to see the horses in the paddock because she was a woman. So, she took a book:

I mean, what would you do? It was Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza*, which I read all the way through. And then, thoroughly fed up, I was dispatched back to the north of England, and I informed my family that that was it, I was now going to become an artist. (De Angelis 1991: 34)

In her fictional short story, the débutante does not even attend the party. After the painting *The Inn of the Dawn Horse* (Figure One), and the writing of this short story, the hyena appears in her work no more. Two years later Leonora convinced her parents to allow her to attend art school. In a quite autobiographical passage from *The Hearing Trumpet* she remembers in a humorous tone that she had to convince her mother:

Back in Lancashire I got an attack of claustrophobia and tried to convince Mother to let me go and study painting in London. She thought this was a very idle and silly idea and gave me a lecture about artists ... Finally I did go to London to study art and had a love affair with an Egyptian. A pity I never actually got to Egypt. (1991: 65-6)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The excerpt is quite autobiographical in that she did have those conversations with her mother. However, there are no records, other than Carrington's own statement, of this love affair. The allusion to not having gone to Egypt is a satirical comment to most critics' agreement that she "followed" Ernst to France. She says she did not follow him: she went there on her own.

In the year 1936 Amedee Ozenfant, the purist painter, founded his school of art in London, and Leonora became his first student. For a year they drew from only one model: an apple. During this period she lived on modest economic help from her family. However, she was happy because finally she was allowed to do what she liked, although to Suleiman she recalls having been told by Ozenfant: "Forget it, you're no good, and anyway there are no good women artists" (Suleiman 1993: 106). At this time she also began her life-long fascination with alchemical texts.

This same year, 1936, and as part of "the vigorous propaganda campaign" alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, a French-English exhibition had been organised by the collector and painter Roland Penrose. In September a bilingual publication entitled *Bulletin international du surréalisme* appeared in London.<sup>3</sup> Soon afterwards her mother presented her with a copy of Herbert Read's *Surrealism*, which had a cover illustration of Max Ernst's *Deux enfants menacés par un rossignol* (1922), an image that "burned" her. She visited the London *International Surrealist Exhibition* and through a classmate, Ursula Goldfinger,<sup>4</sup> she met Max Ernst, and the two fell in love. Ernst was in London on the occasion of his exhibition at the Mayor Gallery. In the interview with Paul De Angelis she recalls:

I already knew who Max was because my mother, which is a very peculiar detail, had given me Herbert Read's book on Surrealism. And in the book I saw *Deux enfants menacés par un rossignol*, and it totally shocked me. This, I thought, I know what this is. I understand it. (De Angelis 1991: 34)

This description of her first meeting with Ernst is very interesting. There are two points she stressed: firstly, the nature of her relationship with her family, especially her mother, and how ground-breaking, therefore, her meeting with Ernst had been; secondly, the importance that this meeting had for her life from an artistic perspective and not from a personal one.

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<sup>3</sup> This *Bulletin international du surréalisme* was the fourth and last issue of a series of bilingual publications produced by the Surrealists; the first three were published in Prague (April 1935), Santa Cruz de Tenerife (October 1935) and Brussels (August 1936).

<sup>4</sup> Ernst Goldfinger, also a new friend of Leonora, was a famous architect.



That summer she went on a trip to Cornwall with Ernst, Nush Eluard, Paul Eluard, Man Ray, Lee Miller and Roland Penrose.<sup>5</sup> Leonora, at nineteen, went to Paris and started a relationship with Ernst that lasted three years. These years meant for her the realisation of her desire to be an artist, an opinion that ran contrary to that of her family. According to her own account, her father believed that all artists were "either poor or homosexual, which were more or less, the same sort of crime" (in Warner 1989a: 5).

When she ran away to Paris, her father repudiated her. Until that moment, her upper-class background had erected many barriers against her deeply-rooted desire to become an artist. "She made up the nickname Candlestick for her family, and it captures the 'upstairs-downstairs' code of her upbringing" (Warner 1991: 12). It appeared it was not difficult to break with an environment that had given her little freedom or with the conventionality to which she had never become accustomed. However, she never saw her father again, and the trauma that this rift caused had deeper implications than she had, at first, foreseen.<sup>6</sup> Even in *The Hearing Trumpet* (early 1960s), the novel where some extraordinary autobiographical excerpts can be found, she never refers to her father. Indeed, on reading the novel one feels that the protagonist of the story, Marian Leatherby, a ninety-two-year-old stone-deaf woman who had lived in Paris with the Surrealists, had not known her father at all. In contrast, there is a strong maternal presence. Marian's mother, a hundred and ten years old, lives in London:

she is getting old now, although enjoying excellent health. A hundred and ten is not such a great age, from a biblical point of view at least. Margrave, my mother's valet, who sends me post cards of Buckingham Palace, tells me she is still very spry in her wheel chair, although how anyone can be spry in a wheel chair I really don't know. He says she is quite blind but has no beard which must

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<sup>5</sup> Carrington's encounter with Ernst and their subsequent relationship are extremely well documented, as opposed to Carrington's other personal and artistic partnerships. There is only one published work that deals at length with her friendship with the painter Remedios Varo. This relationship affected Carrington in many more ways than did her relationship with Ernst, but since both artists are considered "minor women artists", their relationship has remained unremarked. The work to which I refer is Janet Kaplan's *Unexpected Journeys: The Art and Life of Remedios Varo* published in 1988. The importance of this relationship will be addressed in Part Three.

<sup>6</sup> Her relationship with her father and the psychological implications of her condition were given full exposure in the narration of her mental breakdown: "Down Below", analysed in Part Two.

be a reference to a photograph of myself which I sent as a Christmas gift last year. (1991: 3)

Beyond these amusing fantasies about her mother's life and her own, some intimate autobiographical records appear at times in the story. Whilst a father is never hinted at, the mother is often remembered, a mother sometimes with capital "M" (1991: 64,66). It was only many years later that Carrington was strong enough to ridicule both her father and mother's ancestries, going on to suggest a lineage more akin to her character:

My grandfather created a loom which apparently was a bit more efficient than others. He was just an inventor, and then he married above his station ... Now, my mother tended to fantasize a bit about *her* family. So we alternatively related to King Malcolm, who lived before Ethelred the Red in the first century. But after she died, I had an interesting conversation with my uncle Gerald, now dead, who told me that the Moorheads were, in fact, gypsies, tinkers. (De Angelis 1991: 33)<sup>7</sup>

Many of the stories written in France are aimed at ridiculing her family's background, life-style and their passion for ancestry. Just as "The Debutante" is a fantasy about her own presentation at court, "The Three Hunters" "satirizes the pursuits of her class, most particularly her father and brothers, who were keen sportsmen" (Warner 1989b). She herself as a child used to go hunting, which now she regrets profoundly. In "Uncle Sam Carrington" both he and the aunt Maria Edgeworth<sup>8</sup> cause embarrassment to the protagonist's "respectable" mother. There are three literary references to the family link with Maria Edgeworth. The first occurs in the short story "Uncle Sam Carrington" (1937-9). The second is in the unpublished letter to Remedios Varo (Appendix II). The relationship with Maria Edgeworth, her literary ancestor, appears in the expression "converting me into an inkpot (because I was a member of the family after all)". The link is made through the name of this story's protagonist Julep Edgeworth [*sic*] and an inkpot. The third was written twenty years later, when she was

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<sup>7</sup> Harold Carrington's father patented a new attachment to a loom which led to the development of Viyella. This soon made him a rich textile tycoon, the founder of Carrington Cottons.

<sup>8</sup> The Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) was known for her children's stories and for her novels of Irish life. Encouraged by her father, Maria wrote in the communal living-room, the twenty-one children in the family providing both information and audience for her stories. These were published in 1796 as *The Parent's Assistant*. There are some moralising features, believed to be due to her father's editing; however, they retain their vitality, and the children who appear in them are considered to be the first real children in English literature since Shakespeare.

already in Mexico. It is the passage from *The Hearing Trumpet* where Marian Leatherby recounts how, when a young woman, her mother had tried to dissuade her from being an artist:

"There is nothing wrong about painting," she told me. "I paint boxes myself for jumble sales. There is a difference though in being artistic and in actually being an artist. Your Aunt Edgeworth wrote novels and was very friendly with Sir Walter Scott but she would never have called herself 'an artist'. It wouldn't have been nice. Artists are immoral, they live together in attics. (1991: 66)

Carrington, in this passage, is not satirising her mother's artistic pursuits but the way her mother perceived them. In recent interviews she speaks of her own mother as an artist, her work as having influenced her own and, on one occasion, even comparing her mother's work with that of Miró:

My mother used to paint murals, or what looked like murals, on boxes for jumble sales, and they looked like Joan Miró. (De Angelis 1991: 33)

It is in this context that her words: "I already knew who Max was because my mother, which is a very peculiar detail, had given me Herbert Read's book on Surrealism" acquire full meaning. She could not but think it an irony that her first contact with Surrealism came from this conventional family background.

The second half of the quote expresses her opinion of what has come to signify for her the relationship with Ernst: "And in the book I saw *Deux enfants menacés par un rossignol*, and it totally shocked me. This, I thought, I know what this is. I understand it." There are not, in these words, references to Ernst as a "lover", as a "man" or even to Ernst's presence, but only references to Ernst's paintings as "shockingly familiar". After these words she refused to talk further of those years adding: "Come on, everybody knows the rest" (De Angelis 1991: 36).

"The rest" is that Leonora informed her parents of her plans to live with Ernst and left for Paris. They lived together in France for two years. At the beginning they lived in Paris, in the Rue Jacob (the sixth *arrondissement*), and she helped Ernst with the design of sets for the production of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Enchaîné*. With Ernst she found an ideal environment where creativity was encouraged. She minted a personal style in paintings and writings that complement each other. In 1938 they moved to a small village in the south of France, Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche. They restored an

abandoned house and populated it with horses and mythical beasts in frescos, sculptures and sculpted reliefs on the walls. They were visited by Lee Miller, Roland Penrose, Remedios Varo, Leonor Fini and others. Leonora wrote the novella *Little Francis* in the winter of 1937 when both her private and public worlds were disintegrating: the civil war was raging in Spain and a sense of impending catastrophe hung over the rest of Europe; her father had disowned her, and both she and Max had horrible scenes of confrontation with Maria-Berthe Aurenche, Ernst's rejected wife<sup>9</sup>. *Little Francis* is a symbolic account of the triangular relationship between her, Ernst and Marie-Berthe against the dramatic background of a village preparing for war. The following year (1938) her paintings were included in the big *Exposition internationale du surrealisme*, first shown in Paris and then in Amsterdam.

In 1938 she also wrote and published *La Dame ovale*, illustrated by Max Ernst. Then, in 1939, the war broke out. Ernst, a German citizen, was interned as an enemy alien at a camp at L'Argentière. Leonora managed to have him freed. In December he was released from internment. She then painted *Portrait of Max Ernst* (Figure Two), where he is depicted wearing striped socks and a red furry coat, with an icy landscape in the background. He, in turn, painted *Leonora in the Morning Light* (Figure Three), a dark figure emerging from a wild surreal forest. Six months later (May 1940) Ernst was incarcerated again, this time at Les Milles, near Aix. She made an attempt to gain his freedom, but failed this time. The Surrealists disbanded, and Leonora, traumatised and alone, escaped to Santander, Spain, where she was treated for nervous collapse.

### **Surrealism and the question of Woman**

Perhaps a contribution to the debate as to whether the stories of this period can be deemed Surrealist may be to consider a fundamental point: the author is a woman. It is possible to find in this fact the reason why the stories cannot be approached from an exclusively Surrealist point of view. Carrington arrived at Surrealism in a similar way to most of her female counterparts: very young and introduced by an older male

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<sup>9</sup> Max Ernst had met and married Maria-Berthe Aurenche in 1927.

acquaintance. That was the case with Leonor Fini and Dorothea Tanning, the two women who had emotional relationships with Ernst before and after Carrington (Tanning married Ernst in 1946). It was also the case with Kay Sage, who married Yves Tanguy; with Valentine Penrose, who married Roland Penrose; Unica Zürn who became associated with Surrealism through Hans Bellmer; Alice Rahon who married Wolfgang Paalen and, of course, Jacqueline Lamba who was Breton's wife. However, and looking specifically at the case of Carrington, I disagree with Suleiman when she states that:

Since the women were generally younger and started producing later than the men (...), it is not unlikely that their version of Surrealist practice included a component of response to, as well as adaptation of, male Surrealist iconographies and mythologies. (Suleiman 1990: 27)

There is, of course, a degree of internalisation of influences, but I suggest that, in Carrington's case, she left as deep an imprint on other members of the group as they did on her. Yet to analyse *all* the responses inspired by this two-way influence is beyond the scope of this thesis. I shall, therefore, restrict my study of the process of influence and internalisation to the area of dreams. In this sense, a link between the Surrealists' practice of games and Leonora's "playful" relationship with her unconscious has to be noted. During these years, she developed a keen interest in playing with language, symbols and unconscious drives. The unconscious becomes a source of inspiration whilst games and playing constitute an activity intrinsically Surrealistic. One of the many games that the Surrealists devised consisted of:

trying to capture the meaning of time, or of space, or of language, in the moment of their arising - in a kind of original space, with mythical evidence. The practice of automatic writing or drawing is a response to this intention. (Chénieux-Gendron 1990: 5)

However prolific this conception of games and "playing" with language was for the production of literary works and art, the Surrealists' conception of Woman did not prove to be as productive for the women artists associated with them.

As Chadwick (1985) points out, the concept of the Surrealist woman was born out of both Freud's revolutionary studies and the ideal woman for the French poet Apollinaire, who conceived of Woman as both muse and eternal child. To add to Apollinaire's vision of Woman as complementing male artistic creativity, the other great

source for the Surrealists was Gnosticism, which tends to exalt Woman. According to Chenieux-Gendron, Gnosticism defines Woman as "the receptacle of a fragment of divinity ... 'Life,' the feminine principle, is included in man" (Chénieux-Gendron 1990: 25). An example of their understanding of Woman is to be found in Magritte's painting *The Rape* (1934), which represents a woman's face, her eyes, nose and mouth having been replaced, respectively, by breasts, abdomen and pubis. In Magritte's metaphor Woman is her sexual body: she sees through her breasts and speaks through her sex. Man Ray's well-known photographs of 1924 and 1933 also rely upon the objectification of a woman's body; this time her body is an instrument to be played, a violin (which might allude, as does Magritte's work, to a violation of the woman's body: viol-in/viol-ate). Many critics have already commented on the eloquent montage that appeared first in *La Révolution surréaliste* (December 1929) and later in the first issue of the re-titled periodical *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (July 1930). In this photo-montage the reproduction of a female naked body is surrounded by the photographs of the faces of sixteen Surrealist painters and poets (among them Aragon, Breton, Buñuel, Eluard, Magritte, Ernst, Dali). The caption reads: "Je ne vois pas la [femme] cachée dans la forêt": I do not see the [woman] hidden in the forest. The forest (feminine in French) represents not only the feminine but also the unconscious. Aragon puts it in the following way:

Tangible experience, then, appears to me as the mechanism of consciousness, while we can soon see what has become of nature: nature is my unconscious. (Aragon 1987: 138)

Surrealists' forests tend to symbolise strength, energy, wilderness and abundance. The richness of the unconscious is hidden in the forest and the forest is also Woman, the inspiration of the artist. Aragon, in the following quote, makes Woman and nature equal and both equate to the unconscious:

Gardens, your very contours, your artless abandon, the gentle curves of your rises and hollows, the soft murmur of your streams, all make you the feminine element of the human spirit, often silly and wayward, but always pure intoxication, pure illusion. (Aragon 1987: 133)

This passage summarises the male Surrealist's conception of Woman. Her body is objectified and glorified, whilst her artistic and intellectual talents are disdained ("often

silly and wayward"). She is merely a complement to Man. Moreover, she does not even exist; she is "intoxication" and "illusion". "Woman" stands as a mysterious, unconscious force, poetry and art emanate from her, and she is a private haven for artists:

An emanation from this woman ... re-formed itself into that same image which then blossomed into a particular world ... forewarning me yet again that I was entering this concrete universe which is closed to passers-by ... Love was its source, and I hope never to leave this enchanted forest. (Aragon 1987: 212)

"Love" here is the key word. The union of the lovers (which refers solely to the union of Man and Woman) is sanctified by Surrealist men. Only in the beloved, idealised woman can they find inspiration. Breton's and Aragon's works are full of descriptions of coarse women (bar maids, landladies), of prostitutes, of vulgar, common women: they find them uninspiring. It is the young, beautiful, mysterious woman whom they equate with the marvellous. This equation allows Aragon to write the following simile: "Love is a state of confusion between the real and the marvellous" (Aragon 1987: 217). Similarly, in the introduction to "An Inquiry into Erotic Representations" (1964-5) Breton reiterates the idea that for him Woman signifies the "imaginary" whilst Man represents the "real". The union of the real and the imaginary that takes place in poetic creation finds its allegory in the union of Man and Woman:

Would we believe in the words of love if they did not carry the hope of that union of the real and the imaginary of which the lovers' encounter forms the allegory? (in Pierre 1992: 165)

Surrealist men thought of women as complementing male artistic creativity. Throughout their writings, paintings and manifestos, they "glorified" Woman in her dual role of virgin (or child), and sorceress (or erotic object, *femme fatale*). Breton's two manifestos consider Woman from this point of view, but it is probably his last major work, *Arcane 17*, written in Canada in 1944, that is the most explicit about the role of women. *Arcane 17* refers to the seventeenth major arcanum of the tarot, the star. Below the star, a naked girl empties urns. In this work Breton speaks of Woman as representing, as does the card, hope and regeneration for Man. In the words of Chadwick, Breton in this work: "turns his back on mature woman and reveals the *femme-enfant* as the source of creation" (Chadwick 1985: 64). For Aragon, as for Breton, the *femme-enfant* is the epitome of regeneration in the mind of the artist:

And yet, woman, you take the place of all form ... Charming suppositious child, you are the epitome of a marvellous world, of the natural world, and it is you who are reborn when I close my eyes. (Aragon 1987: 183)

Aragon is even less sophisticated than Breton. When narrating his "chance encounter" with the muse he describes her as an undisguised siren:

At first I thought I must be face to face with a siren in the most conventional sense of the term, for I certainly had the impression that the lower half of this charming spectre, who was naked down to a very low waistline, consisted of a sheath of steel or scales or possibly rose petals ... She was ... singing. (Aragon 1987: 37)

The siren stretches her arms towards Aragon and he cries "The Ideal!" It has been a chance encounter and when he returns the following day to the place, she is gone. Alexandrian adds yet another role: the Sphinx. Women represent for Surrealist men the illogical in the logical patriarchal world. They hold the conviction that women were born to be discovered. Woman is a personified enigma and she has to be deciphered. This type of woman has no age: in her intemporality lies the essence of her mystery. This woman is Aragon's Nana in *Paris Peasant*:

I am Nana, the idea of time. Have you never been in love with an avalanche, my dear? Just look at my skin. Although immortal, I have the appearance of a banquet of midday sunshine. (Aragon 1987: 55)

Drawing on these conceptions of Woman as mystery, as muse, as addendum to male creativity, and as source of life, Max Ernst, in his introduction to "The House of Fear", introduced Carrington, whom he called The Bride of the Wind, as the "white cloud" (Ernst 1989: 25) which brought "life to nature" (Ernst 1989: 25). Eloquently enough, he introduces an emancipated woman writer/painter while, unconsciously, confining her in the role male Surrealists wanted women to fulfil: the child-mother-muse. While Loplop (or Bird Superior), Max Ernst, brings "joy to the landscape" (Ernst 1989: 25), the Bride of the Wind brings life to nature. Ernst is the painter who, though unable to create nature, adds colourful notes to it. For him Carrington is the prime mover, the origin and inspiration. Ernst cannot but admire her "intense life, her mystery, her poetry" (Ernst 1989: 26), as he writes in his introduction to "The House of Fear". Carrington was at this time in her early twenties; she had already shown strong determination and creative imagination, exhibiting with the Surrealists. Possibly



paradoxically, male artists surrounding her were too busy designing the role of Woman as a muse to acknowledge the art and the essence of the women surrounding them. Carrington grew, over the years, to be so angry with the male Surrealists' attitudes that in 1990 she stated:

Era un grupo compuesto esencialmente por hombres que trataban a las mujeres como musas. Eso era bastante humillante. Por eso no quiero que nadie me llame musa de nada. Jamás me consideré una *femme-enfant* como André Breton quería ver a las mujeres ... Yo caí en el surrealismo porque sí. Nunca pregunte si tenía derecho a entrar o no.

[It was a group made up of men that treated women as muses. It was quite humiliating. That is why I don't want to be called muse of anything. I never considered myself a *femme-enfant* as André Breton wanted to see women ... I fell into Surrealism just like that. I never questioned whether I had the right to belong to it or not.] (*El País* 1993: 37, my translation)

It should be acknowledged, however, that during the twenties and thirties, Surrealism's fight against the hypocrisy of customs echoed many of the feminists' demands. Surrealists considered that religious and social institutions had restricted women to a secondary role:

To detach love from the normalisation of sexuality within marriage, and to resist the construction of woman as mother, usually based upon the essentialist identification of woman with nature, were fundamental surrealist precepts. (Ades 1992: 193)

Paradoxically, as has been shown above, the categorising of Woman as the artist's muse is based on the very same "essentialist identification of woman with nature". What is more, it seems that the majority of Surrealists were not interested in including women in their "Researches into Love" (which were twelve sessions in the form of round table investigations that took place from 1928 until 1932, with Breton as a permanent presence): "only Louis Aragon suggested that in discussing woman's sexuality it would have been preferable to have had a woman present" (Chadwick 1985: 11-12). Women were involved from the eighth session (1930) onwards, although they participated in only three sessions in all. There is (not only in these twelve sessions but also in other "inquiries" carried out years later) enough evidence to argue that the theoretical stance of Surrealism as regards women was simply crude and exploitative. "An Inquiry into Striptease" (1958-9) was devised with different questions for men and

women and, although a phallicised language pervades both questionnaires, the tone used in the women's questionnaire is condescending and fetishistic. The first of the three questions asked of women is: "During a strip-show ... are you aware of learning a lesson which you could put to your own use?" (in Pierre 1992: 163). Such a question does not expect any intellectual evaluation of striptease from the women surveyed, and it unashamedly aims at persuading women to practise it. By contrast, the first question in the men's questionnaire expects an intellectual evaluation and is more akin to clinical surveys of modern sexology: "Do you consider striptease more or less effective than film in 'arousing the erotic appetite'? Why?" (in Pierre 1992: 164). During these round table sessions, as Dawn Ades testifies:

[Women] frequently disagree with the men, but, while not silent, are in a sense mute. There was no question as to their full participation, equal sexual rights, or their right to speak openly of their own sexuality, which they do, but it is as though they are not heard, or, if they are, only to be contradicted. (Ades 1992: 198)

An instance of how women's visions of Surrealism, and of the erotic and sexual connotations of art in particular, were if not contradicted at least ignored, occurred in 1959, when Carrington accepted Breton's invitation to take part in the International Surrealist Exhibition, which had eroticism as its theme. In his letter to the exhibitors Breton wrote:

there still remains a privileged place, a theatre of provocations and prohibitions, in which life's most profound urges confront one other. This place, into which surrealism has continually mounted expeditions from its earliest days onwards, is eroticism. (in Pierre 1992: 167)

To his letter she replied: "I've long dreamed of a similar show, but I must confess that I see it as comic eroticism (*érotisme comique*)" (in Warner 1991: 11). Then she proceeds to describe a hall where "a very rich bestiary of erotic appliances would furnish the room", a gigantic organ that would actually produce music, and finally:

A Holy Ghost (albino pigeon) three metres high, real feathers (white chickens', for example), with: nine penises erect (luminous), thirty-nine testicles to the sound of little Christmas bells, pink paws... Let me know, dear André and I will send you an exact drawing. (in Warner 1991: 11)

Of course, such an enterprise was never carried out. Warner points out that this was because "By the late fifties, Surrealist installations on the scale of the 1938 show were dreamed, not made" (Warner 1991: 11), but one could also say that this is because her comic-erotic hall was far too sophisticated (by elevating eroticism to a farcical fantasy) for Breton to find it acceptable. Breton is still seeking to "rescue eroticism from shame" (as his "Introduction to the Visitors" reads) and still seeks to "claim the high place to which it is entitled" (Breton in Pierre 1992: 171). The 1959 Exhibition is *too serious* an enterprise for Breton to admit Carrington's *comic* vision: thus once again ignoring women's innovative additions to Surrealism.<sup>10</sup>

Chadwick affirmed that all the women artists associated with Surrealism<sup>11</sup> whom she interviewed when preparing her book on *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* "spoke positively of the support and encouragement they received from Breton and other Surrealists" (Chadwick 1985: 11), although she added that in the case of Carrington the author "remembers finding the theoretical and judgmental side of Surrealism extremely distasteful" (Chadwick 1985: 12). Carrington's vehement answer to how she felt about the Surrealist identification of woman and muse consisted of one single word: "bullshit" (Chadwick 1985: 66). In the interview with Paul De Angelis she was more specific. To De Angelis's comments that "all of the great artists were men" and that "surrealist women had been ignored" she added:

Well, they had a kind of persona thrust upon them, of the muse, you know, so you had to be a slightly crazy muse. And that, they thought, was fine for the women. (De Angelis 1991: 42)

When reading the various anecdotes recounted by Chadwick and Warner about her uninhibited behaviour, one cannot be surprised that she caused such a sensation among the male members of the Surrealist group. The first anecdote takes us to Leonora's teenage years, when she scandalised a provincial religious community by

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<sup>10</sup> Carrington called the Marquis de Sade, whom the Surrealists saw as a model for a total liberty of behaviour, "an eternal bore, pornographic but not a revolutionary anything" (Chadwick 1985: 117).

<sup>11</sup> Given the impossibility of defining "a Surrealist woman", I agree with Chadwick in that one should talk of women associated with Surrealism (Chadwick 1985: 10), especially considering that, when asked, they unanimously rejected the idea of being labelled Surrealist artists at all.

pulling up her dress when introduced to the local priest (she was wearing nothing underneath) (Chadwick 1985: 67). There are various tales, all of them with the common denominator of Leonora undressing or Leonora talking about symptoms of her (invented) sexual diseases. According to Chadwick, Carrington was in effect

a kind of embodiment of all that the movement held dear in its women: young, beautiful, vivacious, uninhibited, and in possession of an imagination that knew no limits. (Chadwick 1985: 67)

Paradoxically, Carrington's use of her nakedness in order to show her uninhibited behaviour both reaches its climax and ends the summer she met Ernst:

On a late-night outing in Cornwall ... Nush, Carrington, Agar, and Miller all danced naked around the disconcerted figure of Herbert Read, illuminated by the glare of a car's headlamps. (Chadwick 1985: 106)

After reading her works and looking at her paintings of those extremely fruitful three years, it is unfortunate that all they could see in her was a "slightly crazy muse". Sadly, when Breton had to introduce her in his *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (published for the first time in France in 1943, although written in 1940), most of the expressions he used referred to her potential to represent "the perfect surrealist muse".<sup>12</sup> Two years after writing it, however, he would include her "among the boldest and most lucid [minds] of our time" (in Rosemont 1978: 213), the only woman in a list that included Bataille and, of course, Ernst. In his introduction, though, she appears exactly as Chadwick points out: young, beautiful, vivacious, uninhibited and imaginative. Breton opens his introduction by describing her as a witch. He agrees with Michelet that witches have acquired a false reputation for being old and ugly over the centuries. Carrington, like those early witches, is "young" and "beautiful": "Beaucoup périrent précisément parce qu'elles étaient jeunes et belles" ["Many died precisely because they were young and beautiful"] (Breton 1950: 425).<sup>13</sup> After this first paragraph, Breton

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<sup>12</sup> Breton holds the credit of being the first person to include "La débutante" in an anthology. It first appeared in his 1950 *Anthologie de l'humour noir* and has since been often republished. It was in Carter's anthology *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women: An Anthology of Stories* (1986) that I first came across the work of Carrington. It has recently been included in an *Anthology of Women Writers: Wild Women* (Thomas 1994).

<sup>13</sup> The translations of this French text into English are mine.

moves on to present her vivacity as an "ardent curiosity" that can find pleasure only in the forbidden: "La curiosité, portée ici à son degré le plus ardent, est bien près de ne trouver son bien que dans l'*interdit*" ["Curiosity, taken here to its most ardent degree, is only to be found in the forbidden"] (Breton 1950: 426). She is, moreover, "uninhibited", as the following anecdote testifies:

Les respectables personnes qui, il y a une douzaine d'années, l'avaient invitée à dîner dans un restaurant de marque ne sont pas encore remises de la gêne qu'elles éprouvèrent à constater que, tout en prenant grand part à la conversation, elle s'était déchaussée pour s'enduire patiemment les pieds de moutarde.

[The respectable people who, about twelve years ago, invited her to dine at a noted restaurant have not yet recovered from the embarrassment that overwhelmed them when, in the middle of the conversation, she took her shoes off in order patiently to spread her feet with mustard.] (Breton 1950: 425-6)

Finally, she shows her unbounded imagination through her culinary skills:

je crois avoir été seul à faire honneur à certains plats auxquels elle avait donné des heures et des heures de soins méticuleux en s'aidant d'un livre de cuisine anglais du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle - quitte à remédier de manière tout intuitive au manque de tels ingrédients introuvables ou perdus de vue depuis lors.

[I think I am the only one who has enjoyed certain dishes she had spent hours on end working on, with the help of an English cookery book of the sixteenth century, in which she substituted, in an absolutely intuitive way, ingredients lacking through unavailability, maybe for centuries.] (Breton 1950: 426)

To her writing and painting Breton refers only in two brief notes: to "Down Below" as an "extremely precise account of a thrilling experience" and to her paintings of 1940 as the "most charged of her paintings with the marvellous".

So, we find Carrington continuously defined by Surrealism as a muse rather than as an artist. When commenting that this is the case of most women associated with Surrealism, Suleiman argues that: "The avant-garde woman writer is doubly intolerable, seen from the center, because her writing escapes not one but two sets of expectations/categorizations" (Suleiman 1990: 15). Suleiman rightly terms the avant-garde woman writer as a being "doubly intolerable." If, on the one hand, the place of women has been traditionally situated on the margins, Surrealism made her doubly marginal. However, this double marginality can open up a new space for women. Suleiman continues by pointing out that this double marginality "provides the female subject with a kind of centrality, *in her own eyes*" (Suleiman 1990: 16-17). Indeed,

many women related to Surrealism, and specifically Carrington, became the *centre* of their own creations. Being neither in the mainstream nor men, Surrealist women writers found in what Suleiman calls "a double allegiance" the positive way out. Suleiman includes the work of Carrington in:

this double allegiance - on the one hand, to the formal experiments and some of the cultural aspirations of the historical male avant-gardes; on the other hand, to the feminist critique of dominant sexual ideologies, including those of the very same avant-gardes. (Suleiman 1990: 162-3)

Although I agree with Suleiman in her expression of the double allegiance and in the fact that Carrington had been forming such allegiances with the rest of the Surrealist members and with her work, I wish to introduce a subtle distinction into her statement. In my opinion the capacity to formulate a feminist critique will come later in her writing. Elements of polemic can be found in her first works, but the practice of most of the Surrealist codes for writing and approaching literature was leading Carrington into quite a dangerous situation. The most daring of the practices with the unconscious may - and indeed did - lead to what are considered "mental breakdowns" or "states of insanity". For Carrington, there came, following the mental breakdown, an overt repudiation of the patriarchal ideology, directed against Surrealism's members. Only at this stage was she able to move into Suleiman's double allegiance, once she had fully emerged from the whirlpool of madness. Indeed, in her interview with Paul De Angelis she agreed that, culturally speaking, most of her work had been developed "outside the Surrealist's environment", whilst complaining: "In the heat of the first movement, all kinds of things are involved. But it was a male-dominated movement" (De Angelis 1991: 42).

Despite some of the unfortunate consequences that Surrealism had for the women associated with it, Carrington does not deny its contributions. She told Lisa Appignanesi that one of the most important contributions of Surrealism was that: "Surrealism made people accept that the mind has many other faculties" (Appignanesi 1992: 13). However, it is the way her opinion is expressed that interests me most in this statement. She uses the past tense when referring to Surrealism in this 1992 interview. Her choice of tense is highly significant, given that critics, even after the publication of

this conversation, are still labelling her a Surrealist, still claiming that Surrealists' works are being produced and that Carrington is one of the few Surrealists of the 1990s. When she wrote *The Hearing Trumpet*, in the 1950s, Carrington herself already considered Surrealism aged, its works being neither revolutionary nor modern any more. She complained mockingly that the establishment had taken over Surrealism, whilst showing a great deal of surprise in their having done so:

I began to want to study in Paris where the Surrealists were in full cry. Surrealism is no longer considered modern today and almost every village rectory and girl's school have surrealist pictures hanging on their walls. Even Buckingham Palace has a large reproduction of Magritte's famous slice of ham with an eye peering out. It hangs, I believe, in the throne room. Times do change indeed. (1991: 66)<sup>14</sup>

After her experience of madness, which occurred in 1940 and with which I shall deal at length in Chapter Four, Carrington stopped being a Surrealist both from the personal and artistic points of view: she moved on to newer, more creative arenas. She was searching for artistic maturity and, contradictorily, she found that being a Surrealist woman meant that "you were the one who made dinner for the male Surrealists" (in Appignanesi 1992: 12). This is the reason why she rejected Surrealism.

### **Carrington leaves Paris**

Leonora spent the second half of 1940 in a mental institution in Santander, Spain, and the biographical account of this experience is recounted in Chapter Four. In January 1941, accompanied by a nurse hired by her family, she left Santander for Portugal where she was to be taken to a mental institution in South Africa. In Lisbon she escaped and sought out Renato Leduc, a Mexican diplomat, whom she had met through Picasso years earlier:

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<sup>14</sup> Sarah Whitfield makes the same complaint as Carrington, only in a much less humorous and quite bitter way:

[They] have been used to sell books, records, insurance, credit cards, televisions, typewriters, calculators, cars, cosmetics, wallpaper, chocolates and clothes, starting even before a major television company appropriated *Le faux miroir* as its logo. Pressed into the service of politics and bureaucracy, they have even been called on to sell ideals, win votes and uphold the law. (Whitfield 1992: 11)

I escaped the keeper in a café. I told her I had to go to the bathroom, and I went out through the other door. I took a taxi and went straight to the Mexican embassy. I married Renato at the British embassy, before embarking for America. (De Angelis 1991: 38)

Still in Lisbon, in the spring of 1941, she had a chance encounter with Max Ernst, which she now describes like "a sort of comic strip, soap-opera silly" (De Angelis 1991: 38):

Then Max appeared, with Peggy and we were always together, all of us. It was a very weird thing, with everybody's children, and ex-husbands and ex-wives [Laurence Vail was there, Peggy Guggenheim's former husband, with his new wife, Kay Boyle; they had with them Peggy's and Kay's children.] (1989a: 213)

Leonora's reunion with Max in Lisbon was occupied with long, intense weeks of reading and drawing with him: they jointly painted *Rencontre* (1941) of which Carrington painted, in noticeably darker tones, the left side of the canvas. *Rencontre* (Figure Four) is a painting that, in its prominent description of mood and emotion through the design of a landscape, is, in spirit, more Romantic than Surreal. The side that Carrington painted presents a horse-like woman, who holds in her hands a bunch of lifeless vegetables, and the landscape behind her seems barren and sombre. Contrastingly, Ernst's side presents the cold bright blues and yellows that Carrington omits. The movement in the bodies and the volcanoes that fill Ernst's side of the painting make his half of the canvas livelier, whereas Carrington's shadowy peaks and still figures appear rather dispirited.

Since they were separated in France Ernst had become Guggenheim's lover, although he did not love her, and Peggy knew it. Peggy, who claims to have been desperately in love with him, realised that he and Leonora had a relationship nobody else could share: "'she [Leonora] was the only woman Max had ever loved" Guggenheim wrote in her autobiography (Guggenheim 1979: 249). On her part, Leonora is still nowadays very critical of Max's attitude; in 1987 she said: "I knew he didn't love Peggy, and I still have this very puritanical streak, that you musn't be with anyone you don't love" (1989a: 213-214). Eventually, Ernst and Guggenheim proposed that they all travel together to America by plane, but instead Carrington and Leduc went to New York by boat. As Carrington told Warner:

She [Peggy] was rather a noble person, generous, and she never ever was unpleasant. She offered to pay for my airplane to New York, so I could go with them. But I didn't want that. I was with Renato, and eventually, we went by boat to New York. (1989a: 214)



This new situation surprised everyone, including their most intimate friends. Guggenheim reports that, on meeting Breton in New York, his main interest was in hearing:

all about Max and our life in Lisbon and what had occurred between Leonora and Max. The report had gone around New York that Max would not leave Leonora in Lisbon, and that that was why we had remained there so long. (Guggenheim 1979: 249)

Under the protection of the Mexican embassy, Carrington lived in New York with Leduc for almost a year; she devoted herself to painting and writing (the stories she wrote in this period, "White Rabbits", "Waiting", and "The Seventh Horse" are analysed in Chapter Six). She saw Ernst almost daily and she met André Breton and other Surrealist refugees:

Renato was working at the Mexican embassy, and I saw the Surrealists all the time. I saw a lot of Breton. Buñuel was there, and Masson was there... Everybody was there. Chagall was there. Ozenfant was there. And Duchamp was living at the time at Max and Peggy's. (De Angelis 1991: 38)

Buñuel, who was by then greatly admired for his *Un chien andalou*, managed a cinema club in New York's Museum of Modern Art. Apart from these, other Surrealists were in New York at the time, including Tanguy and Léger,<sup>15</sup> as well as many avant-garde writers, artists and theorists such as Mondrian, de Saint-Exupéry or the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss.<sup>16</sup> According to Guggenheim, the events in Lisbon and New York were very confusing:

Leonora could not make up her mind whether to go back to Max or remain with her husband ... I don't think Leonora really wanted either of them. There was a moment when she preferred a certain toreador she had met to both of them. She

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<sup>15</sup> Fernand Léger had held an academy of painting in Paris and Leonor Fini, Carrington's closest woman friend during the period 1937-40, had attended his classes briefly.

<sup>16</sup> Around 1975, at Octavio Paz's house in Mexico City, Claude Lévi-Strauss confessed to Fernando Savater (who wrote the prologue to *Down Below* in the Spanish edition) that he was relieved to know he would not re-encounter Carrington (who was meant to attend but felt indisposed). According to Savater, Lévi-Strauss's words were:

La conocí hace treinta años. Era tan hermosa y estuve tan enamorado de ella que no sé cómo habría soportado verla hoy.  
[I met her thirty years ago. She was so beautiful, and I was so deeply in love with her that I don't know how I would have endured seeing her today.] (Savater 1991: x, my translation)

felt that her life with Max was over because she could no longer be his slave, and that was the only way she could live with him. (Guggenheim 1979: 238-9)

Leonora was tormented by Ernst's presence in Lisbon and New York, and Ernst appeared to be absolutely devastated by this turn of affairs, as the chronicles of both Peggy and his son testify. According to Jimmy Ernst:

I don't recall ever again seeing such a strange mixture of desolation and euphoria in my father's face [as] when he returned from his first meeting with Leonora in New York. One moment he was the man I remembered from Paris - alive, glowing, witty and at peace - and then I saw in his face the dreadful nightmare that so often comes with waking. Each day that he saw her, and it was often, ended the same way. I hoped never to experience such pain myself, and I was at a loss of how to help him. (Ernst 1984: 213-214)

Suleiman (1994), Chadwick (1985) and Warner (1991) seem to agree that the highly autobiographical paintings and drawings done by Ernst between 1940 and the spring of 1942 describe the effect the rupture with Leonora had upon him. Ernst adopted Carrington's own totems (horses, women's dark abundant manes or half-animal females) in order to establish a dialogue between himself and Carrington's vanishing ghost. In the summer of 1942 Carrington left New York for Mexico. She never saw Ernst again.

Carrington associated Ernst with her internment in the sanatorium and saw him as an increasingly menacing figure for her artistic pursuits. In 1943 she wrote "Down Below", her narration of the experience at the mental institution, which, together with "The Débutante", has become her most quoted text, and has "consecrated her as a Surrealist heroine" (Warner 1989a: 18). Yet Carrington strongly rejected Surrealism's conception of madness. In a 1983 interview with Chadwick she spoke:

of her anger at Surrealist attitudes toward madness, seeing in them misplaced humor and pretense very much at odds with the anguish and pain that accompany any loss of psychological connection with the external world. (Chadwick 1985: 74)

Phyllis Chesler, in her study of mental illness, speaks of mental illness as a manifestation of cultural impotence and political castration, but it is Shoshana Felman who brings to light the repression of women within the establishment of the family or social groups as one of the reasons for madness:

From her initial family upbringing throughout her subsequent development, the social role assigned to the woman is that of *servicing* an image, authoritative and

central, of man: a woman is first and foremost a daughter / a mother / a wife.  
(Felman 1989: 134)

One could add yet another image: that of muse. Surrealists' male sexual identity is preserved by negating that of the woman: idealised, supernatural, mad, magical. It is symptomatic that Carrington repeatedly associates Ernst with ice and fire, for both extremes threaten death (not quite the fear of physical death that she experienced at the asylum, but a fear of the assassination of her creativity). Shortly after arriving in America, in 1942, Carrington contributed an article to the avant-garde magazine *View*, which was devoting a whole issue to Max Ernst. Her article "The Bird Superior, Max Ernst" (illustrated with Carrington's painting *Portrait of Max Ernst, Figure Two*) recounts her relationship with Ernst. In the story, the Bird Superior "stirs his pot" in his "Subterranean Kitchen" when: "Fear, in the form of a horse and dressed in the furs of a hundred different animals, leaps into the kitchen" (1942: 13). The story ends with the female and male protagonists eloping together, as other stories by Carrington end (*Penelope*, for example, or "A Mexican Fairy Tale") as a symbol for their respective trips to America. However, what is significant in the tale is the Bird Superior's (Ernst's) relationship to Fear (Carrington):

The Bird Superior ties Fear to the flames of the fire by her tail and dips his feathered arms in the color. Each feather immediately begins to paint a different image with the rapidity of a shriek. (1942: 13)

Carrington is reaffirming that her irruption into Ernst's life was crucial for his painting and it was immediately noticeable (he "begins to paint a different image with the rapidity of a shriek"). In the metaphor of the cooking pot, Fear (Carrington) was but "the" ingredient that helped Ernst to concoct his creations. It did not matter for him, as it transpires from the text, that Carrington was meanwhile suffering a slow death by suffocation:

The songs of the white Bats and eagles mix with the neighs of fear [sic] who has the flames of the fire frozen to her tail. Her skin erupts with minute volcanoes which send tufts of smoke through her many-furred mantle. She tosses her head and moths fly out of her mane attracted by the bright frozen light of her tail. (1942: 13)

The game of language that this passage presents summarises Carrington's response to the question of Surrealism and women's creativity. On the one hand there are the serious

accusations: there is no creativity in Fear's slow burning, only the submission (fear "tosses her head") of someone who is being tortured. Yet, she is playing with two ideas, for "tossing one's head" may also mean to raise or jerk one's head with an impatient or spirited movement, in a careless, capricious way. Fear has a "many-furred mantle" that isolates her from attacks: thus, she tosses her head whilst "minute volcanoes" erupt from her skin. Figuratively, the word "volcano" is used to represent violent feelings or passion, especially in a suppressed state, likely to burst out at some time. So, although Carrington is denouncing Ernst's attitude, there is also her own writing as testimony of her artistic creativity, that eventually erupts violently. In the meanwhile, Ernst creates his paintings, characterised by their abundant vegetation:

The Bird Superior, with all his feathers painting different images at once, moves slowly around the room evoking trees and plants out of the furniture. (1942: 13)<sup>17</sup>

In "Down Below" Carrington narrates that one night she had a dream involving overflowing vegetation, which, in my opinion, is a symbolic recollection of her sexual relationship with Ernst:

a bedroom, huge as a theatrical stage, a vaulted ceiling painted to look like a sky, all of it very ramshackle but luxurious, an ancient bed provided with torn curtains and cupids, painted or real, I no longer know which; a garden ... surrounded by barbed wire over which my hands had made plants grow, plants which twisted themselves around the strands of wire and, covering them, hid them from sight. (1989a: 184)

Art ("a vaulted ceiling painted to look like a sky") and sexuality ("a [huge] bedroom ... an ancient bed") play the leading roles in this passage that is, nevertheless, full of negative symbolism. The place where the lovers live is "a theatrical stage" surrounded by wire: a prison. Although Ernst's art (symbolised in the overgrowing vegetation that, nevertheless, comes alive "at the hands" of Carrington) tries to disguise it, the fact remains that she is surrounded by barbed wire: imprisoned in an image that no longer represents her self. Although Ernst appears portrayed as the dependent one,

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<sup>17</sup> This passage echoes "Pigeon, Fly!", where Agathe panics at seeing the objects around her thriving whilst she is slowly "vanishing" in the presence of her "cold" lover Célestin (see Chapter Three): "All the furniture has sprouted new green growth, many chairs have already got leaves, small, fragile leaves of a tender green" (1989b: 27-28).

she is indeed restricted through his attitude towards her. Carrington has emphasised the dwarfing quality of their relationship:

"There is always a dependency involved in a love relationship. I think if you are dependent, it can be extremely painful" ... "I think that a lot of women (people, but I say women because it is nearly always women on the dependent side of the bargain) were certainly cramped, dwarfed sometimes, by that dependency. I mean not only the physical dependency of being supported, but emotional dependency and opinion dependency". (in Suleiman 1993: 115)

The demand to know about her relationship with Ernst has been so implacable that in the latest interview published she exclaimed angrily: "I'm sick of that. Those were three years of my life! *Why doesn't anyone ask me about anything else?*" (Suleiman 1993: 105). This is the reason why I have dwelled on Carrington's relationship with Ernst briefly.

## Chapter Two

### Carrington, Surrealism and Dreams

#### Surrealism and dreams

The Surrealists' interest in dreams can be traced back to 1922, immediately after the rupture between Breton and Tzara. The appearance in the summer of 1924 of Breton's *First Manifesto of Surrealism* together with Aragon's *Une vague de rêves* [A Wave of Dreams] marked the "official" introduction of the Surrealist movement. Breton called in his *Manifesto* for the liberation of the imagination: "Beloved imagination, what I most like in you is your unsparing quality" (Breton 1972: 4). He also advocated that Surrealist artists should be committed to incursions into the unconscious:

We are still living under the reign of logic ... But in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. (Breton 1972: 9)

As this quote suggests, the *Manifesto* and, in fact, many of Breton's theories of art and literature owe much to the theories of Freud, whom he had visited in Vienna in 1921. By thanking the psychoanalyst for putting into words the dearest of the Surrealists' beliefs, Breton aligns himself with the trend of thought that altered the intellectual life of the inter-war years:

It was, apparently, by pure chance that a part of our mental world which we pretended not to be concerned with any longer - and, in my opinion by far the most important part - has been brought back to light. For this we must give thanks to the discoveries of Sigmund Freud. (Breton 1972: 10)

Surrealism was in itself a new revolutionary movement, the concern of which was the transformation and improvement of social issues and human values by means of a "new" poetic vision. Surrealism was defined by Breton in his *First Manifesto* in the following way:

Surrealism, *n.* Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express - verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner - the actual functioning of thought, ... in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern. (Breton 1972: 26)

Surrealism, thus declared "a new mode of expression", was meant to be mainly concerned with language and representation. Dreams were the primal source of material when devising this new mode of expression. Whatever happened to time, space and

causality in dreams could be practised in artistic language and this would lead, Breton claimed, to a better understanding of the human mind. Giving free play to the inner powers of association of words and the images which these suggested was both a poetic and an enlightening exercise. Automatic writing became the most important of the Surrealists' practices. If Surrealism aimed to achieve a language divorced as far as possible from the exercise of the mind, the more the unconscious mind was given voice in the text, the more truthful and pure the writing became and, therefore, the more beautiful. Ernst saw in Carrington's writing the distillation of the essence of Surrealism. As he wrote in his Preface to "The House of Fear", her language is "beautiful ..., truthful and pure" (Ernst 1989: 26). This language was achieved through the adoption of several techniques, automatic writing probably being the most successful. It was first performed by Breton in 1920. Together with Philippe Soupault, he wrote *Les champs magnétiques* as quickly as possible. They tried to avoid as far as they could reasoning about the text that was being written. Automatic writing:

was intended to lay bare the 'mental matter' which is common to all men, and to separate it from thought, which is only one of its manifestations. (Alexandrian 1970: 47)

For Aragon, the relationship between the soul and its desires is one of perpetual conflict. In *Une vague de rêves*, he proposes the idea that the soul's desires can only be met by means of *le hasard*, illusions, the fantastic and dreams.<sup>1</sup> Therefore the surreal is defined as a limiting notion, "a relationship between the mind and what it will never reach" (in Chénieux-Gendron 1990: 40). Aragon in his *Traité du style* (1928) revealed, however, his doubts about the practice of automatism. Although he considers it a convenient method for releasing inspiration, he doubts the political usefulness of automatism if it becomes a string of "dreary idiocies":

The inner meaning of a surrealist text is of the greatest importance, since it is that inner meaning that gives the text a precious revelatory quality. If you write dreary idiocies following a surrealist method they will remain dreary idiocies. Without possible excuse. And especially if you belong to that lamentable

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<sup>1</sup> Carrington rejects the Surrealists' idealisation of *le hasard* and affirmed in 1990: "There is no such thing as chance" (in Suleiman 1994: 93).

category of individuals which is ignorant of the meaning of words, it is probable that the practice of surrealism will bring to light nothing more than this crass ignorance. (Aragon 1987: 12)

In December 1929 Breton published his *Second Surrealist Manifesto* which dealt largely with the topic of Woman. He turned to the hermetic tradition, welcomed the world of divination, the occult and magic, and pondered on the glorification of love. Breton calls for a return to an ancient interest in magic. He argues that the practicalities of life have driven human beings to eliminate the powers of the imagination. He rejects the yoke of logic that removes both the potentiality of dream and the strength of the marvellous:

Under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy. (Breton 1972: 10)

Breton is following the line of thought already started by Rimbaud. Rimbaud had called for the freeing of the senses, the only way, he claimed, to gain access to a poetic state: "C'est faux de dire: Je pense: on devrait dire on me pense ... Je est un autre" ["It is false to say: I think. It should be said: I am thought about ... I is another"] (Rimbaud 1972: 249).

If psychoanalysis were the tool with which to interpret dreams, dreams were, for Breton, the tool with which to approach life and literature. Furthermore, renewed attention to the world of the unconscious, present particularly in dreams, would guide the revolution he sought. Breton in his *First Manifesto* declared that he desired that analysis, attention and study be devoted to the world of dreams. Although dreams had been "a preoccupation of the late nineteenth century" (Sandrow 1972: 41), Breton could rely only to a very limited extent on contemporary works in the field, the most revolutionary of all studies being Freud's *On the Interpretation of Dreams*, first published in 1898.<sup>2</sup> In *On the Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud explains the existence of a universe of dreams as a process of "unconscious transformation of desire". Interpretation of dreams, as if it were a translation, aims to establish a relationship

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<sup>2</sup> Alvarez remarks that there are interpretations of dreams in papyri dating from the second millennium BC and "there was even a book called *The Interpretation of Dreams* seven centuries before Freud wrote his" (Alvarez 1995: 113).



between the "apparent" elements of dreams and their "latent" elements. In his *Second Manifesto* Breton affirmed:

Within the limits where they operate (or are thought to operate) dreams give every evidence of being continuous and show signs of organization. (Breton 1972: 11)

With this statement Breton contradictorily seems to suggest that, although it is the unconscious which regulates the continuity and organisation of dreams, there exists the possibility of certain activity on the part of the dreamer/artist. In Aragon's disillusioned view, dreams are not so different from reality:

What did you think you were up to, my friend, out there on the frontiers of reality? ... What a delusion, to think that by spending twenty-six years digging, with a sliver of broken reason, a tunnel whose starting point is your mattress, you would finally surface at the seashore. (Aragon 1987: 62-3)<sup>3</sup>

For Breton this travelling into the unconscious can happen at any time, or when the subject is in any situation. He is also captivated by the fact that the divisions between dream and reality often blur, and by the fact that he can find, in his daily routine, enough evidence to render that reality unreal:

The mind of the man who dreams is fully satisfied by what happens to him ... What reason ... makes dreams seem so natural and allows me to welcome unreservedly a welter of episodes so strange that they would confound me now as I write? (Breton 1972: 13)

Breton's and Aragon's doubt echoes, inversely, Descartes's doubt. In his formulation of "*cogito, ergo sum*", Descartes doubts that "thoughts" can be trusted, either when awake or when asleep:

and finally, when I considered that the very same thoughts (presentations) which we experience when awake may also be experienced when we are asleep, while there is at that time not one of them true, I supposed that all the objects (presentations) that had ever entered my mind when awake, had in them no more truth than the illusions of my dreams. (Descartes [1637] 1912: 26)

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<sup>3</sup> Cixous in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* makes a metaphor similar to that of Aragon: "Dreams await us in a country we can't get tickets to" (Cixous 1993: 58) and thus excludes the possibility of agency on the part of the artist. According to Cixous, the artist should create a favourable environment for the dream to "occur": s/he should put his/her bed away and be ready to travel, at any time: "toward the foreigner in ourselves. Traveling in the unconscious, that inner foreign country, foreign home, country of lost countries" (Cixous 1993: 69-70).

In order to avoid the suffering that the lack of a unified "I" could provoke in the individual who arrived at this doubt, Descartes forced dreams to become a parenthesis to the identity of the subject. Dreams were threatening for Descartes because in the dreaming state the enclosing walls of the "I" dissolve. As Jimenez notes, for Descartes:

El sueño ... es el espacio de la mentira, de la ilusión ... la fuente de certeza se situará en el "yo pienso", en el pensamiento que el yo produce en su estado de vigilia.

[The dream becomes the space of lies, of illusion ... certainty will be placed in the "I think", in those thoughts produced when awake.] (Jimenez 1993: 143-4, my translation)

Thus, Descartes can proceed to enunciate his formula:

and as I observed that this truth, *I think, hence I am*, was so certain and of such evidence, that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the sceptics capable of shaking it, I concluded that I might, without scruple, accept it as the first principle of the philosophy of which I was in search. (Descartes [1637] 1912: 26-7)

Aragon, in his *Paris Peasant* (1924) attacks Descartes's philosophy bluntly. By questioning the parallelism between "certainty" and "reality" he dismantles the Cartesian doctrine of evidence:

Everyone wanted to join in the quarrel about the objectivity of certainty: no one dreamed of questioning the reality of certainty itself ... Certainty is not reality ... Of all the stumbling blocks confronting the onward movement of the mind and imagination none, surely, has been more difficult to avoid than this sophism about evidence, a sophism which flattered one of mankind's most prevalent ways of thought. (Aragon 1987: 19-20)

Therefore, our century's fascination with dreams and the importance assigned to them appears to be but a revolt against the views held by the traditional European philosophers who feared and distrusted dreams as not being viable sources of knowledge. The Surrealists, then, looked back to artists like Goya<sup>4</sup> who, in 1799, had questioned the philosophical belief that reason was self-sufficient. Goya's *Caprices*, especially number 43, which presents the artist sleeping over a table with monsters and nocturnal birds around him, illustrate this critical view. The inscription on the table reads: "los sueños de la razón producen monstruos" ["the dreams of reason produce

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<sup>4</sup> Goya was one of the European painters who most strongly influenced Surrealists. Carrington appears to be familiar with Goya's work, especially after 1940 when she visited the Prado Museum at Madrid.

monsters"]. Goya appears to be saying that even reason is a dream. Reality and reason become, for the Surrealists, "phantoms of illusion" as the following excerpt from Aragon's *Paris Peasant* shows:

Nothing, neither strict logic nor overwhelming impression, can convince me about reality, can convince me that I am not basing reality on a delirium of interpretation. (Aragon 1987: 23)

In fact, Goya's *Caprices* could serve to illustrate a later philosophical work: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-5), by Nietzsche. Nietzsche set his views on "reason" in opposition to the Cartesian and Spinozan ones. The Cartesian vision he called "the smaller reason", which he contrasted with "the greater reason", identified as the body dominating the "I". Surrealism's consideration of dreams, therefore, finds its roots in a Nietzschean<sup>5</sup> negation of the philosophical concepts that had sustained Western thought. Aragon, for example, despises reason and embraces the body and "its sensuality":

O reason, reason, abstract phantom of the waking state, I had already expelled you from my dreams ... now there is only room here for myself. In vain, reason denounces to me the dictatorship of sensuality ... Let me dream a little about your falsehood. (Aragon 1987: 22)

Nowadays, some critics adopt "scientific" research to arrive at similar conclusions. Alvarez cites neurophysiologists and psychoanalysts to prove Descartes wrong, for, he argues, they have proved that there is thinking activity in dreams just as there is in logic:

Neurophysiologists and psychoanalysts agree on two things at least: that brain work never ceases, even in sleep, and that the traditional belief that thinking is done only in terms of logic and language no longer holds. (Alvarez 1995: 211)

Dreams are not for Freud what they were for Descartes, that is, a threatening realm of "lies". With Freud oneirism becomes as important a part of our psyche as the conscious part. It was probably the most original of the innovations of the Surrealists to reverse the traditional discourse, thus providing the world of the unconscious with more relevance than that of the conscious. However, they were not the first ones in committing it to writing, for writers and artists had glimpsed its potential centuries before. As Jimenez

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<sup>5</sup> Breton, in "Revolution Now and Forever!" (1925) and *Arcane 17* (1944) recognises Nietzsche to be one of the most influential philosophers in Surrealism.

points out, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1598) Shakespeare re-enacted the ancient link between dream and the potentiality for change. Later, Segismundo in Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño* [Life is Dream]<sup>6</sup> will echo *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare developed further his vision finally claiming that *we are dreams*, having been born of the same substance as dreams:

We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.  
(Shakespeare 1987: 181, IV, 1)

The Romantics renewed the concept of dream and elevated dream to a privileged position. Among the English Romantics favoured by the Surrealists are Coleridge, one of the "inspired poets", Shelley and, of course, Keats, who in his *Hyperion* (1819-21) addressed the poet as "dreaming matter". The poet is a dreamer, a visionary, someone capable of finding the way to another dimension and of communicating that vision to us. Amongst the English artists, the painter Samuel Turner, together with the painter and poet William Blake, served the Surrealists as continual reference points. Their closest sources of reference, however, were Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Kafka and Strindberg. Dreams have been an artistic motif throughout the ages and they continue to fascinate writers. As Alvarez notes: "after Surrealism, the Romantic fascination with dreamland was belatedly reborn as Magical Realism" (Alvarez 1995: 209).

Not only did the Surrealists bring into question the notion of reality and dream through their interrogation: "Am I dreaming now? How do I know this is real?" but they also questioned the notion of identity by hinting that we might only exist, like Alice in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, in someone else's dreams. In Carroll's text, Tweedledum says to Alice that she is only a character in the Red King's dreams. If the individual allows this doubt to enter his/her mind, then the question that follows would be, and indeed is, in Carroll's text: "Who am I?" The bridge that connects Surrealism to

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<sup>6</sup> Carrington, already living in Mexico City (1958), together with Remedios Varo designed costumes and fashioned headdresses for Calderón's *El gran teatro del mundo* [The Great Theatre of the World]. (Kaplan 1988: 98).

fantasy stands on this question. Rosemary Jackson in her study *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* states that:

The fantastic problematizes vision (is it possible to trust the seeing eye?) and language (is it possible to trust the recording, speaking "I"?) (Jackson 1988: 30)

For the Surrealists dreams are vital components of the act of writing; without dreams there is no writing. They focus their interest in dreams on the fact that the artist can implement the qualities of dreams in writing through a technique: the symbol, the spatial/temporal transgression, mutations and so on. It is in this sense that they consider the possibility of combining reality and dream, because they do not consider that these two areas are mutually exclusive. Breton believed:

in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak. (Breton 1972: 14)

The Surrealists argue that when we dream we are gathering material and information for writing. Dreams and language are intimately related, and Freud, as Rand and Torok (1993) argue, could not decide which determined which: whether the linguistic expression determined the dream, or whether the universality of symbol, as apparent in the dream, made common dreams possible within differing linguistic expressions. According to Rand and Torok, Freud showed "a fundamental methodological discrepancy" as he "seems to be moving in two contrary directions at the same time" (Rand and Torok 1993: 570). Chadwick claims that Carrington "never shared Surrealism's interest in Freud and the Freudian language of the dream" (Chadwick 1986: 39), and indeed it is difficult to determine the extent to which Freud's statements influenced Carrington's literary expression because there is no written testimony to her having read him. It is quite certain that Breton, as his writings show, agrees with the idea of the universality of symbol. In the case of Carrington, who uses dream and fantasy images and techniques extensively, I think it is possible to venture that she would probably have agreed with the universality of symbol as well. Although sometimes intending to invest them with a different meaning than that commonly accepted, Carrington uses familiar symbols when narrating her dreams.

Moreover, Carrington also showed an interest in Jung. For Jung, who claimed the universality of symbols and of archetypes, "there was never much difference between dreams and poems" (Alvarez 1995: 123). Carrington's interest in Jung confirms further that she would have been more attracted to believing in the universality of dreams and in the possibility of translating them into writing, although what she actually did was to re-create the atmosphere of a dream in writing without commenting whether it had a "real" source in dream. Only once have I come across a comment made by Carrington about her own dreams. Talking to Chadwick for the television programme *Omnibus* she commented that her painting *The Drue* (1992, Figure Five) was the exact "translation" into painting of a dream she had experienced:

I had this dream and the dream was quite clearly a place and the place had something very important for me; and something is going on and I'm looking to see what it is. I was standing looking down and there were two figures, one shorter and one taller, that one might have been a child, or something like that. And then somebody said: "That's the Drue" and then I woke up wondering "What's a Drue?" (*Omnibus*, broadcast November 1992)

Carrington's comment emphasises the conflict between the realm of dreams and the realm of reality. The explanation of what a "Drue" is, provided to her by someone in the realm of dreams, makes sense to her and is perfectly logical. Yet, when awaking she wonders "What's a Drue?" Suddenly she realises that the phonetic and semantic structures that are so clear in the dream world do not correspond to the phonetic and semantic structures of the awake state. Nineteen-ninety-two was not the first time that Carrington had been thinking of this word. Before this, she had written about *Monsieur des Airlines-Drues* in her short story "Pigeon, Fly!" (1937-8) (analysed in Chapter Three). "Drue", in French, is a qualifier normally used for vegetation, meaning dense, impenetrable. "Drue" is, therefore, a word that has been echoing in Carrington's imagination for over fifty years and it is part of a secret code between Carrington and the readers of her stories and the viewers of her paintings.

The Surrealists' interest in dreams influenced the way Carrington conceptualised them and provoked in her positive and negative responses. However, I have to add that, although largely undocumented, long before encountering Surrealism and during childhood, Carrington had started a long-lasting fascination with dreams. Warner points

out that, as a child, Carrington had suffered a feverish illness during which she became delirious. Rather than being frightened, she grew fascinated with the hallucinations she experienced. Then, she wrote down her visions, illustrating them with her drawings. Therefore, when she encountered the Surrealists, she was not a mere recipient of their theories and experiments, she herself for years having been experimenting with, analysing and transcribing her dreams and hallucinations.

It would be reductionist, then, to argue that Carrington's experimentation with dreams and the way she adapts her knowledge to writing are directly and solely linked to the Surrealist adventure. There is a mixture, in her texts, of different prose forms, and thus they can be looked at from different perspectives. Her short stories read at times like fables, fairy tales, folk literature, psychological novellas, for example. Angela Carter, in her introduction to her *Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, claims that:

Ours is a highly individualised culture, with a great faith in the work of art as a unique one-off, and the artist as an original, a godlike and inspired creator of unique one-offs. But fairy tales are not like that, nor are their makers. Who first invented meatballs? In what country? Is there a definitive recipe for potato soup? Think in terms of the domestic arts. "This is how *I* make potato soup." (Carter 1990: ix-x)

Carter's notion of fairy tales echoes Carrington's conception of a work of art. Carrington used a similar comparison in *Omnibus*, when she explained that "painting" was "like cooking":

At first it becomes a sense of something; and then it becomes something that you can see, and then it becomes something that you can do. It's like cooking, but cooking isn't that easy either; probably not. (*Omnibus*, broadcast November 1992)

Carrington's texts are concoctions, a fusion of different influences. Such a mixture exists, I believe, because she conceives of art, writing and painting in terms of the domestic arts.

### Carrington's dreamlike stories

Except for "The Neutral Man", written in English while she was in Mexico, all of the stories to be analysed in this section were written in French while Carrington was living in France - from 1937 until 1940. Although different in theme, style and structure, they have one feature in common: the language of these stories is that of the narration of dreams. Carrington's conception of dreamlike narratives seems to be akin to Strindberg's (who was one of the Surrealists' closest sources of reference<sup>7</sup>). In the "Author's Note" to his *A Dream Play* (1901) Strindberg described such texts as follows:

In this dream play the author has ... attempted to imitate the inconsequent yet transparently logical shape of a dream. Everything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and place do not exist; on an insignificant basis of reality the imagination spins, weaving new patterns; a mixture of memories, experiences, free fancies, incongruities and improvisations. The characters split, double, multiply, evaporate, condense, disperse, assemble. But one consciousness rules over them all, that of the dreamer; for him there are no secrets, no illogicalities, no scruples, no laws. He neither acquits nor condemns, but merely relates; and, just as dream is more often painful than happy, so an undertone of melancholy and of pity for all mortal beings accompanies this flickering tale. Sleep, the liberator, often seems a tormentor, but when the agony is harshest comes the awakening and reconciles the sufferer with reality - which, however painful, is yet a mercy, compared with the agony of dream. (Strindberg 1991: 175)

There is much more to Carrington's dreamlike narratives than their appearance or their formal presentation. She is concerned, and in this case she is in accord with the Surrealist spirit, with the way dreams, their narration and interpretation, serve to re-evaluate our idea of the "real". The *OED* defines "dream" as being used to denote "something ideal, fabulous, perfect". As an adverb used in a phrase, the dictionary offers the example of "like a dream" as equivalent to "brilliantly". However, the qualifying adjective "dreamlike" is not charged with such positive overtones, and is used to describe things or situations that seem "unreal, vague or shadowy, as in a dream". It is in reference to this last meaning that I call Carrington's texts "dreamlike" narratives, as texts narrated in the way one would narrate a dream (*as in a dream*), or at least as close as language can get to dreams. My notion of the dreamlike narrative differs from, for

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<sup>7</sup>Strindberg appears next to Nietzsche and Rimbaud in Breton's *Arcane 17* (in Rosemont 1978: 249).



example, that of Gilbert and Gubar. Gilbert and Gubar have noted the use of "dreamlike writing" in some women writers of the nineteenth century. They affirm that in the case of Charlotte Brontë the writer's vision was:

of an indeterminate, usually female figure (who has often come "from the kitchen or some such place") trapped - even buried - in the architecture of a patriarchal society, and imagining, dreaming, or actually devising escape routes, roads past walls, lawns, antlers, to the glittering town outside. (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 313)

"The Débutante" is an obvious example of such a narrative of escape, in which the text aims to encapsulate the fulfilment of a desire. In the case of "The Débutante", the writer imagines an alternative to attending the party. She devises a story that helps her to overcome a feeling of entrapment and frustration. However, more often than not Carrington's stories do not aim at reaching a Utopian solution or a way out. Thematically, they narrate the nightmare of the entrapment, of the frustration at not finding a way out of a circumstance not of her own choice. This frustration finds its metaphor in the fact that many female protagonists of these narratives become transparent, vanish, melt away or, as in "A Man in Love", become a "warm" corpse. Characteristically, there is a paradox between the theme and the language in these stories: the atmosphere is tragic, but not the tone. Underlying the theme of entrapment, there is a certain playfulness and capriciousness.

"A Man in Love" (1937-8), written in the years in which Carrington was still in Paris, living with Ernst, before the great Surrealist exhibition, is a story that clearly denounces the trap that the male Surrealists have devised for women artists. An unnamed female narrator steals a melon and the fruit seller apprehends her: he forces her to choose between listening to his story or being handed over to the police. The fruit seller is the "man in love" who possesses the ability to dehydrate "meat by just looking at it" (1989a: 57). He tells her the story of his wife Agnes, who grew paler and more lifeless until she was just a warm corpse. He recalls how the day he met Agnes, and immediately after falling madly in love, Agnes told him: "I love you so much I live only for you" (1989a: 57). After this she grew paler and increasingly tired. The nameless "man in love" blames the draughts in the room where they spent their first night together

for her "death" and adds: "She was never herself again" (1989a: 59). Clearly, Agnes is the victim of her devotion to her lover. At the moment she stated "I love you so much I live only for you" she began to die. Carrington seems to be saying that it is only possible for women to create by and for themselves since performing the role male artists want them to perform, that of muse and inspiration, will bring about a "deadly" life, a warm body lacking life. Such stories as "A Man in Love" present the archetypal model of male mobility (the man in love) versus female immobility (Agnes's). But again, a certain sense of liberation occurs in the final paragraph where the female narrator tells us:

At that, the owner of the fruit shop was so blinded by his tears that I was able to make my escape with my melon. (Carrington 1989a: 59)

This attitude is rebellious in its use of humour and in its blatant resistance to authority. The reader wonders whether the narrator has been listening to the "tragic" story, for after all, it seems that all she wants is to make her escape with the melon, when the first opportunity arises. The mixture between tragedy and comedy characterises the dream-like stories of this 1937-9 period.

In the stories of this period, one can read a latent desire to flee, yet it is not the designing of a future, more pleasurable state that occupies Carrington, but the description of the present nightmare. Instead of providing literal escape routes, the reader finds in *humour* both the latent desire to flee and the escape route. With regard to themes, the works of this period lack a historical, social or political context. The absence of context is due, in my opinion, to the saturation of images of women inflicted upon her by the social groups to which she related: the English upper class firstly and then the artists in Paris. During those years in Paris Carrington needed to be extremely introspective in order to be able to examine her own femininity, and to discern what she liked and what interested her. In this sense, these works respond to a very specific need, the need to re-evaluate, among other things, certain images of women. The vehicle for conveying her needs is that of dreams, combined at times with the characteristics of fairy tales. Stylistically, these works owe much to Surrealism. These stories of Carrington's early period celebrate an imagined world, combining it with an ideological breakthrough. The world of the unconscious in stories such as "The Skeleton's Holiday"

(1938-9), "The Royal Summons" (1937-8) or "Uncle Sam Carrington" (1937-8) is introduced by placing the reader and the writing itself in the world of dreams. Hélène Cixous claims that: "A dream's charm is that you are transported into another world; no, you are not transported, you *are* already in the other world" (Cixous 1993: 79). Cixous argues that when a reader starts a novel s/he is immediately inhabiting a world of dreams. In the short story "Uncle Sam Carrington", the narrator/protagonist is an eight-year-old girl who manages, like Alice, to get into a dream. The reader is almost from the beginning of the story immersed with her in this dream/nightmare. Most significantly, the nameless protagonist enters this realm through playing. The protagonist devises a way of not getting lost:

All right, I thought to myself, the journey has begun. The night will surely bring a solution. If I keep count of the trees until I reach the place I'm going to, I shan't get lost. I'll remember the number of trees on the return journey.

But I'd forgotten that I could only count to ten, and even then I made mistakes. In a very short time I'd counted to ten several times, and I'd gone completely astray. Trees surrounded me on all sides. "I'm in a forest," I said, and I was right. (1989a: 62)

She realises she is lost in the forest which, as seen above, is a symbol of the unconscious and therefore of the entrance into a world of dreams. Forest in French is a feminine noun and Ernst had already exploited this fact in his 1934 short text "Les Mystères de la forêt" ["The mysteries of the Forest"].<sup>8</sup> The forest of Carrington's dream story "Uncle Sam Carrington", may, then, represent an incursion into the world of dreams, moreover, an incursion into the dreams of a feminine mind ("'I'm in a forest,' I said, and I was right"). Then the landscape of the dream takes over, the description being further reinforced by the fantastic description of two cabbages fighting violently:

The full moon shone brightly between the trees, so I was able to see, a few yards in front of me, the origins of a distressing noise. It was two cabbages having a terrible fight. They were tearing each other's leaves off with such ferocity that soon there was nothing but torn leaves everywhere and no cabbages. (1989a: 62)

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<sup>8</sup> In his text, Ernst contraposed a geometrical, conscientious, grammatical forest to a wild, ferocious and lovable one. In this comparison Suleiman suggests that Ernst is complaining about his devout wife Marie-Berthe whilst foreseeing Carrington's appearance into his life (Suleiman 1994: 102). The forest remains a recurrent landscape in his 1930s paintings and what was at first simply associated with the feminine, later became the representation of Carrington herself as the wild feminine (see Figure Three *Leonora in the Morning Light*).

The respective existences of dream and reality are brought into doubt, as Breton suggests, when the little girl realises she has not gone to sleep that night. The realisation that she might be inhabiting a nightmare while awake causes her a sudden terrible shock:

"Never mind," I told myself, "It's only a nightmare." But then I remembered suddenly that I'd never gone to bed that night, and so it couldn't possibly be a nightmare. "That's awful." (1989a: 62)

The girl continues her late-night adventure, proceeding to narrate it with no more hints of being frightened or terrified - although she would later have every reason to be so, for the two ladies who are to help her to solve the problems in her family are two "refined" sadists. However, at that point, she simply continues as if it truly were a fairy tale for children: "Thereupon I left the corpses and went on my way" (1989a: 62).

Very much along the lines of Breton's arguments, "Uncle Sam Carrington" presents the world of dreams as a setting for premonitions as well as a site for the magical to appear. The events narrated in this dream/story are presented as being as real as the routines of daily life. Moreover, the magical is treated as the real, where knowing about the future and meeting talking horses are not surprising episodes:

Walking along I met a friend. It was the horse who, years later, was to play an important part in my life. "Hello," he said. "Are you looking for something?" (1989a: 62)

Although disguising it as a popular tale, or a fable, what Carrington does not seek with this text is a moralising or pedagogical effect. Certainly not intended for children, the "tale" attempts to take us to another world, where time, space and body perceptions are not necessarily linear, global or unified.

I approach Carrington's stories less as dreams translated into language or literature than "language clothed as dreams". They are texts constructed in language, and in a literary way, but delivered in such a way that they appear as dreams. "The Neutral Man" (early 1950s) is an example of a story "clothed as a dream". It recounts, in my opinion, Carrington's reimagining of the Christian figure of God the Father (impersonated by a Caucasian white male Catholic character), her loathing for and her subsequent rejection of him. The (again) unnamed female protagonist/narrator of "The

Neutral Man" (1989b: 145-50) is invited to a masked ball thrown by Mr MacFrolick/God the Father. Already in the name of the host, Mr MacFrolick, the reader is confronting a caricature: if one of the rare uses of Frolicker is "someone who entertains by giving parties", a frolicky person is also someone "who enjoys tricks and practical jokes" (*OED*). Cixous argues the school of dreams is about "advancing in the direction of the terrifying" (Cixous 1993: 71). The reader finds that Carrington incorporates a comic element even in the most mysterious and terrifying of her stories. In "The Neutral Man", God the Father appears to be a not very funny buffoon. Indeed, the protagonist finds herself tricked as soon as she arrives at the party:

The rather charged atmosphere made me realize, in the end, that I was the only person who'd taken the invitation seriously: I was the only guest in disguise. (1989b: 146)

There she meets a "grey magician" ("know that there are different kinds of magic: black magic, white magic, and, worst of all, grey magic"), who is described as someone with such a neutral appearance that it makes the protagonist stagger into her chair. The description of the grey magician is symptomatic of Carrington's changing conception of Surrealist witticism and free word association. The "extraordinary neutrality" of the magician is metaphorically compared with the following Surreal image:

I saw a man of such neutral appearance that he struck me like a salmon with the head of a sphinx in the middle of a railway station. (1989b: 147)

Carrington often uses *l'écriture automatique*. However, the sense of "liberation" implied in *l'écriture automatique* is ridiculed in this passage. Carrington is being subtly ironical and critical. This Surrealistic imagery occurs precisely at those points in the narrative where she attempts to convey a sense of colourlessness, indetermination and nothingness, thus aligning Surrealistic free word association and automatic writing with meaninglessness.<sup>9</sup> The protagonist/narrator tries to avoid an encounter with the neutral man ("I feared the neutral man like the plague") and when she fails and finally has a

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<sup>9</sup> If as a woman, Carrington's worst nightmare is to "melt away", like the oval lady, or to "vanish" into thin air, like Eleanor in "Pigeon, Fly!", or, to be a "warm corpse", like Agnes, to lack colour, to be colourless becomes her worst insult. She might be making here a political statement about the Surrealists' "neutral" attitude toward the Second World War and referring to their political non-affiliation.

short conversation with him she feels that her self starts "dissolving into an opaque and colourless mass" (1989b: 148-9).

If the invitation to the party and the strange encounters refer the reader to the narration of a dream, this point marks the definite entrance into the fantastic and, therefore, the break with reality. The narrator continues:

I had been walking along the paths for some time when I arrived at a tower. Through the half-open door I noticed a spiral staircase. Somebody called me from inside the tower, and I went up the stairs, thinking that after all I didn't have a great deal to lose anymore. (1989b: 149)

There are several intriguing elements in this passage (walking along a path, coming across a "tower", a spiral staircase,<sup>10</sup> reaching the top of it), enough to provide various Freudian interpretations. Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* provides his explanation for the appearance of paths and ladders in dreams:

flights of steps, ladders and steps ... represent the definite symbol of coitus. The basis for this comparison is not difficult to find; with rhythmical intervals and increasing breathlessness one reaches a height, and may then come down again in a few rapid jumps. Thus the rhythm of coitus is reproduced in climbing stairs. (Freud 1932: 337)

However, in a narration such as that of Carrington I do not see how this interpretation could be appropriate. According to Carrington the narrator tends only to want the reader to be "familiar with the customs of the British in tropical countries" (1989b: 145). I have to agree with Nicholas Rand and Maria Torok when they question this specific interpretation made by Freud:

The dream image of going up a steep path, for example, can refer to one's efforts in trying to reach a specific goal or to the toil of life in general. Similarly, a staircase can make us think of delayed reaction ... or, alternatively, of professional incompetence. (Rand and Torok 1993: 576)

In Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols*, there is an explanation that I feel conveys precisely the message of this dream-like narrative. Cirlot provides different significations for the tower, and it is the concept of it held during the Middle Ages that I consider fits closely

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<sup>10</sup> There is a spiral staircase in Carrington's house in Mexico City (where she has been living for the last forty years) which, significantly enough, leads to her study.

with Carrington's aim.<sup>11</sup> In the Middle Ages the tower came to express: "the same symbolism as the ladder - linking earth and heaven" (Cirlot 1962: 345). In this case the top of the tower could, therefore, represent heaven, from where the voice of Mr MacFrolick/God the Father is calling the protagonist. The narrator/protagonist describes, satirically, her meeting with Mr MacFrolick who, at a certain point, offers her on a plate a tribute of his manhood: his moustache. He then proposes that she kill the grey magician. The amusing explanation that Mr MacFrolick gives to the protagonist is that he believes that, since she is Protestant, she is not, as he is, obliged to obey the church's prohibition regarding private assassination. The protagonist refuses, whilst declaring that she is not a Christian:

"Leave this house immediately," he screamed. "I don't receive unbelievers in my house, madam. Go away!"

I left as quickly as I could on those stairs, while MacFrolick leaned against his door, insulting me in a language that was pretty rich for so pious a man. (1989b: 150)

The tone is humorous, as well as communicative of the idea that God is most uncomfortable with his role. In two of these narratives the protagonist sets off from her house with the intention of going to a party. As happens in dreams, the results are unpredictable. In "The Neutral Man" Carrington manages *not* to transmit to the reader her stated intentions: an impression of "the customs of the British in tropical countries", as it occurs in dreams, where one's aims and objectives keep changing or else are forgotten altogether. Instead the reader finds a satirical caricature of God, of "instructors in spiritual matters" (of which the grey magician is a representative). In this, as in most of her stories, Carrington shows that even when plotting her narrations she is far more interested in going to hell than to heaven.

Moreover, the subversion of the protagonist signifies the destruction of the traditional theme of divine male power and mortal female submission. Conley, in *Automatic Woman*, states that Carrington "highlights the question of Woman's role in surrealism, accepting it as Other, and then plays with the possibilities" (Conley 1996:

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<sup>11</sup> Carrington has always been fascinated by this period of history: she has studied alchemy and is familiar with Mediaeval treatises, their language and symbolism.

54). However I believe that Carrington's consistent quality is that she rarely accepts anything, least of all the role of Woman. As "The Neutral Man" shows, writing allows Carrington to protest against the images of herself and other women, be they within Christianity, Surrealism or patriarchy. The protagonist of the story does not comply, does not obey, and rejects humiliation.

If images are an important part of Surrealist creation, for women artists and writers representation and image become even more aesthetically and politically charged. They tend to highlight the contradiction between the images of women as portrayed by male Surrealists and those images of women by women. Carrington's work of this period contains many different characters, but, invariably, the protagonists are females. Her fantasy works in revolt against the absence of an image of Woman as Creative Mature Artist, and it is, in this respect, most eloquent.



## Chapter Three

### The Disturbance of Boundaries

#### Beginnings: the horse and "Pigeon, Fly!"

This section looks at the beginnings of some of the 1937-40 stories, where the appearance of the horse marks the entrance into the realm of dreams. Carrington started her identification with horses in childhood when, as Warner relates, she longed to meet Jack Frost to ask him to turn her, magically, into a horse (Warner 1989a: 2-3). At Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche she sculpted, drew, wrote about and painted horses obsessively. "Horses in all the windows," wrote Ernst in his Introduction to "The House of Fear" (Ernst 1989: 26). Horses are, definitely, the most interesting Anglo-Saxon influence her work shows and, strikingly, they dominate her stories from this period. From rocking horses, stallions or mares to colts, it is probably a galloping white horse, like the one that appears in the self-portrait *The Inn of the Dawn Horse* (c. 1938, Figure One), with which she identifies most strongly. In most cases horses are friends of the protagonist/narrator, the ones who help the heroine or those who introduce her to a fantastic story. In other stories, horses are the *alter ego* of the protagonist and the transformation of woman into beast is full of symbolism.

Both in "The Oval Lady" (1937-8) and in *Pénélope* (1957) the horse's name is Tartar. The protagonist of "The Oval Lady" is "A very tall thin lady", Lucretia, whose "face was pale and sad" (1989a: 37). Sixteen-year-old Lucretia<sup>1</sup> does not drink and does not eat. In fact, she dreams of starving herself to death: "It's a protest against my father, the bastard" (1989a: 38). Already in these texts there is a challenge to authority, either in the figure of the father or as a displaced figure. Lucretia is in love with her rocking horse Tartar, who rocks himself into magic lands and is soon covered in snow. Tartar returns her love. Her father has forbidden her to ride her wooden horse, but she refuses to obey

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<sup>1</sup> Lucretia's legend, the story of a Roman patrician woman forced by Tarquin the Proud, was narrated by Livius. The king copulated with Lucretia, without resistance on her part, for he had threatened her with murdering her together with a black naked slave in her bed. At that time, suspicions of adultery were far more serious than accusations of having been raped. Lucretia acceded in order to save her family's honour. Later, when realising that Tarquin remained unpunished, she committed suicide (Escotado 1993: 130-1)

and make-believes that she is a horse, too. In the cold, snowed-in nursery, she metamorphoses into a white horse:

When she emerged, the effect was extraordinary. If I hadn't known that it was Lucretia, I would have sworn that it was a horse. She was beautiful, a blinding white all over, with four legs as fine as needles, and a mane which fell around her long face like water. (1989a: 41)

The metamorphosis completed, "She laughed with joy and danced madly around in the snow" (1989a: 41). On finding out, Lucretia's father decides to destroy Tartar as a punishment to his daughter:

"You're too old to play with Tartar. Tartar is for children, I am going to burn it myself, until there is nothing of it." (1989a: 42)

She "gave a terrible cry and fell to her knees" (1989a: 42). Soon she is kneeling "in a pool of water" and she becomes so "thin and trembling" that the narrator fears she might actually "melt away" (1989a: 43). Ignoring Lucretia, the father goes up to the nursery and thus the story ends: "the most frightful neighing sounded from above, as if an animal were suffering extreme torture" (1989a: 43).

The father wants to control and to inhibit Lucretia's creativity. That he represents order, logic and authority is implied in his being described as looking "more like a geometric figure than anything else". Lucretia's dancing and laughing and Tartar's "rocking motions" stand for creativity. What the story suggests is that Carrington aims to inhabit the world of dreams, she desires to create art in a form as devoid of the yoke of logic as possible. In this she is clearly adopting the Surrealist's theories.

In 1957, Carrington rewrote "The Oval Lady" for stage and entitled it *Pénélope*. In this case she showed that she had finally rebelled. *Pénélope* is the writing and designing of an escape route. Already in the names of the protagonists a certain sense of "liberation" can be observed. Whereas the name of Lucretia refers back to the legendary Roman woman who committed suicide to safeguard her honour, *Pénélope*'s myth can be read, rather than as the epitome of the faithful wife, as the epitome of the woman artist who chooses devotion to her craft over social status. The most important difference between "The Oval Lady" and *Pénélope* lies in the ending. That the poet achieves

creativity over the ruling of her father finds its metaphor in the fact that Pénélope and Tartar transform into one:

Ils sont d'un blanc éclatant, aveuglant. Ils se tiennent par la main. Pénélope a de nouveau une tête de cheval. Ils passent silencieusement par la fenêtre.  
[They are of a dazzling, blinding white. They are holding hands. Pénélope has a horse's head again. They pass silently through the window.] (1978b: 182, my translation)

Moreover, authority is no longer the tormentor. Authority is punished, for at the sight of them, Pénélope's father commits suicide.

A horse named Tartar, such as the one introduced by Carrington in these stories, stands for the writer's renunciation of control over (or maybe an acknowledgement of the writer's incapacity to control) the narrative when this is dominated by the dream. Moreover the notions of laughter and art versus fear and anxiety come together beautifully in the word Tartar. The name of Tartar recurs frequently in her texts over a span of over twenty years. It appears in *Little Francis* (1939) (1989a: 83) and in *The Hearing Trumpet* (early 1960s). In exploring the origin of Tartar and the people so designated, various conjectures have been put forward. In general:

In Western Europe they appear at first as Tartari, tartares or tartars, their name being apparently associated with tartarus, hell. (*OED*)

Tartarus refers, in Western culture, to the infernal regions of ancient Greek and Roman mythology, or, better, the lowest part of those regions, the underworld. Moreover, figuratively, a person named Tartar is assumed to be "a savage ... rough and violent or irritable and intractable" (*OED*). Tartar is also someone too formidable to control or to tackle. Orenstein finds two further pertinent associations in the name of Tartar:

Tartar, derived from Tartarus, the Greek underworld, links another Celtic white horse divinity, Epona, to the realm of the otherworld. Shortened to Tartar, a double anagram of ART, it indicates that through ART we can attain divine and occult knowledge. (Orenstein 1975: 132)

Georgiana M. M. Colville, who reads both "The Oval Lady" and *Pénélope* as rewritings of "Beauty and The Beast", investigates further the possible occult meaning of Tartar, making use of Carrington's practice of mirror writing:

"TARTAR" in the mirror would read "RAT RAT"! An appropriate insult for the murderous father, the epithet probably refers back to Apollo's other name,

Smintherous, meaning "rat". For the Greeks and Romans, the rat was a noxious chthonian beast, propagator of the plague. (Colvile 1990: 162)

For Ferrero, the tartarus is:

(abismo original) donde convergían y divergían el eros y el thánatos propiamente humanos: el instinto de vida y el impulso de muerte.

[(original abyss) where the typically human *eros* and *thánatos*, the instinct for life and the urge towards death, converged and diverged.] (Ferrero 1988: 235, my translation)

Tartarus as an abyss occupies a space similar to that which, according to Cixous, writing occupies:

Writing is situated at the turning point where Evil lets us see how it can be turned into Good and Good can be turned into Evil ... A space that is both totally free and totally limited. (Cixous 1993: 93)

These two excerpts converge at the point where Tartar, either as a space or as a state, opens up the possibility of discovering the supernatural, whether it presents celestial or infernal connotations. The horse in these stories stands for the writing of dream texts, and sometimes for the dream itself.

Significantly, and similarly to Carrington, Cixous identifies the act of dreaming and the act of writing as the act of riding a horse. Cixous's advice for writers is:

We must let ourselves be carried on the dream's mane and must not wake up - something all dreamers know - while the dream is dictating the world to us. How can we do this? We must write at the dictation of our master the dream, a pencil in hand, straddling the mane at full gallop. (Cixous 1993: 107)

For Cixous, dreaming or writing a dream text is like riding a horse when the writer (dreamer/rider) thinks it is s/he in charge - without realising that sometimes the text (dream/horse) provides the main impetus. In the following excerpt from "The House of Fear" Carrington uses graphically, as a metaphor for writing a dream narrative, the idea of following a wild horse that is taking her into a wild adventure:

In the darkness I didn't see which direction we were taking. I ran beside him [the horse], clinging to his mane for support. (1989a: 30)

From the stories I have considered as dream texts (mainly all of the stories of the 1937-40 period), only "The Three Hunters" makes reference to falling asleep. In the rest of the stories, horses appear at the beginning of the story in those cases where the narrative is a dream narrative from the beginning. It is on horseback that the protagonist

of the story "The Royal Summons" (1938-9) travels to the Queen's side, following her invitation (1989a: 49). A horse and an invitation also open "The House of Fear" (1938-9) (1989a: 27). Other stories that do not present features of dream narratives from the beginning, such as the tale "Uncle Sam Carrington" (1938-9) or the novella *Little Francis* (1939), often change speedily into dream texts. In both cases the shift is marked by the presence of a horse.

In the opening lines of the story "Pigeon, Fly!" (1937-40) a horse appears, linked to a feeling of secrecy, fright and the unknown:

"There's somebody on the road. Somebody's coming to see me, someone strange, though I can only see him from afar."

I leaned over my balcony and saw the figure getting rapidly bigger, for it was approaching at great speed. I thought it was a woman, for its long, straight hair fell down upon its horse's mane. The horse was large, with rounded, powerful bones, and it was a strange kind of pink with purple shadows the colour of ripe plums: the colour called roan in England. Of all animals, the horse is the only one who has this rosy colour. (1989b: 19)

The rider and the horse are the emissaries of Célestin des Airlines-Drues who requests the protagonist/narrator to come to his side. Already in this name there are hints of the development of the story. "Célestin" has "celestial," (heavenly) connotations and indeed later in the text, he is referred to as the "Angel" (of Death). "Airlines" refers to some ethereal quality, and also to the act of flying, which, as will be shown, mark the denouement of the story. "Drue", as it was shown in the previous chapter is a word that, meaning "dense, impenetrable", haunts Carrington.

Thus, by mounting the horse with the rider, the protagonist of this story lets the macabre tale begin. The horse and the rider are metamorphosed one into the other like a centaur. They are joined together at the level of the rider's waist and their manes blur the physical separation between them: "its (the rider's) long, straight hair fell down upon its horse's mane". Incidentally, one of Carrington's self-portraits of this period, *Femme et Oiseau* (c. 1937, Figure Six), represents Carrington with a horse-long face, a horse's neck, and with her dark, long, idiosyncratic hair giving the appearance of a horse's mane. Ernst, "the superior of birds", inhabits his space in the right bottom corner of the painting, his image scornfully reduced to a minimal space in the figure of a magpie.

The opening lines in "Pigeon, Fly!" report the thoughts of the protagonist. Her words, enunciated in the mode of a premonition, evolve brilliantly from the magically foreseen to the actually seen. The first words: "There's somebody on the road" are impersonal, for the process "there is" detaches the following unknown "somebody" from the protagonist/narrator. The second sentence alludes to the actual event of "seeing": "Somebody's coming to see me, someone strange, though I can only see him from afar." The protagonist includes herself in the story, this someone is coming "to see *me*". A powerful turn has taken place and, simultaneously with the dreamer becoming the protagonist of the dream, the premonition has shifted into fact. After perception has come vision, and after vision, knowledge should follow. However, in this dream fantasy the relationship between perception/vision/knowledge is problematised. Such problematisation provides the reason why the epithet for the rider is "someone strange", further accentuated by the fact that the narrator/protagonist "can only see him from afar". Irreconcilable aspects of vision form a feature of the fantastic for, as Jackson has stated: "From ambiguities of vision derive all those thematic elements associated with fantastic narratives focussed upon the self" (Jackson 1988: 51). Therefore, the elements of the second sentence have already indicated the development of the story. The narrator is no longer going to be impersonal and detached, but involved in the story as its protagonist, whilst the problem of vision/knowledge hints that the theme of the narrative is to be one "of the self". The story "Pigeon, Fly!" presents all the fundamental themes of the fantastic, starting, as has been shown, with the special causality in the form of premonition and inevitability.

Simultaneously with a total disintegration of traditional conceptions of time and space, two other themes are combined: the multiplication of personality with the collapse of the border between the subject and the object. The protagonist/narrator of "Pigeon, Fly!", Eleanor, is a painter who has been requested to make a posthumous portrait of Agathe des Airlines-Drues, already dead for two weeks. The model is the corpse of the young woman which gave off "a rather unpleasant smell" (1989b: 24). Eleanor thinks she is painting for a few hours when indeed she is painting ceaselessly for a week, but as Monsieur des Airlines-Drues points out to her: "Art is a magic which

makes the hours melt away and even days dissolve into seconds" (1989b: 25). It is not surprising that she has no conception of time, since Eleanor is in a dark forest, the only light being the one that comes from the corpse:

I did not notice until later that the light imprisoned in the circle of trees came from no other source than the body of Madame des Airlines-Drues. The forest was in total darkness. (1989b: 24)

This passage hints at the forthcoming unexpected turn of the narrative. Again, the protagonist is in a forest, a symbol of her unconscious. This time, however, the forest is in total darkness, foreshadowing her present or imminent death. After finishing the portrait, Eleanor (Leonora?) realises that the dead woman and she are the same person:

I was pleased with the portrait, and I stepped back a few paces to see the whole composition. The face on the canvas was my own. (1989b: 24)

Later, Eleanor is taken into Célestin's mansion, where she starts reading Agathe's diary and finds out that on her "wedding night" Agathe had seen an apparition:

*I said to myself, "I'm surely going to die, for here is the Angel of Death."  
The angel was Célestin. (1989b: 26)*

The "celestial" husband forces Agathe, as she recounts in her diary, to play a game called "Pigeon, Fly!" (a French children's game, "Pigeon, vole!" is usually played by six or seven children. One child opens the game saying "Pigeon, Fly!" and all the children wave their hands in the air, because pigeons do fly. The second child calls another, apparently random, word: "Butterfly, Fly!" and again all the children wave their hands in the air, because butterflies do fly. The game gains speed and then one child ~~pronounces~~ something that does not fly: "Ship, Fly!" The distracted or tired child that waves his/her hands in the air loses). Essential for the game is the use of the hands, which are waved in the air.

Agathe is intensely distressed by Célestin's hands:

*I really had eyes for nothing but Célestin's hands. I swear to you, Eleanor, that his hands were running with moisture ... and so smooth, and their colour was strange, like mother-of-pearl. He too was looking at his hands with a secret smile. (1989b: 28)*

The game gains in intensity and the last words in Agathe's diary (indeed they seem to be the very last words Agathe pronounces) are: "*Eleanor, dear Eleanor, his hands*" (1989b:

29). Just as the children's game consists in tricking someone into losing, Eleanor and Agathe have been conned into a premature death. Célestin, as Agathe says, is indeed the Angel of Death. At this point, the protagonist stops reading, realises the canvas is empty, and fears for her life: she realises only too late that she has already died: "my hands were so cold!" (1989b: 29). Her hands, the immediate instrument for the creation of art, cannot produce: they are frozen, petrified and, as in Carrington's worst nightmares, they start to vanish.

The connection between art, death and dreams is thus made explicit in this story. For Carrington, who has been always obsessed by death, dreams are a means of approaching the idea of death:

En realidad sabemos muy poco acerca de la muerte, pero sí sabemos que existe toda una serie de mundos que parecen irse transformando ... en mi opinión las cosas no son como nos las han explicado, creo que seguramente son distintas para cada persona, como los sueños.

[We actually know very little about death, but we do know that there exists a great variety of worlds that appear to be continuously changing ... in my opinion, things are not as we have been told, I think that most probably things are different for each person, just as dreams are.] (De Angelis 1990: 11)

Regarding the events narrated in the story, they reach full climax at the point where Eleanor realises she is the dead woman. This story is about the frustration the Surrealist woman artist experiences when dealing with her Surrealist colleagues. Carrington's fear is that her femaleness is itself a block to creativity. This is the cause of both the women's obsession with Célestin's hands: his creativity anticipates their deaths. Carrington designs the story "Pigeon, Fly!" as a nightmare in which the artist is confronted with her own death, coming at the *hands* of her male counterparts.

In "Pigeon, Fly!" Célestin, the Angel of Death, is clearly a portrait of Ernst, sharing many features with other depictions by Carrington of Ernst. As is Uncle Ubriaco in *Little Francis*, Philip in "The Seventh Horse" and Ignome in "As They Rode Along the Edge", Célestin is obsessed with his own beauty ("Am I beautiful?" he asked. "They say I am"). Célestin wears clothes made of "white feathers, with the wings of an angel" (1989b: 26). A painting of this period, *Portrait of Max Ernst* (c. 1939, Figure Two), shows him dressed in feathers, wearing on his bird-like feet striped socks. Significantly enough, Célestin in "Pigeon, Fly!" "wore blue stockings with red stripes" (1989b: 26). In



the painting, two horses appear. The white horse in the background is motionless, frozen, and the second horse is contained in what looks like a lantern held by Ernst. The Surrealist concept of women as muses causes the horse-like Carrington of the *Portrait of Max Ernst* to freeze, and also kills Eleanor and Agathe in "Pigeon, Fly!". Freezing and petrifying are, therefore, Carrington's response to the Surrealists' idealisation of women. She wrote in a letter to Henri Parisot in 1943:

*Je ne suis plus la jeune fille Ravissante* qui a pass er par Paris, amoureuse - ...  
Donc je ne reproducirais plus l'image d'avant - Je ne serait jamais **petrifi e** dans  
une "jeunesse" qui n'existe plus.

[*I am not any longer the young lovely woman* who passed through Paris, in love  
- ... I shall never again reproduce that old image - I shall not be **petrified** ever  
again in a "youth" that no longer exists.] (1973: 7-8, my emphasis, my  
translation).

She was 26 years old at the time of writing this letter, and she was recovering painfully from her experience of madness. With the writing of this letter (which constitutes the Preface to the French edition of "Down Below"), Carrington reflects on the way she had been regarded by the Surrealists and she explicitly complains of their inhibiting idealisations: that the Surrealist conception of the *femme-enfant* petrified, froze and eventually stifled women's artistic creativity. The "Angel of Death", C elestin in "Pigeon, Fly!", knows of Eleanor's imminent death, since in his letter requesting her to come he informs her that she "will learn something" much to her advantage and ends: "I beg you, dear lady, to accept my deepest and most sorrowful respect" (1989b: 20). This can only be so because, for him, she is already dead or about to die, although she does not know it. Thus, he smiles and waves his hands in the air, with malice and aforethought. If we take this metaphor to stand for the artistic relationship between Carrington and the male Surrealists, the result is that Carrington suspected that by the time she approached them with the intention of becoming an artist in her own right, they had already "killed" her for her own art.

The dream, in the form of rider/horse, overcomes the narrator and she perceives it as the advent of the Other. In fact, since the rider's sex is unknown, the narrator opts for designating him/her as "it": "I thought it was a woman, for *its* long, straight hair fell down upon *its* horse's mane" (my italics). Nor is the horse a normal horse. It is large,

rounded and in its description the word "strange" reappears: "it was a strange kind of pink with purple shadows". Both the rider and the horse together stand for the narrative itself and, as Cixous acknowledges, the dream (-text)

is there like an immobile, eternal, complete person whose never-failing characteristic is to produce something continually strange. (Cixous 1993: 58)

The centaur-like figure is there as the strange, the unfamiliar, in other words, the Unconscious. But if the horse is the dream, where is it taking the writer (and the reader)?

In the interview with Paul De Angelis Carrington commented:

Pienso que para llegar a comprender algo acerca de la muerte, primero tenemos que comprender los distintos lugares que existen en nosotros mismos y los sueños son uno de esos lugares.

[I think that in order to understand something about death, we have to understand first the different places that exist within ourselves, and dreams are one of those places.] (De Angelis: 1990: 11)

The dream/horse is taking the writer/reader into a world of a different form of consciousness, into a different realm. A horse, in Carrington's writing, impersonates the dream narrative itself. Hence, in the beginning there are horses, there are dreams: the way, according to Cixous, to start writing - indeed, to be able to write at all. These texts are the first Carrington published and they begin with departures in the form of mounting a horse for "We always find departure connected to decisive dreams" (Cixous 1993: 67).

### **Middles: "The Skeleton's Holiday"**

Here I consider the development of the stories and, "The Skeleton's Holiday"<sup>2</sup>. "The Skeleton's Holiday" was written in 1938 or 1939 as part of a collaboration novel. Hans Arp, Leonora Carrington, Marcel Duchamp, Paul Eluard, Max Ernst, Georges Hugnet and Gisèle Prassinos each wrote a chapter of this novel. Each was given the last

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<sup>2</sup> "The Skeleton's Holiday" is a very short text (around five hundred words), analysed in this chapter almost word by word.

paragraph of the previous chapter to read. Carrington's story opens with the following words:

The skeleton was as happy as a madman whose straightjacket [sic] had been taken off. He felt liberated at being able to walk without flesh. (1989b: 16)

The simile that opens the story runs through the first paragraph as a sort of philosophy: the flesh on our bodies is as restrictive as the straitjacket of a madman; were it not for the flesh, human beings would be happy and feel free. Twenty years later Carrington developed further this half-anorexic, half-Augustinian motif of the evils of the flesh. In the 1950s story, "My Mother Is A Cow", she transcribes what the "Holy One" revealed to her:

To be one human creature is to be a legion of mannequins ... When the creature steps into the mannequin he immediately believes it to be real and alive and as long as he believes this he is trapped inside the dead image. (1989b: 190)

For Carrington, then, the body is but a prison, an entrapment that exists only to be subverted. She says in these two passages that the body exists only as a receptacle for the inner self. Dreams disclose to her a world where one need not have one's own body in order to exist. In her dreams, as in her dreamlike stories, she takes her body off, metamorphoses it into animals, makes it sometimes female and sometimes male, and she represents herself more often as a girl or as an old person than as a middle-aged Leonora Carrington.

However, before the reader takes the story as a solemn exposition of Carrington's beliefs, the tone shifts perceptibly into the comic, and a somewhat frivolous description of the "burdens" of the flesh follows:

The mosquitoes didn't bite him any more. He didn't have to have his hair cut. He was neither hungry nor thirsty, hot nor cold. (1989b: 16)

The anti-climax, as a stylistic device, is the tool that Carrington uses throughout "The Skeleton's Holiday". Both in respect to short passages and within the structure as a whole, the story is written to deceive the reader. The anti-climax structures the passage where Carrington summarises the story:

The skeleton didn't like disasters, but to suggest that life did have its hazardous moments, he had placed an enormous thimble in the middle of his fine apartment, on which he sat from time to time like a real philosopher. (1989b: 17)

The excerpt presents a troubled skeleton (a "real philosopher", the dancer of Saint-Saëns' "Danse macabre") concerned about issues such as "life" and "death". To counterbalance these propositions some comical breaks appear, such as when the "real philosopher" had placed "an enormous thimble in the middle of his fine apartment". On the whole, the final words in the passage summarise Carrington's attitude towards writing, for the way she writes about her sorrows is similar to the way she makes the skeleton dance the "Danse macabre":

he did it [danced] with such grace, with such guilelessness, in the manner of midnight dances in romantic, old-fashioned graveyards, that nobody seeing him would have thought of anything unpleasant. (1989b: 17)

This is precisely what Carrington aims to do with her dreamlike texts. Carrington is writing these stories on the eve of the Second World War, her relationship with Ernst is being continuously threatened by her own family and by Ernst's wife, she has no income of her own and she is obsessed with madness and death. Despite this, her stories are wickedly comical and seemingly whimsical, so that "nobody" reading them "would have thought of anything unpleasant".

The paradox established between Carrington's fear and her comic disposition, between whim and pain, is emphasised in the story. Despite the humour, the writer contemplates existence as seen through the "eyes" of the skeleton as a realm of lies and deceit: we suffer in life expecting death to redeem us, but the after-life brings only more suffering. Strindberg in the "Author's Note" to *A Dream Play* affirmed that although dream seems the liberator it is in fact the tormentor (Strindberg 1991: 169). Carrington, in the story, correlates the deceit inherent in dying with the deceit of being born: "the newly dead ... are wretched in their abandonment, like the newborn" (1989b: 17). Concurrent with this idea, dreaming and dying are made synonymous in the story. The dreamer wants to fall asleep in order to dream and, instead, finds that the nightmare torments endlessly. The dying person expects death to be a liberator, only to find her/himself misled:

Have you heard the appalling moan of the dead in slaughter? It's the terrible disillusionment of the newly born dead, who'd hoped for and deserved eternal sleep but find themselves tricked, caught up in an endless machinery of pain and sorrow. (1989b: 17)

By addressing the reader, a device that Carrington rarely uses in her writing, the metaphor becomes tangible, "Have you heard the appalling moan of the dead in slaughter?". The reader is invited to envision dying bodies, where after the comic perversity, the mockery of her answer enacts a double deceit: "It's the terrible disillusionment of the newly born dead". The horrified reader who is envisioning a massacre is made to feel more horrified by the fact that the moans come not from the act of dying but from the disillusionment that the after-life produces: they "find themselves tricked, caught up in an endless machinery of pain and sorrow".

This passage also voices Carrington's understanding of dreams. They are the closest the artist can get to *knowing*. Carrington seems to consider writing the tool for learning about oneself, and one's own relation to the world. The well-known metaphor for death as perpetual sleep in "Those who hoped for and deserved eternal sleep" connects Carrington's interest in oneirism with her fascination with death. Furthermore, this short passage introduces one of the constant features in Carrington's textual iconography: the reversal of vision. By speaking of being "newly-born into death" the narrator is placing the reader "on the other side", beyond life and within death. The narrator's voice aims to be the voice of the "dreamer" in these texts: the extraordinary events do not surprise the narrator because transgressions are characteristic of dreams. It is there that the unconscious plays relational tricks not allowed by the conscious. The aim of the writer of a dreamlike text should be to relate the story as the dreamer perceives it.

The resources of the unconscious and the experimentation with free association give rise to an apparently total change in the development of the story:

He was far from the lizard of love. For some time a German, a professor of chemistry, had been eyeing him, thinking he might convert him into a delicious *ersatz*: dynamite, strawberry jam, garnished sauerkraut. The skeleton knew how to give him the slip, by letting fall a young zeppelin bone, on which the professor pounced, reciting chemical hymns and covering the bone with hot kisses. (1989b: 16)

This change is produced, I believe, by the association of ideas. The danger that the Nazi invasion of France posed for both Carrington's and Ernst's personal safety is hinted at in the war vocabulary of the passage. Ernst's mother tongue brings words such as

"sauerkraut" into the text, which, denominating a German dish, is not directly connected with the war. However, another word of German origin is "ersatz", which, denominating "a substitute in a pejorative sense", was widely used during the Second World War, when fakes of products increased. Other words such as "dynamite" or "zeppelin" link together the destructive powers of the explosive with the war airship created by the German Count Zeppelin. The idea of "letting fall a young zeppelin bone" may, for Carrington, have been reminiscent of the zeppelin bombs that ravaged London during the First World War. The zeppelin as a war machine of destruction linked to the Germans appears in a 1940s drawing by Carrington entitled *Tiburón* [Shark] (c. 1942, Figure Seven). For Chadwick, *Tiburón* stands for a vehicle representing both Carrington's physical journey to Mexico and psychical journey into madness:

In *Tiburón* ... a window opens in the side of a fierce fish to reveal a group of well-dressed figures traveling as if in a first-class rail carriage. (Chadwick 1991a: 12)

In my opinion, Chadwick has failed to observe the belligerent connotations of the drawing. *Tiburón*, armed with formidably sharp teeth, bears the shape of a zeppelin, but, unlike the friendliness characteristic of another elliptical creature (the whale), the shark represents aggressiveness and voraciousness. With a capacity for a large number of passengers, zeppelins were used, after the First World War, for pleasure trips. The zeppelin in the drawing, however, is a bearer of death and torture, with women's and men's bodies hung under the shark's abdomen. It is also from the abdomen that comes the screw-propeller, which ends in a medieval-looking mace, and a gigantic gun. The reference to the war denoted by a word like "zeppelin" in "The Skeleton's Holiday" cannot, therefore, be unintentional. From the nostrils of the shark two dark horses (texts) start to gallop, surrounded by a thick cloud (fantasy). It is as if Carrington were suggesting that her fantastically woven nightmare texts have their roots in the horror of the war.

Ernst is undoubtedly the German professor of chemistry and his nationality acts as background connection for the association of ideas. When he appears in Carrington's stories he does so always as a figure of paternal authority and as the embodiment of

knowledge (the most prominent of Ernst's portraits in her writings is as "Uncle" Ubriaco in *Little Francis*). Moreover, the fact that his subject is chemistry (a synonym in Carrington's personal vocabulary for alchemy) is highly eloquent. Chemistry is, in the passage, correlated with cookery, and, as shown above, the two activities are, for Carrington, alternative arts to painting. Again, the passage evolves from an elaborated poetic language at the beginning towards a plain colloquial one, in order to achieve a satirical purpose: to ridicule Ernst and, further, to ridicule love: "the skeleton knew how to give him the slip."

Just when the story has reached a grave point of solemnity, Carrington starts to ease the tone of tragedy through the use of jokes, only to stress further the horror of her conceptions of death. From this point onwards the story rises in climax towards a final paragraph that, paradoxically, is one of "absurd" humour. Thus the short story presents a threefold structure: a first paragraph written in a macabre and lugubrious mood; a change in style marks the second paragraph, sprinkled with light metaphors and even the recounting of some jokes; the story culminates in a final paragraph where logical meaning is absent because of the juxtaposition of bizarre and unrelated images:

It happened that one day the skeleton drew some hazelnuts that walked about on little legs across mountains, that spit frogs out of mouth, eye, ear, nose, and other openings and holes. The skeleton took fright like a skeleton meeting a skeleton in bright daylight. Quickly he had a pumpkin detector grow on his head, with a day side like patchouli bread and a night side like the egg of Columbus, and set off, half reassured, to see a fortune-teller. (1989b: 18)

This final paragraph is, according to the game, the one that the next collaborator of the novel *The Man Who Lost His Skeleton* had to read and had to continue. This might be the reason why the final line ("he ... set off ... to see a fortune-teller") is the only one in the passage that presents a logical syntactic/semantic construction. The excerpt as a whole is absurd, in the sense that it is grotesquely comic (as in: to "spit frogs out of mouth, eye, ear, nose, and other openings and holes") as well as irrational (what is "a pumpkin detector"?). There are impossible sequences, as in "the skeleton drew some hazelnuts that walked about ... across mountains."

As a whole, the narrative is non-rational and it presents an endless juxtaposition of fantastic and unrelated images.

The story "The Skeleton's Holiday" stands as a classic piece of Surrealist writing. Its figurative language is drawn from the world of the unconscious, particularly as it appears in dreams. The act of translating the dream imagery from the realm of the unconscious into that of the conscious finds a correlation in Carrington's writing in French rather than English. These stories written in French in the period between 1937 and 1940 present both an incorrect grammar and an apparently inappropriate choice of lexicon. Indeed, Carrington refused to correct her imperfect French or even have it corrected. This act signifies a subtle subversion that goes, therefore, beyond a mere thematic transgression. The way she loosened the constriction of syntax was welcomed by the Surrealists, especially Max Ernst who wrote:

Who is the Bride of the Wind? ... Can she write French without mistakes? ... *The House of Fear* ..., written in a beautiful language, truthful and pure. (Ernst 1989: 26)

Rosemary Jackson acknowledges the many areas of similitude between the fantastic and the surrealistic, but she concludes that their main difference relies on the fact that their different narrative structures and the different relationship they establish between the narrator and the reader prevent them from being the same type of literature:

Surrealistic literature is much closer to a marvellous mode in that the narrator himself is rarely in a position of uncertainty. The extraordinary happenings told do not surprise the narrator - indeed he expects them and records them with a bland indifference, a certain neutrality. (Jackson 1988: 36)

Indeed, the narrative structure and thus the relationship between narrator and reader reproduce the pattern of the traditional fairy tale, so that much of her "fear" is "neutralised" (as in "The Neutral Man"). Carrington starts most of these stories as a "marvellous" fairy tale. In the case of "The Skeleton's Holiday", it might seem, were it not for the macabre element of the story, that we are dealing with a typical fairy tale. Located in the past, the story is told by an authoritative omniscient narrator, who does not question the events narrated, but detaches herself from the story while narrating. The story is situated simultaneously in the "real" and in the "imagined". However, the fairy



tale provides, by its very definition, "educative" patterns, with the help of moralising sub-texts reinforced by happy endings. Indeed, Jackson argues:

Tolkien sees the function of faery as three-fold: to provide recovery, escape and consolation; it promises wish fulfilment, magical satisfaction. Theorists of fairy tales all stress this consolatory function of the marvellous. (Jackson 1988: 154)

There is nothing of this in Carrington's dreamlike narratives: their sub-texts escape the reader unless s/he is determined to analyse the symbols they present. There are no moralising or educative sub-texts and, most importantly, there are rarely happy endings or even blissful plots. The function of Carrington's dreamlike narratives can be considered to be subversive, as are other fantastic literary texts, but their disguise as fairy tales is intended to mislead the reader. Jackson argues that although in the modern fairy tale there is a recognisable "death wish", this drive is exploited in a conservative manner since:

They avoid the difficulties of confrontation, that tension between the imaginary and the symbolic which is the crucial, problematic area dramatized in more radical fantasies. (Jackson 1988: 156)

This is not so with Carrington's narratives which, from the very beginning, break down barriers; in this case, between the different genres. Carrington's stories show a blending of the **function** of the **fantastic** with the **structure** of the **marvellous**. These texts revolt against both the fantastic and the fairy tale, creating an alternative text that blends the function of one with the form of the other. They move between definitions, and this movement seems to become an end in itself.

Carrington's dream-like texts' non-thetic quality is their most outstanding quality.<sup>3</sup> One of the most subversive attempts a text can make to challenge the thetic is

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<sup>3</sup> Sartre distinguished between the two categories of thetic and non-thetic, and critics Bessi re and Jackson have made use of them in analysing the language of desire in fantasy (Jackson 1988: 75-6). The thetic, or theses, are propositions and refer to that which is perceived as real, rational. The non-thetic, on the contrary, lacks a thesis, a language to speak, and it is perceived as unreal, irrational. Non-thetic texts, therefore, cannot exist. But, as Jackson argues, literary fantasies attempt to belong to the realm of the non-thetic. The narrative of the fantastic "is situated *between* the thetic and the non-thetic, positioned within the first and pushing (back) towards the second" (Jackson 1988: 76). Kristeva makes specific reference to the thetic, a term she applies to the two strategic moments in the infant's life: the Lacanian mirror-stage and the later moment, the Law of the Father. Feminist literary critics deriving their critical analyses from Lacanian psychoanalysis speak in terms similar to Bessi re's and Jackson's of * criture feminine*, a writing that is also within culture but which attempts to go back to a pre-linguistic state. It is also a decerebralised writing seeking to bring to the surface that which was once forgotten and repressed. In this push towards the non-thetic or towards the writing of the body the writer has to be careful enough just to take the

by the breaking of semantic structures, that is, by dissolving the order that governs language. Very often, absurd propositions are stated as sensible ones: "I don't like walking on hot days. I don't mind swimming or flying or sleeping or even drinking. But I don't like walking" (1989a: 80). To fly is incorporated as a human activity together with walking, swimming or sleeping. Thus, this semantic impossibility is assumed to be possible.

Furthermore, Carrington's texts, as "The Skeleton's Holiday" proves, are rooted in the same fundamental principle that, according to Cixous, characterises feminine writing, "an inexhaustible source of humour" (in Sellers 1994: 59). Humour is the keynote of "The Skeleton's Holiday". The comic note works in two ways: stylistically speaking, humour marks the shift in tone, therefore bringing about the anti-climax; thematically speaking, humour provides the topics, the jokes, and determines the choice of lexicon. In both areas, however, humour works as a disturbance. Its aim is to celebrate, as Cixous puts it, "life in the face of death". Laughter neutralises the fear of death. When the skeleton faces death, Carrington, the writer, is in the abyss. And there and then, the writer, as Cixous proposes: "will heartily laugh" (in Sellers 1994: 61). "The Skeleton's Holiday" is structured around anti-climax and humour and it aims at dissolving traditional linguistic and literary conventions. The humour clashes against the pain. Above all, by taking her female body off, Carrington is aiming at getting out, even getting out of life itself.

### **Endings: "Pigeon, Fly!" and "The Skeleton's Holiday"**

The stories examined in the previous two sections, "Pigeon, Fly!" and "The Skeleton's Holiday", stand as examples of Carrington's competence in moving between two different types of writing. This section looks at the endings of these two stories, their similarities, their differences and their aims. "Pigeon, Fly!" is a story closer to the fantastic, it is concerned with establishing a dialogue between "real" and "unreal", "self"

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writing to the tangent, the margin, in such a way that the text can still be understood and not reduced to 'absence' or an 'irrational babble'.

and "other", and its function is to show the problems of representing the "real". "The Skeleton's Holiday" is closer to the marvellous: it is concerned with showing that, for the writer, the foundations of the "real" have already been transgressed; it is a text written in the negative of the "real", thus attempting to place the writing beyond life, in "death". Both stories reject Christian beliefs and dogmas while worrying at them, and both highlight a drive towards mental otherness and metamorphic physical appearance. In addition, the metaphor "dreaming is dying" underlines both stories.

Written in the first person, the voice of "Pigeon, Fly!" is that of a female protagonist who, at the moment she puts her physical unity in doubt, starts moving painfully from life to death. Featuring a world from inside the real, Eleanor struggles to unravel the cultural system in which she is placed. By contrast, "The Skeleton's Holiday" is written in an indifferent and neutral third person narrative voice and the protagonist is an "it". Although "it" has no physical unity, that factor does not seem to concern the protagonist. The movement from life to death having taken place before the narration of the story, the skeleton is not faced with death: it is placed in death, featuring a world beyond the real. In fact, "The Skeleton's Holiday" parodies the fear of death.

The stories are very different in their imagery. "The Skeleton's Holiday" lacks the Gothic architecture and landscape, as well as the claustrophobic images of enclosures, displayed in "Pigeon, Fly!". Agathe's once-luxurious studio at the Airlines-Drues's mansion ("so sad in appearance that I felt a keen desire to turn round and go back home") is baroque and dusty: "the embroidered silk draperies were now torn ... the delicately carved furniture broken" (1989b: 25), giving the room "a fossilized look" (1989b: 25). In fact, Agathe's studio is the exact opposite of the skeleton's home, where "the ceiling was the sky, the floor the earth" (1989b: 16). The word Carrington uses for the skeleton's accommodation is "lodging" (1989b: 16), a word that not only means personal accommodation but also implies temporary accommodation, and it is a sarcastic designation for a place that should last an eternity. The mausoleum-like description of Eleanor's supposedly temporary accommodation at Agathe's studio (the ornaments scattered around "like the skeletons of other things") contrasts with the skeleton's "transparent monument" (1989b: 16).

"Pigeon, Fly!" shows fear at the ambiguous nature of bodies, objects and language. Agathe writes in her diary that she is growing hazy, and that when she looks at herself in the mirror: "*I can see the objects in the room behind me through my body*" (1989b: 27). Simultaneous to her slow vanishing, Agathe observes nervously how the inanimate objects in her room become alive and "*many chairs have already got leaves, small, fragile leaves of a tender green*" (1989b: 27-8).<sup>4</sup> Objects escape Agathe. Words elude her. She tries to paint a self portrait but she cannot see herself. The evasiveness is all permeating and she complains: "I elude myself" (1989b: 27). She eludes herself because she perceives herself as a model, a muse, no longer an individual. Images for Woman as Beauty, Agathe and Eleanor are two-dimensional representations.

The impression these texts produce is of inconclusiveness. Although I shall qualify the endings of these two stories as different in nature, they are similar in that neither offers a definitive resolution. This is so because dreams, due to their insubstantial nature, cannot have an end forced upon them. Cixous believes that:

Dreams remind us that there is a treasure locked away somewhere, and writing is the means to try and approach the treasure. And as we know, the treasure is in the searching, not the finding. (Cixous 1993: 88)

Painting Agathe's portrait, Eleanor, like Oscar Wilde's Basil Hallward (Wilde 1992: 6), reveals herself on the painted canvas. Reading Agathe's diary, Eleanor has discovered that, since they are the same person ("today is my birthday, and of course yours too"), her fate is to vanish just as Agathe did. "Pigeon, Fly!" ends at the point when Agathe's diary "suddenly stopped", and Eleanor does not dare to look at herself in the mirror. The story ends with the following passage:

I turned to her portrait: the canvas was empty, I didn't dare to look for my face in the mirror. I knew what I would see: my hands were so cold! (1989b: 29)

Agathe "suddenly" disappears and Eleanor is to follow her shortly. The story ends before Eleanor vanishes simply because she is the narrator and there cannot be narration once the narrator has died. Moreover, this story is told in the form of a dream, and in dreams, although the dreamer may know that s/he is about to die s/he very rarely

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<sup>4</sup> Remedios Varo used this idea for her painting *Mimesis*, see Figure Nine and Chapter Seven.

actually dies in the dream: the dreamer tends to wake up. The ending in "Pigeon, Fly!" is a suspension. Cixous explains this in relation to dreaming and writing in the following way:

We always have the belief and the illusion that we are the ones writing, that we are the ones dreaming. Clearly, this isn't true. We are not having the dream, the dream has us, carries us, and, at a given moment, it drops us, even if the dream is in the author in the way the text is assumed to be. (Cixous 1993: 98)

With that uncertainty Carrington's texts drop the reader as if this were in a dream and s/he had suddenly awakened. That is the reason why the endings may be experienced by the reader as unsatisfying. Their apparently premature termination leaves us without a sense of order or of place.

There are several factors making the ending in "The Skeleton's Holiday" unrealisable. Firstly, the circumstances in which the text was produced mean that it has to have an open ending, since, as part of a collaborative novel, it is one sequence in a chain of texts. Secondly, since it is structured upon contradiction and impossibility it cannot offer a conclusive ending. The ending is as impossible (absurd) as the text. Finally, because the whole intention of the text is to produce a satirical effect, the text frustrates the reader's anticipation (forged by habit to traditional plots), thus ending the reading without discovering where or how or from what the holiday of the skeleton took place.

In contrast with that which a reader expects, the writing of dreamlike texts is fluid, and unconfined within the traditional parameters of the narrative line. In these dream-texts Carrington explores her own nightmares and attempts to come close to her own body, to the "other", or her unconscious self. Realistic parameters of time and space are, therefore, transgressed. These two stories, then, treat the same topic which could be summarised as "dreaming is having access to other worlds and, therefore, learning about death". They rely heavily on the participation of the reader. If the reader did not build expectations there would be no anti-climax; without the reader's fears, there would be no humour. However, the greatest collaboration Carrington expects from the reader is in the endings. Both texts are endless since both bestow on the reader the continuation of the story. "The Skeleton's Holiday" is born out of co-operation and, as it has been

already shown, addresses to the reader (who hence becomes the writer) the last sentence that will inspire the continuation of the story. The narrative structure of "Pigeon, Fly!" involves the reader as well. Agathe is a painter, who dies in the process of creating. Eleanor, who reads Agathe's diary, is an artist as well and dies in the process of painting and writing the story of Agathe. The reader (if willing to engage in the game) is, thus, subtly invited to write about Eleanor, the empty canvas, Célestin's hands and herself. However, she might be the next one to die, and so on, *ad infinitum*. The text is passed on - and so is death. The text's ending is another text's beginning.

**PART TWO**  
**DEADLY NIGHTMARES INHABITED**

*I think life is very frightening and I think  
that I'm very frightened of death  
and I think most people are.*  
*Leonora Carrington, Omnibus programme, 1992*

## Chapter Four The Personal and the Historical

### The history of "Down Below"

The story of Carrington's descent into the underworld of madness and subsequent recovery from it has undergone several stages, from oral to written, and from French to English and vice versa. Marina Warner (1989a: 16-17) reports that Carrington initially wrote a version in English while living in New York. She showed it to Janet Flanner, an American publisher, who returned it to her as being not worth publishing. This English version was lost when Carrington moved to Mexico. Encouraged by Pierre Mabilie, a surgeon related to the Surrealist movement,<sup>1</sup> Carrington wrote the present version in August 1943, while she and other refugees were camping at the Russian Embassy in Mexico City. She later told it, in French, to Mabilie's wife. The first version of "Down Below", published in French, is based on that account.

From the French version Victor Llona made the translation for publication in the American journal *VVV*,<sup>2</sup> in the February 1944 issue. Both the French transcript and the translation by Victor Llona were used as the basis for the text published by Virago (1989), which was revised for factual accuracy by Leonora Carrington herself in 1987. The Virago edition includes a postscript from a 1987 interview between Carrington and Marina Warner.<sup>3</sup>

This pilgrimage from oral to written and between French and English versions makes it possible to identify the text as being in itself a metaphor for the events narrated. If the history of the processes of writing, publishing and translating the text is long and intricate, the history of the story itself presents a blending of years: on the one hand, the present time, August 1943, when a mortified Carrington is trying to come to

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Mabilie was a student of Jewish mysticism. Carrington was familiar with his books before writing "Down Below". She quoted a passage from *Le Miroir du merveilleux* (1940) in her first version although she deleted it for the revised text. She had also read *La Conscience lumineuse* (1937), and after writing "Down Below", she read *Initiation à la connaissance de l'homme* (1949).

<sup>2</sup> Edited by the sculptor David Hare, the periodical *VVV* (together with *View*) was one of the publications that included the writings of the Surrealists in exile.

<sup>3</sup> The text appeared in its first Spanish translation (Mexico, 1948), as *Abajo*, published (in two parts) in the periodical *Las Moradas*.



terms with her past; on the other hand, the time of that past, 1940, when the events that are being remembered occurred. The text is organised around five headings, each presenting a different date. According to those headings, Carrington wrote "Down Below" in one five-day period from Monday 23 August to Friday 27 August, 1943.<sup>4</sup> Within this skeleton Carrington transports herself and the reader to 1940:

Monday, August 23, 1943

Exactly three years ago, I was interned in Dr. Morales's sanatorium in Santander, Spain, Dr. Pardo, of Madrid, and the British Consul having pronounced me incurably insane. (1989a: 163)

Each time in the following first two sections (days) Carrington resumes writing, she is unsure of the usefulness of what she is doing and her present irrupts into the narration of the past; conversely, the past disturbs her present, too:

Wednesday, August 25, 1943

I have been writing for three days, though I had expected to deliver myself in a few hours; this is painful, because I am living this period all over again, and sleeping badly, troubled and anxious as I am about the usefulness of what I am doing. (1989a: 185)

It is a painstaking exercise because, as Winterson writes:

What the writer knows has to be put away from her as though she has never known it, so that it is recalled vividly, with the shock of memory after concussion. (Winterson 1995: 57)

Carrington "disguised" her mental breakdown under the appearance of a journey, both for poetic and for personal reasons of survival. It should not be assumed that I believe that Carrington herself considered her mental breakdown to be a necessary phase in her personal and artistic development. However, when bringing herself to narrate the story, the "reality" of the content was too poignant and too painful for her to bear. To make it more tolerable, she masked it behind the façade of a journey of self discovery. This deceit is inevitable, for, as Winterson writes: "not only are the writer's emotions returned and recharged: they are re-drawn" (Winterson 1995: 57). It is the cathartic quality of the writing that allows the past to irrupt, whilst the writer consciously manipulates and interferes with the events of 1940 as part of her healing process.

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<sup>4</sup> In the publication of the text in French, the year appears as "194".

Conflict is, once more, at the centre of the text. Carrington understands that she cannot remain faithful to her experiences; she is aware that she manipulates all those events just by writing them down and, indeed, "healing" only comes about because the writing of it is manipulative; otherwise, the memory would remain unchanged. At the same time, because of the healing nature of the writing process, she needs to be accurate with dates and episodes. She makes a tremendous effort to recount, in a more or less linear fashion, the events that took her from Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche to Madrid. However, when she narrates the awakening from the coma (induced by a triple injection of Luminal<sup>5</sup> and systemic anaesthesia given by Dr Pardo at Madrid), Carrington no longer provides dates:

I now must resume my story at the moment I came out of the anaesthesia (sometime between the nineteenth and the twenty-fifth of August 1940). (1989a: 177)

From this point onwards the reader follows the narrative with no more temporal markers (except for two occasional references to the autumn: "a heap of dead leaves" and the "manuring of the neighbouring fields"). In 1987 Carrington stated that she had left the sanatorium by the end of December: the chronological time of "Down Below" stops in August 1940, from whence the narrative shifts into a timeless sequence.

Because of the "unconscious" nature of the experiences, the mobile history of the different texts she wrote, and because she is aware of the impossibility of transcribing into writing autobiographical facts, Carrington acknowledges at a certain point: "I am afraid I am going to drift into fiction" (1989a: 175). The line between autobiography and fiction in "Down Below" is a very fine one (indeed, that "all autobiography is fiction" is a truism within contemporary criticism). Paradoxically, however, "Down Below" can be said to be an extremely accurate historical document. This chapter approaches the

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<sup>5</sup> Luminal is a barbiturate that was mainly used for its anti-epileptic properties and in the treatment of anxiety (Goodman and Gilman 1985: 351). Many female protagonists of women's novels during the interwar period had kept Luminal by their bedside, as is the case with Sasha in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) (Rhys 1970: 178). The list of the adverse effects of Luminal includes mood changes, impairment of cognition and memory, and mental depression. Excessive dosage (as being given Luminal three times, in Carrington's case) may result in coma and death. Indeed, Carrington wrote that after having been given the drug she "was handed over like a cadaver to Dr. Morales, in Santander" (1989a: 175).

narrative as a historical text, and Chapter Five looks at the way Carrington "translates" autobiography into art, "a problem that each artist solves for themselves" (Winterson 1995: 106).

Most critics of Carrington have commented on "Down Below" and this has resulted in a wide variety of interpretations. In her first study, "Surrealism and Women" (1975), Orenstein focuses on the image of the egg which, she claims, represents the female part of the androgyne, while in Carrington's other stories the horse represents the male part. Orenstein concludes that "Down Below" was one of Carrington's multiple attempts to reach "the androgynous totality ... also connected with a new kind of knowledge" (Orenstein 1975: 132). Later, in an essay entitled "Leonora Carrington's Visionary Art for the New Age" (1977), she develops further the idea of the egg as an image for the feminine. She reads "Down Below" as a document written by a "visionary" artist who identifies herself with the tradition of the Great Goddess. Carrington aims, she argues, "to restore to its rightful place a female power and feminine wisdom" (Orenstein 1977: 68). Finally, in an essay called "Journey to Madness and Back" (1982), she claims that the experience of madness did not result for Carrington in a *breakdown* but a *breakthrough* to a different psychic realm. To me, the "breakthrough" seems less obviously so by the end of the narrative when Carrington demystifies her experience. The "*merveilleux*" experience of madness sought by the Surrealists is barely validated in "Down Below", where Carrington provides a pitiless though hair-raising account of her experience which leaves her, as she acknowledges, an utterly different being: "'After the experience of *Down Below*, I changed. Dramatically. It was very much like having been dead'" (in Warner 1989a: 18).

Renée Riese Hubert, for her part, understands "Down Below" as a transitory stage in Carrington's life and artistic development. Her essay "Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst: Artistic Partnership and Feminist Liberation" (1991) explores Carrington's early work as the result of the partnership with Ernst. Carrington's subsequent "Mexican Period" is said to be substantially more artistically independent:

Surprisingly, we find only minimal reference to Max Ernst in *Down Below*, either in recollection or in sorrow ... Whatever reconciliation may take place

between Carrington and the world, whatever identity may generate and energize her writings, they will belong to her and bear her name alone. (Hubert 1991: 727)

Hubert, consequently, sees both the narrative and the actual mental breakdown as a "passage" in Carrington's artistic development. Other critics, such as Cottenet-Hage (1990) and Assa (1991) refer to those passages where Carrington "purifies" and "mortifies" her body in order to purify and redeem the world. They both refer to the body imagery of "Down Below" as a transformation that opens the self to the outside world. Finally, in her book *Automatic Woman*, Conley sets out to propose a "fresh view of surrealism": "I argue that it was not unremittingly misogynist, as has sometimes been suggested in the last twenty years of criticism" (Conley 1996: 3). She devotes one chapter to Carrington's "Terrible Journey" and despite its many enlightening propositions, her conclusions betray the spirit of her book:

In *En Bas* we witness the extreme process by which Carrington attempted to void herself of an identity that had become too painful - as Max Ernst's abandoned lover - and then sought to construct a new one, as Europe's saviour, which failed. (Conley 1996: 72)

Conley sets out to see what there is for women in Surrealism: "Clearly there is something for women in surrealism. This book is one answer to just what that 'something' might be" (Conley 1996: 4). However, she concludes that Carrington's madness was prompted by the abandonment of Ernst and she does not question why Carrington would need to reject a role and impose on herself another also doomed to failure. Ultimately, she seems to be concluding that Surrealism could offer nothing to Carrington.

However, I agree with the arguments that some of these critics put forward. For her personal survival, Carrington had to consider her mental breakdown to have been a positive experience and, above all, she felt she had to tell the story. While I agree that her journey into madness and back supposed a renewal in her personal and artistic creation, I contend that the writing of this experience fulfilled an even more important function. Elizabeth Bruss, when alluding to the significance of the illocutionary function of the autobiographical text, notes the importance of one of the purposes it serves; it not only acts as self-discovery but also helps in correcting or even destroying the conception

of the self that had been imposed by external media (Bruss 1976). I consider that "Down Below" succeeds for Carrington in this specific purpose: it did indeed lead to poetic re-birth but, above all, it served to eradicate the claustrophobic personae imposed upon her: the "good girl" the Carringtons had expected their daughter would become, and the "inspiring muse" of her lover Max Ernst.

### **Leonora: the battlefield**

A few months before writing "Down Below", in the homage story "The Bird Superior, Max Ernst" (1942) Carrington had provided, in just over thirty words, the reason for her mental breakdown:

A still quiet pulse from the petrified world outside becomes audible like distant drums. The birds and the beasts tramp their feet to the rhythm and small earthquakes ripple under the hide of the earth. (1942: 13)

The world is paralysed by fright and yet its pulse is calling to war ("distant drums"). Ernst ("birds") and Carrington ("beasts") set off on a wandering journey walking heavily to the rhythm of war. The surface of the earth vibrates when bombs fall ("small earthquakes ripple under the hide of the earth"): the Second World War has broken out. This is the reason for Carrington's subsequent "abnormal" behaviour as well as Ernst's imprisonment.

Both in "The Bird Superior, Max Ernst" (1942) and in "Down Below" (1943) Carrington connects the outbreak of the war with her break with reality. In 1991 she referred to her breakdown as "war psychosis" (De Angelis 1991). Moreover, Dr Morales, when asked what was, in his opinion, the cause for Carrington's crisis, answered that for him Carrington's crisis was clearly caused by the historical events of 1940: "the 'schizophrenic condition' she suffered is linked to that historical period" (Appendix I). Asked about Carrington's psychological state when she arrived at Santander, Dr Morales answered:

Leonora Carrington came to us with catatonic schizophrenia diagnosed by various doctors. But, this was only a reaction. Everybody thought she was demented, I didn't. (Appendix I)

Despite all these opinions, of Dr Morales and of Carrington herself, some critics, such as Patrick Waldberg, Ernst's biographer, choose the simplest option:

Ils avaient ordre de le conduire au camp de Loriol, dans la Drôme. Ils lui passèrent les menottes. Léonora, muette et terrorisée, regardait faire. Max Ernst, en un éclair, vit chavirer son regard: la secousse émotive avait été trop forte. Elle perdait pied.

[They had orders to take him [Ernst] to the concentration camp of Loriol, at Drôme. They took him in handcuffs. Leonora, mute and terrified, observed their doings. Ernst, as in a revelation, saw her gaze fall: the shock to her emotions had been too strong. She was losing her footing.] (Waldberg 1958: 333, my translation)

Ernst's imprisonment remains for many the strongest cause of Carrington's break-down.<sup>6</sup> Although this may seem to be partly supported by Carrington's own account, her words do not present the event as the cause, but as a mere *temporal* marker:

*I begin therefore with the moment when Max was taken away to a concentration camp for the second time, under the escort of a gendarme who carried a rifle (May 1940).* (1989a: 164, my italics)

Carrington herself suggests the reason for her breakdown a few lines later in the text: "I had realised the injustice of society, I wanted first of all to cleanse myself, then go beyond its brutal ineptitude" (1989a: 164).

Carrington is taking the war on herself, her body is the site of confrontation and therefore the battlefield: "look at my face ... 'Don't you see that it is the exact representation of the world?'" (1989a: 173). Her inner anguish is a synonym for the world war and the unbalanced relationship between her mind and her body reflects the two contingent positions: "I hoped that my sorrow would be diminished by these spasms [vomiting], which tore at my stomach like earthquakes" (1989a: 164). The violence of the bombing is reflected in Leonora's body as if in a mirror: her stomach is "the centre of the universe". Carrington was terrified by the dead and the number of "people who had been killed by the Germans" (1989a: 167); she was terrified to find that the numbers of refugees were escalating rapidly and that it was increasingly difficult to escape (1989a:

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<sup>6</sup> As in the case of a literary character, Stephanie, the protagonist of Balzac's *Adieu* (1830), to lose sight of her lover precipitates the woman's loss of reason. Balzac's short story was studied in detail in Felman's ground-breaking essay "Women and Madness: The Critical ~~M~~allacy" (Felman 1989).

169-70). She decided in June 1940 to escape from Occupied France and cross the frontier into Spain.

A year before, on 1 April 1939, Franco had announced that the Spanish Civil War was over or, as he put it, that Spain had been "liberated" (he meant from the "Marxist hordes"). Franco intended to take part in the Second World War, only he tried to delay it as much as he could, if possible until the conflict was clearly ending. He was convinced the Allies would lose the war. Samuel Hoare, the British ambassador, arrived in Madrid "on a Special Mission" in June 1940. His job consisted of doing everything possible to prevent Spain from entering the war. One month after Hoare's arrival, in July 1940, Carrington arrived in Madrid. She also believed she had a mission: to "liberate" Madrid from Fascism and thus end the Second World War. Critics such as Conley often find that in "Down Below":

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between memories of events that may have actually taken place and memories of hallucinations ... while it tells a story that reads like the epitome of surrealistic unreality, it resonates with a sense of truly lived experience. (Conley 1996: 61)

If Carrington's text often reads as a historical document, it is because it is indeed a historical document (as well as a classic narrative of experiences of madness by women writers) comparable to Samuel Hoare's book *Ambassador on Special Mission* (1946) where he manages to portray the corrupt and terrifying dictatorship of Franco. Where Hoare writes that the British embassy in Madrid knew, through exceptional sources, that in June and July 1940 "French refugees were already crossing the Pyrenees in large numbers", Carrington herself had been trying to cross the border and she writes: "All of this was taking place in June and July, and the refugees were piling up" (1989a: 169-70). Hers is an exceptional first-hand document. Moreover, the parallels between Hoare's document (the memoirs of a political man) and Carrington's account of life in Spain provided in "Down Below" are extraordinarily similar, as regards the political and social atmosphere of Madrid. Their first-hand descriptions of life in Madrid during the summer of 1940 (when both Hoare and Carrington arrived) are historically valid, coming as they do from two otherwise rather dissimilar British citizens. Carrington's distress was worsened by Spain's post-war devastation. She identified so closely with

Spain, and with Madrid in particular, that Madrid's political confusion (1989a: 170) and sorrow (1989a: 171) became her own, and in the text she expresses the belief that the lacerated Spanish countryside is her kingdom:

I was quite overwhelmed by my entry into Spain: I thought it was my kingdom; that the red earth was the dried blood of the Civil War. (1989a: 170)

Franco was just beginning to elaborate a basic ideology: the dichotomy of "Spain" (Nationalists) as having triumphed over the "anti-Spain" (Republicans).

Historian Tuñón de Lara explains:

Se exalta la dicotomía considerando que el enemigo ... está al margen de la comunidad nacional. La funcionalidad "ideológica" de este pensamiento se comprueba al ver que los vencedores no consideraban españoles a los del otro bando, negándose así el principio de "guerra civil", sustituido por el de "liberación" y el de "cruzada".

[This dichotomy is exalted and it considers the enemy ... to be an outsider from the national community. The ideological function of such a manoeuvre is enforced by the fact that the victorious did not consider the defeated to be Spanish, thus the principle of "Civil War" being substituted by the principles of "liberation" or "crusade".] (Tuñón de Lara 1987: 437, my translation)

Fascist ideological mottos included expressions such as "empire", "unity of destiny in the universal" or "tradition", whilst the ideal Spaniard was presented in the dichotomy "mystic" (saint) or "warrior" (soldier). The ideological axis of the Francoist regime, created in the early 1940s, was what has been called "national-Catholicism":

nación y cultura se identificaban con catolicismo y tradición; todo lo que quedaba al margen de estos ... quedaba igualmente fuera de la nación, no tenía derecho a participar en los destinos políticos del país.

[nation and culture were identified with Catholicism and tradition; whatever lay at the margins of these ... was considered equally outside of the ideology of nation and could not claim a right to participate in the political destiny of the country.] (Tuñón de Lara 1987: 440, my translation)

In July Carrington crossed the frontier into Spain. Her first impression was that of an overwhelming sense of death and devastation, whilst she found herself in a state of nervous excitement:

I was choked by the dead, by their thick presence in that lacerated countryside. I was in a great state of exaltation ... convinced that we had to reach Madrid as speedily as possible. (1989a: 170)

Hoare wrote to Lord Halifax on 3 June 1940, a few days after arriving in Madrid:



First and foremost it must never be forgotten that I am working here in entirely abnormal conditions. The country is in a state of suppressed excitement, and the Germans and Italians are deeply entrenched in every department of the Government and in every walk of life. Our own prestige, as a result of the Civil War and of the comparatively small part that we have played since it, is very low. The day to day conditions of life are impossible. Food is very short and daily more expensive, ordinary life is dislocated and everyone is living on their nerves. (Hoare 1946: 30)

That first night in Madrid Carrington felt the importance of the city in the on-going war. She sensed the political confusion, and she believed Madrid to be a besieged city in need of restoration:

At the International we dined that first night on the roof; to be on a roof answered for me a profound need, for there I found myself in a euphoric state. In the political confusion and the torrid heat, I convinced myself that Madrid was the world's stomach and that I had been chosen for the task of restoring this digestive organ to health. (1989a: 170)

Since two-thirds of university teachers were in exile and the intellectuals had either died or fled during the war, culture and artistic expression was in the hands of those Spaniards in exile: whom the poet José Bergamín called "The Peregrine Spain". Within the Peninsula the only politics at work were "la más estricta censura y un cerrado dogmatismo" ["the utmost strict censorship and most rigorous dogmatism"] (Tuñón de Lara 1987: 438, my translation). Hoare wrote in this respect: "We have had no British papers since we arrived, and the Spanish press contains nothing more than monotonous repetitions of German propaganda" (Hoare 1946: 33). Nazi ideology was not only in the papers but in all walks of life. It seemed that Madrid was full of German and Italian soldiers, as Hoare testifies:

As the Embassy was either partially dismantled or largely occupied by the Chancery, we started life in the Ritz. The Madrid Ritz, though it looked like other members of its family, had at that time its distinctive peculiarities. It was, for instance, filled with very aggressive Germans. Gestapo agents listened to our conversations and hung around us at every turn. Our telephone was regularly tapped ... The atmosphere ... of enemy espionage could not be mistaken. (Hoare 1946: 22)

He describes the streets as "filled with soldiers, Falangist and police", and the roads, "heavily patrolled with guards of all kinds" (Hoare 1946: 33). He concludes that the atmosphere was that "of some impending *coup d'état*" (Hoare 1946: 33).

On her part, Carrington suspected everything and everyone. She illustrates the armed city by scattering soldiers, guards and policemen throughout her text: raped by Requeté officers (1989a: 170), picked up by a policeman (1989a: 171), brought back to the hotel by an officer of the Falange (1989a: 173). With all the effectiveness of its specific historical reference, Carrington's account gains strength when she aligns her own body with the battlefield in all conflicts, including in the war of the sexes. Earlier in the narrative Catherine had urged Leonora to leave France because:

For Catherine, the Germans meant rape. I was not afraid of that, I attached no importance to it. What caused panic to rise within me was the thought of robots, of thoughtless, fleshless beings. (1989a: 166)

A political event (in this case the systematic rape of women by the soldiers at war) is inwardly assimilated, inducing the protagonist to make personal the event. In this passage, physical rape is connected with another type of violation: the mental one. The soldiers, already brain-dead, are advancing, carrying with them the death of reason. After arriving in Madrid, according to the 1989 revised edition, the Requeté officers take her to a brothel: "and after tearing off my clothes raped me one after the other" (1989a: 172). The fact that the rapists were Requeté officers is eloquent, since they are the Spanish archetypal version of the deeply traditionalist Catholic Carlists: they were rejected by the extreme-right Falange as being "far too" extreme and monarchic. Their official name was Carlists, and Requeté was a popular nickname (actually an adjectival phrase meaning "Far-too-much"). Their motto was "God, Fatherland, King". Carrington comments no further on the rape except for the fact that she "spent the rest of the night taking cold baths" (1989a: 172). It is of great significance that this is one of the two differences between the English revised edition and the earlier French *En bas* (based on the 1943 account). Carrington omitted the rape when she first wrote the account:

me jeta sur le lit après avoir déchiré mes vêtements et *tenta de* me violer.  
[threw me on to the bed, and after tearing off my clothes *tried* to rape me.]  
(1973: 20, my italics)

In the French original text one official is involved in the "attempt", whereas in the revised English original text there are several and they actually do rape Leonora. If the rape scene is the narration of a factual event (since the text is so accurate, this

probably did occur), it may be that Carrington could only bring herself to write about it four decades later. If it is a literary strategy, it is very effective. She establishes an implicit metaphor that unveils the plot of her novel: the rape foreshadows a subsequent mental violation. The mental rape that doctors are about to attempt during Carrington's internment is not hinted at figuratively, but literally: Carrington is first physically raped and the reader, by then, starts suspecting another, later, rape. In Carrington's failed metaphor, the vehicle to hint at a forthcoming mental violation becomes, tragically, the tenor: a physical and actual rape.

Confronted with the destruction of war, she accuses the current political and economic systems of trapping people in "aimless labyrinths" (1989a: 173). Her subversiveness takes shape in the form of a "reverse world" where she confers on "bootblacks, café waiters, and passersby ... tremendous power" (1989a: 167). Astonished by the fact that the population in Europe is surrendering to the Germans she can find no other reason but that they are being hypnotised:

I was still convinced that it was Van Ghent who had hypnotized Madrid, its men and its traffic, he who turned the people into zombies and scattered anguish like pieces of poisoned candy in order to make slaves of all ... I stood .... horrified to see people in the Alameda go by who seemed to be made of wood. (1989a: 172)

Indeed, somewhere in the text Carrington uses the explicit term (of German origin) "to mesmer": "I believed that I had been mesmerised in Saint Martin-d'Ardèche and drawn to Santander by some mysterious power" (1989a: 200).<sup>7</sup>

The Second World War, then, sets the scene in historical terms for the text of "Down Below", a narrative the main concern of which is to relate the creation of art to war and patriarchy. In her private fight against conformism, fathers, doctors and dictators personify her enemy, and also the enemy of mankind: they immobilized "the cogs of the human machinery" (1989a: 198); they kept "the world in anguish, war, want, and ignorance" (1989a: 198). Showalter identifies this battle in many narrations of experiences of madness written by women:

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<sup>7</sup> To "mesmerise" owes its sense to the German-Swiss physician Mesmer (1733-1815) who induced in his patients "abnormal" states of their nervous system in order to control their wills.

These dramatized female plots ... demonstrated that the signs and symptoms of schizophrenia could be caused by the patient's unlivable situation in the home, as the parents ... contradicted and fought their daughter's efforts to achieve independence and autonomy. (Showalter 1987: 221)

Within "Down Below", "The Germans" become for Carrington a synonym for everything that is hostile to her: Fascism, patriarchy, doctors, family.<sup>8</sup> She makes the correlation categorical: "At that time I was as frightened of my family as of the Germans" (1989a: 213). Three conflicts intermingle in the narrative "Down Below": the Second World War, the war of the sexes and her fight against "the parents". For her, the attempt to end war in the world was intimately linked to her struggles against the conformism of the previous generation (who were partly responsible for the beginning of the war) intermingled, finally, with the ever-present war within sexual politics. Whether in the figure of a traditional parental image ("a hundred per cent Philistine" Carrington calls her father) or in the person of a lover who bases on her beauty the creation of his art (Max Ernst), what is certain is that Leonora first suffered and later rejected two very strict patterns of femininity: those of her parents and of the Surrealists.<sup>9</sup>

In England, in 1938, Virginia Woolf had written *Three Guineas*, a book that presented as its central, most revolutionary declaration, the idea that the despotism of the patriarchal establishment operated in the same way as European Fascism. Carrington in "Down Below" rendered the two (patriarchy and Fascism) inseparable. Inscribing popular songs to put into context the climate of Madrid in 1940 Carrington wrote:

Madrid was singing "*Los ojos verdes*" (The Green Eyes) ... Green eyes, the eyes of my brothers who would deliver me at last of my father. I was obsessed by two other songs: "*El barco velero*" (The Sailboat), which was to take me to the

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<sup>8</sup> Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway* [1925] (1976), Plath in *The Bell Jar* [1963] (1966) and Atwood in *Surfacing* [1972] (1992), also associate male dominators with the German Fascists.

<sup>9</sup> Through the description of the entrance into a state of madness, its diagnosis and treatment, the text achieves its purpose. Written in 1943, "Down Below" is prior to the publication of the "antipsychiatric" theories developed by Laing and Thomas Szasz in the 1950s and 1960s. They were two of the first psychiatrists to confer on mental insanity a social and political meaning. Carrington's text is a precursor of later "classic" women's narratives that conceptualise madness politically, such as Plath's *The Bell Jar* or Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water* (1961). Showalter, in her study *The Female Malady*, has pointed out that in this world of the mental asylum: "The doctors, the demons, and the fathers begin to sound alike; their voices merge in a chorus of condemnation" (Showalter 1987: 213).

Unknown, and "*Bei mir bist du schön*," which was sung in every language and which, I thought, was telling me to make peace on earth. (1989a: 176-7)

The three songs are charged with fabulous significance, the end of patriarchy and peace on earth are to be attained through her travel to the Unknown: madness. Nevertheless, Carrington is aware that madness can be a form of escapism, not a political tool. She believed Madrid to be a chained city, "the city it was my duty to liberate" (1989a: 172). She thought that the best solution was an accord between Spain and England:

I therefore called at the British Embassy and saw the Consul there ... I endeavoured to convince him that the World War was being waged hypnotically by a group of people - Hitler and Co." (1989a: 173)

The British consul telephoned a physician: "That day, my freedom came to an end. I was locked up in a hotel room, in the Ritz" (1989a: 174). A distinction needs to be made between her perception (which was extremely accurate) and her behaviour (demented and paranoid). Historians testify to that atmosphere of "dominators" and "dominated". Already in 1939, Franco's ideological project had started to take form: the population was clearly divided between "the victorious" (the dominant class) and the hungry and tired masses who, according to Tuñón de Lara, exhausted from a three-year war, acted expressionlessly in order not to provoke the tyranny of repression. The majority of the population, Tuñón de Lara writes, "adopted a conformist, indifferent or simply resigned attitude" (Tuñón de Lara 1987: 437). Thus, when Carrington refers to Spaniards as "the *zombies*" (1989a: 194) or as "people who seemed to be made of wood" (1989a: 172) she is being extremely perceptive. Her behaviour, however, walking naked, aiming for the roof of the building, convinced all around her that she was "raving mad". The British consul together with the medical profession and the influence of Carrington's father, Harold Carrington, played a crucial role in ensuring that Carrington lost her freedom.

The role played by Harold Carrington in the internment of his daughter was of the utmost importance and has remained largely unremarked. Even today, although critics acknowledge that "all the distortions of reality to which she testifies seem almost understandable [as] response to the madness being manifested in the world around her",

her acute depression and subsequent internalisation seem to be "clearly a result of the strain of loss" (Conley 1996: 62). Thus is her case analysed. However, Carrington implies repeatedly in "Down Below" that her internment was mostly due to the influence of "her father" and his contacts with ICI. After she had left them and moved to Paris, Carrington's family, according to Ernst's son, never ceased in their efforts to separate the two:

They had gone so far as to influence British authorities to issue a warrant for Max's arrest, on charges of exhibiting pornographic paintings in London while he was on his way there. It was only with the help of Roland Penrose that he escaped discovery by the police during what had to be a secret stay there. (Ernst 1984: 109)

With the outbreak of the war and using Carrington's outspoken "Surrealism" (for her parents, a synonym for "disobedience") as an excuse, Carrington's father rapidly took advantage of the situation to have her locked up. Carrington acknowledges that she managed to cross the frontier after sending "wire upon wire" to her father:

Finally a curé brought a very dirty piece of paper, coming from I know not what agent of my father's business connection, ICI (Imperial Chemicals), which should have allowed us to resume our journey. Twice already we had attempted to cross the Spanish border: the third attempt proved successful, thanks to the curé's bit of paper. (1989a: 170)

It was somehow through her father that she came to meet Van Ghent and his son in Madrid:

I met a Dutch man, Van Ghent, who was Jewish and somehow connected with the Nazi government, who had a son working for Imperial Chemicals, the English company. He showed me his passport, infested with Swastikas. More than ever I aspired to ridding myself of all social constraints. (1989a: 171)

Whenever Carrington refers to ICI, there are ambiguities: for example, in the above presentation of Van Ghent as a Jew connected with the Nazi government. The Public Records Office held records (now destroyed) of a Dutch Van Ghent involved in the occupation of Holland. His entry reads: "Van Ghent; Antipathy to Allies: Master Harbour at Curaçao". Carrington is obsessed with the idea that her father is controlling her through the company's employees: "when I read ... IMPERIAL CHEMICALS, I also read CHEMISTRY AND ALCHEMY, a secret telegram addressed to myself" (1989a: 175-6). She is continually aware of "the power of Papa Carrington and his millions"

which was "represented in Madrid by the ICI" (1989a: 174). Using his contacts with ICI (the company of which he was a major share-holder) in Madrid, it seems that Harold Carrington carefully arranged for Leonora to be diagnosed as mentally ill and thus committed. That her father greatly influenced her experiences in Spain is hinted by Carrington herself in "Down Below":

I called everyday on the head of the ICI in Madrid ... I came to enlighten him on politics and denounced him, pellmell with Papa Carrington and Van Ghent, as being petty, very petty, and pretty ignoble ... I soon found myself a prisoner in a sanatorium full of nuns. (1989a: 174-5)

Ultimately, it was through her father's connection with Van Ghent and with the head of ICI in Madrid that a Dr Pardo was summoned. Carrington was taken to a mental institution in Santander:

the head of the ICI told me that Pardo and Alberto would take me to a beach at San Sebastián, where I would be absolutely free ... I was handed over like a cadaver to Dr. Morales, in Santander. (1989a: 175)

It is distressing that, even to this day, Carrington is fearful of the power wielded by her father and the representatives of ICI. In this respect, in 1987 she provided two highly significant pieces of information. Firstly, one of the two major changes she made when revising the present edition of the text was to delete the name of the head of ICI in Madrid, Gilliland (that had appeared in the 1943 version), whilst all other (real) names remained unchanged and undeleted. Secondly, in her conversation with Warner, Carrington showed herself reluctant to name or expound on the people who had imprisoned her: "It is sort of tricky to talk about this period, because Imperial Chemicals were really up to all kinds of things" (1989a: 211). Her comments were confirmed to me by Dr Morales himself who, to my question "How did you become Carrington's doctor?", answered:

I didn't intervene, they made me intervene. The war seemed to be ending but nobody was clear which side would win, whether the allies or the Germans. I was then very young and a gentleman contacted me. That was suspicious, my practice has been very important since, but at the time I had barely any experience. I think they believed that because I was young I would be easily manipulated. (Appendix I)

The same ambiguity verging on fear shown by Carrington towards ICI's politics seems to be hinted at by Dr Morales in the passage above; he began answering with a political statement about the war and by establishing the fact that nobody knew who would win. He did not explain to me who "they" were who wanted to manipulate him, although "the gentleman" who contacted him seemed to be Gilliland, the head of ICI in Madrid. The Public Records Office also kept records of an investigation into the head of ICI at Madrid in 1941: "Imperial Chemicals Industries; Abuse of Foreign Office facilities by representative at Madrid". The Public Records Office has also held accounts of ICI supplying copper sulphate to Spain and manufacturing explosives in Spain in 1940, at the time when Franco was preparing the country to join the war. All these ambiguities, together with Carrington's comment that "Imperial Chemicals were really up to all kinds of things", hint at the fact that ICI's politics were ambiguous to say the least, and that they did not conceal a certain degree of sympathy towards Fascism.

Not only did Carrington's parents influence the authorities to lock her up, but their attitude towards her remained a self-righteous one. They sent her Nanny to Santander: "she was sent to me by my hostile parents, and ... her intention was to take me back to them" (1989a: 201). Dr Morales, on releasing her, advised her not to return to them. "Selfishly perturbed" Edward James<sup>10</sup> calls Carrington's parents when he narrates that she was discharged from the asylum "against the wishes of some of her selfishly perturbed English connections" (James 1976: 13). Carrington herself complained to Warner:

One would have thought they would have come themselves to Santander. But you know, they didn't. Nanny was sent. You can imagine how much Spanish Nanny talked. It's a wonder she ever got there. (1989a: 214)

She was wrongly interned and treated as Dr Morales' article "La enfermedad de Leonora" ["Leonora's illness"] explains. In this article published in *El Pais*, he throws doubt on the fact that Carrington could be considered a mentally ill person, by using

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<sup>10</sup> Carrington met Edward James in 1944. James, the rich English eccentric (said to be an illegitimate grandson of Edward VII) and patron of Surrealism, became the most important collector of her work. James also introduced her to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.



italics for the word "patient" (Morales 1993: 37). In the interview I conducted in December 1995 he was even more explicit:

Well, my first diagnosis was that she wasn't a mentally ill person, she is not now and she has never been. I maintained my assessment firmly and that surprised many people: I said it was "symptomatic" madness. For me Leonora provided an extraordinary lesson. Because of my views about her I was considered disturbed myself: Leonora Carrington changed my mode of thought regarding mental illnesses. (Appendix I)

Once at the mental asylum, Carrington was told that she was not there for treatment but for a "rest cure":

I walked along the corridor without attempting to open the door with the opaque glass panels, and reached a small square hall with windows closely corseted with iron bars. I thought: A funny rest place! These bars are here to prevent me from going out. (1989a: 179)

It might be argued that Carrington did seem to be suffering different kinds of delusions, such as those of grandeur, "I thought at the time that I was [Queen Elizabeth's] reincarnation" (1989a: 202); of being observed, "I was examining the windows attentively, for I wanted to make sure that no microphones had been attached to them" (1989a: 205); and of being manipulated, "At that moment I noticed Frau Asegurado standing behind me; she felt to me like a *vacuum cleaner* ... I begged her to leave my brain alone, demanded the freedom of my own will" (1989a: 205-6). A final type of delusion could be identified as one of clairvoyance:

I was happy and lucid, I was saying, among other things: "I can do anything, thanks to Knowledge" ... I also said: "Outside this garden, so green and so fertile, there is an arid landscape; to the left, a mountain on top of which stands a Druidic temple." (1989a: 184)

However, the report by the psychiatrist who treated her contains many conditional statements, and he affirms twice that Carrington's "illness" was caused by her own marginal attitude to the world, her behaviour being merely a Surrealist affirmation. Morales also stresses in his article that whilst "only three sessions were enough to cure her", the actual reason for her internment was related to other people's interests:

Médicos de prestigio, abogados, hombres de negocios y diplomáticos, por su anormal conducta, nos la confiaron para que Leonora recuperase un buen y bien vivir.

[Due to her abnormal behaviour, prestigious doctors, lawyers, businessmen and diplomats confided her to us so that she could regain a good, healthy way of life.] (Morales 1993: 37)

In the 1995 interview I conducted, Dr Morales was very explicit as to the role Carrington's family played in her internment:

her family took advantage of Ernst's incarceration to separate her from the German. To this end, they were prepared to do anything and they had influences that were often invisible. (Appendix I)

But the doctors had lied to her. She was incarcerated not only for a rest cure, but also for treatment. Of the first session of Cardiazol, Carrington wrote:

A new era began with the most terrible and blackest day in my life. How can I write this when I'm afraid to think about it? I am in terrible anguish, yet I cannot continue living alone with such a memory ... I know that once I have written it down, I shall be delivered. But shall I be able to express with mere words the horror of that day? (1989a: 191)

It seems that the treatment was far too excessive for an individual suffering just "symptomatic" madness. She was given three injections of Cardiazol, which is a convulsant stimulant (exemplified by pentylenetetrazol) - often called a medullary stimulant - since administering it culminates in convulsions. The effects of doses of Cardiazol only slightly larger than those required to stimulate depressed respiration:

cause convulsions comparable to grand mal seizure. The convulsions can still be precipitated in animals after decerebration. Awakening and spinal cord stimulation appear only with larger doses. Hypo<sup>o</sup>themia and cardiac arrhythmias are important toxic effects. (Meyers 1968: 310)

Carrington was given three injections of Cardiazol, in doses intended to create maximum brain stimulation, described in pharmacological terms in the following way:

This convulsion resembles that produced by electrical stimulation of the brain with current of just threshold intensity ... clonic movements are observed. This phase is usually superseded by a tonic convulsion; such a convulsion resembles that produced by maximal brain stimulation in that the movements of the limbs consist in flexion followed by extension. (Goodman and Gilman 1985: 585)

Carrington describes the effects of the first injection in the following way:

Don Luis's eyes were tearing my brain apart and I was sinking down into a well ... very far ... The bottom of that well was the stopping of my mind for all eternity in the essence of utter anguish.

With a convulsion of my vital center, I came up to the surface so quickly I had vertigo ... "I am growing. I am growing" ... And I would sink again into panic. (1989a: 191-2)

Tonic-clonic seizures, or *grand mal* epileptic seizures, consist of major convulsions and maximal tonic spasms of all the body's muscles (all muscles stretch and contract violently and unvoluntarily), followed by synchronous clonic jerking (regular, milder, movements repeated at equal intervals of time). Patients do not come back to a normal state but to a prolonged depression of all central functions. They cannot move, they cannot feel anything except that they are about to die (what most patients describe as a "sensation of imminent death"). Carrington ends her description:

Have you an idea now of what the Great Epileptic Ailment is like? It's what Cardiazol induces ... I was convulsed, pitifully hideous, I grimaced and my grimaces were repeated all over my body. (1989a: 192)

For several days after she endured "the terrible downfall induced by Cardiazol" (1989a: 194). Although widely used in the past, "no established use for these drugs remains" (Meyers 1968: 310). Because the convulsions caused in the patients were comparable to *grand mal* seizures and because "post convulsant depression is disastrous" (Meyers 1968: 310) this drug has remained only of historical interest, for its use in convulsant therapy before ECT. I asked Dr Morales about the treatment:

I used Cardiazol as a chemical substitute for electroshock. Cardiazol was an Austrian drug of Jewish origin that helped to let go. She needed to let go. I used it medically as a treatment for the creative Leonora. Art, if it is not properly channelled provokes all types of illnesses: respiratory, intestinal or mental. In the case of Leonora Carrington it was symptomatic schizophrenia. (Appendix I)

Yet again, in 1995, Dr Morales was using ambiguous terminology. I wondered if he had explained to Carrington that "Cardiazol was an Austrian drug of Jewish origin": if she was suffering from war psychosis the explanation could not have been very reassuring. Indeed, in "Down Below", Carrington complains that doctors "took pleasure" in "deepening the mysteries" that surrounded her. She writes that "a sentence" was passed on her and she was "sent" to Santander like any other war prisoner. "Down Below" is thus presented as an allegory, her sufferings encompassing those of a collective: "I tried to understand where I was and why I was there. Was it a hospital or a concentration camp?" (1989a: 178). From this point onwards Carrington repeatedly

correlates her experience in the mental asylum with that of concentration camp prisoners. There, she was tortured and wounded: "*Armed with a syringe that she wielded like a sword*, Mercedes stuck a needle into my thigh" (1989a: 182, my italics). The violence of this passage is achieved through the references to war: the syringe is a weapon, and Mercedes held it like the sword that symbolises the dictators in their official photographs. The other inmates are not insane but are defeated prisoners of war (1989a: 186). Her belief that she is in a prison camp is further intensified by the staff's habit of speaking German when they do not want her to understand (1989a: 204). Carrington's allegory has its foundations in the attitude of Dr Morales and his staff. In the interview I conducted he often employed dated Francoist terminology and most of his statements were confusingly sprinkled with terms such as "race", "Catholicism" or "unitary sense":

I, in her treatment, employed the classical racial ideas of Christian Catholicism. Of course, I redirected them: I used charity and love. This is because I advocate the unitary knowledge of science. (Appendix I)

Carrington's description of her journey into Spain and her stay in Madrid proves to be largely biographically reliable. Although the linearly ordered time sequence of the text stops once she reaches the point of narrating her arrival at the mental institution in Santander ("I am afraid I am going to drift into fiction"), her description of her stay there, while devoid of dates, is also surprisingly accurate for an individual who was being continually drugged for over four months (she was at the institution from the end of August until the end of December 1940). My interview with Dr Morales confirmed that Carrington's text was extremely accurate. When I carried out my interview Dr Morales was recovering from a cerebral thrombosis that had occurred just weeks before my visit: his speech was difficult to understand and his mind often wandered. Yet he could remember with extraordinary clarity certain facts: he was surprised that I knew not only of his existence but the names of his father, Frau Asegurado, Mercedes, José and other members of the staff. Each time I asked him whether certain characters had really lived or been interned in the asylum or whether certain conversations had taken place, his surprise was total and he asked me how I acquired those facts. In each instance I

reminded him that I knew of them through Carrington's narrative (whilst mentally confirming their existence and myself marvelling at her acute memory). It is likely that she kept a diary: in the narrative she says she requested pen and paper and in the text she refers to "my notebook" (1989a: 204). It appears that the names given by Carrington to the different wards and pavilions of the institution were the names they bore in 1940. The cemetery outside the institution as part of a dream in the narrative was a well-known cemetery in Santander, popularly nicknamed *el cementerio de los ingleses* [the cemetery of the English]. When Carrington refers to the Sun Room, a place of peace and brightness, she is referring to the greenhouse. Down Below (Abajo), the place Carrington aspires to reach after the purification process, was the home of the Moraleses. Dr Morales also confirmed that there was a German nurse called Frau Asegurado (who had learned English in New York) and that several members of the aristocracy were also patients.

There was a passage in "Down Below" that had always fascinated me and I decided to ask Dr Morales about it:

My second ride was in a horse carriage. Don Luis took me to the undertaker's, in Santander, where he rented me a carriage pulled by a small black horse. A very small boy sat down next to me, to keep me company. I drove the horse very fast and finally attained what felt like a dizzy speed, while the excited child cried out: "Faster! Faster!" (1989a: 206)

Aware of the fantastic vision that this must have been to the inhabitants of Santander I secretly hoped that this was fact and not fantasy. Dr Morales answered:

As I was aware of the love that Leonora professed for horses, I asked an acquaintance of mine, Nereo, the only person in Santander who had horses then, if he would let Leonora ride: he was the undertaker and Leonora drove the undertaker's carriage. (Appendix I)

Dr Morales informed me that Hoare had pressed him to release Carrington: "Carrington came from a very influential family, you know. She was the niece of the last Viceroy of India." This fact surprised me for he even provided the name of Samuel Hoare as Carrington's uncle and as the last Viceroy of India. At first I wondered whether Carrington had been telling him the tall tales her mother used to tell; otherwise it might well have been due to the fact that he appeared deeply impressed with Carrington's

background as well as distressed by the influence of the Carringtons and the power of ICI over Leonora's life (and to some extent over his own life as well). I discovered that although the last Viceroy of India had been Mountbatten, Samuel Hoare had been Secretary of State for India during the 1930s (he was appointed in 1931) before he was appointed ambassador to Spain. Re-reading Carrington's 1987 postscript to "Down Below", the chain of events became clear:

I had a cousin in Santander, in the other hospital, the big, ordinary hospital. He was a doctor, Guillermo Gil, and I think he was related to the Bamfords, my grandmother's family in Cheshire. He was half English and half Spanish. It was a coincidence. He arrived, and they didn't want anyone to see me. But he was a doctor and he insisted, and so I had an interview with him, and he said, "I'd like you to have tea with me. They can't refuse." Which they couldn't. And we chatted, and at the end, he said, "I'm going to write to the ambassador in Madrid, and get you out." Which he did. They sent me to Madrid with Frau Asegurado, my keeper. (1989a: 210)

That the British ambassador, Samuel Hoare, played a part in helping Carrington's release from the sanatorium is implicit in his memoirs. Her case, like many others, had become part of his mission:

Escaped prisoners of war, refugees of many countries ... are not normally the concern of a diplomatic mission. In Madrid, their affairs occupied more of our time and thought than any other single question. (Hoare 1946: 226)

In all, between 1940 and 1944 Hoare and his staff helped 30,000 individuals to get safely out of Spain. Sadly, Carrington's case falls within the many stories of "distinguished individuals whom from time to time we helped through the country" and of whom "The details of their journeys cannot at present be disclosed ... Their stories would fill a volume" (Hoare 1946: 237-8). Records and correspondence of the help provided were, for a time, kept at the Public Records Office. There, in what is now called "the old card system", I found interesting entries, such as the one reading "Refugees (British): Procedures to Release Three British Refugees from Spanish Mental Institutions" (1940). Regrettably, all records have now been destroyed. There were other entries for Carrington herself, such as:

Carrington, Leonora, Miss. "Request for Spanish Visa in order to leave Andorra (France)" (1940).

Carrington, Leonora, Miss. "Refugee: Refusal of passage from Lisbon to UK" (1941).

Carrington herself refused passage to the UK because she was informed, by the head of ICI at Madrid (who "had reappeared"), that her family planned to take her to another sanatorium, this one in South Africa. Her father and his ICI contacts kept organising her life: she recalls "staying in a large, rather expensive hotel" in Madrid (1989a: 211) but she does not mention who was paying for it. Similarly she mentions that in the asylum there was a congenital idiot who, "Being a charity case", served as watchdog (1989a: 179). If she herself was not a charity case, we have to assume that her family paid the clinic and her hotel bills in Madrid. She was invited for lunch by the head of ICI and his wife at Madrid. He often took her out in the evening, on his own. One night he took her alone to a very expensive restaurant. He informed her about the South Africa project and then he added:

"I have another idea, personal, of course: I could give you a lovely apartment here, and I could see you very very often." And he grabbed my thigh. (1989a: 211)

It is revealing that South Africa was the choice. It could have been any other English-speaking African country, but her family chose a country that repressed elementary liberties and that was politically extreme right-wing. Her father definitely liked authority. Carrington took the decision between "going to bed with this appalling man" or being "shipped to South Africa" with her characteristic fascinating mixture of fact and magic:

We were about to leave the restaurant when there was a tremendous gust of wind and the metal sign of the restaurant fell just in front of me, at my feet. It could have killed me, and so I turned around to him, and said, "No. It's no." (1989a: 211)

I have contacted the ICI group on four occasions. They claim there appear to be no records in their files of Harold Carrington, Van Ghent or Gilliland, but they do not discard the possibility that there might be "something" on them.

Carrington gave her papers away in an attempt to avoid the trip: "but they seemed to turn up again. I was being shipped out. They were ashamed of me" (1989a: 212). Carrington confirmed that she was feeling perfectly sane: "I'd learned by then, You

[sic] don't fight with such people. You have to think more quickly than they" (1989a: 212). In Lisbon, before embarking on a ship for South Africa, she succeeded in escaping from her keeper and from a committee from ICI who watched her carefully (1989a: 212). She sought protection at the Mexican embassy, where she waited for a diplomat she had met first in Paris and later in Madrid: Renato Leduc. She says now that the Mexican ambassador was "wonderful" to her. He told her: "You're on Mexican territory. *Even the English* can't touch you" (1989a: 213, my emphasis).

In order for her to enter America she married Renato Leduc. Although Carrington's mother went to Mexico in 1946 when Carrington's son Pablo was born, Carrington concluded the interview with Warner with the following words:

we never talked about this time. It's the sort of thing English people of that generation didn't discuss ... I never saw my father again. (1989a: 214)

Writing "Down Below" helped to "get rid of the parents" quite literally; she never saw her father again and after 1942, when she moved to Mexico, never saw Max Ernst again. As she wrote to Parisot in 1943, the writing helped her "to try to empty myself of the images that had made me blind" ["je cherche de vider les images qui m'ont rendus aveugle"] (1973: 8). In her 1987 conversation with Warner she remarked that she had not been angry enough either with her family or with Ernst, because her drive to fulfil herself creatively did not allow her the time:

What is terrible is that one's anger is stifled. I never really got angry. I felt I didn't really have the time. I was tormented by the idea that I had to paint, and when I was away from Max and first with Renato, I painted immediately. (1989a: 214)

However, "Down Below" is an avowal of her anger. Maybe she was not as enraged as she felt she could be, but the accusations she voices in the text (against her father, against the war, and against the treatment in the institution) remain as testimony of her ire. Carrington told Warner that after the experience, she changed:

Dramatically. It was very much like having been dead ... I was no longer suffering in an ordinary human dimension. I was in another place, it was something quite different. Quite different. (in Warner 1989a: 18)

Carrington's experience, which she compares to that of "having been dead", had enormous implications for her writing and opened up a second moment in her literary



production. In 1943 she wrote: "Je cherche a connaître Le Mort pour avoir moins peur" ["I endeavour to understand Death in order to be less afraid"] and this is, I believe, the great theme that dominates the writing of "Down Below" and the short stories in the years immediately following.

## Chapter Five

### Madness and Death

#### "Down Below": Carrington's school of the dead

Carrington's experience of madness and, in particular, the feelings induced by its treatment (inertness, "sensation of imminent death") open up a second period in her literary career. In the argument that follows a parallelism between a desire for madness, literary experimentation and the Cixousian "desire for death" will be addressed. In *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* Hélène Cixous claims:

To begin (writing, living) we must have death. I like the dead, they are the doorkeepers who while closing one side "give" way to the other ... It's true that neither death nor the doorkeepers are enough to open the door. We must also have the courage, the desire, to approach, to go to the door. (Cixous 1993: 7)

Indeed, it has often been asserted that the ultimate piece of writing should be that which explores the mysteries that human reason cannot explain. In the words of critic Fanny Rubio:

La función del escritor, de la cultura, es anticipar o alumbrar esa cosa nueva que viene de camino, que está detrás de la puerta.  
[The writer's duty, culture's duty, is to anticipate or to illuminate everything new that is to come, whatever exists behind the door.] (Rubio 1993: 47, my translation)

This area, whether it be called madness, death or vacuum, has served as aesthetic inspiration for artists throughout the centuries. Significantly, the paradoxical impossibility of entering a state of death, or madness, and making of it a meaningful, writeable experience is what attracts artists and writers.

I maintain that an artist's madness does not necessarily signify an artistic or political breakthrough appreciable in the artist's work. Indeed, literal madness can be equated with artistic suicide. Cixous makes explicit that the desire to die (the desire to which critic and theorist are referring above) and the temptation towards suicide are two different notions:

I am not talking about suicide ... suicide is murder, suicide is aimed at someone or something, whereas the desire to die is not this at all - which is why we can't talk about it. (Cixous 1993: 33)

The temptation of suicide relates, according to Cixous, to a desire to disappear, whereas the desire to die is the metaphor she uses for the desire to know, for the desire to illuminate that which is a mystery: "When we climb up toward the bottom, we proceed carried in the direction of - we're searching for something: the unknown ..." (Cixous 1993: 6). The protagonist and narrator of "Down Below" desires to "die", but not in its literal sense. Indeed, she is very much afraid of death, both psychic and physical. It is against her death that she fights as "a tigress" (1989a: 193). Carrington, as an artist, was not looking forward to death as an act of suicide. Her madness is clearly not a search for actual death or bodily destruction but for knowledge. She does not want to die, to disappear, but "to understand".

Cixous and Carrington's desire to die is not directly related to Freud's "death drive" either. The death drive, for Freud, comprises all the psychic processes of the mind when this responds to the idea of bodily decay and human fatality. As he put it in "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death": "everyone owes nature a death and must expect to pay the debt" (Freud 1991: 77). For Freud, the death drive takes form in the individual's simultaneous fear of and attraction towards repetition and fragmentation, which the ego (in an act of survival) tries to control and overcome. Along the same lines as Freud, Unamuno described the sum and substance of humans as being entirely shaped by their desire to overcome death, as he wrote in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*.<sup>1</sup> One of the ways in which the acknowledgement of human fragmentation, decay and fatality translates into writing is in that which could be called a "Stoic" poetic disposition: the appraisal of death as the embodiment of life's only meaning. Deleuze quotes Joe Bousquet, who gives voice to this "Stoic" poetic statement:

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<sup>1</sup> Carrington read Unamuno's work at the Spanish asylum. She refers to him when she realised she was denied paper and pen. From Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who narrated a rest cure in *The Yellow Wallpaper* [1890] (1981), to Virginia Woolf, many women writers have been forbidden to read or write by their doctors as part of their "rest cure" treatment. In Coleman's *The Shutter of Snow*, the protagonist pleads with the medical staff: "Please give me the pencil? No. I need one very much I want to write a letter" (Coleman 1981: 19). Carrington valued greatly the few opportunities she had of obtaining pen and paper and on one occasion this difficulty is outspokenly remarked within the narrative: "I had had great difficulties obtaining pencil, paper, and permission to free my hands to draw" (1989a: 185). Moreover, Leonora designates as "her room" a little study-room, the only place she longs to go: "a rectangular room furnished with a writing desk and a small bookcase" (1989a: 202). Once in the room she chooses a book by Unamuno where was written: "God be thanked: we have pen and ink" (1989a: 202).

My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it ... To my inclination for death, which was a failure of the will, I will substitute a longing for death which would be the apotheosis of the will. (Bousquet in Boundas 1993: 78-9)

As Chadwick explains, Breton's *Nadja* was influenced by Freud's conception of the death drive. For Breton, triumphing over the conscious and attaining the marvellous is a victory over death:

*Nadja's* own mythology, revealed in her drawings and in the stories she tells Breton, centers around her search for a self-image that can triumph over her fear of death and psychological disintegration. (Chadwick 1985: 35)

Again, this attitude differs from Cixous' and Carrington's. They do not see death as the ultimate meaning of life but as a metaphor for enlightenment. The desire to die to which Cixous refers contains, however, some similarities to Lacan's reconceptualisation of the "death drive". In Lacan's last rethinking of the "death drive" he came to see that the Other is formed around a traumatic experience that individuals are incapable of abandoning:

Lacan argues that the subject is constituted from this paradox: objects with which infants identify were never possessed in the first place, and were always already radically lost. Yet, loss is at the heart of language, being, representations, desire and body, and thus the death drive - *jouissance* effects that coalesce around loss - is central to life. (Ragland-Sullivan in Wright 1992: 58)

In her theory of the writer's "desire to die" Cixous presents this idea of loss and of "buried" experience (she calls it "the scene of the crime") as the very centre of the writer's search. The writer "must unbury the burying, which is equivalent to bringing what has been repressed back to the surface of consciousness" (Cixous 1993: 44). For Carrington thinking and writing about death retains this sense of bringing back, of unburying. In the 1992 BBC programme *Omnibus*, when asked about her attitude to death, she expressly added a distinction to the use of the word "discovery" ("that which is known for the first time") by adding "uncovery" (the act of divesting of covering; of making known, of disclosing):

A lot of my journeys were running away, but in old age I feel I am beginning a journey, in a way ... death is of course inevitable. I see death as a way of discovery or of uncovery, because we really don't know anything about it, nothing. (*Omnibus* broadcast, November 1992)

Death, for Carrington, as for Cixous, epitomises the unknown, and since the dead are buried, and "they" know, the writer's search is downwards:

without it [truth] (without the word *truth*, without the mystery *truth*) there would be no writing. It is what writing *wants*. But it "(the truth)" is totally down below and a long way off ... Paradise is down below. (Cixous 1993: 6)

Down Below is the name of the pavilion where the protagonist of Carrington's text wants to go. Down Below (Abajo, as the pavilion is called in the Spanish asylum) is the name of the home of the Moraleses, yet Carrington's protagonist believes it is "Paradise", where she will attain "Absolute Knowledge":

I had heard about several pavilions; the largest one ... was called Abajo (Down Below), and people lived there very happily. To reach that paradise, it was necessary to resort to mysterious means which I believed were the divination of the Whole Truth. (1989a: 188)

In Down Below, the pavilion which the protagonist renames "the Earth, the Real World, Paradise, Eden, Jerusalem" (1989a: 195), the sensation of fragmentation or of multiple selves will be expressed. Carrington's writings and rewritings of "Down Below" point out the poetic effort of approaching that moment when she feels closer to "death". Carrington's protagonist goes back to that first scene that has ever after been continually repressed: "Memory races back to the birth of time" (1942: 13). According to Cixous this is writing's noblest function: "Writing ... is the attempt to unerase, to unearth, to find the primitive picture again, ours, the one that frightens us" (Cixous 1993: 9). It is in this primal scene, in "the birth of time" (1942: 13), where the protagonist realises without fear of destruction her multiplicity and fragmentation:

I felt that, through the agency of the Sun, I was an androgyne, the Moon, the Holy Ghost, a gipsy, an acrobat, Leonora Carrington and a woman. (1989a: 195)

This passage disregards the binary system that organises the traditional conception of death. Carrington challenges the prevailing dichotomy between life/death, the one that is commonly translated into being/non-being, by multiplying the possibilities of her existence. Death (as a metaphor for knowledge) is wedded not to permanence and immutability but to continuous movement and multiplicity. Making Leonora sane is the aim of the doctors and they inject her with Cardiazol in order to bring her back to sanity (to "life"); life (as a metaphor for "ignorance") is feared by the protagonist as an

"atrocious experience" paradoxically described in the same language in which traditional logocentrism describes death (as that which is permanent and immutable); thus her living body is described as characterised by "absence of motion, fixation, horrible reality" (1989a: 207).

She believes that the doctor's injection is intended to annul her multiplicity and "fix" her into one single self. This experience drives her to conclude that fathers, doctors and dictators intend to freeze culture and life in the world by imposing their order. She appears as a female Quixote, subverting and denouncing war and repressive political systems. She is "the prophet" climbing up the mountain towards her Druidic temple (1989a: 184-5). In order to endure the treatment (the imprisonment), she experiences it as an act of martyrdom. For the same reason she presents herself as the redeemer: she decides to take Christ's place for, according to her, the Holy Trinity needed a woman:

I knew that Christ was dead and done for, and that I had to take His place, because the Trinity, minus a woman and microscopic knowledge, had become dry and incomplete. Christ was replaced by the Sun. I was Christ on earth in the person of the Holy Ghost. (1989a: 195)

The protagonist impersonates the third person of the Holy Trinity, who stands for the power to speak different languages. Indeed, later in the narrative, the protagonist finds a Bible which she opens at random:

I happened on the passage in which the Holy Ghost descends upon the disciples and bestows upon them the power to speak all languages. I was the Holy Ghost and believed I was in limbo. (1989a: 205-6)

She understands that she has to expiate the wrongs done by humanity to humanity. Her consternation at the crimes committed during the Spanish Civil War fills her with remorse and when she is punished and strapped to a bed for several days she explains this act to herself not as the medical staff's incompetence and cruelty, but as a mythical punishment:

I don't know how long I remained bound and naked. Several days and nights, lying in my own excrement, urine, and sweat, tortured by mosquitoes whose stings made my body hideous - I believed that they were the spirits of all the crushed Spaniards who blamed me for my internment, my lack of intelligence, and my submissiveness. The extent of my remorse rendered their assaults bearable. (1989a: 183)

However, the ominous presence of the Second World War haunts her continually, and she thinks that she also has to redeem the atrocities done to the Jews:

I believed that I was being put through purifying tortures ... that ... Don Luis and Don Mariano [the doctors] were ... Jewish; I thought that I, a Celtic and Saxon Aryan, was undergoing my sufferings to avenge the Jews for the persecutions they were being subjected to. (1989a: 195)<sup>2</sup>

The treatment, and not madness, is symbolically viewed as an act of martyrdom. This point is important in that Carrington does not romanticise or mystify madness. She is, indeed, mystifying the treatment, for it is in this way that she is able to bear it. The treatment, of devastating consequences if viewed from a detached point of view, is given symbolic significance. If Leonora convinces herself that it leads to spiritual regeneration she is able to ignore its flagrant oppression. On the other hand, it is noticeable in these passages that she seems to be trying to come to terms with two quite different perceptions of herself: she is at once victim (in the figure of Christ) and perpetrator (as an Anglo-Aryan).

Just as the sufferings narrated in "Down Below" are allegorical of the world's sufferings, so is her body the battlefield. Thus, the allegories run like a spiral staircase whereby one premise (the mental asylum as a prison camp) winds into the next (the asylum inmates are prisoners of war and the doctors, German Fascists) and the allegorical readings of the text become endless. Both through her projection on to multiple selves ("I was an androgyne, the Moon, the Holy Ghost, a gipsy, an acrobat, Leonora Carrington and a woman") and through allegory Carrington attempts to express the plenitude that, in the mental asylum, she felt she possessed. It attempts to represent, in language, what cannot be represented: knowledge. When, in the 1992 *Omnibus* interview, she was asked to express what life had taught her, she said that she hardly knew much more than that she was an old woman and that she was in Mexico. The interviewer asked her to expand on that and Carrington concluded her interview with the following words:

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<sup>2</sup> This is another instance, I believe, of Carrington's present interfering with the events of the past. It is highly improbable that as early as the second half of the year 1940 Carrington knew about the extermination of Jews in prison camps; however, it is probable that she knew by 1943.

I don't think that I know anything. It would be nicer if I could sit back and say: "I know now." But I don't. I am an old woman, human species, sitting in Mexico. (*Omnibus* broadcast, November 1992)

More than fifty years after her experience of madness, the information "Leonora Carrington" and "a woman" is too awesome to be reduced to a simple explanation, since the knowledge of what it means remains buried. Nevertheless, Carrington has always been concerned with "understanding" what those words mean, which is the main reason for writing. Carrington's "Down Below" is a narrative of a quest for knowing the unknowable. In the opening pages she warns the reader of the theme of her writing: to explore that part of her life when she was nearer to dying (to knowing); not to die physically, however, because as she informs the reader: "I knew that I was not destined to die" (1989a: 165).

### **To death through the route of madness**

In "Down Below" the protagonist's experimentation with mad states is called "playing". Leonora, the protagonist, responds to the doctor's inquiries with the following words: "*I have no delusions, I am playing. When will you stop playing with me?*" (1989a: 203). For Carrington, experimenting with mental states, and with language, finally, is a means of acquiring further knowledge about the working of the unconscious, and she approaches these states in the spirit of a performer. This differs from Laing's notion of "play". In *Knots* (1972) Laing wrote that the mad person believes that it is the others who are playing a game and that the patient observes other people's reactions with bewilderment:

They are playing a game. They are playing at not playing a game. If I show them I see they are, I shall break the rules and they will punish me. I must play their game, of not seeing I see the game. (Laing 1972: 1)

Laing presents in this passage the idea that the patient perceives relationships (of bodies, of time and space) differently. He argues that life is a game and that the psychotic thinks that the rules have been changed. I believe that Carrington's perspective, although coincidental with Laing's in establishing the equation "Life is a Game", contrasts strongly with this. Carrington deliberately decides to change the rules of the game. The



protagonist of "Down Below" does not find that the rules have been changed for her: she herself alters them. This is different from the set of rules within the institution, since the rules in the sanatorium at Santander, and indeed in any mental asylum, are definitely different from the set of social and behavioural rules that govern life outside the mental asylum.

She changes (or rather believes that she can change) social and behavioural regulations. Thus, when the protagonist finds that she has lost control over her movements, the narrator provides the explanation: she is, for the first time, allowing her unconscious mind to interrupt the conscious one. Furthermore, it is stated that her mind does not only not "lose" control, but "gains" another language, that of the body; this allows Carrington to provide, at the beginning of the text, her own definition of madness:

I realized that my anguish - my mind, if you prefer - was painfully trying to unite itself with my body; my mind could no longer manifest itself without producing an immediate effect on my body - on matter. (1989a: 168)

The protagonist, therefore, travels to madness as if she were journeying to "a new world" (1989a: 168) where she refuses to obey the rules of "old, limited Reason" (1989a: 168). Indeed, she considers that being not mad is being "sadly reasonable" (1989a: 178). In this new world there is not strength but gentleness and understanding (1989a: 168-9); hence, her "pact" with the mountain and with animals, especially with her *alter ego*, the horse (1989a: 169). From the moment she retreats to her inner "reality", the aggressions of the outside world do not affect her: she states that she is not afraid of rape (1989a: 166) and when raped (1989a: 172), the experience is not presented as traumatic.

There are enough elements within the narrative to deduce that the disordered mental state of the protagonist is psychosomatic, as would be confirmed by the protagonist's own decision to go "beyond its [the world's] brutal ineptitude" (1989a: 164). This could explain, then, the narrator's apparent ability to distinguish among dreams, hallucinations and real events. Within this framework the words of Dr Morales, "Her behaviour was a Surrealist attitude", acquire full meaning. Her "attitude" leads the

protagonist to incarceration in the mental asylum. It is the playfulness that Carrington's "selfishly perturbed English connections" (James 1976: 13) could not tolerate. According to Foucault, madness is censored not because it voices the forbidden nor because it expresses a language that is codified and transgressing, but because of its very absence of meaning:

It is this obscure and central liberation at the very heart of the utterance, its uncontrollable flight toward a source that is always without light, that no culture can readily accept. Such utterance is transgressive not in its meaning, not in its verbal property, but in its *play*. (Foucault 1995: 294)

When Carrington writes in "Down Below": "Can't you see I'm playing?" she does not use the verb "to play" to allude to the whimsical activities of someone who is vulnerable. Madness is meant as an act of rebellion, an acting out of a wish for transgression. The rebellion, following Foucault, lies in the very act of delivering meaningless utterances, not in the utterances *per se*.

In "The Bird Superior, Max Ernst" (1942), Carrington summarises, in a very short paragraph, her experience of madness. This passage follows the allusion to the outbreak of the Second World War: "A still quiet pulse from the petrified world outside becomes audible like distant drums." Although she does not make it clear whether she is still referring to the war or to her subsequent breakdown, I shall analyse the following extract as Carrington's making verbal her mental breakdown and, furthermore, as illustrative of her conception of madness as "play":

Memory races back to the birth of time, whips the infant away from the nipple of an erupting volcano, and tosses it playfully into space; this pleasantry is so gigantic that Intelligence, with peals of agonised laughter, pulls off his head, which is Thought, and tosses it into space as a plaything for the infant Time. (1942: 13)

Radically different in style from "Down Below", in this passage Carrington has turned to a completely different language to describe the experience. Firstly, she detaches herself from the experience by moving from the first person singular, used in "Down Below", to the third person singular. Secondly, in contrast to the narrative "Down Below", the lexical choice is codified so that only through the context and through detailed analysis can it be argued that the passage refers to her experience of madness.

The passage links two rather different, and apparently irreconcilable, areas of discourse: that of the world of the nursery with that of the world of ontology. On the one hand, words and expressions such as "infant", "nipple", "toss", "playfully", "pleasantry", "peals of agonised laughter", "plaything", take the reader to the world of the child's room. On the other, the characters in the story are unexpectedly portentous. In the passage the chief character is "Memory", the infant is "Time", the nursery is "Space" and the toy is "Thought", a product of "Intelligence". The passage summarises, in my opinion, Carrington's experience of mental breakdown. At the outbreak of the war (an erupting volcano) she withdraws into a state similar to that of babyhood, where there is no consciousness of time and space and where reason is experimenting in order to rationalise reality. The allusions to "play" have two simultaneous functions: not only do they establish a metaphorical correlation between the state of madness and that of infancy, they also serve to render those major concepts of human rationality (thought, time, space) unimportant when compared to the power of the imagination.

There is, however, an unfortunate aspect in this vision of madness, for it leads to its mystification and romanticisation. In *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, Cixous, using the Kafkaesque metaphor of "fire" as the representation of the "forbidden", encourages writers to pursue the areas of madness and death. Cixous stresses that it is with the intention of playing (in its meaning of "performance") that writing should explore death:

The writers I feel close to are those who play with fire, those who play seriously with their own mortality, go further, go too far, sometimes go as far as catching fire, as far as being seized by fire. (Cixous 1993:18)

There is a pun in Cixous's words. Like Prometheus, writers can steal fire from the gods (they can play with the knowledge of death that madness provides) but they can be punished, they can be engulfed by it into nothingness, death or madness, thus "catching" fire. Carrington might appear in this light as a martyr ready to lose her freedom, her health and her mind in the pursuit of further artistic enlightenment. In her transgressive attitude she would be exploring precisely that realm Surrealist artists were encouraging

women to explore: the relationship between dreams, madness and creativity. Women's nature, according to the Surrealists, was more apt than men's to explore this relationship.

Carrington, in her exercise of simulation (Breton's term) of madness, or through her paranoiac-critical activity (Dali's term), might become the *femme enfant par excellence*. *Simulation* is the most famous form of directed automatism. Breton had, as a medical intern during the war, encountered patients simulating mental illness in order to avoid being sent to the front. Apart from stimulating the imagination and letting the unconscious run free, the simulation had another purpose: it aimed "to resolve the antinomy between reason and madness" (Breton in Gooding 1991: 143) and to show the fictional nature of this duality. Breton's *First Manifesto* had already consecrated madness as a source of poetic knowledge:

they [mad people] derive a great deal of comfort and consolation from their imagination, ... they enjoy their madness sufficiently to endure the thought that its validity does not extend beyond themselves. (Breton 1972: 5)

However, when in 1928 Breton attempted to make an incursion into the world of madness he chose as the subject of his analysis not himself, but the eponymous Nadja. The vision of madness acquired by Breton through his medical investigations and love relationship with Nadja has been widely criticised as naïve, by the milder critics, and as self-defeating by others, since madness, especially in women, is for Breton as much a source of poetic inspiration as was the dead woman for Poe. Carrington, as has been shown in a previous chapter, violently criticised Breton's conception of madness; several critics (Bronfen 1992) have since theorised on the facile association of madness with enlightenment.

Susan Sontag in her work *Illness as a Metaphor* gives her view that "insanity is the current vehicle of our secular myth of self-transcendence" (Sontag 1991: 36) and that mental illness represents a cultural metaphor for psychic voyages. The mad-person is metaphorically made to disagree with the social and cultural orders and charged with an over-intensity of character. Indeed, madness, and particularly madness in women, has come to be seen, in contemporary thought, as an act of resistance and transgression. In this sense Cixous considers the madwoman, the hysteric in particular, a chief character

in the liberation of women in as much as she is the only figure who counteracts patriarchy. For Cixous the silence that characterises the language of madness is highly eloquent, for it denounces the restricting structures of patriarchal discourse:

Silence: silence is the mark of hysteria. The great hysterics have lost speech ... their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's the body that talks and man doesn't hear the body. (Cixous 1981: 49)

Different instances in "Down Below" inform the reader about the protagonist's attitude towards language and utterance. In some cases Leonora is persuaded to keep silent, diving into what she calls "a voluntary coma":

We were to meet ... with two Andorrans who were supposed to get us across the border in exchange for the gift of our car. Catherine and Michel told me very seriously that I had better refrain from talking. I agreed and dived into a voluntary coma. (1989a: 167-8)

More revealing, however, is the protagonist's attitude towards the Spanish language, once she has crossed the border:

The fact that I had to speak a language I was not acquainted with was crucial: I was not hindered by a preconceived idea of the words, and I but half understood their modern meaning. This made it possible for me to invest the most ordinary phrases with a hermetic significance. (1989a: 170)

It would have been probably easier to dive into yet another silent coma. However, the protagonist decides not only not to do away with language altogether but to make use of every word's possible significances. The protagonist/narrator is conscious that she is facing, in Barthes's terminology, the infinite "play" of the word (Barthes 1990: 16). Barthes uses the term "play" in his definition of the writable text and this is significant in that Carrington makes use of playing with the various possibilities of words as part of her mad-narrative:

When I gazed at posters in the streets [of Madrid], I saw not only the commercial and beneficent qualities of Mr. X's canned goods but hermetic answers to my queries as well - when I read AMAZON COMPANY or IMPERIAL CHEMICALS, I also read CHEMISTRY AND ALCHEMY, a secret telegram addressed to myself in the guise of a manufacturer of agricultural machinery. (1989a: 175-6)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Breton had already hinted at the perpetual correspondence of words in *Nadja*. One of the instances of connections between terms that is similar to Carrington's occurs when "Louis Aragon shows Breton that a hotel sign, MAISON ROUGE, can be read from another angle across the street as POLICE" (Cardinal

Handling two of the aims of the action "to play" (to gamble and to amuse) Carrington exercises her scant knowledge of Spanish to produce some comical passages, where the puns alleviate the deadly tone of the narrative. The joke in the following passage comes from a play on the Spanish words "pie" (foot) and "dolor" (pain) as they half-appear in the proper name "Piadosa":

A squinting maidservant (they called her Piadosa) brought me my food ... I thought that Piadosa, which means pious, meant painful feet, and I felt sorry for her because she had walked so much. (1989a: 183)

Eventually, her playing with various languages (English, French, Spanish, and the German the staff speak so that she cannot understand) evolves towards a playing with all languages:

It was no longer necessary to translate noises, physical contacts, or sensations into rational terms or words. I understood every language in its particular domain: noises, sensations, colours, forms, etc., and everyone found a twin correspondence in me and gave me a perfect answer. (1989a: 176)

As with spoken languages, the protagonist starts by understanding them, moving to reproducing them, to actually "speaking" them, with her body: "At night, my exasperated nerves imitated the noise of the river, which flowed tirelessly over some rocks: hypnotizing, monotonous" (1989a: 168). The protagonist's body echoes the elements of nature and these passages are illustrative of Cixous's definition of the language of the body, its *jouissance*. According to Wright's *Dictionary of Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, *jouissance* means "the usufruct or surplus value of an object or property ... It also connotes the bliss of sexual orgasm" (Wright 1992: 185). In this sense, a narrative of female *jouissance* includes metaphors of fluidity, flux and contiguity and tends to highlight the relationship between language and the body. Carrington's continuous drawing of parallels between the female body and language is illustrative of the corporeal language of the madwoman. She writes in "Down Below" about her body and she writes it with her body. Even in the instance when the traumatic experiences of rape and internment affect her menstrual cycle to the point of stopping it, the protagonist/narrator sublimates this act, endorsing it with a mythical meaning:

I ceased menstruating at that time ... I was transforming my blood into comprehensive energy - masculine and feminine, microcosmic and macrocosmic - and into a wine that was drunk by the moon and the sun. (1989a: 177)

All these instances highlight the importance of the relationship between the protagonist's mind and the narrator's language by sublimating these experiences into what can be described as an almost orgasmic relation between sexual libido and language.

Closely related to the disappearance of psychic and physical boundaries, the disappearance of temporal and spatial boundaries occurs. To provide an impression of disorientation is precisely the intention of the following passage, when the protagonist awakens from the drug-induced coma:

I probably was still in Spain. The vegetation was European, the climate soft, the architecture of Covadonga rather Spanish. But I was not at all sure of this, and seeing later the strange morality and conduct of the people who surrounded me, I felt still more at sea, and ended believing that I was in another world, another epoch, another civilisation, perhaps on another planet containing the past and future and, simultaneously, the present. (1989a: 180)

All in all, Carrington's text is built upon a series of portraits, scenes and epiphanies, which include dreams and hallucinations. This produces an amorphous narrative structure, that can be defined as elliptic, with one scene relating only to the preceding one and not to a general argumentative line. The language is often hermetic, giving the impression of a disoriented narrative voice. At the moment of the protagonist's shift into madness (*jouissance*), "Down Below", originally conceived as a clinical narration, a case study, stops being a text to be psychoanalysed. It becomes a literary narrative resistant to clinical analysis and indifferent to logic.

It is because of this resistance to logic that, whilst Cixous celebrates the silence of the hysteric in favour of the body-talk, other critics such as Mitchell, Rose or Clément expose its ambivalent political power. In her reformulation of Freud, Mitchell writes, referring to hysteria:

Hysteria is the woman's simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the organisation of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism. It is simultaneously what a woman can do both to be feminine and to refuse femininity, within patriarchal discourse. (Mitchell 1974: 290)

Mitchell points out that in the response of the hysteric there is a certain level of acceptance of the patriarchal system. Clément moves even further and, contrary to Cixous, concludes that, due to the ambiguous attitude of acceptance and refusal on the part of the hysteric, the madwoman should be regarded as more of a victim than a heroine:

This feminine role, the role of the sorceress, of hysteric, is ambiguous, antiestablishment, and conservative at the same time ... These roles are *conservative* because every sorceress ends up being destroyed, and nothing is registered of her but mythical traces. (Clément 1986: 5)

Madness then is anti-establishment for it questions what is taken for granted: communication (Rose 1994: 403). But it is conservative as well since it capitulates, giving to silence that which patriarchy demands of woman.

In 1943, when she wrote "Down Below", Carrington intended to demystify the state of knowledge and madness she had sought in 1940. She concluded that madness led to sensations of imminent death and disempowered her. Moreover, if viewed from a historical Surrealist perspective, her experiencing was merely a submissive response to the Surrealists' dictum. If viewed from a much broader contemporary psychoanalytical and philosophical perspective, it may also be concluded that it is conformist, since it capitulates in silence. Indeed, Carrington's illustration of her experience with the words "it was very much like having been dead" reinforces the idea of the inefficacy of madness as a literary or political tool.

### Writing death

The impressive imagery of death that "Down Below" presents starts with a scene at a cemetery. On Carrington's way to Spain, near a huge cemetery in Perpignan, scenes of death pervade the landscape and the narrative:

We had driven all night long. I would see before me, on the road, trucks with legs and arms dangling behind them ... The road was lined with rows of coffins ... I was very frightened: *it all stank of death*. (1989a: 167)

Of the dead bodies near the Perpignan cemetery the narrator accuses the Germans: "They obviously were people who had been killed by the Germans" (1989a: 167). The metaphor of war and death is carried further to the point of using, later in the text, the



expression "infested with Swastikas" (1989a: 171) when referring to a passport; carried away by her hatred for the Nazis, Carrington uses a comparison between Nazism and an epidemic implying that with their politics the Germans (germs) spread Nazism (a disease) as an infestation.

A scene in a cemetery opens the narrative. It speaks of the death of others, of Carrington's guilt about the killings, and it hints at the main theme of the narrative. After this scene the text starts to unravel and Carrington descends to Down Below in five steps (the days that it took her to write the account of her descent into madness). However, these images of death (coffins, inertness and stench) contrast strongly with the vision of death as a quest for knowledge that has been traced in this chapter. This is so because in the process of exploring "the unknowable" Carrington realised that she was putting her own life, in both the artistic and physical senses, at risk. Therefore, when "the desire to die" (as a metaphor for the desire to know) is explored we find a narrative that can be described in terms of body language: continuity, fluidity, multiplicity and sexual bliss. When the narrative centres around describing the treatment, the images are those of death (customarily described in terms of immovability and fixation).

It threatened her poetic life because, as Foucault has argued in his essay "Madness, the Absence of Work", madness implicates itself into absence. Foucault argues that, since Freud:

Western madness has become a nonlanguage as it turned into a double language (a linguistic code that does not exist except in its utterance, an utterance that does not say anything other than its linguistic code) - that is to say, a matrix of a language that, in a strict sense, does not say anything. A fold of the spoken that is an absence of work. (Foucault 1995: 295)

Madness, according to Foucault, does not hide signification, but speaks of a suspension of meaning, an emptiness:

Madness opens up a lacunar reserve that designates and exposes that chasm where linguistic code and utterance become entangled, shaping each other and speaking of nothing but their still silent rapport. (Foucault 1995: 295)

This lacunar reserve, as the grave of the dead, cannot narrate or be narrated. Foucault's "lacunar reserve" of mad language is similar to death in that it is emptied of time, space and bodies; or at least emptied in language, since the time, space and bodies in death

cannot be spoken of. Madness, or death, cannot be spoken about or written about. In realising this, the protagonist/narrator retracts immediately and starts heading out of her playing with language.

Madness threatens her physical existence as well. In her search for poetic creativity the protagonist of "Down Below" has set herself to exercising the manifestations of her mind over her body without realising that her "playing" might have devastating consequences. In fact, in "Down Below", the narrator acknowledges:

I gave little thought to the effect my experiments might have on the humans by whom I was surrounded, and, in the end, they won. (1989a: 169)

At the point where the protagonist is "incarcerated" in the mental asylum, she realises that the "playfulness" of her madness is not going to be accepted. The narrator/protagonist of "Down Below" accuses the doctors of trying to "control" her mind and develops the idea that mental asylums are prisons where those who are intelligent and challenging towards society are "reduced". In "Down Below" the narrator/protagonist has the continuous feeling that she is in a prison (1989a: 180) and suffers a "terrible nostalgia and a desire to run away" (1989a: 187-8). Mental asylums represent, for Ellen Moers, the twentieth-century locus for the female Gothic novel. According to Moers the asylum is:

an elaborated, enclosed, and peculiarly feminine testing ground for survival. There are the large, spreading, mysteriously complicated buildings; the harsh guards and strange rules; the terrifying inmates; the privations, restraints, and interrogations; the well-meant, but indubitable torture of electric shock treatment. (Moers 1978: 133)

Within the "Chinese puzzle" or concentration camp that the mental asylum appears to be for Leonora, and that she struggled "to solve" (1989a: 201), everything suddenly acquires a symbolic meaning and, repeatedly, she finds herself "arranging" the objects she is given:

I was given back the objects which had been confiscated on my entering the sanatorium, and a few others besides. I realised that with the aid of these objects I had to set to work, combining solar systems to regulate the conduct of the World. (1989a: 195-6)

Leonora painfully devises "rituals" as "solutions to cosmic problems". Each time, she expects that her problem-solving will please the "complicated" mind of the

prison warden. After arranging the objects she waits impatiently for Don Luis: "I said to myself: 'I have solved the problems he set before me. I shall certainly be led Down Below'" (1989a: 196). Similarly, the food is eaten according to a particular ritual and "the remnants of ... fruit, rinds and stones" are arranged "in the form of designs" (1989a: 194). Again, she is hopeful: "I believed that Don Luis and his father, seeing the problems solved on my plate, would allow me to go Down Below, to Paradise" (1989a: 194). Leonora is repeatedly puzzled and frightened to find that not only is she not going to the pavilion that holds the library, but that she is punished with further tortures: "So I was horrified when, far from appreciating my labor, he gave me a second injection of Cardiazol" (1989a: 196). Indeed, Showalter has identified the mental asylum as a confusing place:

[Mental asylums are] secretive prisons operated on Wonderland logic. Their female inmates are instructed to regard themselves as "naughty girls" who have broken a set of mysterious rules that have to do with feminine conduct. (Showalter 1987: 211)

Although it might seem that Dr Luis Morales questioned, in both his article and the interview, whether Leonora needed to recover any "good and healthy living", the fact is that, at the asylum, Carrington was urged to act according to stereotypical patterns of femininity. Nurses and doctors reinforce the idea and when she is asked to promise "she will be good", Leonora's shock knows no limits:

I was so surprised by her question that I remained disconcerted for a few moments and could not produce an answer. I had only meant to do good to the entire world, and here I was, tied down like a wild beast! (1989a: 178)

She is repeatedly asked to behave in a feminine way ("My keeper always wanted me to sit on a chair like a good girl") which consists, as she finally discovers, of acknowledging her powerlessness, acknowledging that the doctor "was a *master*" (1989a: 193), and in behaving "as obedient as an ox" (1989a: 193). This is why Leonora, after the second injection of Cardiazol, decides to show the doctor, the incarnation of power itself, that she has surrendered and abandoned her war of sexual politics:

I confessed to myself that a being sufficiently powerful to inflict such a torture was stronger than I was; I admitted defeat, the defeat of myself and of the world around me, with no hope of liberation. (1989a: 192)

She eats with docility and allows the staff to do what they please with her. Her adoption of a "feminine" form of behaviour is reinforced by the visit of Dr Morales:

He spoke to me in French, very politely, something to which I was no longer accustomed.

"So you feel better, Mademoiselle? ... I am no longer seeing a tigress, but a young lady." (1989a: 193)

Carrington uses the narrative to denounce the brutal and repressive hospital treatment. She was forcibly fed, drugged, and bound to a bed. Looking at the other inmates Leonora infers that the asylum is:

some sort of prison for those who had threatened the power of that group [Van Ghent's]; also that I, the most dangerous of all, was fated to undergo a still more terrible torture in order to be reduced better still and become like my companions in distress. (1989a: 186)

In this passage Carrington declares that she has suspected all along that when politicians and doctors were locking her up and "treating" (torturing)<sup>4</sup> her there was something other than "good will" in their intentions.

Thus, Carrington presents her experience as a battle for survival. She encloses with the narrative a map of the different pavilions in the asylum and attaches extreme importance to each of them, as they come to represent different stages in her quest for survival. In fact, she even suspects that doctors and nurses are planning to kill her eventually and she identifies with the dead Covadonga (the doctor's sister, after whom one of the pavilions is named), and fears that the asylum is going to be her tomb: "Dead leaves were heaped there, and in my mind the heap took the shape of a tomb, which became for me Covadonga's and my own" (1989a: 202).<sup>5</sup> Thus, when exploring the theme of death (meant literally, not as a metaphor for knowledge), the writer is concerned with depicting scenes that represent culturally-accepted notions of death.

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<sup>4</sup> Coleman, in her novel *The Shutter of Snow* (1981) voices the same accusation. Similarly, Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water* (1980), and Antonia White's *Beyond the Glass* [1954] (1979) condemn the treatment of the inmates.

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Istina Mavet, the protagonist of Frame's *Faces in the Water*, considers ECT "the new and fashionable means of quieting people and of making them realize that orders are to be obeyed and floors are to be polished without anyone protesting and faces are made to be fixed into smiles and weeping is a crime" (Frame 1980: 15). Like Leonora, Istina Mavet waits for ECT as for a "death sentence" and she is convinced that the medical staff is planning to murder her with electricity (Frame 1980: 100).

Carrington narrates the deadly sensation (of reality) provoked by the injections. Awakening in her room at the sanatorium, this "(death-)chamber" is described as a mausoleum decorated in "pine", "marble" and is: "panelled with opaque glass, which I watched avidly because it was clear and luminous and I guessed that it opened into a room flooded with sunshine" (1989a: 177). Not only is the room her tomb but eventually her body is described as being in a state of decay (which, in fact, aims at denouncing the torture-like incompetence of the hospital's treatment of patients): "lying in my own excrement, urine, and sweat" (1989a: 183). Carrington portrays the protagonist as very much afraid of her own death because, as she says looking back on that period, she had not assimilated the idea that she was mortal:

What it [madness] mainly did for me, in a conscious way, was that suddenly I became aware that I was mortal and touchable and that I could be destroyed. I didn't think so before. (*Omnibus* broadcast, November 1992)

According to Cixous this is the ideal message that the writer/explorer of death should be able to understand and communicate. Cixous claims that to be human (to feel mortal), the writer has to experience the end of the world, in a notion that mythically unites world and self:

We need to lose the world, to lose a world, and to discover that there is more than one world and that the world isn't what we think it is. Without that, we know nothing about the mortality and the immortality we carry. (Cixous 1993: 10)

Thus, the narrator is convinced that the destruction of her self is the destruction of the world. However, to look forward to that destruction would be to commit suicide; particularly after the first injection of Cardiazol, which leaves her "convulsed, pitifully hideous" (1989a: 192), she realises that the doctors can kill her with their injections (1989a: 192). Buried in a mental asylum the putrid body of the protagonist is described in different stages of decomposition. The protagonist decides that if "playing" with language, multiplicity and disruption of boundaries is going to mean her psychic and/or physical death, the poetic effort will not benefit from it: "In a moment of lucidity, I realised how necessary it was to extract from myself all the personages who were inhabiting me" (1989a: 203). Quite suddenly, when the reader thinks the text has reached the lowest point, there is another scene of a cemetery:

From the bathroom window, I gazed for a long time at a sad, green landscape: flat fields stretching down to the sea; near the coast, a cemetery: the Unknown and Death. (1989a: 199)

Closing the narrative circle this passage marks the end of "Down Below". The reader is brought to the surface and Leonora is no longer mad. Indeed, she is very keen on demystifying any possible romanticisation of her experience:

And I learned that Cardiazol was a simple injection and not an effect of hypnotism; that Don Luis was not a sorcerer but a scoundrel; that Covadonga and Amachu and Down Below were not Egypt, China, and Jerusalem, but pavilions for the insane and that I should get out as quickly as possible. (1989a: 208)

The desire to know the unknowable (still epitomised by "a desire to die") remains an area of attraction for Carrington, but it stops being located in madness. After the experience and the writing of "Down Below", finished in 1943, her vision of madness, in particular women's madness, is highly politically aware and completely detached from poetic creation. Showalter, in her chapter "Women and Psychiatric Modernism" (Showalter 1987) argues that novels written before the 1960s dealing with madness in an institutional setting are not much more than "guilt-ridden accounts" (Showalter 1987: 211). She adds that those women authors did not think mental disturbances had any political or social meaning. Written two decades before the 1960s Carrington's text is therefore highly advanced. Madness did not prove to be, for Carrington, as major a creative source as dreams had proven to be and, far from advocating the creative energy of madness, she warns against the suffering it causes.

Moreover, Carrington seems to have achieved what she sought in 1943 - to make of the experience (through the process of writing) a phantom of the past. Once the story had been written and was awaiting publication, she wrote to Henri Parisot (the publisher of the French version): "En tout cas faites ce que vous voulez avec cette fantôme" ["In any case, do whatever you want with this ghost"] (1973: 8). The fact that she refers to "Down Below" as a "fantôme" is important. Other writers refer to such works as "monuments" or even "tombstones". Whereas both terms retain some Gothic connotation, a tombstone, placed over a person's grave, "covers" the grave: fixes meanings in the form of a monument. On the contrary a phantom, from the Greek

*phantazein* (fantastic) retains a mobile quality and its most immediate connotation is of something false, unreal: a mental or optical illusion, even a delusion of the mind. "Down Below" is thus a ghost of Carrington's past: a flitting, distorted version of events. More importantly Carrington renounces ownership: "do whatever you want with this ghost". The ghost of the past is thus exorcised and put within a receptacle: the text, disposable material.

## Chapter Six

### Seeing Through the Monster

This chapter analyses five short stories: "Cast Down by Sadness", "White Rabbits", "Waiting", "The Seventh Horse" and "As They Rode Along the Edge". Although written prior to "Down Below", these stories follow, chronologically, the experience at Santander. On release from the sanatorium, Carrington envisions laughter as a means of pursuing further her playing with language, with multiple meanings, while aiming at liberating herself from the dogmatism of doctors and the self-importance of the Surrealists. She wrote and published these stories in New York, and they signal a definite farewell to Surrealism.

The story "Cast Down by Sadness" (1937-40) begins casually. An unnamed and ungendered<sup>1</sup> narrator wanders into the garden of a little old woman, Arabelle Pegaso (yet another equine-inspired protagonist). There, the narrator is introduced to Arabelle's son, Dominique. The story begins its dramatic turn just at the end, when an unnamed and ghostly girl appears and the narrator witnesses a ritualistic spectacle. The girl orders Arabelle to undress and both mother and son appear to be extremely frightened by her:

"I am dead," Dominique said. "Leave me in peace."

"Is he dead or is he alive?" asked the girl in a sonorous voice.

"Alive," cried the mother.

"And yet he's been buried a long time," replied the girl.

"Come let me kill you," the old woman shrieked. "Come let me kill you for the hundred and twentieth time." (1989b: 55)

In the final paragraphs the girl and Arabelle are drowned fighting in the lake. As they die the narrator sees that "With a sigh, Dominique crumbled into a heap of dust" (1989b: 55). As is often the case in Carrington's stories, the gloomy narrative voice remains unsurprised, as the final words of the narrator testify: "I was alone in a night without light" (1989b: 55).

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<sup>1</sup> Given the impossibility of keeping adjectives ungendered in Spanish, Francisco Torres Oliver, in the Spanish translation of this story, has chosen to make the narrator male (Carrington 1992). This choice is, in my opinion, quite unjustifiable for, as I claim in the argument in this chapter, the femaleness of the characters and of the narrative voice provides signification to these stories.



In the three 1941-2 short stories "White Rabbits", "Waiting" and "The Seventh Horse", Carrington barely disguises the events occurring during her last reencounter with Ernst.<sup>2</sup> "Waiting" (1941)<sup>3</sup> focuses on the idea of the present as the murderer of the past. A young woman, Margaret, is, for some unexplained reason, standing in the middle of the street and looking at the windows above. She appears impassive and ghostly: "her clothes were too long and her hair much too untidy, like those of a person barely saved from drowning" (1989b: 61).<sup>4</sup> After hours of looking up at one of the windows of an elegant house and of concentrating on the monotonous, "loud and dangerous" pounding in her head, she is interrupted by Elizabeth, a tall, composed woman walking two dogs. Elizabeth invites Margaret to her disordered and dirty apartment and there follows a confrontation between the two women whose attachment, one present, one past, is to the same man: Fernando. Although this story contains more exposition and dialogue than other stories by Carrington it still lacks background and clarification. The dialogue between the two women is often cryptic: "Fernando is forty-three, that makes seven ... a beautiful number" (1989b: 63). There is no climax and no apparent "story" and the reader is baffled when, in the final words of the story, Elizabeth challenges Margaret with evidence of her love-making with Fernando.

The structure and the characters in "White Rabbits" (1941) are similar to "Waiting". Set in New York, where Carrington was living at the time of its writing, it develops around a visit. "White Rabbits" is told by an unnamed female narrator who becomes fascinated by the apparently empty house opposite. One afternoon, as she sits

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<sup>2</sup> "White Rabbits" was published in the journal *View* nos. 9-10, New York 1941; "Waiting" in the journal *VVV* no. 1, New York 1942 and "The Seventh Horse" in *VVV* nos. 2-3, New York 1943. "As They Rode Along the Edge" was first published in France, in Editions *Le Temps Qu'il Fait*, in 1986.

<sup>3</sup> The title of the story might refer to the events that occurred in the months that they had been together in Portugal, "waiting" for the Clipper that was to take Peggy and Max to New York. The following passage, that appears in Guggenheim's autobiography, recounts an event occurring in Lisbon that might have inspired the story "Waiting": "She [Leonora] was not very friendly toward me, so I was rather astonished one day when she brought Max to my room and seemed in some strange way to be giving him to me" (Guggenheim 1979: 238).

<sup>4</sup> Margaret could be Carrington's self-portrait. Margaret is said to be a young woman and Carrington herself was twenty-four years old at the time of writing the story. Moreover, Guggenheim described Carrington as a beautiful woman with a "lovely figure", adding: "but she always dressed very badly, on purpose. It was connected with her madness" (Guggenheim 1979: 239).

on the balcony of her apartment, she sees a woman there. From their respective balconies they chat and the narrator is invited over, provided she brings any "bad meat" she might not need: "'Any what?' I called back, wondering if my ears had deceived me. 'Any stinking meat? Decomposed flesh meat?'" (1989b: 57). The curious protagonist/narrator buys a lump of meat which she leaves some days to putrefy. Taking with her the rotten meat she visits her neighbour who rushes to give the meat to "about a hundred snow-white rabbits":

With a sensation of deep disgust, I backed into a corner and saw her throw the carrion amongst the rabbits, who fought like wolves for the meat. (1989b: 59)

She is then introduced to the woman's husband, Lazarus, who seems to be unconscious of everything around him, his isolation marked further by the bandage that covers his eyes. The atmosphere at 40 Pest Street is deadly and contagious: Ethel and Lazarus are lepers.<sup>5</sup> The narrator/protagonist is confronted with a place that nourishes life and death or, more precisely, one that nourishes life *through* death: for the visiting protagonist to stay in the house equals her signing her own death warrant. The protagonist sees no other option but to run away: "I was suddenly clutched by fear and I wanted to get out and away from these terrible silver people and the white carnivorous rabbits" (1989b: 60). The narrator/protagonist informs her hosts that she is about to leave:

The woman thrust her face so near to mine that her sickly breath seemed to anaesthetize me. "Do you not want to stay and become like us? In seven years your skin will be like stars, in seven little years you will have the holy disease of the Bible, leprosy!" (1989b: 60)

The narrator manages to escape from the house and when she turns, compelled (like Lot's wife) by "some unholy curiosity", she sees Ethel: "waving her hand over the banister, and as she waved it, her fingers fell off and dropped to the ground like shooting stars" (1989b: 60). This simile is grotesque. The extreme horror of a disintegrating, putrefied, rotten body is assimilated into the poetic, even magic beauty of shooting stars.

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<sup>5</sup> A deadly disease is also the subject of another woman Surrealist's, Joyce Mansour's (1928-86), short story: "The Cancer". Written in French in the mid-fifties it is published in English in J. H. Matthews, *The Custom House of Desire*. (1975: 189-94).

"Her fingers fell off and dropped to the ground like shooting stars" opens unexpected connections between words. The reader softens her disgust at the sight of the leprous woman by means of the beauty of poetic language only to discover that those words are both the climax and the end of the story.

It could be said that "Cast Down by Sadness", "Waiting" and "White Rabbits" present themselves as one unit. They are characterised by a mood of fear, sadness and loss. Their structure is similar in that they all feature a female visitor confronted with two further characters: a man and a woman. However, and following the order in which they have been summarised, it can be observed that the female visitor gains authority from one story to the next. The nameless, ungendered protagonist of "Cast Down by Sadness" becomes a stronger, although eventually muted, visitor in "Waiting"; gaining, finally, complete autonomy and body in "White Rabbits". It is always the women who bear a name (Arabelle, Elizabeth and Ethel), the ones that confront the unnamed protagonists/narrators, the men being either unequipped for confrontation or unimportant to the women's quest: Dominique is dead, Fernando absent from the events of the story, and Lazarus's blindness isolates him from the events of the story. Although the triangular relationship of characters continues in "As They Rode Along the Edge" and "The Seventh Horse", the mood of these last two is radically different. Where "Cast Down by Sadness", "Waiting" and "White Rabbits" deal with the formless and the terrifying, "As They Rode Along the Edge" and "The Seventh Horse" deal with celebration and resurrection.

"The Seventh Horse" (1941) features three main characters: Hevalino, apparently a mare-woman (described as "a strange-looking creature" with a long mane), who appears suddenly in the garden of the lord of the manor, who already has six other horses; Philip, "the friend of horses" and lord of the manor; and Mildred, his wife, a "proper lady" who despises Hevalino in the opening lines of the story and whom Philip in turn despises. After a dispute at the dinner table, during which Mildred claims to be pregnant and Philip insists she cannot be since he has not slept with her in seven years, he leaves and calls his horses. He leaps on to the back of Hevalino and they gallop wildly all night. The story ends tragically for, at dawn, Mildred is found "trampled to

death" although Philip's horses are "gentle as lambs". By the end of the story, Mildred is "stuffed" into a coffin whilst "nobody could explain the presence of a small misshapen foal that had found its way into the seventh empty stall".

The protagonist of "As They Rode Along the Edge" (1937-40) is Virginia Fur, a half-human and wildly sexual heroine who lives in the forest together with her hundred cats and who has a tempestuous affair with a wild boar called Ignose. Saint Alexander, a pretentious local preacher, leads huntsmen to the animal. After her lover is killed, Virginia gives birth to seven little boars. She keeps one, and she and her cats eat the others at the funeral meal. The story ends with Virginia's vengeance on Saint Alexander. In the forest where she travels about on a wheel she gains the help of all the wild beasts who vow death to Alexander. With her cohort she goes to the convent where Saint Alexander preaches. When the boar is brought in for a banquet, all the animals of the forest storm the building, and Virginia is visible amid all the destruction, seated on her wheel. Together, they all cry "death" to Saint Alexander.

According to the 1989 Virago collection of stories entitled *The Seventh Horse*, only three of Carrington's stories were written in the two years Carrington spent in New York: "The Seventh Horse", "Waiting" and "White Rabbits". However, as is shown by the argument that follows, "As They Rode" (dated 1937-40) also belongs to this period. "The Seventh Horse" and "As They Rode" present obvious similarities in plot: strong animal-like female protagonists become pregnant following an explicitly described act of sexual intercourse in both cases termed "an ecstasy of love" (explicit descriptions of sexual intercourse do not otherwise appear in Carrington's stories). In both stories, the female protagonists revenge their lovers by killing their adversaries: Hevalino kills Mildred and Virginia kills Saint Alexander. The symbology of "As They Rode" is the same as that of the 1941-2 stories: the number seven (there are seven metals involved in the alchemical work) is the magical number in all stories, as is the presence of two "proper ladies". In "The Seventh Horse", particularly, Mildred refers to her husband as "my poor silly little husband", adding, "He is such a child, you know" (1989b: 66). Exactly the same comment appears in "As They Rode" ("he's such a child, my husband. My husband has his flings, but I leave him totally free, my dear little husband"), and it

may be an explicit reference to Peggy Guggenheim who, during the year 1941, repeatedly made it clear that she considered Ernst a child that "had been abandoned on her doorstep" (Guggenheim 1979: 239/248). The similarities in plot, structure, symbology and intention between "As They Rode", "The Seventh Horse" (1941) and the homage "The Bird Superior, Max Ernst" (1942) suggest that these stories were written at about the same time, and, therefore, that "As They Rode" was written, not when Carrington was still in France, as has been believed, but in New York, in 1941 or 1942.<sup>6</sup>

The multiplication of selves that can be observed in these stories - or rather, the doubling and subsequent dismemberment of these selves - is intended neither as an allegory of Carrington's own life nor as a therapeutic exercise, but as a broader understanding of the self. They are grotesque bodies and they inhabit equally grotesque spaces. They mark Carrington's creative resurrection and voice a new literary turn.

### **Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque and the body**

The "carnavalesque" and the Bakhtinian theories of the monstrous provide a useful way in approaching these stories. The connection between laughter and the death of the old indicates these writings' concern with themes of regenerating and renewing power. Charles May defines the comic grotesque as "that strange blend of fantasy and reality" (May 1995: 23). It is to its capacity of "blending" different categories that most definitions of the grotesque refer. Traditionally, the grotesque has been viewed as an artistic style, marked by a bizarre, exaggerated and distorted representation of vegetation and bodies:

A style of decorative painting or sculpture consisting of a fantastic interweaving of human and animal forms with flowers and foliage; *loosely* a comically distorted figure or design. (*OED*)

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<sup>6</sup> Warner also poses a doubt with regard to the date of this story: "'Ignose' is the Spanish word for yam, and this suggests that the date of 1937-40 given for the story is a little early, and that Leonora Carrington wrote it after she had settled in Mexico" (Warner 1991: 20). However, the word "Ignose" does not appear in the *DRAEL* (*Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua Española*) and this item can hardly be of an American indigenous origin since its etymology indicates a West African root. Even if Warner's suggestion is questionable, it is interesting that she doubts the dates offered for this story.

Although the grotesque has always been ideologically charged, with Bakhtin the grotesque is reclaimed and theorised as a politically disruptive and linguistically innovative genre. Bakhtin redefines the characteristics of the "image" realm of the grotesque (an image, by definition, unfinished) and marks what constitutes the "word" realm of the grotesque and its implications. Whilst "the grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming" (Bakhtin 1968: 24), it functions as a means of voicing disagreement with the dominant order and of reclaiming poetic liberation. For Bakhtin, the grotesque form serves:

To consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. (Bakhtin 1968: 34)

According to Bakhtin, the grotesque's revolutionary nature lies in the fact that, in it, both the traditional and the new intermingle. The horrifying, the exaggerated and the monstrous appear parallel to the traditional social and linguistic fabrics, threatening them:

The essence of the grotesque is precisely to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. Negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation, from the birth of something new and better. (Bakhtin 1968: 62)

The grotesque as a literary and political model aims at reversing the traditional hierarchies of the spiritual over the physical. Bakhtin theorises the grotesque as a model for a better world order that is organised horizontally rather than vertically. Kristeva praises Bakhtin's modification of diachrony by synchrony as he situates the text: "within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them" (Kristeva 1986: 36).

Thus, grotesque realism, as a literary mode, incorporates a social discourse of dissidence combined with the opportunity of implementing literary innovations. In this sense, Bakhtin adds to the traits of the grotesque identified by Hegel (fusion of natural spheres, immeasurable and exaggerated dimensions and the multiplication of organs in the human body) a potentially revolutionary comic nature.

Bakhtin stresses that the most prevalent and positive trait of the grotesque is laughter. Through laughter, language can be used "as a weapon in the struggle against tyrannical ideologies" (Bakhtin 1968). The comic nature of the grotesque is a liberating procedure, for, as he notes:

Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naïveté and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality. (Bakhtin 1968: 123)

Laughter is intimately linked to the grotesque body, for according to Bakhtin, the theme of mockery is almost entirely bodily and grotesque: "Wherever men laugh ... their speech is filled with bodily images" (Bakhtin 1968: 319). The body is, for Bakhtin, a semantic sign. Therefore, descriptions of bodies as well as bodily actions can be and are actually "read" and explained in terms of meaning and linguistic function. Bakhtin defines the "grotesque body", the monster, as the opposite of the traditional "ready-made, completed being":

[Grotesque images] are contrary to the classic images of the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development. (Bakhtin 1968: 24)

Bakhtin says of the grotesque text: "the essential aspect of this form is the monstrous; the aesthetics of the grotesque are to a certain extent the aesthetics of the monstrous" (Bakhtin 1968: 43) and the essence of carnival is figured in what Bakhtin names as "the grotesque body". The grotesque body, "a body blended with animals, with objects" (Bakhtin 1968: 27), displays convexities and protuberances, and its emphasis on bodily functions indicates sexuality and fertility:

The grotesque body ... is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world. (Bakhtin 1968: 317)

Bakhtin's theory assumes "man" (man's predisposition, opinions and reactions) to correspond to humanity and to humanity's social and cultural development. Although to a certain extent he is justified in assuming this (the analysis of history, society and culture predominantly having been carried out by patriarchy), he ignores the autonomy of the individuals that belong to muted groups. What is most shocking, though, is that in

his, apparently, gender non-specific theory the traditionally white, male ideology is the one that marks the "norm". When Bakhtin refers to "the classic images of the finished, completed man" he is referring to the white European male of classical culture. Therefore, for him, the grotesque body is the body that is "other" to white European masculinity: other-sized, coloured or female individuals are somehow presented as the grotesque body that shows to the white European male the possibilities of difference.<sup>7</sup> If the grotesque body is thus presented as an allegory for the confrontation of the "normative" body with the "different" body, a fundamental question arises: how, then, do individuals who belong to the category of "other" (dwarfs, blacks, women) envision, and subsequently voice, dissidence through the grotesque?

However misogynistic Bakhtin's theories sometimes are, his arguments are relevant inasmuch as a philosophy of the grotesque permits, in the first place, a reappraisal of the body, a reappraisal that appears in his scholarship to be as crucial an aspect as the spirit; secondly, it enhances a positive recovery of the non-normative body: a desire to inhabit a "different" body highlights and recognises the revolutionary potential of bodies traditionally cast out of society. Thirdly, through the definition of the grotesque body Bakhtin formulated a theory that established a distance between language and reality, between the body and the word:

the creating artist began to look at language from the outside, with another's eyes, from a point of view of a potentially different language and style. (Bakhtin 1981: 60)

Although the theories of the grotesque are, broadly, a model through which to analyse texts placed within a white European cultural context, such as those by Carrington, it still remains to be seen how a woman writer (who, by merely considering herself an artist and writer, is herself regarded by culture as a grotesque character) engages in the writing of the grotesque.

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<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin's theory betrays a wish for achieving a female body that can conceive and procreate. All the main organs of the grotesque body (ears, anus, mouth, nostrils) are but alternatives for the aperture that is most closely linked with childbirth: the vagina. The grotesque body could be said to be, then, a male fantasy of procreation, "the body that grows, procreates, and is victorious" (Bakhtin 1968: 339). It must be acknowledged that Bakhtin developed his theories during the 1920s and 1930s when scholarship on culture and history from a gender perspective was still unthought of.



### Carrington's grotesque monsters

Carrington's short stories certainly evoke, visually, grotesque images. They present rampant vegetation, from the exterior of the houses to the interior. In the case of "Waiting", a slimy moss covers furniture, ornaments and kitchen utensils:

Elizabeth pulled Margaret into the kitchen, where the long-dead stove was littered with cooking utensils or half full of what looked like green food; but Margaret saw that the greenness was a fluffy growth of fungi. Most of the crockery on the floor was covered with the same feathery vegetation. (1989b: 63-4)

The vegetation grows at an alarming rate and the female protagonists, unlike the Leonora of Ernst's painting *Leonora in the Morning Light* (Figure Three), cannot control it; they fear being engulfed by it. The weeds that overrun these stories are exaggerated into voracious vegetation:

There were certain parts of the garden where all the flowers, trees, and plants grew tangled together. Even on the hottest days these places were in blue shadow. (1989b: 67)

In this garden, Hevalino is trapped in the abundance of the vegetation and, in the effort to set herself free, hurts herself to the point of bleeding:

A strange-looking creature was hopping about in the midst of a bramble bush. She was caught by her long hair, which was so closely entwined in the brambles that she could move neither backwards nor forwards. She was cursing and hopping till the blood flowed down her body. (1989b: 66)

As was shown in Chapter One, Surrealism's strong, wild and abundant vegetation symbolises both the richness of the unconscious and Woman (Aragon 1987: 133). Where Aragon objectifies and glorifies the female body of women in the description of a garden, Carrington's gardens (inasmuch as they represent the female body) are wild and decayed. The lively Leonora of Ernst's painting becomes, in Carrington's writing, a bleeding Hevalino. The garden, a witness of the past, is populated by old, broken and beheaded figures: "There were deserted figures overgrown with moss, still fountains, and old toys, decapitated and destitute" (1989b: 67). In other descriptions, the abundant foliage engulfs the protagonists and their residences, as in the case of 40 Pest Street in "White Rabbits":

It took me some time to find the front door of the house opposite. It turned out to be hidden under a cascade of something, giving the impression that nobody had been either in or out of this house for years. (1989b: 58)

Besides the decapitated toys mentioned above, Carrington's description of the bodies of the characters also conforms to the most traditional features of the grotesque imagery. Where Ethel's and Lazarus's bodies are literally breaking apart, the bodies of Virginia Fur and Hevalino conform to the most grotesque interweaving of the human with animal forms. Philip asks Mildred in "The Seventh Horse" whether Hevalino "Is ... an animal or a woman?" (1989b: 69) and he obtains no answer. Hevalino, "a strange looking creature", is described as a She-creature who curses and is "impertinent as well", and, although possessor of beautiful hair, also has "long wolves' teeth" (1989b: 68). Similarly, Virginia Fur, in "As They Rode", is another animal-like creature: she is foul-mouthed and frightening. That she is a female is the only clear feature: "one couldn't really be altogether sure that she was a human being" (1989b: 3). Also, her hair, like Hevalino's, is "a mane of hair yards long" and her nails are always dirty. These female protagonists are characterised by highly sexualised body features, body smell and body hair. Whereas Virginia Fur smells of nature, "a mixture of spices and game, the stables, fur and grasses" (1989b: 3), cultured human beings are characterised by "a rare filthiness" and a peculiar stench: "The sickening smell of a human entered her nostrils" (1989b: 4). Hevalino and Virginia are the paradigm of the free creature; although dirty and hideous, they succeed in captivating the reader who identifies with them rather than with the traditional characters that present clear human features. In "The Seventh Horse", Mildred (Mild-red, the menacingly docile female) represents what society considers to be a "respectable" lady. Two similar characters appear in "As They Rode". One of the two women dressed in black "wore the icy look of a dutiful lady" (1989b: 10) whilst "The other one, with her pinched, dry face, talked in a crystal clear voice, one of those voices that are so tiresome when one wants to go to sleep in a railway compartment" (1989b: 10). These "proper ladies" are in both "The Seventh Horse" and "As They Rode" ridiculed for their simplicity and affected piety. The respectable women in black are not only indifferent to sex but also made infertile (Mildred is "thin and dry

as a stick"). The "monstrous" females Hevalino and Virginia are described in explicit sexual terms and they are made to procreate. Hence, using Bakhtin's words: "the monster, death, becomes pregnant" (Bakhtin 1968: 91).

The comic nature in "As They Rode" is produced by the reversal of traditional social concepts. All is turned upside down, the "good" stinks and sainthood is "foul". Beauty is Virginia Fur's hair "always full of nocturnal animals", and Ignose's "russet buttocks". Lack of inhibition and "unladylike" behaviour are Virginia's attributes, the "dutiful ladies" having "a certain nauseating smell of the sick" about them. The theme of mockery in this story is almost entirely based on the body and on the grotesque. In "Waiting", Elizabeth advises Margaret:

"you must get free, free to kill and scream, free to tear out his hair and free to run away only to come back laughing." (1989b: 62)

To kill and scream whilst laughing is what Carrington's texts are about. These writings' comic nature makes the reader laugh at the horrific, as is the case with stories such as "As They Rode", where Virginia Fur, the monster allied with nature, boils in her stewpot six of her seven offspring as "a funeral feast". "As They Rode" is a narrative of a festival where the savage is the protagonist and Virginia Fur's world is an ongoing wild celebration. The derisive criticism of Catholicism is surrealistically heretical and Carrington translates into her writing her beliefs about the Church. She considers that behind the Church's apparent naïveté and good will lie perversity and malevolence. Thus, the writing's expression of religion in the story is naïve and perverse, comic and lethal:

Saint Alexander showed off his garden [of the little Flowers of Mortification] with a certain pride. "Little Theresa never thought of underwear of reinforced concrete," he said. (1989b: 5)

The story's heretical comic nature aims at liberation from what Bakhtin calls "the great interior censor": "fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power" (Bakhtin 1968: 94). These stories aim at undermining authority and celebrate positive destructiveness with laughter. "As They Rode" ends with the cry of the Roman Carnival "Death to thee!" (Bakhtin 1968: 334-5) marking the victory of laughter over seriousness: "Killlll himmm!, death to foul Alexander!" (1989b: 10). Laughter in "As They Rode" is

a medieval laughter in that it defies authority whilst being non-dogmatic; linked to the act of procreation, with birth, renewal, fertility and abundance. The killing and eating of the heroine's offspring as well as Virginia's revengeful attitude, however, turn the narrative towards death rather than resurrection. If Carrington's previous stories presented "fear" as a central theme, fear is also central to "As They Rode", where she confirms that every laugh intends to defeat seriousness and ultimately fear. "As They Rode" masks fright behind the comic, as exemplified by Virginia Fur's "gaping mouth":

She opened her mouth and a blind nightingale flew in: she swallowed it and sang in the nightingale's voice: "Little Jesus is dead, and we've had a fine dinner."  
(1989b: 7)

Several elements in this passage offer a variety of interpretations. On the one hand the image of the nightingale recalls the work by Ernst (*Deux enfants menacés par un rossignol*) that stimulated Carrington into joining the Surrealists. The "blind" bird is yet another reference to Ernst: blind (as Lazarus) and a bird (as Ernst's icon "Loplop") and by swallowing it Carrington is destroying whilst embodying the teachings of Ernst and other Surrealists. On the other hand, words such as "mouth", "swallowed" and "dinner" offer a different reading of the passage. The line "she swallowed it and sang in the nightingale's voice" links devouring with singing, orality with creativity. The production of speech, language, is thus linked to engendering and devouring. Virginia Fur provides, then, Carrington's answer to the questions about female creativity raised by the Surrealists. It is this "edge" that Virginia and her cats ride along in "As They Rode Along the Edge": the edge between body and language, between the self and the word. In fact, the crucial aspect of the grotesque's comic nature, of Carrington's writing's comic nature, lies in its refusal to admit that language is omnipotent; language is felt to be senseless and thus ridiculed.

Carrington's humour makes use of the incongruous: "I sold it [my soul] a long time ago for a kilo of truffles" (1989b: 4), and of the unexpected: "several days per week she was forced to live on lost sheepdog, and occasionally mutton or child, though this last was rare since no one ever came here" (1989b: 4). The writing makes the reader laugh, and even when it is not the reader but the characters of the stories who laugh (as,

for example, when "Elizabeth laughed so much that she reeled around the room") the reader is made to laugh again. Laughter serves as well to confound the reader's expectations and often shows a sardonic awareness of Carrington's own non-conformism. This turns into scenes of self-mockery such as when Margaret's and Elizabeth's irritation at each other is extrapolated to the two female characters who open the story:

Two old women were fighting in the street, pinching each other like a pair of angry black lobsters. One or two nighthawkers watched them appreciatively. (1989b: 61)

A grieving for lost love and the expression of love/desire as destructive are illustrated in "Waiting" both by the opening scene and by Margaret's definition of love: "You can't love anyone until you have drawn blood and dipped in your fingers and enjoyed it" (1989b: 62). This testifies to a violent substratum in Carrington's heroines, always likely to erupt: the desire for murder (indicated by the image of Arabelle and the ghostly girl drowning each other in the lake) and the assassinations carried out by Hevalino and Virginia Fur all declare the anger, pain and thirst for revenge that can be read within the frame of Carrington's experience of mental breakdown and are best exemplified by the idea presented in "Waiting" that the past only dies "if the present cuts its throat" (1989b: 63).

These stories are even more violent than the previous ones and the reader may ask, if the "represented" woman dies and the heroines are dismembered and rotten with leprosy and their offsprings are murdered, what remains? The texts and their continuous production of signification remain. Death and birth are thus linked, and the monstrous act of murdering enhances the rebirth of a multiplicity of interpretations. The grotesque is the literary genre that favours this process, as grotesque laughter itself is based upon the interdependence of death with rebirth (Bakhtin 1968: 12). In this death-birth chain, Carrington's writing exercises the power to unmake in order to create again. Emerging from the experience at the sanatorium Carrington aims to "write along the edge", that is, to produce a language that is deformed, disproportionate, excessive, and that seeks to re-explore the body, the body of woman and the body of the text.

### The monstrous reader and the grotesque body of the text

Carrington, after the experiences at Madrid and Santander, perceives herself as a Lazarus, as she names one of the protagonists of the 1941 stories. Her resurrection into artistic life and freedom of movement is, however, affected by a different understanding of her body and mind. In 1943, in a letter enclosed with her manuscript of "Down Below", Carrington wrote to Henri Parisot from Mexico:

Je suis une vieille dame qui a vecue beaucoup et *j'ai changée* - si ma vie vaut quelque chose je suis le resultat du temps - ... J'accepte L'Honorable Décrépidité actuelle - ce que j'ai à dire maintenant est dévoilé autant que possible - Voir à travers Le monstre - Vous comprenez ça? Non? Tant pis.

[I'm an old lady who has lived long and *I have changed* - in that as long as my life is worth anything I'm the result of time - ... I accept my present Honourable Decrepitude - What I have to say now is unveiled as much as possible - See through The monster - Do you understand that? No? Too bad. (1973: 7-8, my translation)

Carrington states here her new motto, "Voir à travers Le monstre" ["To See through The monster"] which has, in both French and English, different meanings. Among others, it could be read as "See beyond The monster", in which case Carrington would be proposing that everything is monstrous and that one has to endeavour to find, through it, an ultimate truth. It could be read as "See via The monster", that is "Carrington, through the monster, seeing"; in this case Carrington would imply that the only way to write and to live is by realising everything is hideous. It could also be the instruction "See The monster in yourself" or "Carrington as seen through The monster" which would allude to a medievalist perception of evil and good as co-existing in the self, in which case Carrington endeavours to find her evil side. Finally, reversing the elements of the expression, Carrington might be aiming at "Seeing The monster through", that is, the monstrous is expected to belong to the past. Although when she wrote her 1941-2 stories she did not expect anyone to understand what she was attempting, ("Vous comprenez ça? Non? Tant pis."), I am concerned with exploring Carrington's literary interest: Voir à travers Le monstre.

Carrington complains to Parisot that she has lost all of her teeth (it is not known whether this occurred as a result of the injections at the sanatorium). At twenty-six she

feels deathlike but, paradoxically, she presents herself as the exact reverse of traditional representations of Death; where the Grim Reaper is old and cadaverous, Carrington is young; where Death's face presents merely a sardonic smiling set of teeth, Carrington's offers a gummy grin. She is a monster: young but toothless, a twenty-six-year-old crone. This paradoxical perception of the self is transformed into the representation of old/young bodies and developed in the opposition of death and resurrection in "Cast Down by Sadness".

The young girl in the story, although beautiful and elegantly dressed, seems to have no physicality: "Her black dress blended with the shadows around her, and I had the impression that her face was floating in space" (1989b: 54). The girl orders Arabelle to undress and then the narrator realises that "her body was nothing but a skeleton" (1989b: 54). Both characters, the young and the old, lack corporeality and illustrate Carrington's surprise at perceiving herself alive, despite having "died" at the sanatorium. In these two monstrous self-portraits, Arabelle's skeleton and the girl's phantom, Carrington includes the two possible representations of herself:

Death cannot be portrayed directly: it appears in literature either as a *figura* (emblem) such as the medieval *memento mori* skeletons, or as mere space. This is materialized as a ghost. (Jackson 1988: 68)

The skeleton and the ghost are Carrington's immediate reaction to the experience of madness and death. If, for Carrington, the experience of madness is equated to death, her present life was then monstrous: a dead person alive. The grotesque bodies of Arabelle and the girl suggest life after death: they hint at an interpretation of life as cyclical and eternal (indicated by the two protagonists' *perpetual* struggle). There is an aspect of the narrative line that does not, however, conform to the optimistic spirit of Bakhtin's grotesque. If the scene recounted by the unnamed narrator is one that is eternally re-enacted, there must be a moment when the girl and Arabelle reappear from the lake, when Dominique regains his corporeality from being a heap of dust. Yet, the narrative line reveals the progress of the characters towards death, not from death towards resurrection.

Yet again, it seems possible for the characters of "Cast Down by Sadness" to be dead and alive at the same time. The logic of "being killed", entailing "dying", is overturned. Arabelle Pegaso's and the ghostly girl's grotesque bodies are always in the process of becoming. This idea is further complicated when the reader interacts with Carrington's monstrous projections. The ghostly girl is powerful and "beautiful", Arabelle is "coquettish" and the possessor of "luxuriant hair". The reader is well disposed towards them, whilst despising Dominique, whose filthy appearance makes one "recoil involuntarily" (1989b: 53). Yet, Dominique is alive and they are dead. The ghost asks the corpse: "'Is he dead or is he alive?'" Dominique wishes he were dead "I am dead. Leave me in peace". Dominique, being alive rots, whereas Arabelle and the girl are perpetually regenerated. Carrington puts a horrific idea in the reader's mind, that s/he prefers "the dead" to "the living".

In "Waiting", the story that focuses on the idea of the present as the murderer of the past, the import of Carrington's motto would mean, instead, "To see The monster through". Parts of the body and bodily waste are the elements that characterise this story. Both the body's state of decomposition and the spaces allude to the imagery of the grave. Death is all-pervading and even Margaret's past must die. The young Margaret seems determined to break free of the passionate love she feels for Fernando and when Elizabeth asks her mockingly whether she thinks "that the past dies", Margaret answers resolutely: "Yes, yes, if the present cuts its throat" (1989b: 63). Everything around Elizabeth is putrid, soiled and old:

a diminutive hall littered with beautifully coloured and rather soiled clothes. Their entrance provoked a flight of large moths, which had been grazing peacefully amongst the more mature fur coats. (1989b: 63)

Margaret perceives some sort of contagion in Elizabeth and she is ambivalent as to whether to follow her. For Margaret, the dirt is not repulsive, and she merely takes note of it. Elizabeth takes pleasure in trying to disgust Margaret and she points out to her: "You see, I don't like meals, I only eat banquets" (1989b: 64). Margaret does not feel disgust at the sight of the kitchen waste. She does, however, reject the food offered to her in an excrement-soiled spoon: "It dropped into the lavatory the other day ... while I



was washing up. Hungry?" (1989b: 64). Nail clippings, excrement and body odours are the evidence of her love-making with Fernando:

"I cut his toenails myself. And I know every inch of his body and the difference between the smell of his hair and the smell of his skin." (1989b: 64-5)

Insects, germs and fungi feed on the grotesque and putrid surroundings. Elizabeth and Fernando in "Waiting" nurture death. Ethel and Lazarus in "White Rabbits" nourish death.

The attempt to reverse the body, that is, the attempt "to see" literally "through" the inside of the body, takes place in "White Rabbits". The action by the unnamed narrator of buying a piece of meat points once more to the separation of what is traditionally kept unified: the body. The elegant house, with a hall of carved wood and "decorated with dark baroque furniture and red plush" (1989b: 58), is dark and dirty. Two elements or, rather, two symbols are at work through the text: red and white, which represent the dichotomy between life and death, but which could also be seen as the whiteness of the body tissues and the redness of the blood. The house is decorated in red; however, it is filled with a hundred snow-white carnivorous rabbits. Lazarus, although dressed in a plush-like red gown (Figure Two), possesses a glittering white skin. "Seeing through The monster" in "White Rabbits" is an extended metaphor for the reversal of the outside/inside opposition. When the protagonist enters 40 Pest Street she is entering into a monstrous body where she finds disease, images of bodily decay and violent desires.

Yet again, a desire to break with the past, "To see The monster through" can be observed when "White Rabbits" is compared with a story of the previous literary moment, "Pigeon, Fly!". In fact, "White Rabbits" brings in, rhythmically, the same leitmotifs of "Pigeon, Fly!". Indeed, it could be a second (and final) episode to that narrative. Both "Pigeon, Fly!" and "White Rabbits" focus on a female narrator/protagonist's encounter with her double, married to a domineering husband. Agathe ("Pigeon, Fly!") is renamed Ethel in "White Rabbits", the contraction of the qualifying "ethereal" (Agathe died when she became ethereal, transparent and faded away). For her part, Ethel reminds the reader of Agathe, since her skin glittered, like the

stone, "as if speckled with thousands of minute stars" (1989b: 58). Both stories present abundant metaphors of death and both narrators acknowledge their fright at what they perceive as imminent death. In "Pigeon, Fly!" the woman visitor finds her double already deceased and her own death (which begins to show in her hands, as does Ethel's death) follows shortly. Ethel is forsaken, isolated and, moreover, rotten with leprosy. She is the phantom of the male Surrealist idealisation of woman. She is incapable of creating art since she loses her fingers, the most immediate instruments of the artist. The narrator is invited to stay over and, for a moment, she feels as immobilised as Eleanor felt in "Pigeon, Fly!". But the most radical difference in the revision is in the conclusion: the protagonist resolves to take the alternative option of escaping, of "Seeing The monster through".

In Carrington's concern about the body's integrity, a revision of the established body politics of the grotesque can be observed. To the voicing of a discrepancy between body and spirit, and to the images of loss, split and physical changes, Carrington adds a reappropriation of the deformed, decaying grotesque female body. The putrefaction of the bodies and the fungi and dirt that characterise the spaces surrounding the protagonists communicate the result of Carrington's rehearsal with death. "Waiting" and "White Rabbits" present Carrington's desire to embrace life in its most primeval aspects. The protagonists employ their senses continually: they see the extreme, basic colours, white and red; they hear screams; they finger the velvety growth of fungi; they taste excrement-soiled food and smell the putrid odour of decomposing meat. Everything is for them extreme. The grotesque body becomes in these stories *not* an alternative to the "cleansed, complete body", allowed only to exist in the momentary wilderness of the carnival. Bodies in these stories are ageing or diseased female bodies who are presented as the most reasonable and permanent perception of the body. The doubling of one female character into another and their subsequent dismemberment expose a rejection of the immobility of the traditional body and expose the possibility of evolution and transition.

It is meaningful that all the protagonists are females, particularly when all other categories are blurred: they blend with animals, with vegetation, and even with objects

(the wheel *is part* of Virginia's body). Carrington wants these bodies to be female, and just as the monstrous body is a statement of social and cultural disagreement, the female grotesque body is even more so. With her inclusion of female grotesque bodies Carrington is making a statement about patriarchy.

The fact that these monstrous females are protagonists is yet another form of breaking prohibitions since it is through language that the monstrous is introduced to the reader as being perfectly natural and unsurprising. These protagonists make the reader ally with femaleness. Moreover, they allure the reader into taking the same pleasure as them in disturbing common uses, meanings, spaces and characteristics. The inclusion in these stories of the image of a monstrous female body concealed behind a comic disposition is presented so deftly that the reader is irresistibly carried along with it. In "Cast Down by Sadness", for example, a simile very much like the one that appears in "White Rabbits" is wittily introduced at the beginning of the narrative with the purpose of connecting the reader with the plot and the characters. Where in "White Rabbits" the final words are "her fingers fell off and dropped to the ground like shooting stars", in "Cast Down by Sadness" the simile is "You have little feet like knife blades" (1989b: 51). As in "White Rabbits" the words are pronounced by the first person narrative voice and they are referring to a repellent body, in this case that of Arabelle Pegaso. However, unlike the simile in "White Rabbits" this one is placed at the beginning of the narrative and the elements in comparison are reversed. In "her fingers fell off and dropped to the ground like shooting stars" the horrifying comes first ("her fingers fell off"), the poetic transformation second. In "You have little feet like knife blades" the elements have been altered and the reader finds her/himself carried along with conceiving mentally a metaphor possibly more complicated than the previous one. The reader is comfortable with a likening that commences "You have little feet" and shocked by its continuation "like knife blades". The reader wonders whether the choice of words has something to do with the effect of the sound of the words together; it might be alliteration, as "little feet like" sounds like the grinding of knives. The simile appears in the following context:

"Madam," I said, "innumerable troubles have befallen me, and I am very grateful to you, as you have shown me the most beautiful feet I have ever seen. You have little feet like knife blades." (1989b: 51)

"Little" is a qualifier for that which, by being a diminutive, invokes tenderness and even feelings of protection. Few readers will feel protective of or tender towards knife blades. The simile is impossible, and yet, placed at the beginning of the narrative and pronounced by the narrative voice that is closer to the reader, the unfeasible simile becomes effectual. The reader looks differently now at Arabelle Pegaso (the voice called her "Madam", "beautiful", said that it was "grateful" to her) knowing that her/his *alter ego* (the narrative voice) likes Arabelle's frightful body. The reader, unconsciously, knows something more breathtaking: that s/he can enjoy depravity and repugnance, that s/he can be poetic about it. Now, both Carrington and the text are laughing while "Seeing through The monster", for the monster is the reader.

The texts themselves are grotesque in that they uncover a myriad of possible readings. The reader makes the stories grotesque by interpreting them. S/he becomes an accomplice with the writer in the construction of meaning, which s/he co-builds. I posit Carrington's writing in the grotesque realm of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque where the recipient of the message is as much an originator of meaning as the bearer of the message (Bakhtin 1968: 7). Once the text is finally handed over to the reader, it is open to further analysis and discussion. The variety of readings that can be made (of which my analysis is but one) implies that there is a constant exchange of meanings: the triangle formed by the writer, the story and the reader places the text in a constant process of signification. If writing and reading involve the capturing, killing and consuming of reality, the reader, when carried along with the events of the stories, is her/himself being blended with animals and vegetation, and metaphorically killing her/his own progeny, for, as Winterson writes: "True art, when it happens to us, challenges the 'I' that we are" (Winterson 1995: 15). The process of involving the reader in the creation of signification of the word or the image is a metaphor for a larger process taking place within the writing act: the process involved in the creation of those very words or images. In 1987, answering Warner's question about the relation between her writing and painting, Carrington wrote to her: "I haven't been able to reconcile

image world and word world in my own mind" (Warner 1991: 20). Although I contend that when looking at the grotesque quality of Carrington's short stories the "image" and the "word" worlds appear propitiating towards one another, what interests me most about Carrington's answer to Warner lies in the sentence she wrote after that:

"I haven't been able to reconcile image world and word world in my own mind, I know the Bible says sound came first - I'm not sure. Perhaps simultaneous, but how did it get solid?" (in Warner 1991: 20)

Carrington deliberates over the ethereal quality of thought, for she acknowledges a bodily source in writing and painting. What interests her is the movement from the mind to the letter, from the spiritual to the physical. She has reached a point of abstraction of language that goes beyond its corporeality (in the image or in the word) or its spirituality (in dreams or thought) where she seeks to understand the way in which the creative process takes place. Picasso, by the end of his life, commented upon the same consideration; as he told Gilot:

I have less and less time, and yet I have more and more to say, and what I have to say is, increasingly, something about what goes on in the movement of my thought. I have reached the moment, you see, when the movement of my thought interests me more than the thought itself. (Picasso in Schnieper 1971: 166)

This is an enigma that cannot be resolved. What Carrington can achieve, though, is to involve the reader in the processes of association of words and production of signification so that, then, both the writer and the reader can be puzzled by the mystery of the creation of poetic language. In this case the reader and the writer are "Seeing through The monster", for the monster is the text.

A feminist answer to the question posed above regarding how women writers voice dissidence through the grotesque is to be found in the shifting positions the monster occupies. In the traditional grotesque, the monstrous body is defined by opposition. The "normative" body (the white European male of classical culture) marks the creation of the monstrous body. Carrington uses the grotesque differently. Her monsters are not defined by opposition to a single source (not defined in terms of animal and human, black and white, man and woman, health and sickness) but are to be found in a variety of shifting positions. The monster is everywhere. In these texts the monster can be seen as the writer's past or as the writer's own body; monstrosity can be seen in

the heroines' sick and putrefied female bodies; above all, the reader discovers that s/he is a monstrous reader and that all this monstrosity is coming from a single source: the monstrous text. Carrington breaks the dichotomy of the definitions of the monstrous and she spreads it everywhere, not as something bad, though, but as something that is fact, that ought to be acknowledged, and she does so with the deadpan seriousness of her comic writing style.

**PART THREE**  
**MEXICO AND TRAVEL**

*Life: a puzzle made by a lunatic, the  
winding circles lead to another  
puzzle sillier and more puzzling yet.*  
*Leonora Carrington The Stone Door (1940s)*

## Chapter Seven

### Mexico

Caroline Cass writes that Carrington "is today to feminist art historians what Tina Turner is to ageing rockers - something of a cult icon" (Cass 1997: 28). However, as her 1997 meeting with Carrington shows, Carrington's attitude towards her devotees is disagreeable, to say the least. Cass painfully realised that finding information about Carrington's life after 1942 is extremely difficult. Indeed, it is quite startling that there is so much information about her life for the period 1937-42 and so little about the years preceding and following these. The reasons for this are complex. Carrington first gave an interview to Germaine Rouvre in 1977, and for the following twenty years she agreed to talk about her life on another seven occasions. Chadwick saw her in the early 1980s and Warner in 1987 and neither of them felt they could publish the interviews as such, but they often quoted her words. On these three occasions the interviewers were interested in her as a *Surrealist* and asked particularly about her relationship with Max Ernst.<sup>1</sup> Then, in 1990, her literary agent, Paul De Angelis, thought it appropriate, for marketing purposes, to conduct and publish an extensive interview. In it he asked about Carrington's childhood as well as about her life in Mexico and in this interview one can read the first signs of her boredom with interviews and interviewers. When he asks her to tell how she became Ernst's lover, she exclaims angrily: "Come on, everybody knows the rest" (De Angelis 1991: 36).

Probably prompted by her realisation that critics were only interested in her relationship with Ernst, she decided to decline most interviews or to boycott them. So, when by December of that same year, Suleiman went to see her, she found an enraged Carrington who exclaimed "Those were three years of my life. *Why doesn't anyone ask me about anything else?*" (Suleiman 1993: 105).

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<sup>1</sup> Although Rouvre's interview focused on her as a woman artist, and asked her about feminism, creativity and maternity, the complete printed interview was included in a collection on Surrealist women. Chadwick saw her when she was preparing her book on *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* and was obviously interested in her life in France. Warner conducted the interviews in order to write the introduction to the Virago editions of Carrington's writing. Because the two books published by Virago include mainly stories written between 1937 and 1942, her interviews concentrated also on this period of her life.



Suleiman had a disastrous interview. Apparently, Carrington contradicted the very basis of her questions:

When Leonora told me, straightfaced, that she had never thought of Max as a bird, I acknowledged my defeat. There was nothing to do but put away the photographs and turn off the tape recorder. (Suleiman 1993: 104-5)

Suleiman considered her interview "frustrating" and blamed herself, for she realised that: "Leonora had spoken at length about the subject with other interviewers" (Suleiman 1993: 105). But the reason for the failure of the interview lies, in my opinion, in Carrington herself: "I don't like definitions. I don't think one can be defined, made into a concept" (Appignanesi 1992: 13). This is the second reason for the lack of information. Having realised that interviewers were only interested in one aspect of her personality she also realised how much the labels of "Surrealist", "mad" and "Ernst's lover" defined and enclosed her. As is shown in Chapter Eight, Carrington argues in *The Stone Door* that the notion of "one complete being" limits a person's potential power to change their identity. In order to avoid definitions she now refuses to speak. Although in 1992, she subjected herself to the filming of the *Omnibus* programme, a sequence in the film shows how difficult she can be. Chadwick and Carrington are in an art gallery, in Mexico City. They are looking at Carrington's paintings:

Chadwick: ... the space in this painting makes me think of a conversation we once had about liminal space...

[*Silence*]

Carrington: Yes, yes, I remember that.

Chadwick: Is this a kind of liminal space for you? The space that is always so full of possibilities?

Carrington: I don't know. I'm always a bit afraid of defining things too much. I think whatever there is to see is there to be seen without defining it.

[*Silence*]

Chadwick: I'm always curious about all the wonderful little details. [*Vaguely and slightly patronising:*] What's happening here? [*Pointing to the painting*]

Carrington: Well, that's someone being swallowed by a crocodile, isn't it?

Chadwick: [*In an abated tone:*] Yes, it does appear to be someone being swallowed by a crocodile, [*inspiring*] a sort of androgynous little figure.

Carrington: [*Deadpan:*] Mmm.

At this point it seems that Chadwick is aware that Carrington is not prepared to talk about her paintings or about the motifs they present. Like Suleiman, she acknowledges defeat:

Chadwick: It is so difficult, I think, to paint the paintings and then have some art historian come along and ask to talk about them.

Carrington: [*Looking at the painting:*] Yes, that's what art historians do, don't they. They lay down laws. [*Looking at Chadwick:*] But I don't go along with the laws. I wouldn't be doing it, would I, if I went along with the laws.

Chadwick: [*Crossing her arms over her chest, in protection:*] No, but it must be hard having art historians come along afterwards.

Carrington: [*Looking at her defiantly:*] It's not hard because I ignore what they say.

[*Extremely long silence where they maintain eye contact*]

Chadwick: Shall we move on?

Carrington: Yes, why not ... After all ... (*Omnibus* 1992)

The filming at the art gallery ends here. Later Carrington commented to Lisa Appignanesi that she found the process of participating in the BBC film delightful: "Everyone was absolutely charming, kind, tactful" (Appignanesi 1992).

Some of the writers who achieve fame during their lifetime spend their old age reconstructing their past into the myth of the "great artist". Carrington does not appear eager to create an image, but to *destroy* one: that of the crazy Surrealist muse. This is why her antipathy towards critics and historians has become proverbial. Despising art critics, she once wrote: "Once a dog barked at a mask I made; that was the most honourable comment I ever received" (1976: 23). She selects her interviewers carefully: the BBC producers of *Omnibus* and a telephone conversation for *the Guardian* to coincide with her 1992 exhibition at the Serpentine, and a meeting with Cass for the *Telegraph Magazine* are the most recent interviews. Yet, even when she agrees to speak, she does not accommodate her interviewer. Cass's 1997 interview shows that Carrington merely agreed to let herself be photographed next to her paintings. Carrington greeted her "cautiously", did not speak, and Cass realised that Leonora "protects her privacy with the determination of a seasoned hermit crab" (Cass 1997: 30). Indeed, the voices that appear in Cass's frustrated interview (rather, a review article) are those of Gunther Gerszo, Nita Renfrew, "a confidante" and "an old acquaintance" - Leonora's own comments come from sources other than this 1997 interview.

Her silence, rooted in the reasons given above (exasperation at having to talk about her relationship with Ernst, dislike for being labelled and made to fit into academic theories, and protection of her own privacy) is not only not proving effective

but is having the opposite result. Confronted with an implacable silence, Cass organises her article around the Leonora portrayed by Chadwick and Warner: a young, passionate woman aspiring to become an artist and writer. The article's heading "The Mistress of Surrealism" already includes the mythical elements: Surrealism and muse, whilst the subheading clarifies that she was "Former Lover of Max Ernst". With the use of the word "mistress", Cass elaborates on the iconography: denoting love and passion, a "mistress" is perceived to be more voluptuous, licentious and dependable than a "lover". On several occasions, Cass improves on the legend, such as when she writes "Spurred on by her mentor and lover, Leonora began writing" (Cass 1997: 32), despite Carrington's claims that she wrote since childhood.

When, for the purpose of this thesis, I contacted her, she answered that she was not interested in researchers or critics, that she wanted to be left in peace. I was particularly interested in her life after the Surrealists, not only because I feel there is more than enough research done about her life in France and Spain, but also because her relationship with Mexico, its culture and its people bewilders me. I was left with no first-hand information. When I commented on this to Warner in March 1994, she answered that this attitude was consistent with her zeal for privacy and her complete disregard for the commercial aspect of art. Warner commented that had she registered and copyrighted all her artistic production, which, after arriving in America, included sculptures as well as writings and paintings, she would be an extremely wealthy woman by now. However, she lost, rewrote, found and then misplaced manuscripts of all of her literary production, and some of it went straight into the dustbin.

An example of how her work is being increasingly appreciated is recent sales. Her sculpture *Cat Woman* (or *The Grande Dame*) (1951), bought by Edward James in the Fifties, was sold in 1994 at the New York Sotheby's for \$299,500 (*El Pais* 1994: 35), and one year before this *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* was sold at a record \$500,000 (Cass 1997: 28). Her work has entered what Cass terms "New York's high-voltage zone". Yet, as Warner noted, she is not rich, she lives well, but struggles to finance her trips between Chicago (where one of her sons lives) and Mexico City (where

her husband Chiqui lives). Recent visitors to her house in Mexico City were shocked by her "spartan kitchen" and confused when offered "tea in chipped mugs" (Cass 1997: 28).

### **The forties and fifties**

Carrington arrived in Mexico in 1942 and she immediately obtained Mexican citizenship, offered by the country to European Second World War refugees.<sup>2</sup> Her husband Renato Leduc wanted to enter the world of politics in his country, and even though they separated in 1943, he was instrumental in introducing to Leonora a wide variety of representatives of Mexican culture and politics, from poets and bullfighters to diplomats (a parody of a Mexican embassy party is the subject of "The Neutral Man" (early 1950s)). Leonora also soon renewed her acquaintance with members of the Surrealist movement. She met Remedios Varo (her closest friend for the next twenty years), and Varo's husband Benjamin Peret, and through both of them she met the painter Esteban Francés. She reunited with Wolfgang Paalen, his wife, the painter and poet, Alice Rahon, (who had just ended a lesbian relationship with Elisabeth Smart) and Eva Sulzer (Paalen, Rahon and Sulzer lived in a *ménage a trois*). Very influential was her acquaintance with the psychoanalyst and writer Pierre Mabille, for he encouraged her to write "Down Below". She established a very close friendship with the film director Luis Buñuel, the basis of which was a common rapport regarding humour, Surrealism and their passion for story telling. In an interview Buñuel reminisced that when he first met Carrington in New York, she often looked at him affectionately and exclaimed: "How very much you look like my guardian at the insane asylum in Santander!" (in Turrent and de la Colina 1993: 42) Lucero Isaac, a former assistant to Buñuel, recalls that first meeting between Leonora and Buñuel and exposes their shared sense of the absurd:

Buñuel went to visit Leduc, who wasn't at home. Leonora opened the door ... She promptly went into the bathroom, keeping the door open and, fully dressed,

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<sup>2</sup> Mexico was the only country in the Americas that did not recognise Franco's government. In 1940 Mexico offered its protection to all Spanish refugees (Varo would benefit from this policy) and later to the war refugees.

began taking a shower. Buñuel, bewildered, continued sitting staring at her. "After all I am a surrealist," he thought, "but at what point does it stop?" (in Cass 1997: 34)

Buñuel remained ever after fascinated by her and according to Aranda (Buñuel's biographer) three items decorated the walls of his home: a portrait of himself painted by Dalí, a painting by Carrington and a map of the Paris underground (Aranda 1969: 227). She also met the Hungarian photographer and photojournalist, Emerico "Chiqui" Weisz, whom she was eventually to marry in 1946. Soon after arriving she met Edward James, the rich English eccentric and patron of Surrealism, who became the most important collector of her work - he bought, for example, the sculpture *Cat Woman* (1951), and the oils *The House Opposite* (c.1945) and *Portrait of the Late Mrs Partridge* (1947) among many others. Hayden Herrera, the biographer of Frida Kahlo, tells that Peret, Francés and Carrington were some of the very few European visitors admitted to Kahlo's studio during the early forties (Herrera 1989: 334). Carrington was also invited to Rivera and Kahlo's second wedding. As she recalls the event:

Diego and Frida Kahlo got remarried in Coyoacán, and I was at that wedding. It was a huge party. I had a long conversation with Diego. He told me a lot of gossip. He was amusing and I rather liked him because he was so funny, so full of life, exuberant. But Frida had a very hard time then. She started to get really very ill. Then she became bedridden, of course, not too long after. (De Angelis 1991: 39)

Frida Kahlo died soon after, in 1954. Six years after her death, Carrington, with the collaboration of Alice Rahon and Remedios Varo, organised an exhibition-homage to her.

Critics Juan Manuel Bonet and Jose Pierre distinguish two nuclei of European artists in Mexico during the forties and fifties. One was made up of the collaborators of the journal *Dyn*: Paalen (its founder), Alice Rahon, César Moro and Eva Sulzer, among others.<sup>3</sup> The second group was made up of Leonora Carrington, Benjamin Peret, Remedios Varo, Kati and Jose Horna and Gunther Gerszo, who portrayed the group in

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<sup>3</sup> Founded in 1942, the first issue of *Dyn* marked the rift between Paalen and Breton in the former's essay "Farewell to Surrealism". The following year an "Amerindian" issue contained contributions of many Mexican authors and analysed and mentioned many autochthonous aspects of Mexican art. One year later, in 1943, after the publication of its sixth issue, *Dyn* disappeared.

his painting *Los Días de la Calle Gabino Barreda* (Figure Eight). Gerszo refers to his first meeting with Leonora as "unforgettable":

I saw this lady sitting in a patio in Mexico City with her legs spread wide apart. She was the most foul-mouthed woman I ever heard in my whole life. (in Cass 1997: 34)

As depicted by Gerszo in *Los Días de la Calle Gabino Barreda*, she is the woman-like figure sitting naked with a long mane, while her hands hold a female torso surrounded by clinging vines. It is very interesting to note that Gerszo chose to identify the female artists with precisely the same images they use to represent themselves: Carrington is easily identified by the long, dark, horse-like mane and Varo by her feline eyes and by her being surrounded by cats. Carrington and her friends created close bonds, meeting regularly every Saturday in Varo's and Peret's house (situated in Gabino Barreda Street), thus reproducing the intellectual exchange they had in Paris. Luis Buñuel, César Moro, Wolfgang Paalen, Alice Rahon and Dorothy Hood were frequent visitors to the house on these Saturday evenings. The first group (formed around Paalen and the collaborators of the review *Dyn*) shared more interests with Surrealism (despite their article "Farewell to Surrealism") than Carrington's group. However, neither group can be labelled "officially" Surrealist (for an official Surrealist group was being formed at the time in New York around Breton).

On their arrival in Mexico in 1943 Leonora and Renato Leduc first lived with Varo and Peret and then rented an apartment near Remedios. Carrington's huge apartment in Rosa Moreno Street was in a building that had once served as the Russian Embassy, but had since been abandoned. When they moved in, "the marble floors and curving staircases lay in a state of near ruin" (Chadwick 1985: 191). A home-made film of Leonora in the forties, walking along the interior patio of this house would not have shocked the readers of her 1941-2 short stories: a web of tropical vegetation threatens to engulf both the walls and Leonora (*Omnibus* 1992). The clip also shows her painting in her studio, which was visited by Edward James in 1944 and described as follows:

Leonora Carrington's studio had everything most conducive to make it the true matrix of true art. Small in the extreme, it was an ill-furnished and not very well lighted room. It had nothing to endow it with the title of studio at all, save a few almost worn-out paint brushes and a number of gesso panels, set on a dog-and-

cat populated floor, leaning face-averted against a white-washed and peeling wall. The place was a combined kitchen, nursery, bedroom, kennel and junk-store. The disorder was apocalyptic: the appurtenances of the poorest. (James 1948)

Despite living in near poverty, the forties were industrious years for her. Apart from producing over nine paintings,<sup>4</sup> she wrote and published her play *Pénélope*, which is the final rewriting of "The Oval Lady".<sup>5</sup> In 1946 she married her second husband, Emerico (Chiqui) Weisz, and on 14 July had her first son, Gabriel, who would become a writer and theatre director. The following year, on 14 November 1947, she had her second son, Pablo, who became a physician and painter.<sup>6</sup> With the novel *The Stone Door* (1947) and the painting *Chiqui, Your Country*, she moves on to celebrate her relationship with Chiqui Weisz.

Weisz had journeyed from Hungary to Mexico via France and Spain. He had left Hungary with Robert Capa (legendary founder of Magnum Photos), worked with him in Paris (during his time in France he filmed a documentary on French concentration camps) and fought in the Spanish Civil War. According to Nita Renfrew, a friend of Leonora and Chiqui, Robert Capa's renowned photograph of a soldier being struck down during the Civil War had been taken by Chiqui:

He told me it had been him and nobody knew it. I felt he was a man betrayed by his friend and that when he went to Mexico, he lost his identity as a creative artist. (in Cass 1997: 34)

One of the stories of the novel *The Stone Door* relates Chiqui's journey, as the odyssey of the boy Zacharias throughout Mesopotamia, which represents Mexico. It is a tribute to his sufferings and wanderings as well as a celebration of their encounter. By the end of the novel Zacharias (Chiqui) and "the White child" (Carrington) meet. If, in

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<sup>4</sup> One of these was her renowned *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, submitted to an international competition of paintings with that title and reproduced in *The Temptation of Saint Anthony Catalogue* (1947) and Schlieker (1991).

<sup>5</sup> In the play (as it occurred in the short story "The Oval Lady") Pénélope and Tartar rebel against the male authority figure, the father. The new elements of the play are the inclusion of a female symbol, the Cow (a being from another world and one of the forms of the mother-goddess), and the ending. The play ends with Tartar and Pénélope merging together in one whilst the father commits suicide. The recurrent psychological break with "the father" allows the beginning of new forms of relationships.

<sup>6</sup> *Tuesday* (1946), *Amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle* (1946) and *The Giantess* (1948) present prominent motifs of maternity.

*Pénélope*, *The Stone Door* and *Chiqui, Your Country* she translates her experience of love into the physical union of the two lovers, the use of the vocative in the title of the painting suggests the depth of their dialogue, so strong as to permeate through the title, as well as making it immediately recognisable as, once more, a "collaboration work" (at least in inspiration and delivery if not in the actual act of painting). During the seventies she had to face the reproach that her self-depiction in *The Stone Door* was that of a pitiful woman subjugated to the man. In the novel, the two lovers reunite only after the female protagonist implores the man to open the door and rescue her from the "Country of the Dead", where she has been impatiently waiting for him. To this comment, her only reply was that she had written it when she was very young. Of this period she remembers:

Edward arranged an exhibition with Pierre Matisse in New York, and when that exhibition opened, I was in the hospital having Pablo ... I worked very hard, being pregnant and living on the border of poverty. (De Angelis 1991: 40)

Although in 1991 she told De Angelis that she did not know whether becoming a mother had influenced her art, she had previously acknowledged, in the 1977 radio interview with Germaine Rouvre, that the experience of maternity had laid obstacles in the way of her life as an artist:

G.R.: Est-ce qu'il vous aurait été plus facile de vous réaliser en tant qu'artiste si vous aviez été homme plutôt que femme?

L.C.: Oui, ça aurait été plus facile. Pour des raisons que Simone de Beauvoir a expliquées très clairement quand elle a dit ... que la femme était un animal qui est biologiquement mère - et ça peut vouloir dire aquatique ou maternelle, ça peut être double, enfin pour moi - c'est-à-dire que nous les femmes nous sommes des animaux conditionnés par la maternité, ça va très profondément, nous sommes très profondément conditionnées à faire survivre l'espèce, et c'est très profond, très puissant, beaucoup plus puissant que la volonté, alors si un enfant est malade on soigne l'enfant, vous comprenez? C'est ma réponse.

[G.R.: Would it have been easier for you as an artist to have been a man rather than a woman?

L.C.: Yes, it would have been easier. For the reasons that Simone de Beauvoir clearly explained when she said that woman was an animal who is biologically mother<sup>7</sup> - and this can mean aquatic or maternal, it can be double, in my opinion - that is, that we women are animals conditioned by maternity, we carry it profoundly, we are profoundly conditioned to the survival of the species and this

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<sup>7</sup> In French mère (mother) and mer (sea) are phonetically the same.



is very profound, very powerful, much more powerful than will, then if the child is ill one takes care of the child, do you understand? This is my answer.] (Rouvre 1977: 91, my translation)

It is the "profundity" of the emotional response that somehow gave her an inner view that she lacked before. That new state of being, "the underworld", became for her, after the birth of her two sons, the female space. In the painting *Chiqui, Your Country* the two lovers elope in a chariot into what seems to be a portrait of the underworld and from 1947 onwards Infernos, underworlds, caves and subterranean kitchens, appear repeatedly in her work:

I had had no idea what the maternal instinct is. I had no idea that I was going to be more or less possessed by it. I'd seen no signs of it before my sons were born, but it appeared out of the depths ... (De Angelis 1991: 40)

The underworld is not a wonder world, though. It is a space that implies tension, for as she told Rouvre:

je crois que pour les animaux femelles l'acte d'amour qui est suivi par le grand drame de la naissance d'un nouvel animal nous pousse dans le souterrain biologique très profondément.

[I believe that for female animals the act of love, which is followed by the great drama of the birth of a new animal, pushes us into the biological underworld, very deeply.] (Rouvre 1977: 91)

Birth calls for death. She talks of the birth of her sons as the inevitable biological sequence to her own death. Seen in reproductive biological terms, the birth of her sons meant a beginning asking for an end.

A feeling of "foreignness" pushed her further into the underworld she had devised out of her experience of maternity. During the following decades she lived immersed in the experience of foreignness: she was a stranger to her birthland (England), and to her adopted land (France), and even after residing in Mexico for forty years, she could not call this land "her land". Her feelings for Mexico are best described as paradoxical. From the first days in the country until the present, a mixture of fascination and anger, excitement and revolt emerge in her comments about Mexico. Chadwick claims that: "Carrington herself would always resist simply adopting indigenous motifs and images" (Chadwick 1991a: 10). In addition, Edward James seems to confirm the deliberate seclusion she created around herself, especially after the first years:

At all events, instead of Mexico taking her over, she took Mexico. More especially in Leonora's case would one have expected the sort of reaction most painters have to Mexico; the first time confronted with so forceful and pungent a racial aura, the average artist is overwhelmed. (James 1976: 17)

For years, she retreated into a self-created seclusion, which she entitled "the underworld", and which marked a personal ideological (r)evolution. In this respect she wrote to Parisot:

"Ce qu'on appelle la vie intérieure est devenu pour moi beaucoup plus, et ressemble plutôt à une brume extérieure, épaisse et enveloppante."  
[That which is referred to as inner spiritual life has for me become much more, and increasingly resembles an external fog, dense and enveloping.] (Chénieux 1975: 54, my translation)

The bright Mexican light has turned into a Gothic ambience that forces her to look inward. In this respect, her feelings are similar to those of Alice Rahon during her first years in the country. Rahon told Elizabeth Smart:

It's abstract, the country. You can't become part of it. You are forced to turn into yourself for nourishment. That is why it might possibly make you write or paint in the end. All the sources of nourishment are cut off, so you have to turn in on yourself. (Smart 1992: 225)

Carrington was in continuous disagreement with Mexican culture. She wrote to Parisot that she could hardly tolerate:

tous les côtés horribles et angoissants du Mexique, ainsi que le culte de la mort, l'indifférence enveloppante des gens, la croûte d'éternelle saleté, et l'occulte et lourde atmosphère de désespoir.  
[All the horrid and anguishing sides of Mexico, such as the cult of death, the enveloping indifference of the people, the scab of eternal dirt, and the secret and heavy atmosphere of despair.] (Chénieux 1975: 54, my translation)

She longs for the lost paradise (which she locates in "the North") which she will never be able to recover. To Henri Parisot she wrote between 1946-8:

Je veux retourner dans le Nord, je ne m'habituerai jamais à ces pays tropicaux, je n'aime pas ça, malgré les perroquets, les crocodiles et le soleil.  
[I want to return to the North, I will never get used to this tropical country, I don't like this, despite the parrots, crocodiles and sun.] (Chénieux 1975: 54, my translation)

She bitterly complains about all she has sacrificed to Mexico, herself, her body and blood:

J'ai rêvé depuis très longtemps d'échapper au Mexique. Je l'ai déjà dans le sang.

[I've long dreamt of escaping from Mexico. It's already in my blood.] (Chénieux 1975: 54, my translation)

She repeatedly felt she needed to leave the country and go north, and although she left the country twice, she always returned. Two decades after writing this letter, when she was writing *The Hearing Trumpet*, she seems to complain, in a humorous way, through her protagonist, Marian Leatherby, that she has not yet been able to leave Mexico. Marian Leatherby, of English origin, is a ninety-two-year-old caricature of herself. Her dream is to go and live in Lapland:

I never could understand this country and now I am beginning to be afraid that I never will get back to the north, never get away from here. I must not give up hope, miracles can happen and very often do happen. People think fifty years is a long time to visit any country because it is often more than half a lifetime. To me fifty years is no more than a space of time stuck somewhere I don't really want to be at all. For the last forty-five years I have been trying to get away. Somehow I never could, there must be a binding spell which keeps me in this country. (1991: 2)

Written more than twenty years after arriving in Mexico, *The Hearing Trumpet* shows a strange contentment, created by the blend of resentment (turned to irony) with the assurance of one who knows her place to be one of perpetual transience. *The Hearing Trumpet's* ironic and utopian transformation is Carrington's meditation on Mexico and it reflects her thinking on her own foreignness and on her relationship with Remedios Varo, who appears in *The Hearing Trumpet* as the red-headed Carmella Velasquez, the protagonist's Spanish friend.<sup>8</sup>

She told Chadwick "Remedios's presence in Mexico changed my life" (Chadwick 1985: 194). The two women had met in Paris but their friendship reached its peak in Mexico: it lasted until Varo's unexpected early death from a heart attack in 1963. Nine years older than Carrington,<sup>9</sup> Remedios Varo left Spain in 1937 and joined the Surrealist movement in Paris at the same time as Carrington did. Unlike Carrington, though, she never returned to her native land. She participated in collective (written and

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<sup>8</sup> In turn, Varo's writings are populated with British female characters in clear allusion to Carrington: Ellen, Mistress Thrompston, Leonora and Sra. Carrington (Varo 1990: 124, 136, 161, 218)

<sup>9</sup> Varo, born in 1908, was nine years older than Carrington. According to the date on her tombstone, however, Varo was only four years older. It appears that Varo misrepresented her age on different occasions, such as when she duplicated her passport, giving her birthdate as 1913.

painted) works with other Surrealists and she exhibited in the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1940. Towards the end of the thirties, Varo became interested in the theories of Gurdjieff, and later in Mexico (one year after Gurdjieff's death in 1949), together with Leonora Carrington and Eva Sulzer, joined a group of followers of the teachings of Gurdjieff (Varo 1990: 58-9). The peculiarities of this group and its participants inspired Carrington's satire of Lightsome Hall and its spiritual leader, Dr Gambit, in *The Hearing Trumpet*. Carrington and Varo discussed philosophy, religion, painting and literature and sent messages and notes to each other daily (see unpublished letter from Carrington to Varo, Appendix II). Carrington says that for over two decades she saw Remedios on a daily basis (Chadwick 1985) whilst Remedios, in the transcription of her dreams, often refers to dreaming about Leonora and her children, calling them by their nicknames Gabi and Palito (Varo 1990). Leonora appears in many of Remedios's short stories and Remedios in hers. They appeared in each other's dreams and liked cooking inedible meals together, made with the exotic ingredients they found in Mexico City's many markets. Chadwick and Kaplan affirm that both Carrington's and Varo's artistic maturity appeared only after years of profound, intimate and artistic partnership:

Building on the strange powers of inspiration that each felt so intensely, on a shared belief in the mystical and the powers of magic, the two women developed a deep rapport, finding themselves able to communicate in a way that fed their lives and their work ... Varo thought herself an eccentric that others couldn't understand and looked to Carrington as a soul mate who would need no explanations, an ally who would not try to explain away her anxieties with facile logic or undermine her visions with common sense. Carrington shared this feeling of finally having found a confidante in an otherwise hostile world. (Kaplan 1988: 93)

Kaplan implies that the amity that united Carrington and Varo was based on similarity. Both artists, however, have in different ways and on different occasions stressed their different personalities. I would like to illustrate this point with two texts: one by Varo and the other by Carrington. The text by Varo was written in Spanish and its ungrammaticalities reveal that she was probably transcribing a dream immediately after having had it. The text narrates a period in A's life (Remedios's) when she meets X (Carrington). Varo stresses that their friendship was not based on likeness but on

complementing each other: "*No se parecen físicamente, se complementan*" ["They are not physically alike, they complement each other"] (Varo 1990: 242). They tend towards becoming one being, of which the main feature is the hair, although the two characters appear to be, later in her notes, still distinct:

El pelo, quizá fuera posible que, el *único pelo*, fuera algo violáceo, compuesto de los otros dos: uno rojo y el otro azulado (negro azulado). *Taches de rousseur* casi invisibles, pero en el uno oscuras, en el otro claras (como si las manchas del uno hubiesen sido las manchas hechas sirviéndose de la piel del otro en la forma en la que se hace el *pochoir*).

[The hair, it may be possible that, the *one type of hair*, was violet, made up of the other two: the red one and the bluish one (bluish black). *Touches of red* almost invisible, but in one dark, in the other light (as if the touches of one had been made by the contact of the other one, in the way one makes a *template*).] (Varo 1990: 243, my translation)

Varo hesitates when trying to unite A with X. The words "it may be possible" induce a physical union of the two characters, and Varo stresses the words that characterise that physical united body: "the one type of hair". However, she retreats into the idea of two physical bodies again, although by this time the qualities of one have become part of the qualities of the other so that they are forever changed and bear the imprint of one another.

There are two main reasons why Varo is so reticent about writing a story in which she and Leonora become physically one: firstly, her apprehension of the fact that her description of a physical union might imply a desire for physical union.<sup>10</sup> Varo's passage is complex in that, despite their dual femaleness, she is defining the two of them as "complementing each other" (marking her desire, both for Leonora as well as for wholeness) and attempting a possible union of their two bodies which she soon interrupts. Varo's denial of the possibility of sexual union with another woman is ambiguous. It may have been caused by fear or it may have seemed finally unrealisable, for although she could see how they complemented each other spiritually and

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<sup>10</sup> Within Surrealist imagery the androgyne represents the ultimate myth of love and mystic fusion. Apart from representing a wish for spiritual or creative union, the androgyne, as a metaphysical fusion of male and female into the perfect being, personifies the Surrealist sublimation of sexual intercourse (Carrington uses the image of the androgyne repeatedly to signify sexual union and she subscribes to the basic definition of the androgynous figure: the complementarity of male and female).

artistically, she could not conceive their interrelating physically. A more probable view is that Varo may have feared losing her own identity. Already when writing her sketch notes, Varo might have realised that the feature that identified the united body was Carrington's mane, not the iconographic symbol of the cat's eyes that she repeatedly used to represent herself. She might have feared that just as Carrington's characteristic mane overshadowed her own icon, Carrington's powerful personality and creative impulse would overshadow her own persona and work.

Carrington's position in their relationship is made clear in the 1940s complete text of *The Stone Door*.<sup>11</sup> As it is published by Virago, and revised by herself, the 1989 text of *The Stone Door* is only half the length and plot of the complete original. In the complete first version the reader is confronted with a mystery, an inscrutable story line that unfolds into two (apparently unconnected) stories. Chapters One, Two and Three of the first complete version of *The Stone Door* introduce the character of Brigitte-Amagoya, a double female character who conceals a cryptic, blended portrait of Leonora and Remedios. Brigitte's and Amagoya's names and characteristic iconographic symbols reveal that Brigitte represents Leonora: she is of English origin and like Leonora she had a Shetland pony, named Black Bess, when she was a child. The proper name Amaya (a name of Basque origin, as Varo herself) was the name of Gerardo Lizarraga's (Varo's first husband's) daughter, whom Remedios loved deeply. Like Varo, Amagoya has bright red hair. Brigitte-Amagoya is confusingly presented as one character with a sort of inverted split personality; instead of one body with two identities, Brigitte-Amagoya is two bodies with shared mental attributes.

However, Brigitte is not Amagoya: they have separate lives, partners and work. They are physically separate, mentally they are together most of the time. The initial scene presents Amagoya worrying about her friend, who is now living elsewhere. Brigitte used to live with Amagoya and Wenceslao (significantly the name of street in

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<sup>11</sup> *The Stone Door* was written in the 1940s, in Mexico City. It was first published as *La Porte de pierre* (1976), translated into French and edited by Henri Parisot. The complete, original English manuscript was published by St Martin's Press, New York, in 1977. I shall use the 1978a English version for the complete text and the 1989b Virago edition for the shortened, revised edition.

the narrative is the same as the street where Varo and Peret had shared a house with Carrington: Rosa Moreno Street) but has now moved to a nearby house. The problem is that Brigitte has "abandoned" Amagoya mentally and, as this can only occur in death, Amagoya tries to locate Brigitte through dreams, premonitions, visions, and a visit to a wise old woman who will give her clues as to Brigitte's ongoing quest.

Simultaneous to the transcription of dreams and premonitions, Amagoya (Varo) discovers a black coffer which contains a manuscript. It is Brigitte's (Carrington's) diary and narrates the story of how she cannot live with Pedro (Renato?) and of her esoteric encounter with Phillip (Chiqui?). In their encounter, which takes place in different periods of time and in strange lands, Brigitte and Phillip stop being Brigitte and Phillip and they become the White child and Zacharias. Part of this document is transcribed in Chapter Two and the rest forms the final chapters Four and Five. It is significant, and it will be discussed later in this chapter, that it is only Chapters Two, Four and Five of the original text (where neither Amagoya nor her partner Wenceslao figure) that become *The Stone Door* as published by Virago in 1989. No critic has referred to the existence of two different versions and, therefore, the phenomenal implications of Carrington's mutilation of her original text for the 1989 revision have passed unnoticed. The forsaken narrative of Brigitte-Amagoya provides Carrington's answer to her relationship with Varo, and to their relationship to texts and artistic production.

In the complete version, she projects herself in the person of Brigitte whilst at the same time she is giving voice to Varo in Amagoya. These two characters are not alike; as Varo said, they complement each other. Brigitte-Amagoya is incomplete if halved. This is made clear in the letter Amagoya writes to her friend after having read the first part of the manuscript document:

You left everything here and I read what you had hidden in the trunk. All that is written there partially belongs to me, I cannot apologize for having read your secrets. You always told me everything ...

Do you remember all the strange worlds we crossed together? You should have told me because I possess some of the missing pieces in your story. You say things so much more easily than I, you know I could never talk well.

It is impossible to believe that we are now separate persons. (1978a: 31)

I would like to contrast this extract of *The Stone Door* with an extract of Varo's sketch notes for a story (the following passage, written in note form, reads like a transcript of a dream; I have translated it to the letter):

Un trozo de la vida de A, después, el viaje a esa otra ciudad encuentra a X (*no se parecen físicamente, se complementan*). Al principio, sólo pequeñas coincidencias, después, relatos de X (incluso con ocasionales documentos fotográficos de rincones de la casa, animal favorito, fiesta o reunión, etc.) con precisiones de *fechas y días*, que descubren la coincidencia (el lugar en que vive en esta otra ciudad tenía algunas *huellas* cuando llegó por primera vez: la silla en que se sentó estaba algo caliente, etc., etc.) Desde luego, X tiene en su poder algunos objetos que A creyó haber perdido o cuya desaparición era oscura. [A sketch of A's life, then, A's trip to that other city where she finds X (they are *not* alike, *they complement each other*). At the beginning, simply small coincidences, later, X's stories (even with the occasional photographic document of some parts of the house, favourite animal, party or gathering, etc.) with the precision of *dates and days*, that they discover the coincidence (the place where she lives in this other city gave *clues* when she first arrived: the chair where she sat was warm, etc, etc). Of course, X possesses some objects that A thought she had lost and whose disappearance was mysterious.] (Varo 1990: 242)

Both texts stress the fact that the destiny of the two characters (Brigitte-Amagoya in Carrington's narrative and A-X in Varo's sketch notes) is one; that, in fact, they complement each other, and that neither of them should have secrets from the other because they can mutually help each other in (re)constructing their lives. All the elements of Varo's sketch notes for a story appear in *The Stone Door*, for example, the story of the old wise men observing the events from their telescopes/microscopes or the hair of Amagoya becoming darker as a result of blending with that of a black-haired being, in the shape of a dog or a wolf.

What is Carrington doing, then, in *The Stone Door*? It seems as if she had taken Varo's sketch notes and written the story herself, adding her own story for the final chapters. In fact, she makes Amagoya-Varo say "you know I could never talk well". Perhaps this is the reason why she writes the story Varo had invented. Or, maybe, it was always her story, in invention and development, and Varo just jotted down in note form what Leonora had told her. Or perhaps it is true they were one mind in two bodies and this was the result of their spiritual rapport. These protagonists are not replicas of Carrington and Varo. They do not have the physical boundaries Leonora and Remedios have; they are beings in themselves, in fiction. In fiction the two women can become



one and they do. So, somehow, in order to become one being, Leonora and Remedios aim at becoming fiction. Winterson writes:

Instead of art aspiring towards lifelikeness what if life aspires towards art, towards a creative, controlled focus of freedom, outside the tyranny of matter? (Winterson 1995: 59)

I believe this is what happens in *The Stone Door*. Leonora and Remedios translate their separate lives into the life of the protagonist(s). In the texts and in fiction the different bodies merge into one complete body; their multiform perceptions make for a better understanding. The story is not a version of how they perceived their lives. Through the story a new life is created, ruled by completely different principles. When she cut the novel for the 1989 edition she was literally amputating the (fictional? real?) body of Brigitte-Amagoya, as Brigitte-Amagoya does not appear in the revised version.

In the revised version, she left only the adventures of the White child (who is never called Brigitte, for Brigitte would have Amagoya attached to her and they must both disappear) and the boy Zacharias. She cuts off what was her relationship with Varo (a relationship that created a whole new being, a whole new way of perceiving). She committed a literary murder. Her decision to cut the original text is inspired, I think, by the same fear that prevented Varo from ever writing the story: they could not possibly be artistically recognised as two-in-one. That new being Brigitte-Amagoya (the two blended in one) is only fictional. In "real life", and for the purposes of the artistic and literary markets, they have to be distinct. Uniqueness (in the sense of individuality) and independence are demanded of them, and they surrender. In this respect, in 1965, after Remedios's death, Octavio Paz acutely perceived that "the secret theme" in Varo's *oeuvre* was "harmony - the lost parity" (in Varo 1990: 9).

Varo's and Carrington's fear is confirmed by contemporary reviews of both Carrington's and Varo's work. Pairing destroys the sense of originality, even of singularity. Pairing somehow makes them weaker artists in the eyes of the literary establishment. It can be noted that in the Mexican reviews of exhibitions, most critics connect them. Octavio Paz makes good use of every opportunity to praise the work of Carrington, which he inevitably links to that of Varo. After the death of Peret he wrote

to Varo: "It is marvellous, after all, to have friends like you and Leonora" (Kaplan 1988: 215). Mexican art critic Luis Cardoza y Aragón analyses the work of Varo and Carrington under the same heading, one with both the artists' names. He even wonders:

Varo y Carrington ¿por qué reunir las en mi crónica si son tan diferentes sus talentos y virtudes? Cierta clima las acerca y las distingue a fondo.  
[Varo and Carrington, why associate them both in my chronicle if their abilities and excellence are so different? A certain rapport brings them together while marking profound differences between them.] (Cardoza y Aragón 1974: 75-6, my translation)

More often the appraisal of the work of the one stimulates an appraisal of the other. After Remedios Varo's successful debut at the Galeria Diana in Mexico City in 1955, Diego Rivera was moved to declare:

Mexico has the good fortune that among us live three women painters who undoubtedly are among the most important women artists in the world: Remedios Varo, ah, how the painting of that woman enchants me!, Leonora Carrington and Alice Rahon. (in Kaplan 1988: 133)

Varo and Carrington felt they could defy individuality, but they also felt that it might destroy their artistic lives. In fact, by the early 1960s, the two women artists seem to be taking quite different paths: Carrington's imagery became "more hallucinatory" and Varo's "more concrete" (Kaplan 1988: 220). The reason for their separation is hinted at in Beatriz Varo's biography of her aunt:

A partir de 1959, Remedios fue perdiendo poco a poco la ilusión de vivir. Algunos de sus grandes amigos desaparecieron en pocos años, suicidándose o por enfermedad.  
[From 1959 onwards, Remedios gradually lost interest in life. Some of her closest friends disappeared in a few years, either by committing suicide or due to sickness.] (Varo 1990: 100, my translation)

Varo's niece includes in her biography medical documents that confirm Varo's natural death of a heart attack. This is so because "Reports of her emotional condition" days and hours before her death "are ... conflicting" and "Rumors of suicide quickly surfaced" (Kaplan 1988: 223). The rumours were intensified after the discovery that, just before her death, Remedios had burnt some letters, drawings and documents she did not want to be made public (Varo 1990: 147). Although there is no conclusive evidence, what is certain is that Varo was aware of her near death. Walter Gruen, Varo's partner since the

forties, explains that Varo's ironical turn towards Catholicism (which she had previously condemned so resolutely) in later life was prompted by the deaths of her friends:

unos meses antes había muerto ... José Horna ... Durante el velatorio, Remedios le dijo a su amiga Leonora Carrington, que a ella le hubiera gustado, por lo menos la asistencia de un sacerdote. Leonora, que vivía a dos calles de nosotros fue una de las primeras personas que acudió a nuestra casa a la muerte de Remedios y me dijo lo del sacerdote.

[José Horna had died a few months before ... During the funeral, Remedios told her friend Leonora Carrington that she would have liked, at least, the assistance of a priest. Leonora, who lived two streets away from us, was one of the first people to come to our house when Remedios died, and she told me about the priest.] (in Varo 1990: 103, my translation)

Carrington was pushed deeper into her intellectual and emotional underworld with Varo's death. That year, 1963, she concentrated on the painting of the mural *El mundo mágico de los mayas* [*The Magic World of the Maya People*].<sup>12</sup> Almost thirty years after Varo's death, she is still trying to distinguish her own work from that of Varo. After Paul De Angelis's comment on the similarity of their work, she almost invites him to ask the underlying question that most of the art critics were probably asking themselves: Who was following whom?

P.D.A.: Remedios Varo's work and yours clearly share common elements ... Did you develop a common style together?

L.C.: Not really, no, but when I met Remedios, she was doing abstract art, more like Cubism.

P.D.A.: So in a way she was following you?

L.C.: More, yes. But I was groping, and I was influenced by many things. (De Angelis 1991: 40)

She fears that their intellectual and artistic rapport might never be understood, thus the works of them both would lose out. Art critics Chadwick and Kaplan note that Varo often appropriated imagery from her work and emulated her, adding a personal touch of her own. They both point at Varo's 1960 painting *Mimesis* (Figure Nine) as a parody of Carrington's *Self-Portrait* (Figure One):

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<sup>12</sup> She was commissioned to paint the mural by the Mexican government and although since the late Eighties the mural has been at Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital of Chiapas state, it was originally intended to decorate the Museo de Antropología in Mexico City. Her drawings illustrate two works on the magic world of the Maya people (Medina and Sejourne 1964, and Sejourne 1967).

Carrington had depicted herself seated in a chair that takes on her physical attributes ... In Varo's witty reversal, her sitter becomes the chair - her hands and feet becoming turned wood. (Kaplan 1988: 218)

The title of Varo's painting is significantly ambiguous. Indeed *Mimesis* shows a woman *becoming* the chair where she is sitting (her skin taking on the *fleur-de-lis* pattern of the chair). But in the mirroring of the painted woman and her alter ego (the hyena or the cat), in the window/mirror/wardrobe that opens on to a landscape ... what *Mimesis* really imitates and shows close resemblance to is Carrington's work.

Although her relationships have always moved around art and artists, and although she has sometimes claimed that the whole question of influence is unimportant to her, in recent interviews Carrington is increasingly detaching herself from Ernst and Varo in an effort to establish her own originality. This might be one of the reasons why she is so reluctant to publish the stories and plays she wrote with Varo. She told Paul De Angelis that they wrote "a lot" together:

Remedios and I used to write a lot of stuff together. But that must have disappeared into somebody's garbage can many years since. I would write a chapter, but I wouldn't tell her what it was. She would write the next chapter, and when we'd written about five chapters, we'd put them together, and it was very funny. (De Angelis 1991: 40)

She is probably referring here to a play they wrote together, now in the Walter Gruen Archive in Mexico City. Intended to be performed by their own friends, the three-act play narrates the classical fairy tale theme: competition for the hand of the princess. The scenes were alternately written by Carrington and Varo, and the play offers different endings. Most of their joint writing is now in the Gruen Archive, though Carrington refuses to have it published for she considers it "not sufficiently interesting" (Gruen 1996).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Carrington's and Varo's way of writing was popular with the Surrealists of the early 1930s. The *cadavre exquis* was a game of hazardous associations and unconscious mental connections which required the collaboration of two or more artists to create a story. Later developed more in the form of visual works to include drawing, it owes its name in the first instance to an initial Surrealist game: "Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau" ["the exquisite corpse will drink the young wine"] (Kaplan 1988: 38). The "*cadavre exquis*" game performed a very important role in social and creative life, and it represents just one of the many forms that her desire for partnerships take. Two short stories unmistakably related to this game belong, however, to two very different periods. In the first one she contributes a chapter, "The skeleton's holiday", to the novel *L'Homme qui a perdu son squelette* [*The Man who Lost his Skeleton*] which was analysed in Part One. The second one, "The Happy Corpse Story", was written in English in Mexico in 1971. Partnerships took different forms and during the "days at Gabino Barrera" (1945) she made, together with José Horna, a *bateau-barceau* (boat-cradle), which she actually used in 1946 when her first

The fact that she is eagerly trying to detach herself from Varo (as well as preserving her and Varo's privacy) is finally made clear by the knowledge that Carrington has not given interviews to Varo's biographers. During the eighties she would not be interviewed by Beatriz Varo who was preparing a biography on her aunt. Most of the people who surrounded Carrington and Varo during the forties, fifties and beginning of the sixties did offer their co-operation: Walter Gruen, Kati Horna, Eva Sulzer and many others. As a result, the second chapter of Varo's book "The Mexican Period: Success" is paradoxically (it was the most successful time in Varo's life) and significantly shorter than the others. Kaplan's experience was similar. Her acknowledgements run to three pages and Carrington is only thanked for lending "additional access to photographs". The uncooperativeness of Carrington and other friends of Varo's is explained by Kaplan as follows:

Fiercely loyal to her memory, Varo's friends maintain a strong allegiance to the artist even twenty-five years after her death ... It is as though they remain concerned, as she was herself, that she might be misunderstood and misinterpreted, that her eccentricities might be trivialized or trespassed. Their reticence has left me feeling that ... there is an aspect of this woman that remains elusive, hidden behind her work. (Kaplan 1988: 234)

This might as well be an accurate portrayal of Carrington.

Although the whole of Carrington's literary production and her role in the intellectual life of Mexico of the 1940s and 1950s remain widely acknowledged, it is as a painter and as a theatrical designer that she has entered the history books in Mexico. *Historia General de Mexico* [General Mexican History] cites Carrington and Gerszo as the only two Mexican artists to challenge the tyrannical propaganda practice of muralism (Monsivais 1976: 1490) and stresses her activity as a theatrical designer. Rodriguez Pamprolini, on her part, qualifies the influence of Carrington over the young Mexican neo-Surrealist generation as one "of great importance" (Rodriguez Pamprolini 1969: 75). By 1955 she belonged to the newly-founded avant-garde theatrical group *Poesía en Voz Alta* [Poetry Out Loud], and it is her work in this workshop that gains her a place once more in the *Historia General de Mexico* (Monsivais 1976: 1546). In the

mid-1950s, she designed the set production for Alvaro Custodio's modern version of *Don Juan*, by Zorrilla. She designed masks for many theatre festivals, an activity she first carried out with Varo when they designed costumes, hats and masks for Calderón de la Barca's *El teatro del mundo* [The Theatre of the World] and Jean Giraudoux's *Madwoman of Chaillot*. Then, on her own, she designed the 1961 costumes and masks for *The Tempest* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. Simultaneously, she was writing plays. Apart from *Pénélope* (1946), which she produced in 1962 and 1963 for the stage, directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky, she wrote four plays in English. Of *La Fête de l'agneau* [*The Lamb's Holiday*, 1940] (1978b: 183-281) and the one-act play *Une chemise de nuit de flanelle* [*A Flannel Nightshirt*, 1945] (1978b: 95-113) now only the French versions remain.<sup>14</sup> The other two are *Judith* (1961) and the opera-play *Opus Sinistrum* (1969) (1978b: 282-317). She has also written one play in Spanish: *La invención del mole* [The Invention of the Mole] (1956).<sup>15</sup>

### From the sixties to the present

Carrington's concerns shifted during the 1960s and 1970s. In the previous decade women artists had started to gain some prominence in Mexico's artistic life (Carrington exhibited for the first time in Mexico City in 1950 in the Galería Clardecor) and by 1960, the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes had acquired *Reflections on the Oracle* (1960) for its permanent collection. The Mexican government's greatest recognition had been the commission of the mural in 1963. During these decades she engaged in intense political activities. Since she arrived in Mexico, she twice left the country, both times as a protest against Mexican politics. The first time was in 1968, when the university students' movement was violently repressed. She was associated with the student activism for two reasons: firstly because, at the time, both her sons were university

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<sup>14</sup> Peter G. Christensen sees *La Fête de l'agneau* as a companion piece to *Pénélope* (Christensen 1990: 150). Bettina Knapp reads *A Flannel Nightshirt* (and *The Débutante*) as a dream narrative of a *rite d'entrée* (Knapp 1977: 526).

<sup>15</sup> Originally a sauce for chicken, *mole*, the traditional Mexican dish, is made with cocoa as its main ingredient.

students and, secondly, because the murderous repression of 2 October 1968 (in which the army killed over six hundred students and imprisoned over two thousand) took place in the building compound where she lived (particularly savage were the events at her own building, the "edificio Chihuahua"). She then left for Chicago with her two sons, but returned the following year. From her return she played a large part in the formation of the Women's Movement of Mexico City. Her poster *Mujeres Consciencia*, dated 1972, is one illustrative example of her commitment. The poster depicts Eve taking back the apple and reclaiming her place in creation (Chadwick 1991b: 32-3). Her feminist contention during the sixties and seventies is rooted, once more, in a magical underworld; feminist liberation is for her beyond reason:

G.R.: Et vous pensez qu'il est nécessaire pour la femme de lutter pour cette libération de la condition féminine?

L.C.: Absolument parce que je crois que ce mouvement des femmes a des racines qui dépassent la raison, il semble qu'il y ait des forces très profondes qui ont commencé à provoquer l'indignation chez les femmes, chez les nègres aussi, et chez toutes les races qui ont été opprimées, et j'inclus les autres espèces, pas seulement les humains. Il paraît qu'il y a dans tout ça une sorte de révolte, c'est très curieux, très intéressant. Mais ça pourrait faire aussi des nouveaux monstres parce qu'on vit sur une planète qui a une tendance à la monstruosité, non?

[G.R.: Do you think it is necessary for women to fight for the liberation of the feminine condition?

L.C.: Absolutely, because I believe that this women's movement has roots that go beyond reason, it seems as though there are very deep forces that have begun to cause indignation in women, in blacks also and in every oppressed race, and I include other species, not only the human species. It seems as if there is in all this a kind of rebellion, it is very fascinating, very interesting. But this could also create new monsters, because we live in a planet with a tendency towards monstrosity, don't we?] (Rouvre 1977: 92, my translation)

In response to Rouvre's questioning, Carrington was careful not to sound assertive (which she probably equated to radical) and she counterbalanced her first immediate reaction, "Absolutely", with the suggestion that she would not like the roles to be reversed, for that would be as monstrous as the present oppression, which she did not deny. It might seem that she was identifying herself ideologically as an egalitarian. However, the words "profound", "roots" and "beyond" keep reappearing in her 1977 interview, and hint at a wider conception of feminism. She acknowledges "difference", but her fear is to fall into radicalism. By the 1990s, she is more assertive, whilst still attaching to the feminist movement some kind of infallible mystical foundation:

I think the feminine movement is a very, very good thing ... It's a movement that is coming from the depth in the feminine sex and I find it fascinating. And it's coming into its own whether we want it or not. Whether it's ideal or will end up in feminine bliss, I don't know, but it's there and in the next 200 years, it will make a difference. (Appignanesi 1992: 12)

She is suggesting here that, for her, the Women's Movement is beyond the current conception of equality. She terms it the Feminine (not Feminist) Movement and her preference seems to be based upon the readings of Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, which she read a year after its publication in 1948, and her studies of Jung. Graves's and Jung's works made an extraordinary impression on her and confirmed for her that there is a universal feminine archetype to be recovered as a source of inspiration and creativity. Chadwick says that she "remains convinced that the female images circulating today are largely the invention of men" (Chadwick 1991b: 28) and that she seeks a feminine archetype beyond current images. Denying the possibility that her views could lead to the designation of women as a counter-power or counter-society, she is reluctant to consider women as being essentially different from men and she affirms that "from a depth point of view" we all come from a place "that doesn't have much to do with male or female. Maybe it has a lot to do with both" (Appignanesi 1992). It is not the difference between men and women that interests her, but the "difference" that acknowledging a universal feminine (now hiding behind façades of images) will make.

In 1976, she regretted that women must demand their rights whilst refusing to place the experiences of women within the parameters of history:

Most of us, I hope, are now aware that a woman should not have to demand Rights. The Rights were there from the beginning; they ... were ours and ... were violated, stolen or destroyed, leaving us with the thankless hope of pleasing a male animal, probably of one's own species.

History has a peculiarity of making gaps whenever they appear convenient. (1976: 23)

Whilst denouncing the inconsistency of history when looking at women's experiences, she includes, in her definition of women, the females of all species. Her short story "My Mother is a Cow" (mid-fifties) speaks of her fascination with the female ideal, and relates an imaginary dialogue with the "Horned Goddess". This is one of her stylistically more experimental short stories. It narrates a conversation between Carrington and the



goddess, abounding with irony, humour and her usual scepticism. Her reworking of this myth continues a long-lasting search for "alternative" realities, and, ironically, the narrator explicitly denies believing in "The Holy One" (1989b: 189). The last words define what is for her the wisest state of being, that of "Those who no longer pretend to know who they are" (1989b: 192). In fact, Carrington is not a seeker of answers and does not long to find any. On the contrary, she finds her self in continual wondering and questioning. Her vision of feminism is akin to her vision of the occult. During the sixties and seventies she was still fascinated by divination, the cabbala, alchemy, witchcraft, horoscopes and magic. Since 1971, when she went with Anne Fremantle to the Tibetan Monastery in Scotland (the last time she visited Britain), she has studied under the exiled Tibetan Lama in Canada and upstate New York and remains a regular, if sceptical, disciple: "I've never been convinced by any sect or cult. The closest I've ever been to being convinced of anything was by the Tibetan Buddhists" (De Angelis 1991: 42). The reason for her scepticism is based on a long search and a wide knowledge of different cults and beliefs: "I do not know of any religion that does not declare women to be feeble-minded, unclean, generally inferior creatures to males" (1976: 23).

The second time Carrington left Mexico in protest was after the catastrophic earthquake that destroyed Mexico City in 1985, an event which was unfortunately mishandled by the authorities. As Warner narrates, she had joined her son Pablo, then a doctor, in the relief work:

but when the sniffer dogs that had been flown in by an agency to trace survivors in the rubble were diverted and sold as pets, Carrington found she could bear to stay no longer. (Warner 1988: 796)

Leaving behind her son Gabriel, a professor of literature in Mexico City, and her husband, she moved to New York. She lived and worked there for three years, although still returning to Mexico for lengthy visits and travelling frequently to Chicago to be near her son Pablo. In 1988 she moved to an apartment in Oak Park, Illinois (Chicago) and two years later, in 1990, she again returned to Mexico City, where she has lived since. When she was in Chicago she had stopped living together with Chiqui, although they remained friends (Warner to Salmerón 1994). The reason is, in her own words, "a

puritanical Catholic streak" that prevents her from abandoning her husband (Warner to Salmerón 1994). According to Cass, during the sixties and seventies "depressions and near-breakdowns continued to plague" Carrington to a point when "her imagination was paralysed" (Cass 1997: 34) and friends of the couple commented that this damaged her relationship with Chiqui. Nita Renfrew refers to "Leonora and Chiqui" as two "tormented souls" and Gerszo recalls that he witnessed Chiqui's "patient, passive character [that] could destroy granite" being pushed to the brink by Leonora: "I had to keep him from going at her with a large kitchen knife" (Cass 1997: 34). Cass also hints at Carrington's numerous "sexual shenanigans" (Cass 1997: 34). This image of Carrington as tormented and violently passionate is the one that is enduring. Carrington is well aware how images cling on to us. After the way in which her relationship with Ernst was scrutinised she decided to "cover" her privacy under a thick silence. Yet, to fill her silences, the voices of others keep emerging: voices that do not regard the multiple aspects of her personality but who want to trap her in the image of the wild crazy Surrealist "mistress".

It is for this reason that I prefer to arrange my study of her work in Mexico around Carrington's own words. During the eighties and nineties she has remarked that she is aware of her age and that she is trying to figure out how to live the remainder of her life: "The things that interest me most now are issues surrounding aging, illness, and death" (in Chadwick 1986: 42). These words were pronounced in February 1986, when Carrington accepted an Honor Award at the Women's Caucus for Art convention in New York.

## Chapter Eight

### The Mexican Writings

In Mexico Carrington wrote several plays, short stories and two novels. This chapter deals with four of these writings: the novel *The Stone Door* (1971), the play *The Invention of the Mole* (1960s), the short story "The Happy Corpse Story" (1970s) and an unpublished letter to Remedios Varo (1958) (see Appendix II). In their published versions, the texts come to the contemporary reader in three different "original" languages. The text of *The Stone Door* has been recently revised by Carrington herself for publication in its original language, English, but, in the process, the original text has been halved (1989b, London). To read the complete version the reader has to search for the first edition (1971, New York) which is now out of print, for the English language version of 1978 (London), or for its translation into Spanish (1985, Mexico) or French (1982, Paris) taking care not to acquire the versions of the halved text already available in both Spanish and French. *The Invention of the Mole*, written originally in Spanish, is available in English in a version revised by Carrington herself. Paradoxically, the text is not available to the Spanish reader, for it was first published in a review journal no longer extant. The fate of the third text, "The Happy Corpse Story", has been similar to that of *The Invention of the Mole*. Written in English in the early seventies, "The Happy Corpse Story" was first published in French translation in 1975. The English reader has had to wait twenty-five years to read the original, complete, English version. The letter "Dear Zebra" is unpublished material kindly given to me by Walter Gruen.

Set at the time of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, *The Invention of the Mole* recreates the recipe of the Mexican *mole*, with an added, human, ingredient. Made with cocoa as its main ingredient, the *mole* is a sauce for chicken. The traditional Mexican dish was first invented in the sixteenth century, and the popular legend attributes its invention to a nun who, faced with the unexpected visit of an archbishop, and having only cocoa, a chicken, and herbs in her kitchen, produced the peculiar dish. In Carrington's satire the sanctimonious archbishop becomes the *mole*'s main ingredient. This is not the first of her stories to include recipes, although the inclusion of a human being in the cooking appears only in the Mexican writings. The idea was probably

shared by Varo who, in her "Receta para provocar sueños eróticos" ["Recipe to Induce Erotic Dreams"] (Varo 1990: 240-241), gives instructions for preparing the cook as an added ingredient.

"The Happy Corpse Story" presents a young man in search of his beloved. A talking corpse offers to help him find the young woman. The components of "The Happy Corpse Story" include the mythical mother and the phantasms of Freud's family romance, for the Happy Corpse turns out to be the youth's mother who tricks him by taking him to the gates of Hell rather than to his beloved. However, the mythical mother is far from sublime, her corpse is "full of holes and dents" and so it "could talk out of any part of its body" (1989b: 177). Moreover, it stinks. If, in the story, the Happy Corpse laughs continuously at the youth's sadness, her mere existence mocks our reverence for the figure of the mother, for death and for history. The Happy Corpse has, apparently, approached her son to tell him the story of her own father, but what she really wants is to warn him against accepting history and "truth". Finally, in her letter, Carrington sets out to tell Varo (Dear Zebra), in a fantastic recreation, the details of her conception, birth and early educational background.

Although apparently unconnected, all these four texts are about travel. Carrington seems to claim that it matters neither where the traveller departs from nor where s/he arrives. In *The Stone Door* the reader is taken with the protagonist to the "Country of the Dead". In *The Invention of the Mole*, dying becomes not an end but a way of transformation, a metamorphosis of both physical and psychic matter. In "The Happy Corpse Story" the reader is taken with the young man to the gates of Hell and, finally, in the letter the reader is taken to the writer's conception, to "the beginning of time". In all four stories the travelling device (dreams, cauldron or the dead mother's corpse) is remarkably important. The travellers never remain still once they have reached their destinations: they all need to move somewhere else. Carrington's fascination with voyage and travelling seems obsessive (Chadwick 1991a: 11-12) and this obsession is illustrated in her writing through techniques other than the description of literal vehicles. It could be said, therefore, that the use she makes of the theme of travelling is a metaphor for the way she envisions writing. She is neither interested in

her own previous writings nor in taking them to a predetermined end. What really interests her is the vehicle: language, how it is constructed, designed, how she can make it ever innovative whilst beautiful, but most important of all, her interest is in keeping her texts alive, or coming back to life. She does not seem to be particularly interested in addressing a reader, but she does engage in a constant dialogue between the text and herself, and also between the texts themselves. When they are seen as a whole, the reader can observe that her texts go through gates, metamorphose, die, resurrect, with only one purpose: to be errant, to keep language moving.

### *The Stone Door*

My analysis of the narrative plot of *The Stone Door* reads it as a parable for the creation of what Kristeva calls poetic language (although Kristeva is probably not known to Carrington herself). Reduced to its basic elements the story unfolds as follows. There is a woman in the cave of a subterranean ocean and she wants to leave the cave to go into the country of the Living but she cannot do so, for a stone door separates the cave from that country. Time begins from the stone door onwards and she can do nothing but wait to have the door opened from the other side. Divination and understanding have led her to this cave, but once there she understands nothing ("all that is left for me is the ragged black hole of my loss. Loss and the world around"). She can . . . but wait; although, since there is no time, she is not waiting, she is merely there. The space where the woman is reminds one of a womb, of the Kristevan *chora*. The cave and its perennial image of the feminine sexual organ stand as a matrix space, nourishing, warm, anterior to time ("I am an hermaphrodite," says the woman), a most incomprehensible space. There, the woman represents the fluid mobility of the semiotic pulses. The semiotic is related to the pre-Oedipal phase, its pulsions are simultaneously dichotomous (the woman is in the frontier between the country of the Dead and the country of the Living) and heterogeneous. Although the opposition between feminine and masculine does not exist in the pre-Oedipal stage, seen from the symbolic it resembles a feminine-connoted space insofar as it is a marginal state related to the mother.

Then there is Zacharias, a man, who is travelling in linear time and covering geographical space towards the woman. He does not know he is looking for her, but something compels him towards the stone door. He represents the symbolic, the Law of the Father, the masculine. Guided by the woman, who appears to him in dreams, he eventually arrives at the door that closes the cave.

The door could symbolise the splitting (which Kristeva calls *coupure*) of the semiotic which enables the subject to attribute differences and thus signification to the otherwise heterogeneous fluidity. Zacharias has to be the one who opens the door because, since he represents the symbolic, only within the symbolic can the semiotic be recognised and therefore defined and articulated. There would be no recognition of instinctual pulses but for the giving of rules and structures by the symbolic. Zacharias looks for a key, although there is no keyhole. The door has to be opened "with words, blows, prayers or music". So, he blows his pipe in a musical key and the door opens; Zacharias and a magical cinnamon-smelling wind are united and the novel ends.

Seen in this light, the criticism that Kristeva's theory provokes is similar to the one Carrington's novel produced when published in the 1970s. If the woman is a pitiful and helpless creature without the man, the feminine is helplessly subordinated to the masculine in Kristeva's theory. It is controversial to support such an argument, since for some critics (Oliver, Rose) femininity itself for Kristeva is simply a myth (as in Kristeva 1981a: 158) and Kristeva's only definition of femininity is that which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order (in view of definitions of the Symbolic order - Law of the Father, ruling, repressive - can it be other than patriarchal?). However, other critics (Grosz, Butler) see Kristeva's theories on the maternally-connoted semiotic and the paternally-connoted symbolic as founded on an essentialist conception of maternity. These critics claim that Kristeva's theory denies the possibility for change. As Butler puts it:

Kristeva describes the maternal body as bearing a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself. She thereby safeguards the notion of culture as a paternal structure and delimits maternity as an essentially precultural reality. (Butler 1990: 80)

Counteracting criticisms such as this, Moi (1988: 165) and Oliver (1993: 9) argue that such criticisms are based on misreading: that, in fact, "Kristeva argues that maternity calls into question the boundary between culture and nature" (Oliver 1993: 9). Oliver goes on to indicate that the use of maternity by Kristeva is an illustration of a subject that puts into question the border between self and other and that, since the maternal body encloses an other, the maternal body "calls into question any notion of a unified subject. Maternity becomes a prime example of what she calls a 'subject-in-process'" (Oliver 1993: 9).<sup>1</sup>

Whatever contradictory responses Kristeva's theory on the creation of poetic language may incite, her theory may be useful. Leaving aside the question of whether a maternally-connoted semiotic can be equated with a feminine realm and a paternally-connoted symbolic can be equated with a masculine realm, the idea that signification is created by a dialectic between the semiotic pulses and the symbolic state is highly productive. As Kristeva puts it in *The Revolution of Poetic Language*, to look at those uses of language where the semiotic element can be seen in oscillation with the symbolic opens the possibility of a revolution in representation.

In *The Revolution of Poetic Language*, Kristeva maintains that structuralism, by focusing on the "thetic" (motionless) aspect of language, regards it as a homogeneous structure. Instead, for her, the study of linguistics should tend, rather, towards the study of semiotics, concerned with regarding language as a heterogeneous structure: "one should begin by positing that there is within poetic language ... a *heterogeneousness* to meaning and signification" (Kristeva 1981a: 133). Depending on the extent to which a semiotic disposition can be observed in a particular utterance, Kristeva distinguishes different types of signifying practices (Kristeva 1981a: 134). At either extreme she places scientific language and poetic language. Scientific language is a language that prioritises the symbolic and where the semiotic component is minimal. Poetic language

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<sup>1</sup> Significantly, the cover of Oliver's book on Kristeva is illustrated with Varo's painting *Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst* (1961). The woman drops her father's head into a small well, while layers of veil drop off her face. She carries a basket where she has put yet more "psychological waste" ("despercios psicológicos" she wrote in the note that accompanied the painting - Varo 1990: 238).

is that where the signifying process is informed by the semiotic as well as the symbolic, giving preference to the semiotic. As Kristeva puts it:

the signifying economy of poetic language is specific in that the semiotic is not only a constraint as is the symbolic, but it tends to gain the upper hand at the expense of the thetic and predicative constraints of the ego's judging consciousness. (Kristeva 1981a: 134)

The semiotic is a "*heterogeneous*" flow of pulsions whose effect in the meaning and signification of poetic language displaces the notion of language as unified, univocal and fixed in meaning. The presence of semiotic pulsions provides a "*distinctiveness*" to poetic language since it produces in this language not only

'musical' but also nonsense effects that destroy not only accepted beliefs and significations, but, in radical experiments, syntax itself, that guarantee of thetic consciousness. (Kristeva 1981a: 133)

For Kristeva, language will cease being considered as a monolithic, homogeneous structure only when the speaking subject is no longer considered a transcendental Cartesian ego: "in a culture where the speaking subjects are conceived of as masters of their speech, they have what is called a 'phallic' position" (Kristeva 1981b: 165).

For Kristeva, the conception of language as a heterogeneous process follows the redefinition of the speaking subject, a redefinition based on the course of thought developed after Hegel, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. The speaking subject is thus redefined, following these thinkers, as divided, decentred, overdetermined and differential, what she calls a *subject-in-process*:

If it is true that there would unavoidably be a speaking *subject* since the signifying set exists, it is nonetheless evident that this subject, in order to tally with his heterogeneity, must be, let us say, a questionable *subject-in-process*. It is of course Freud's theory of the unconscious that allows the apprehension of such a subject. (Kristeva 1981a: 135)

Once the speaking subject is the focus of the linguistic analysis, language becomes a complex signifying process rather than a monolithic system:

The fragmentation of language in a text calls into question the very posture of this mastery. The writing that we have been discussing confronts this phallic position ... to traverse ... it. The word "traverse" implies that the subject experiences sexual difference, not as a fixed opposition ("man"/"woman"), but as a process of differentiation. (Kristeva 1981a: 165)



For Kristeva, revolutionary texts are those where the subject is a subject-in-process. This subject-in-process maintains an uneasy balance between "the semiotic activity" and the "symbolic disposition". The semiotic activity introduces an errant wandering or fuzziness into language whereas the symbolic disposition is the maker of language without which the semiotic could not be voiced.

In the following pages I suggest that in *The Stone Door* an attempt at showing a decentralised, dispersed, multisexual, multiform and polyphonic speaking subject can be found. The presence of such a subject-in-process intends, ultimately, to voice metaphorically the fragmented and heterogeneous nature of language. The metaphor that conveys such a proposition is the labyrinth, which provides both the form and structure of the text. The labyrinth, insofar as it is an architectural, formal design connoting a place, is the locus of the process of writing. However, such a locus of writing is not static but mobile for, being of a complex structure, the labyrinth is constructed as a confusing network through which it is difficult to find one's way. In the Carringtonian labyrinth, time and space lose their co-ordinates, thus conveying non-fixity and a desire to "traverse".

The dissolution of the body boundaries as enhancing the move from the monolithic Cartesian ego towards a multiform, polyphonic, dismembered ego, is explained by Carrington in a metaphor. Fond of cooking metaphors when explaining her theories, she affirms that the "thinking substances" that make up body and mind are like jelly. Asked about her house at Mexico City (at the entrance of which Edward James inscribed "Here lives the Sphinx") she said:

In Scotland they have a very nice expression about hares (h-a-r-e-s) and when the hares nest they call it a "form". It means to me that our space is our form, like our container. I think our lives and the places we live in are like a dish that contains a jelly, and that substance, which is a jelly, sort of melts and sort of disintegrates. I think we are sort of like that. Paintings are like that. And there are things that are flowing from one space to another. (*Omnibus* broadcast, November 1992)

The physical or psychic solidness and unity of the "jelly" (the body or the mental act) is called into question. The consistency of the jelly is, by its very definition, inconsistent. It can be made amorphous or shaped into a different form by cooling or freezing; it melts

into liquid or even disintegrates when heated. Jelly is normally yellowish or colourless, soft and semi-transparent, firm yet elastic, it becomes brittle when dry; it can be tasteless or flavoured. A gelatinous substance (obtained from the concoction of animal or vegetable matter), jelly can be solidified, congealed, coagulated, melted, and it can disintegrate. Jelly can take various forms and serve different purposes: it can be eaten, it serves for coating, it is used in photography, it is a component of glue and of intense explosives: "Paintings are like that." And narratives too.

Carrington's figurative conception of "matter" serves to define both the body and the mental process: "the matter of our bodies, like everything we call matter, should be thought of as thinking substance" (in Warner 1991: 23). If the body is a "thinking substance", it follows that the body possesses those same qualities. In *The Stone Door*, Brigitte-Amagoya can be one and two simultaneously because her self is like a jelly, multiform, variable and because the self is "flowing from one space to another" and can inhabit "different dishes". In *The Stone Door*, Carrington suggests that the notion of the body, "one complete being" as it stands in contemporary Western thought, limits a person's potential power to perceive their identity. If the subject is perceived as diffuse and multiform, it follows that the body is similar. The traditional concept of the body is presented as another of the limitations imposed by patriarchal thought. Two is not necessarily the result of subsuming two units. As the Artisan affirms in *The Stone Door*:

It is erroneous to think that two necessarily follows one or that twice three is eternally condemned to make six. I forgot how to count long ago because as soon as I reasoned a while I saw I had to start everything all over again, and real counting did not fit at all into the strict stiff rules mathematicians made for us. (1978a: 37)

Zacharias, who supposedly has had access to a different realm of knowledge, suggests that "A whole could have two bodies" (1989b: 136). When he is refuted: "The Masters would never permit that" (1989b: 136) he concludes: "These Masters are powerful. Their power lies in the unit. Their belief is one" (1989b: 137). The unity of the body, as a fixed boundary that implies safety, becomes for Carrington a limitation, a barrier to be crossed, rather than a means of protection. Western conceptualisation of the

body and of the subject is portrayed as a manoeuvre invented by patriarchy to limit a deeper knowledge of oneself:

As long as man thinks that he is whole in his one body he can never achieve the wisdom which would endanger the Plan. Believing that he is one keeps him in perpetual combat with another half of himself. Once he could see and accept that other half without combat, the Plan would totter like a ninepin. (1989b: 137)

Although the limiting notion of the body converts it into a prison, its enclosing quality allows Carrington's protagonists to use their bodies as places to hide:

Wearing a mask I am on all fours with my nose almost touching the nose of a wolf. Our eyes united in a look, yet I remain hidden behind myself and the wolf hidden behind himself; we are divided by our separate bodies. (1989b: 76)

The body is a site of limitation and Brigitte longs to break the barriers that incarcerate her in her body, and dreams of another concept that does not imprison her but allows her to flow amongst all elements. Within language, in the symbolic, this communion (*jouissance*) is impossible: it can only occur in dreams insofar as dreams are a dissolution of the semiotic disposition into the symbolic:

Last night in a dream It returned ... Screaming I entered the fur, wool, or hair, crying tears that were dark and sticky like blood. Tears thick with centuries of agony remembered all at once, they matted the furry coat and stank of birth and death. Shamelessly abandoning all that anguish to this man, animal, vegetable, or demon. Then I was in entire possession of the five sensorial powers and their long roots were as visible as the sun. The light of a vision or a dream is united to any given luminous body outside. No longer alone in my own body. (1989b: 77)

The words "centuries of agony remembered all at once" stand for an (im)possible return to the union of the newly born with the mother, before the acquisition of language, which requires acknowledgement of the self as an "independent" body. In the transition from the pre-Oedipal to the Oedipal, the semiotic is rejected in favour of the symbolic, thus the subject acquires language. The symbolic entails separation, individualisation, language and logic; the semiotic entails union, communion, absence of language and fluidity. The semiotic is related to the moment of birth and, in as much as it is unspeakable and is a state towards which the subject is attracted, it reminds her of death ("stank of birth and death").

Brigitte finally achieves the breaking of the barriers that incarcerate her in her body. The characters in *The Stone Door* open their bodies on to the exterior where they

are reunited with all things and all beings. Brigitte is Amagoya and Amagoya is Brigitte. Furthermore, Brigitte is the White child, and because the perception of herself is fragmentary, the woman protagonist is able to change sex and wander along Mesopotamia as Zacharias; already being Zacharias, she can even then change species and become a turkey in order to meet the Wise King of all the Jews, who in turn is Zacharias reborn. Double bodies are not enough: Brigitte-Amagoya feels she is still incomplete and the androgynous union of the White child with Zacharias also proves insufficient. Instead, the characters move towards an "open" notion of the self that would reject duality and pairs of opposites to embrace a variety of different matters: animal, vegetable or mineral they would all conform to a non-patriarchal "semiotic" conception of the body. *The Stone Door* dissolves identity, not only sexual identity, but even humanly specific identity. Its characters are the paradigm of a subject-in-process.

The novel is of a labyrinthine structure, fashioning different episodes, themes, images and narratives into a tortuous arrangement. Episodes vary greatly; past and present shift, dreams and "reality" run into each other and history and myth become synonymous. Thus the first notion of unity, that of the text, is already invalidated. Carrington's novel is a direct result of the process of producing "texts", in its etymological sense. The word "text" derives from "texture", the result of the Latin verb "texere" (to weave). Carrington succeeds in becoming the Weaver, by combining the most, apparently, unconnected elements (from words or events to genres) into a narrative. She emphasises this conscious device of subverting traditional structures and explicitly uses the verb "to weave" in order to describe this process:

Divination is difficult with isolated incidents. Weaving them together into prophecy is an arduous labor. Hazard a word dropped out of the unknown. Several hazards sometimes make a whole sentence. (1989b: 76)

Carrington's suggestion here ("Hazard a word dropped out of the unknown. Several hazards sometimes make a whole sentence") stresses the plural and multiple nature of any discourse. However, even though the passage might lead us to believe that the formal arrangement of the novel and the choice of words are fortuitous, little of her writing is unplanned, as is, least of all, her choice of such a labyrinthine structure. In

fact, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the labyrinth's first association is "with reference to the structures so named in classical antiquity", thus designating a direct link between labyrinths and the classical myths. Through the notion of the labyrinth the myths of Parsiphae and Ariadne are remembered, but so too is Persephone's abduction to the underworld, mirrored in *The Stone Door's* nameless female protagonist's journey to the "country of the Dead" (1989b: 90). A different argument that, nevertheless, still relates labyrinths to a feminist appropriation of mythology, is related to a second *Oxford English Dictionary* meaning for the word "labyrinth", according to which "labyrinth" is synonymous with "the internal ear". Daly reads this connection in the following way:

there is a *labyrinthine sense*, which is defined as "a complex sense concerned with the perception of bodily position and motion". Hags heading into the labyrinth beyond the foreground hear new voices - our own voices ... Hearing/moving through this intricate terrain we find our way from the entrance of the labyrinth deeper into the center of the homeland, of the Self. (Daly 1979: 405)

Although Daly's Self, as a place only accessible through a maze, echoes her concern with these constructions, Carrington herself does not give credence to the conclusive solutions provided by Daly's ecofeminism. *The Stone Door* gestures firmly towards the notion of goddess worship and even reformulates the central myth of witchcraft, the myth of rebirth, also called "The Legend of the Descent of the Goddess into the Underworld". However, she "is quick to emphasize that the goddess worship of today's ecofeminists offers answers no more definitive than does chaos theory or the new geometry" (Chadwick 1991a: 14). Rather, she is concerned here with the relationship between reality and the articulation of that reality. Labyrinths, rather than representing a thematic or symbolic anxiety, become for her the procedure by which she articulates thought in writing. The labyrinth becomes an architectonic symbol for the articulation of the epistemological complexities of time and space. It permits the illusion of movement, denied by the bare existence of the written word: "The written word hangs in time like a lump of lead. Everything should move with the ages and the planets" (1989b: 76). The movement implied by the labyrinth within the text is a synonym for the movement produced by a verb within the sentence. Thus, if the speaking subjects are dispersed and multiple, so are the actions they perform.

The illusion of movement is achieved through leaps in time and place such as when the boy Zacharias (known in the orphanage as "105") meets the girl in his dreams.<sup>2</sup> In the dream, 105 and the girl meet long before they do "in reality" at the end of the novel. At this point, moreover, they hint that they have already met before, although they cannot remember when or how:

"Who are you then?" replied 105. "And why do we go on asking all the time when we know?"

"We know but we can't remember," said the little girl. (1989b: 97)

The woman and Zacharias travel back to their past and meet in one of the winding circles that structure the narrative. A well-ordered, chronological structure is abandoned and it is substituted by a timeless maze. In the narrative the timeless maze is not incorporated with the intention of confusing the reader but with the intention of illustrating to the reader his/her already confused and distorted perception of time. Memory and history, although both unreliable, are continuously shaping and redefining the characters. Brigitte, when she was still Brigitte and was writing her diary in Chapter Two of the complete novel, attempts to structure her writing in the form of a diary. When narrating dreams and daily events it seems possible for her to accommodate a chronological order, although her subjectivity appears to intrude even in the heading of her dates:

September 15. / Day. / It is still October. / The last days of October. / All Saints' Day. / November 16. / November 20. (1989b: 75, 76, 77, 78)

"It is still October" speaks of the woman's anxious waiting for the events she knows by intuition are going to occur, whilst "All Saints' Day" reminds the reader of the other realm, that of the dead, to which she is soon to journey. However, as soon as her real world turns into a magical one, the headings in the diary disappear and a Kristevan circular, eternal time dominates the rest of the narrative:

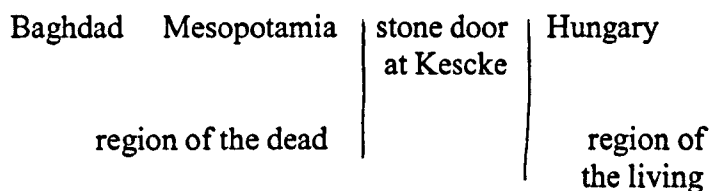
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<sup>2</sup> The passage where "the girl" complains about the way her family treats her is entirely autobiographical. Leonora did in fact have three brothers and was not allowed to play with them. It is also true that her mother, horrified by Leonora's interest in sorcery, warned her, to Leonora's satisfaction, that she would become a witch before her twentieth birthday (1989b: 98).

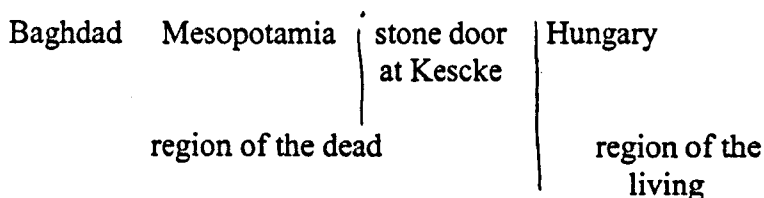
"It is prejudice that makes us conceive time as a straight line or as any sort of line at all, from a corkscrew to a zig-zag, or a circle or anything really. Time was invented as something strictly beginning and ending irrevocably, a long time after they made clocks." (1978a: 37)

The little girl, Zacharias's friend, acknowledges that: "It is possible to travel in your dreams in time and space, at a greater distance than when you are awake." It is possible for them to meet even though they are in different countries: "'Where are we?' asked 105. 'I mean what country?' ... 'Of course, you are in England now, and I am in Hungary'" (1989b: 97).

Several journeys are travelled in the novel, for the protagonists visit such varied places as Paris, Poland and England. However, I shall be concentrating in this study on the terrain covered by the protagonists within the "main" storyline. The woman is the one who makes the longest journey. She departs from Baghdad, and passing through Mesopotamia, arrives at the stone door in Kescke, where she waits for Zacharias to open the door into Hungary. Zacharias travels in the opposite direction, from Hungary towards its frontier with Mesopotamia, where the stone door stands. The landscape covered by the protagonists is thus as follows:



The travels of the woman converge with the travels of the man at the stone door, the boundary between the living and the dead. The diary transcript of Chapter Two of the novel describes how the woman arrives at the stone door. Chapter Four takes place in Hungary. Finally, Chapter Five narrates Zacharias's arrival at the stone door, and it is at the stone door, the place in the centre of the landscape, that the novel ends:



Diary Chapter Two-----> Chapter Four <--Chapter Five

The stone door, consequently, stands at the centre of the narrative, but considering the structure of the novel we can also say that it is the heart of the labyrinth. It is therefore most significant that the heart of the labyrinth is represented by a door. Once more Carrington has misled the reader, for a door is not a place in itself but a swinging piece which is used to open or close the entrance into a place. It is a beginning or an end but virtually never the heart of anything, least of all a labyrinth. There is no heart of the labyrinth, rather the door symbolises pure absence. The presence of a door, both at the centre of this labyrinthine narrative and in the title, has a more abstract meaning than the one adopted by the cabbalists.<sup>3</sup> Doors as absence are immediately identifiable with the literature of the fantastic in which they proliferate. Jackson refers to: "doors, apertures which open into another region found in the spaces of the familiar and the known" (Jackson 1988: 44). When Zacharias opens the stone door, time and space may flow in either direction. Doors will become even more confusing elements in *The Hearing Trumpet*, where they are simply drawn on the walls and do not lead anywhere. The stone door represents, then, what Freud termed in his analysis of the Wolf Man (which was later adopted by Lacan) a "kernel of nonsense": the absence at the centre of fantasies. Fantastic literature often presents such an absence at its core, since its aim is, as the Argentinian writer Julio Cortazar put it, to decentre the centre ("descentrar el centro").

A magical realist quality that intensifies the uncanny sensation of being lost in a labyrinth is created by means of dissolving apparently "unreal" or "enchanted" events into those characterised as "real". In the first part of the novel the solitary woman "enters" twice into a magical world. The first time, the cinnamon she puts under her pillow induces the dream in which she is a young boy wandering Mesopotamia towards Hungary. In this instance, the entrance into the world of dreams is as clear as is the moment of awakening:

When I closed my eyes the following dream, memory, or vision unrolled: I was crossing Mesopotamia on foot and carried a load on my back ... The dream left a

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<sup>3</sup> Cabbalists follow the treatise by Sephr Jetzirah that in an inductive way structures the world from "nature" to "god". Cabbalists have been called "doors" themselves because no one can have access to the paths of the different structures if s/he has not been first initiated by a master (Alonso 1993).



sensation of such bitter loss that I felt life could only be lived in sleep. (1989b: 78, 84)

However, there is a second occasion when there is not a threshold to the "other world" of dreams. The protagonist is slowly pushed into this other realm, her conversation with the Blind Jug being the reader's only notion that a magical transmutation is occurring:

The morning has been tedious. I have not been able to move away from the window, watching the street, waiting for some sign outside my dreams ... Blind Jug, tell the future? ... In some mysterious way these words will enter life.

The air was rare and chill so I thought that I was already amongst the highest mountains ... "This is the frontier of Hungary," said my thought. (1989b: 87-9)

There is a continuous emphasis on the impossibility of translating life into a written story. But this is precisely what Carrington is attempting when writing *The Stone Door*. The words in the paragraph above: "In some mysterious way these words will enter life," express the possibility of arranging life into writing and *vice versa*. Carrington visualises texts as "thinking matter", and, as such, they "are flowing from one space to another" (*Omnibus* broadcast, November 1992). The process of the text's taking a life of its own and informing "real" life is mysterious, but Carrington says it happens. Insofar as a text can bring about change for its author and its reader, the text itself is transformed by the reader and the author. The reader and the author can fictionalise themselves in the text, and thus they enter life, albeit in a different dimension.

*The Stone Door* experiments with different writings, from the narration of dreams to liturgical document, from autobiographical writing to cabalistic tract, and there is a special fascination with storytelling. More than ten different stories, fables and tales unroll within the "main" argument: the text is a graphic puzzle. *The Stone Door* can be characterised as a narrative metamorphosis. It denies the supposed unity of narrative discourse and elevates fiction to the category of cyclical and eternal living entity. However, given the short length of the "main" story and the great number of tangential stories, they are easily confused with the main tale and that is precisely Carrington's purpose. She aims determinedly at dissolving the barriers that make up the concept of unity, unity claimed to govern mental perceptions, body perceptions and, thus, writing. That is why my definition of the "main" argument, i.e., the story of the

woman journeying to the region of the dead and the endeavours of Zacharias to bring her back to the world of the living, has been written in inverted commas. "All stories are true" (1989b: 80) she writes in *The Stone Door*. All the stories told in the novel, as unrelated to the protagonists' pilgrimages as they can at first sight appear, are vital constituents of the dénouement of the story and therefore are as "main" argumentative lines as the one quoted above. Carrington's enterprising objective in the writing of *The Stone Door* is to achieve a narrative technique, by means of a labyrinthine fabrication, as close as possible to our perception of life. The timeless and placeless maze, the exploration of language, the use of different linguistic and narrative modes are tools to compensate for one painful recognition: "Words are treacherous because they are incomplete" (1989b: 76). Therefore, the writing of *The Stone Door* is an agonising exercise for it aims not only to convey in literature the portrayal of life, but to ascribe to writing an animate quality. The difficulty of the enterprise permeates the novel: "This is a love letter to a nightmare" (1989b: 88).

Taking the text as a mental process or as a body, there are many entrances to the Carringtonian labyrinth. Textually we can approach it by identifying with Brigitte and subsequently metamorphosing ourselves as she does. Otherwise, the reader may identify with the first character introduced, Amagoya, and see the story of her female friend from her perspective, through foretelling, dreams and visions. However, the reader can also detach him/herself from these characters and identify with the boy Zacharias, therefore having access to the story of the woman and to the labyrinth of the text by wandering with him in the magic lands in search of his beloved. To the surprise of the reader all these doors of access into the text are once more confusing, for, whichever voice the reader identifies with in order to approach the text, they all converge into one, whilst maintaining the appearance of several. The confusion in the reader's sense of time and space is as great as the confusion that the characters cause. Not only are the characters caught in a textual labyrinth: we are ourselves caught in it.

The labyrinth, related to the rejection of mental and bodily boundaries as limiting human perceptions, stands, then, as a metaphor for a rather complex way of conceptualising writing. In her article "Women's Time", Kristeva argues that syntax is

constitutive of our sense of chronological time by the very fact that the order of words in a sentence marks a temporal sequence: since subject-verb-object cannot be spoken simultaneously, their utterance necessarily impedes the temporal continuum of "eternity":

    this linear time is that of language considered as the enunciation of sentences (noun+verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending), and that this time rests on its own stumbling block, which is also the stumbling block of that enunciation - death. (Kristeva 1986: 192)

For Kristeva literary texts have to be looked at, not as solid grammatical constructions, but as an exchange of different dispositions, the semiotic and the symbolic, as continuous communication and transformation. It is the symbolic act of attaching meaning(s) to the word that should be examined. Faced with the difficulty of "voicing" eternity in language (since one word follows another syntagmatically) Carrington attempts to voice eternity metaphorically. The result is a story which is "a love letter to a nightmare" (1989b: 88). Each sentence of the text presents the subject-verb-object structure. However, a look at the structure of a larger construction (the narrative) shows that the meaning of 'subject-verb-object' is subverted. If the subject of the narrative (the narrative voice) is multiple and diverse (the reader often does not know *who* is speaking) then it follows that the actions performed by the subject are diverse (who is doing what). The text seems absurd in that it presents an absurd core (a door) to an absurd formal arrangement. This is, I believe, what Kristeva means by "the revolution" of poetic language. If the language of literary texts can, metaphorically, voice the articulation of the mental processes, a door is opened for (even political) change. As Winterson writes: "Metaphor is transformation" (Winterson 1995: 66) and the narrative *The Stone Door* is a metaphor for movement: ultimately, for movement through time and space.

## Texts and Travel: the propelling power of the word

Carrington is fascinated by travelling devices, as the proliferation of all sorts of ships, boats and arks in her stories testifies. *The Stone Door* includes a design for a *goat-ship*:

Harelip pulled the dead goat out of the fire and flayed her with a knife shaped like a gnomon. He put the carcass whole in the cauldron and set it to boil.

"She will be your boat, Brother," he told Zacharias. "In her you will cross the subterranean ocean to Kescke, the stone door."

After some boiling the goat's flesh dropped off the bones. Harelip lifted the skeleton out of the broth and stretched the hide over it, forming a light boat.

... They fixed Sari's broom as a mast and the skin of Ancient Böles Kilary as a sail. The little brig stood ready for her journey. (1989b: 138)

Carrington's vehicles appear to be simultaneously both too kinetic and too magnificent to move. The key characteristic that these stories emphasise is language as a vehicle. Both words and vehicles serve to communicate and Carrington's vehicles are light and portentous simultaneously because they resemble words. Such a kinetic and static quality best applies to her Ark design. In *The Hearing Trumpet's* final pages, when the earthquake has removed Mexico from its spatial location to Lapland, Marian Leatherby and her friends receive a visit from Marlborough, an old friend. He has arrived in his self-designed Ark which has taken him and his sister/lover all over the world:

Outside the tower stood Marlborough's Ark. I must say it was a most impressive sight. It was mounted on runners like a sledge, but otherwise it looked like a Renaissance version of Noah's Ark, gilded, carved and painted in gorgeous colours, like a painting by a mad Venetian master. The whole contraption was covered with bells that tinkled frenetically with every gust of wind.

"Atom-propelled impulsion," said Marlborough proudly. "The whole engine fits into a rock crystal case no bigger than a hen's egg. It is the most modern form of mobile vehicle. No fuel, no noise. In fact it is so noiseless that I had to put the bells on to keep me company. How do you like it?"

"It's very gaudy," I said in admiration. "I suppose you had it made in Venice?"

"My own design," said Marlborough. "Gypsylike simplicity and atomic comfort." (1991: 150-1)

If, in *The Hearing Trumpet* (1973), Marlborough uses his vehicle to travel around a disordered planet, in "The Happy Corpse Story" (seventies), Carrington takes the reader straight to Hell. Through the figure of the corpse of the mother, she cautions against trusting history, the family and the omnipotence of death. How to voice history

outside traditional parameters is difficult, since it seems the choices are restricted to speaking within history or to remaining silent:

Women are, in fact, caught in a very real contradiction ... As long as women remain silent, they will be outside the historical process. But, if they begin to speak and write *as men do*, they will enter history subdued and alienated; it is a history that, logically speaking, their speech should disrupt. (Gauthier 1981: 162-3)

Kristeva's alternative option in response to the contradiction is to be found in her enunciation of Women's Time. Through her notion of motherhood and reproduction as the access to a new realm, another space and another time, the time and language of history can be transgressed and traversed. Kristeva declares the space of the mother as the space from which such a time and transgression can be effected. She establishes a link between the maternal, the subversive and the poetic.

In the story, the reunion of mother and son marks that return reunion of the baby with the mother and the transgression of history begins. Contrasted with the solemnity of Kristeva's declaration, Carrington's statement in "The Happy Corpse Story" becomes poetic and subversive because it is done irreverently. The Western respect for the mother and son dyad is defied, somehow blasphemously, through her use of humour:

The story began. Think of listening to a story told straight into your face out of a hole in the back of the head with bad breath: surely this must have troubled the delicate sensibility of the young man. (1989b: 177)

The nursery-rhyme tone is humorously ridiculed and the comic stands as the linguistic vehicle for traversing ontological concepts. Within the plot, yet another vehicle appears, for the materialised corpse of his mother is the youth's means of transport:

"If you catch hold of me and ride on my back, I may help you to find this woman."

"Whoop!" yelled the youth and grabbed at the corpse, which fell into ashes and appeared on the other side of a brambleberry bush.

"Not so fast."

Around and around the brambleberry bush they ran, and as the young man got nearer and nearer the corpse got thicker and thicker, till the youth leapt on its back; whereupon the Happy Corpse stamped its foot and away they ran. (1989b: 177)

A gradual substitution of topography for temporality takes place as the story is narrated. First "thorns grabbed at the pair as they hurried through the wood" (1989b:

177) but as the story progresses the trees become "scarcer, so that a stretch of desert was visible in the distance" (1989b: 179). Just as it seems that temporality has taken over from topography, temporality also disappears and only memory remains: "They were both lost for a moment in memories" (1989b: 180). However, at the gates of Hell, and after the collapse of linear time, another disintegration is about to take place, that of memory, for: "those on their way to Hell forget. Now you must remember, and in order to remember you must return again, alone" (1989b: 180). Travel has occurred not in linear time or in geographical landscape but within memory and circularity. By the end of the story there are no reliable co-ordinates, spatial or temporal, remaining. However, the cyclical timing of the story does not render it claustrophobic or petrifying; rather, it provides a breath of innovation through the use of memory mixed with fantasy and humour. By the end of the story, the Happy Corpse has told the story of her ambitious businessman father and his death from overwork, and of the bulimia, boredom and eventual suicide of her mother. The corpse and the youth have recognised each other as mother and son and they have forgiven each other.

If the use of memory is the vehicle for subverting historical time in "The Happy Corpse Story", history and the popular imagination are subverted in *The Invention of the Mole* through irony. A satiric comedy, *The Invention of the Mole* presents three main characters, Montezuma (the Aztec leader), a Friend and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The story involves the ridicule of both the Aztec people and the teachings of the Anglican Church. The dramatic irony, and much of the satirical humour of the play, resides in the fact that the situation allows the audience to understand that the Aztecs are going to cook the Archbishop of Canterbury in a chocolate sauce, whilst he remains ignorant:

THE FRIEND: ... I do believe it's time for the Archbishop to begin his ablutions. Supper has been announced for nine o'clock. (1989b: 171)

It is not the Archbishop's tragic fate but his ignorance that makes the play comic. The Archbishop, unknowingly, acts in a way the audience and the reader immediately recognise as entirely inappropriate to his circumstances, by arguing with Montezuma about spiritual matters and despising his paganism:

THE ARCHBISHOP: Supper at nine, with guests coming? Don't, please, go to any bother for my sake, I beg you. My stomach is a bit upset from all the condiments and spices you use. I'll be happy to have a boiled turkey, and, if possible, a few of those delightful corn cakes. And perhaps a cup of that delightful drink which you call chocolate, I believe. (1989b: 171)

The Archbishop's pretension of frugality will turn against him for he will not have dinner. The situation is further complicated by the Archbishop's obtuseness, thus creating situations that anticipate the actual outcome. The achievement of disruption by the play comes from the fact that the comic, rather than evoking laughter as an end in itself, derides. Carrington uses laughter as a vehicle to ridicule not only the Archbishop of Canterbury but the whole institution of the Church. The Archbishop represents all dignitaries of religious orders, the Spanish colonialists, and even the white race:

THE FRIEND: You will forgive me my frankness if I tell you that you people, you whites, are so lax in ritual bathing that your flesh, even after repeated immersion in spices and pulque, is far too coarse for good eating. (1989b: 172)

Such a comment satirises the Aztecs as well as the Europeans by portraying their rituals as grotesque and inhuman. In her satire of the Aztec people, she plays with the words of the Aztecs' autochthonous language, Nahuatl, characteristic in their use of the phonemes "tlx" and "clx". In the play, words in Nahuatl are comically deformed and exaggerated into an unintelligible and unpronounceable cacophony as, for instance, the name of the Great Priestess, "Tlaxcluichiloquitle". The Third Great Priestess of Imperial Mexico is summoned in order to prove to the Archbishop that the Aztecs' magical demonstrations are not as "mortally boring" as "the rite of the Holy Mass". The priestess's magical display turns into a fiasco, and they are all disappointed:

THE FRIEND: The banana peels leave me cold. I'm disillusioned. I expect she must be saving her vibrations for later on tonight. (1989b: 175)

The satiric disruptiveness of *The Invention of the Mole* is not achieved by applying the elaborated form and ceremonious style of the time (the play, at times has a certain epic undertone) to the trivial subject matter of the invention of the *mole*; nor is the irony achieved through the ridiculing of both European and American cultures. Carrington's irony is as subtle as it is subversive. It is the comic recreation of history, together with the ironic challenge to a political reality, that makes the play subversive.

The first obvious satirical item, the idea that the Archbishop is to be cooked, is merely a way of stimulating a Mexican public always ready (understandably) to mock the colonial powers. What the audience finds along with the mockery of the white European is a fierce critique of the Mexican indigenous past. Written at the time of the cultural and intellectual movement "Mexicanidad", *The Invention of the Mole* is subversive. Apparently set within the "Mexicanidad" movement and displaying the intention of recuperating and recreating an indigenous past with pride, it mocks the very interest of such a recuperation and recreation. The movement is challenged and undermined and the play is thus inscribed within the most subversive functioning of irony: a self-critical, self-knowing, self-reflecting, counter-discourse.

Fire, a mythical means of transformation, recurs in Carrington's Mexican stories and plays, and it is especially useful in helping transform the always mutable human body. Being cooked in a cauldron is merely the step from one stage to another, as *The Invention of the Mole* suggests:

THE FRIEND: At all times [during dinner] the conversation will shine with humour, ingenuity, and culture. Of course you yourself will no longer be in a state to participate. (1989b: 173)

It is hinted that the Archbishop will still exist, although in a different state. To be eaten is once again simply another form of transformation. Not in all cases are human beings cooked as a form of punishment.

In the story "A Mexican Fairy Tale",<sup>4</sup> Carrington presents two characters, Juan and Mari, who will "travel" by means of the element of fire. By going together into the bursting fire they arrive not only at another place or time, but at another stage: the androgyne.

"Maria," called a million voices, "jump into the fire and take Juan by the hand, he must burn with you so you both shall be one whole person. This is love."

They jumped into the fire and ascended in smoke through the shaft in the roof to join the Evening Star. Juan-Mari, they were one whole being. (1989b: 158)

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<sup>4</sup> Although the Virago edition dates it as from the 1970s, "A Mexican Fairy Tale" was written in the 1940s. Jacqueline Chénieux suggests that it dates from the years 1946-48 (Chénieux 1975: 54).



This way, through their melting together into one, they have travelled to a different stage and they have crossed frontiers beyond space and time, even those of gender. In "A Mexican Fairy Tale" being cooked and eaten is also meant as a transformation: Juan is told not to worry when his body is "chopped up like meat stew" (1989b: 156) because "this is only a first death" (1989b: 155). Finally, in *The Hearing Trumpet*, the transformation is complete. By the end of the novel Marian arrives at the subterranean kitchen where she sees herself stirring a cauldron. She is grabbed and forced into the cauldron. At that moment the transformation takes place:

When I was well within range she suddenly jabbed the pointed knife into my back side and with a scream of pain I leapt right into the boiling soup and stiffened in a moment of intense agony with my companions in distress, one carrot and two onions.

A mighty rumbling followed by crashes and there I was standing outside the pot stirring the soup in which I could see my own meat, feet up, boiling away merrily as any joint of beef. (1991: 138)

There are two subtle simultaneous transformations. The first transformation takes the narrative "I" from "I am she" to that "she". And, simultaneously, the "she" takes the place of the "I" thus becoming the first person narrator. These transformations of the narrative voice confirm that the stories they tell are never ended but transformed and Marian lives to eat her own meat in the stew (which, she regrets, is "not as good as a bouillabaisse").

"Metaphor is transformation" and transformation is change, revolution. "Books are kinetic" (Winterson 1995: 123); they can make the reader travel where s/he would never dare to go. The reader can travel in time, in space, and even into a different "thinking matter". *The Stone Door* makes readers travel through their identification with the text's subject-in-process, but more important, in my opinion, is the travelling that takes place through the act of giving meaning to the words. Even though, according to Carrington, "The written word hangs in time like a lump of lead" (1989b: 76), the aim of the writer is to provide words with travelling devices since "Everything should move with the ages and the planets" (1989b: 76).

What makes the letter (Appendix II) interesting is the fact that the text is in accord with Carrington's views on biography and how to deal with biographical material

(see Chapter Seven). Instead of dates and facts the writer provides, once more, material for textual literary analysis:

Oui, Cher Zebre, tu ne dois pas me meprise depuis que tu sais mon origine purement scientifique. Je suis nee par insemination artificielle.

Yes, Dear Zebra, you must not despise after knowing my purely scientific origins. I was born by artificial insemination. (Appendix II)

She fictionalises events of her life ("The Debutante" as an account of her presentation in court, "Down Below" as an account of her time in Spain). This time she is writing to Varo a fictionalised version of her own conception and birth. Several items, characteristic of Carrington's writing, reappear in this text:

Ma Mere comme ravissante jeune mariee, preci-pitee dans une languissante desperation a cause du froideur Anglo-Britannique de son mari, a promener par une nuit de Lune croissante dans les laboratoires conjoint aux vastes et luxuriantes granges qui faisait partie des proprietees familiales. Ces laboritoires etaient le lieux favori des jeux inter-seminaires de mond grand oncle Julep Edgworth.

My mother as a ravishing young bride, thrown into a languishing desperation because of the Anglo-Britannic iciness of her husband, wandered on a crescent-moon-lit night into the conjugal laboratories on the vast and luxurious stable which made up part of the family state. These laboratories were the favourite place for my grand uncle Julep Edgworth's inter-seminary games. (Appendix II)

The reference to her mother walking into the "vast and luxurious stable which made up part of the family state" is connected to Philip, one of the protagonists of "The Seventh Horse". Philip walked into the stable one night and rode on Hevalino's back, followed by the appearance, the following morning, of a small foal in the seventh empty stall. The "iciness" of the mother's Anglo-Britannic husband is characteristic of many of her male protagonists' physical appearances. In most cases I have dealt with them as the representation of Ernst: Célestin in "Pigeon, Fly!" has a blindingly white body. Lazarus in "White Rabbits" has a glittering skin, "like tinsel on a Christmas tree" (1989b: 59). Fernando, in "Waiting", is said to possess an "almost blue, blue grey" hair (1989b: 62). Philip's face in "The Seventh Horse" is "luminous and white as snow" (1989b: 71). It is noticeable as well that Carrington does not write "my mother was thrown into a languishing desperation because of ... my father" but instead she writes "of her husband". This may be because within the plot of this story, she says she was born through the artificial insemination of different animals' semen (thus her mother's

husband not being her father) but it is also a statement about her relationship with Harold Carrington (see Chapter Four). Although in its *formal* presentation the letter appears as a "standard" one, Carrington keeps playing with words. "Inter-seminary" or, as the French original reads, "inter-seminaires" is a pun of which the mental association seems to be "artificial-insemination".

With her play with language, Carrington answers her own question: "Comment saurais-je transmettre de transgression a transgression?" ["How to convey transgression upon transgression?"] (Appendix II). To transgress is to break, to violate, to infringe. It is to cross borders. Often to transgress is associated with crossing the borders of family, community, nation. It should really mean to transgress the borders of the body, the first place of limitation. When Carrington writes "How to condense my experiences into a letter? How to convey transgression upon transgression?" she is speaking of crossing borders. A way in which she can convey transgression immediately is by "playing" with language. She does so quite literally, for the French often seems intentionally imperfect.

Not only is Carrington playing with language she also plays with facts and memory. The playing is based on using contradictions: Carrington knows that a sentence in Latin adds prestige to her letter although she is mocking the reader: "Ex opolorum pan excelsus veribitarum. Amen" (Appendix II). This sentence means absolutely nothing and yet it sounds as if it would (*opolorum* is not a Latin word). Moreover it sanctimoniously ends with the word "Amen" which adds the religious touch to the sacrilegious letter. She includes Latin and religious terminology in many of her texts, the most obvious examples being: *The Hearing Trumpet* (1991: 95, 97), "As They Rode Along the Edge" (1989b: 6), "How to Start a Pharmaceutical Business" (1989b: 185) and, of course, in the title of the short story "Et in bellicus lunarum medicalis" (1989b: 159).

Moreover, looking at the *content*, the letter refuses to focus its attention on her "real" life of December 1958 and instead continually turns the reader's attention back to fictionalised events. Even the present date (late December 1958) is something to "play" with:

je te souhaite une profitable et hereux annes de 1958, car ce fois ci ils ont decidee de repetee la meme annes par faute d'evenements.

I wish you a profitable and happy year for 1958, because this time they decided to repeat the same year due to a lack of any other events. (Appendix II)

If Mexico is the Surreal country *par excellence* as Breton said, she is mocking here Mexico's sometimes Surreal policies. Carrington's letter features such absurd situations as 1958 being repeated by official policy. But humour still pervades: the comic orthographic mistakes undermine the possible seriousness of her criticism.

The invention of a machine where her mother is said to sit for a rest is, once more, characteristic of all her *oeuvre*:

Figures-toi, alors, que cette Machine Special etait precisament le dernier invention de mon Oncle Julep. L'artefacte de haute precision chargee de neuf cent gallons carres de secretions seminales de tous les animaux males de la proprietées.

Just imagine, this Special Contraption was precisely the last invention of my uncle Julep. The high precision artefact packed full of nine hundred gallons squared of seminal secretions from all the male animals on the property. (Appendix II)

Saint Alexander's "garden of the little Flowers of Mortification" (1989b: 5), the sadist Misses Cunningham-Jones's "kitchen garden" (1989a: 65) or the huge apparatus in the shape of an organ she designed for the 1959 Surrealist Exhibition are all invariably machines of huge dimensions with sado-masochist elements. In the background of this machine's creation stands her grandfather's flair for invention.

But it is the new turn in her writing that makes this letter really valuable. What Carrington succeeds in doing in her writing of the Mexican period is linking the old and the new, high and low. The high ("splendid stallions of the Arab race", "royal pigs") and the low ("common, everyday ducks") mix their seminal secretions for the fantastic conception of Leonora Carrington. The human ("my mother") and the animal ("all the male animals on the property") are mixed to create the grotesque Carrington. Thus she concludes "uncle Julep kept me in the special fridge where *other monsters* waited" (my emphasis), and it is not the first time that she describes herself as a monster (see Chapter Six). Mostly she mixes the comic and the deadly:

Laissons tombee discrettement et en silence le gros toile d'araignee co me voile de mariee sur ma difunte virginitee.

Let us discreetly and silently allow the big cobweb to fall like a bride's veil over my defunct virginity. (Appendix II)

A qualifer like "defunct" is shockingly followed by virginity. The brilliancy by which she is able to make the reader associate a cobweb with a bride's veil belongs to the Gothic. Another instance of comic black humour and Gothic horror appears in a comment such as "original manuscripts written on Vatican bishop skin" (Appendix II). Thus she is crossing borders: those that delimit animal from human, old from new, horrific and comic. And this is the topic that characterises the third moment of her *oeuvre*: the Nether Realms. She travels on the edge, into the horrific or backwards, she reverses "reality" and fantasy: she is transgressing, trespassing frontiers. In a previous chapter (Chapter Five) I argue that her "play" with language led her to a metaphorical death and a creative halt. Now Carrington has realised that her "play" with language will be both transgressive and "approved" if it is ironic and comic.

Carrington writes to Varo that the last transgression will be "a gentle senile decline into ... my past" (Appendix II). Written to Varo in 1958 these words are the basis for *The Hearing Trumpet*, first written in the early 1960s. In this respect there is a crucial passage at the beginning of the novel where Muriel, Marian's daughter-in-law, is telling Galahad that his mother is senile. Marian, who is able to hear the conversation with the aid of her hearing trumpet, muses to herself:

Senile? yes I dare say they were right, but what does senile mean?

I applied the trumpet again to the other ear, "She ought to be dead," Robert said. "At that age people are better off dead." (1991: 10)

*The Hearing Trumpet* is her exploration of what being old means, of what it is like to drift "into the eight tender but hairy arms of my past" (Appendix II) and what re-shaping one's own past achieves. And all because, as she makes Marian say "why do they suppose they know that one is better off dead? how can they possibly know that?" (1991: 12).

Regarding the imagery, several elements in the letter will later serve to create the intricate cobweb of events in the novel. A hive of wild bees (1991: 32) is one of the protagonists of *The Hearing Trumpet*, where Marian possesses a "neo-barbarous nature" (as in Appendix II). The word "souvenir" is one of the crucial repetitions of *The Hearing*

*Trumpet* (1991: 58, 59). Cravings and anxiety for food are an iconographic symbol: Muriel, Galahad's wife in *The Hearing Trumpet*, suffers from bulimia (1991: 7). Key technical and thematic elements of this letter are reappropriated for *The Hearing Trumpet*, such as the huge, impossible belly, and an explosion capable of creating an earthquake; furthermore the novel elaborates on the "bio-chemical reactions" of such a pregnancy ("she had turned coal black"):

For Doña Rosalinda, who had always been a thin woman, had swollen to such a monstrous size as to resemble a small whale, and she had turned coal black. The swelling process had attained its utmost dimension and she slowly floated into the air, where she remained suspended for a moment. Then a sudden quaking came over the body, followed by a report louder than any known cannon and an explosion of such violence that I was thrown against the wall. (1991: 99)

When Carrington wrote this letter to Varo at the end of the year 1958 she was devising her most important work, her novel *The Hearing Trumpet*. Although the novel was finally prepared for publication in 1973, it is believed to have been written in the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Maybe it was started as soon as 1959, for in this letter many of the issues and imagery of *The Hearing Trumpet* appear in embryo form. This text is in many ways the culmination of Carrington's long journey *through* and *out of* language to the other side.

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<sup>5</sup> Suleiman dates the novel in the early fifties.

## Chapter Nine

### The Hearing Trumpet

*The Hearing Trumpet* is, to date, the last work in Carrington's literary career and it is the culmination of her writing. It incorporates the stylistic devices that characterised her dream-texts as well as exploring further her ongoing preoccupation with death. The Nether Realms symbolise these two worlds, of dreams and of death. Carrington writes about these themes so lightheartedly that her protagonists instead of being engulfed by dreams and death, as was the painter Eleanor in "Pigeon, Fly!", find a way of defeating death and achieving change. As was shown in the previous chapter, humour is one of the main instruments in Carrington's playing with language. However, this text's most revolutionary characteristic is, in my opinion, the use of the attributes of the oral tradition: memory and repetition.

Orenstein (1982) reads *The Hearing Trumpet* as a novel where the principle of the Triple Mother Goddess is reclaimed. Mandlove (1981) and Suleiman (1990) analyse the revolutionary possibilities of humour. Byatt (1990), in her preface to the Virago edition, studies the novel as a feminist revision of the quest for the Holy Grail. I shall focus in this final chapter on one of the figures of classical rhetoric that Carrington practises in *The Hearing Trumpet*: repetition. Repetition is the key element that opens the way to all possible analyses. Repetition catalyses the different interpretations of the novel, be they theme-based analyses such as Orenstein's or Byatt's, or textual-effect analyses such as Mandlove's and Suleiman's.

Despite the flashbacks, such as when Marian reminisces about her youth, or about the art scene in Paris, or about Surrealism and how it shocked London society, the first part of *The Hearing Trumpet* follows a chronologically ordered sequence. In the first section of the novel Marian introduces herself and the reader becomes familiar with her peculiar narrative voice. Marian is a ninety-two-year-old, bearded, stone-deaf and whole-hearted woman. She lives in a tiny room in the house of her son Galahad in Mexico. The intelligent and witty Marian is despised by all the members of her family who eventually dispose of her in a bizarre and evil home for old ladies in Santa

Brigida,<sup>1</sup> called the Well of Light Brotherhood. Marian suffers by being separated from her cats and from her elderly Spanish friend, Carmella Velazquez, who had given her a hearing trumpet. Even if the events of the first part (Marian at Galahad's) do lead directly to the events of the second part (Marian at the institution), this latter section is, however, more complex than it at first appears. Two distinct stories develop in the events that deal with Marian at the institution. The Well of Light Brotherhood is run with pedantic assertiveness by Dr Gambit,<sup>2</sup> and Marian is given a few days to become familiar with the institution. The buildings are all differently shaped: there is a medieval castle, a tower, a railway carriage, a Swiss chalet "which on closer observation turned out to be a cuckoo clock" (1991: 31), a red toadstool with yellow spots, a boot, a birthday cake, a circus tent, an Eskimo's igloo and one or two ordinary bungalows. Her companions at the old ladies' home are equally bizarre: ninety-eight-year-old Veronica Adams is a totally blind water-colour painter; Maude, we discover after her death, is Veronica's secret lover and a man; there is a French marquise, and an eccentrically dressed octogenarian called Georgina Sykes. Two other inmates are the compulsive talker Anna Wertz and Christabel Burns, who is the only black person in the institution and an expert in witchcraft. Finally, there are two evil characters, Vera van Tocht and Natacha Gonzalez. The fact that Carrington often chooses to depict these women with reference to witchcraft is a way to suggest that they are different and are being rejected for it. As Gabriella Morisco contends:

Being a witch ... means acknowledging an ancient secret bond which holds together all the women who, defying social norms, recognize themselves and are recognized by others as different, transgressive and self-determining. (Morisco 1995: 17)

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<sup>1</sup> Carrington probably extracted information about Saint Brigida from her readings of Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*. She read *The White Goddess* after its publication in 1948. Saint Brigida, who lived during the fourteenth century, is said to be characteristic, according to Graves (1952: 392), of the transformation of the Celtic goddesses into Christian saints by popular mythology.

<sup>2</sup> The personality of Dr Gambit as a puritanical and pedantic religious leader is so well delineated that some writers, such as Maureen Duffy, have adopted his name to describe similar characters. In Duffy's *Love Child* the principles of the school the protagonist attends ... have been "invented or devised by the principal, Dr. Gambit" (Duffy 1994: 11)



The plot centres on Marian's obsession with the portrait of a Spanish Abbess which hangs in the dining hall of Santa Brigida. The Abbess seems to be winking at her at every meal and Marian gives her the name of Doña Rosalinda Alvarez Cruz della Cueva. Carmella, who has an acute and extraordinarily well developed sense of dream telepathy, tells Marian in a letter that she is dreaming about a nun in a tower: "She has a most interesting face, which is slightly deformed by a perpetual wink" (1991: 52). Maude, on her part, tells Marian of having dreamt about the nun of the painting and about a mysterious "magic cup" (1991: 57). The Gothic element provided by the image of the nun gives the narrative a new turn and, eventually, Marian's and Carmella's ruminations about Doña Rosalinda become uncannily confirmed. Her lucubration is elaborated when Marian reads an eighteenth-century document passed on to her by Christabel Burns. The document relates the life of the Abbess Doña Rosalinda as written by her confessor. Apart from various letters, the document also contains translations of two earlier documents, the first one in Hebrew, dating from before the Christian era, and the second in Medieval Latin, which tells about a branch of the Knights Templar. The narrative works as a vortex and, as Freud noticed, uncanny feelings are constantly provoked by the incomprehensible repetitions. Dreams, fantasies and invention come together when Marian reads the story of the Abbess and her quest to recover the Holy Grail.

The document sets out to provide "A true and faithful rendering of the life of Rosalinda Alvarez della Cueva" (1991: 73) who, having been a sinful and sacrilegious nun, according to her confessor, was canonised by mistake. Doña Rosalinda spends her life searching for the Holy Grail. In this version of the legend, it is said to have contained not the Holy Blood but an aphrodisiac magic ointment given by Mary Magdalen, a disciple of the Great Mother Goddess, to Jesus Christ, thus enabling him to perform his miracles. The Abbess, herself a devotee of the Great Goddess, tries to steal the Grail from the Templars and, after having locked herself in a chamber with the vessel, returns to her convent pregnant. According to the account provided by the eighteenth-century document, the Abbess explodes while giving birth to a winged boy

holding an arrow. Most facts of her life being unknown to everyone but her confessor, she is soon canonised.

Marian is not disillusioned by the life of her leering nun, despite the fact that, in her opinion, "the snooping priest, Dominico Eucaristo Deseos, had done his best to portray her in a pernicious light" (1991: 101). For Marian, Doña Rosalinda remains "a most remarkable woman" (1991: 101). When she wakes up the morning after reading the manuscript, Marian discovers that Maude has been poisoned by Dr Gambit's favourites, Vera van Tocht and Natacha Gonzalez. Marian and Carmella decide that the food is no longer safe and together with the other inmates they stage a hunger strike to get the two murderers expelled.

Therefore, section two is made up of two separate stories: firstly, the order of events that lead to Maude's death and eventually to the old women's hunger strike and, secondly, the transcription of the story of the Abbess Rosalinda. The final section is the sequel to the two previous stories. The events in the final part of the narrative are as much a result of Maude's death and the revolt of the old ladies as well as the narrative continuation of the story of the Abbess Doña Rosalinda. Carmella sets out to rescue Marian and the group of women who live at the institution and eventually moves in with them. A new Ice Age begins. Heavy snow begins to fall and the old ladies take refuge in an underground shelter. Marian solves the riddles that Christabel Burns sets her and descends to the bottom of the tower (out of which a winged creature has escaped following an earthquake) where she sees herself stirring a cauldron of stew.<sup>3</sup> Marian is thrown in the cauldron to reappear again stirring her own meat, at which point she realises that she is Hecate, the Abbess, the Queen Bee and herself.<sup>4</sup> The rest of her companions have undergone the same process so that now they are strong enough to go out into the world and capture the Holy Grail, which they do, after dancing wildly

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<sup>3</sup> This is the most obvious connection with the archetype of the Great Mother, for as Neumann notes: "The magical cauldron or pot is always in the hand of the female mana figure, the priestess, or, later, the witch" (Neumann 1972: 288).

<sup>4</sup> This again appears documented in Graves's *The White Goddess*, since he argues that according to the myth, the Triple Goddess was born of the Cerridwen cauldron (Graves 1952: 75).

around the bee pond. By now all of the rites of passage into witchcraft have been performed: Marian has been initiated into witchcraft by another, older, woman, she has been to secret places and she has danced and sung. Nevertheless, the novel is not an exploration *per se* of witchcraft. Witchcraft functions as a metaphor for independence, revolution and power. Morisco argues:

Deviation, heresy and dissent are taken as a starting point by contemporary women poets for discovering their inner dark side and the act of proclaiming themselves witches has by now become the sign of power already attained. (Morisco 1995: 28)

Marian explains that, due to the new Ice Age, humanity is at its end but that the document will be continued by Anubeth's (the werewoman's) children. Finally, Marian realises that, due to the reversal of the poles, she is no longer in Mexico but "somewhere in the region where Lapland used to be" (1991: 158).

### Repetitions

In a text such as *The Hearing Trumpet* the relationship between narrative structures and textual organisation exists through complex associations. The narrative structures function through a constant relationship with the surface level of the text.<sup>5</sup> *The Hearing Trumpet* is not so much about telling a story but about the way a story can be composite. The lexical surface (the words themselves and the way these relate to each other) demands constant attention on the part of the reader who may obtain pleasure, or displeasure, not from the story itself and what it tells, but by the manner in which it is told. *The Hearing Trumpet*, as the title suggests, is a novel to be heard, to be listened to. The participation of the listener or the reader is a vital component of its process of signification. The cumulative effect of repetition is to produce a text where the narrator places different elements together, not with a hierarchical relationship between them, but rather by superimposition, which enhances the overall effect of dense, repeated quilting. In *The Hearing Trumpet* repetition is used in order not to problematise the

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<sup>5</sup> Rimmon-Kenan defines "surface" structure as "the abstract formulation of the organization of the observable sentence" and opposes it to "deep" structure which "lies beneath it and can only be retrieved through a backward retracing of the transformational process" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 10).

narrative logic, but to require attention from the reader for the fact that the story is not only a story about the Grail, or Marian, or the Bible, but also about the act and the change-invoking function of repetition in language. Furthermore, repetition is needed in this chain-narrative to create the illusion of unity in both the style and the narrative discourse.

According to Rimmon-Kenan, repetition "is a mental construct attained by an elimination of the specific qualities of each occurrence and a preservation of only those qualities which it shares with similar occurrences" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 56). However, insofar as repetition implies a variety of events, the resemblance of the repeated event or repeated segment of the text is merely a rhetorical resemblance. As Bronfen puts it:

The repeated event, action or term always contradicts its predecessor because, though similar, it is never identical, and though recalling the unique, singular and original quality of the former event, it emphasises that it is 'more than one', a multiple duplicate, occurring at more than one site. (Bronfen 1992: 324)

Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes between constructive repetition, as a way of articulating difference, and destructive repetition, as one signifying repetition of the same as the same. According to Bronfen:

The former ... allows repetition to be used to transform a passive into an active position which results in a mastery over a disturbing, wounding event. While this form of repetition is constructive precisely because it works on a principle of difference, another form of repetition based on undifferentiated oversameness without variation, comes close to being an occlusion of approximation and distance, a complete repetition, which is death, beyond life and narrative. (Bronfen 1992: 325)

Thus, a repetition that does not emphasise difference annuls the distinction between the original and the copy. However, complete repetition is impossible since, as Rimmon-Kenan goes on to argue:

no event is repeatable in all respects, nor is a repeated segment of the text quite the same, since its new location puts it in a different context which necessarily changes its meaning (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 56-7).

The most basic function of repetition is when it works for the reader in maintaining his/her retentive memory and mental associations. This is so, for example, in the constant repetition of the word "violet" by which Marian refers to her friend

Carmella: "We both sat down and sucked a violet scented lozenge which Carmella likes because it scents the breath" (1991: 5).<sup>6</sup> In the novel, the character of Carmella is thus "coloured" violet and whenever she appears the violet lozenge is associated with her. Although Marian first states that the lozenges have a "rather nasty taste" their association with Carmella accustoms her to their taste and when she is at the institution her longing for Carmella makes her crave for the lozenges: "How I longed to ... suck violet flavoured lozenges on the porch" (1991: 55). Once the reader has established an association between Carmella and the violet scent, the word "violet" reappears, in this case referring not to the smell but to the violet's visual characteristic: "It was really delightful to look once more on her delicate handwriting and violet coloured ink" (1991: 52). That the word "violet" is not an item of scrutiny in itself but an aid to the reader's receptive memory is made explicit when, later in the text, the word changes to "lilac" without affecting the function of repetition:

We were happy to see Carmella's lilac limousine drawn up at the front door ... I noticed she wore a handsome new lilac wig, to match the car. (1991: 130)

It seems that by the end of the novel she has forgotten the precise word. "Violet" is different from "lilac", yet what the speaker's (or Carrington's) misremembrance shows is her aim of associating Carmella with a colour. This is a strategy that makes of Carmella a character easily recognised and easily remembered by the reader.

A second function of repetition is that of helping the reader to draw parallels between certain unrelated events, characters or segments of the text that would otherwise be difficult for the reader to associate. Since the novel's structure is a circular one, with several different characters becoming one by the end of the narrative, the text must aid the reader in initially establishing the connections between the various characters that will be blended later. The description of Marian Leatherby, for example, is quite exceptional in that the female character is not only recognisable by her short greyish beard but by the fact that she is remarkably proud of it: "Indeed I do have a short

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<sup>6</sup> Violet lozenges are the peculiar product of a turn of the century *patisserie* situated in the heart of Madrid (they are known as "*Violetas Imperiales*"). That Carmella likes sucking the lozenges is most probably a reference to Remedios Varo, who lived in Madrid for over ten years.

grey beard which conventional people would find repulsive. Personally I find it rather gallant" (1991: 3).<sup>7</sup> While imagining the life of the nun in the portrait that obsesses her at meals, Marian muses:

She was abbess, I imagined, of a huge Baroque convent on a lonely and barren mountain in Castile. The convent was called El convento de Santa Barbara de Tartarus, the *bearded* patroness of Limbo. (1991: 43)

Through the strategy of depicting both characters as displaying the peculiarity of a beard, the reader is compelled to establish a link between Marian and the Goddess of the Underworld (later known to the Christian world as Saint Barbara).<sup>8</sup> However, the connections do not end here for the Abbess often disguises herself with "a short reddish beard" (1991: 87). Now Marian, Saint Barbara and the Abbess are all recognisable by (as well as indistinguishable through) a short beard; in case the reader has missed the connection s/he is finally forced towards it:

For some thousands of years the cup was safely in the keeping of the subterranean Goddess, who was known to be *bearded* and a hermaphrodite. Her name was Barbarus ... I must say I found the name most striking, through obvious associations. (1991: 91)

This function of repetition is, in this particular instance, doubly significant. On the one hand it serves to confirm and stabilise a specific element in the reader's mind, while on the other it aims to cross the boundaries of events and characters in an attempt to blur the distinction between them. One of the reasons for such a comprehensive strategy is that of making the concept of time problematic, and this is the impulse behind the beard that characterises Barbarus, the Abbess and Marian. In ancient Greek culture there existed two terms for what we now designate as "time". One aspect was *aión*, the equivalent to "lifetime", the other, *chronos*, "time duration" or time as a whole. If, in the beginning, *aión* was used to measure the individual lifespan of an entity (implying, therefore, a limited duration) its meaning evolved and when Plato and Aristotle were writing it already meant "eternity": it is used to talk of a "lifetime" always

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<sup>7</sup> In this chapter the italics are my way of emphasising repeated words. There are no italicised items in *The Hearing Trumpet* unless otherwise stated.

<sup>8</sup> It is significant that, according to Daly, the name of the Great Triple Goddess is Marian (Daly 1979: 88).

renewed, indefinite (Jimenez 1993: 103). It is to this double meaning of *aión* (as an eternal-lifetime) that the beard of the text refers: Barbara was the Goddess of the Underworld who guarded the Holy Cup until the start of the Christian era, the Abbess Doña Rosalinda who lived in the eighteenth century recovers, if only momentarily, the Cup, and Marian, who finally returns the Cup to the Goddess, lives in the twentieth century. However, as these bearded females are presented not as an evolution of each other in a chronological historical time but as the same character inhabiting a multiplicity of times and spaces, the bearded female inhabits an eternal *aión*:

"[Doña Rosalinda Alvarez Cruz della Cueva] was her name during the eighteenth century," said Christabel. "But she has many many other names. She also enjoys different nationalities." (1991: 72)

By virtue of their cyclical reappearance in historical time and by one uniformity in their physical appearance, Santa Barbara, Doña Rosalinda and Marian are presented as three faces of the same female figure.

Repetition occurs as well in the form of recollection, since memory, represented as both the memory of the characters in the story and the textual memory of the reader, plays a fundamental role in structuring the narrative. Formally, the story presents the most basic form of recollection, in that Marian, the main narrator, is narrating from a wiser and stronger selfhood the experiences that have led her to the acquisition and recognition of her consolidated identity and thus her role in the world. However, *The Hearing Trumpet* acknowledges that such an evolution cannot be conveyed by one single narrative voice nor organised as an orderly chronological discourse. There is an acknowledgement that a sense of history cannot be conveyed by the mere ordering of dates and by proclaiming the outcome immutable. This is the reason why, textually, the narrative voices are multiple. This sense is further enhanced by the remarkable role of dialogue in the novel: it acts as a privileged manner of communicating the different characters' respective consciousnesses as well as providing multiple insights into one specific event. As Gabrielle Annan remarks in her review for the *Times Literary Supplement* (Annan 1977), each character is given a peculiar voice, as in the characteristic and dated expressions of Georgina, for instance:

"There are times when this place gives me the pip ... The beastly Gambit Female wants me to peel potatoes and I can't possibly scrounge in the kitch' when I have just done my nails." (1991: 32)

The role of dialogue is to create the effect that each character is providing one of the pieces of the jigsaw, but through dialogue it is ultimately acknowledged that a sense of history is unattainable and that history crumbles into a multitude of perceptions. Apart from the different voices that appear in the dialogues, the text is composed of the narratives of nine different narrators. The first of Margrave's postcards to Marian is to be found at the beginning of the narrative, whilst the second is transcribed at the end of the text; then Marian transcribes Carmella's letter (1991: 52-4); she also transcribes the tractate of Doña Rosalinda written mainly by D. E. Deseos (1991: 73-100) but expanded by letters (such as the ones written by the Abbess, the prince Zosimus and the Bishop) and two documents, one translated from Hebrew and the other from Latin. *The Hearing Trumpet's* narrators are also those characters who relate long tales: Georgina's story of Maude's past as a man, Christabel's narrative about Doña Rosalinda and the stories told by the bard/postman Taliessin. There is not one story but a multitude to be narrated and thus the way of articulating such a multiplicity is in collage form. Recollection shows that there are as many realities to be recalled as characters in the story. It also serves to emphasise that the past cannot be contained in the perception of the present narrator. Even if the narrator could recall all memories, the act of narrating, as Marian herself acknowledges, requires their control and structure:

How my mind runs on, or rather backwards, I shall never get on with my narrative if I can't control those memories, there are too many of them. (1991: 66)

Although, apparently, Marian tries to control her memories, the inclusion of the strategy of flashbacks into the narrative serves to acknowledge that the apprehension of reality is a disarticulated process that should not be conveyed linearly or coherently but, rather, formlessly:

My memory is full of all sorts of stuff which is not, perhaps, in chronological order, but there is a lot of it. So I pride myself on having an excellent faculty of miscellaneous recall. (1991: 23)



The stress on memory and what she terms "miscellaneous recall" is successfully communicated by means of the repetition of the word "souvenir" which in the text is used as a noun meaning "a remembrance, a memory". According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* such a use is now *rare*. Marian informs the reader:

Souvenirs from the far past rose like bubbles in my mind and things I thought were long forgotten came back as clear as if they had just happened. (1991: 59)

Even though it is a rare use, the word "souvenir" recurs in the text in consecutive pages: "'Perhaps she feels different being a Negress,' I said. 'Negresses have different sorts of souvenirs from us'" (1991: 58). The choice of word might be aiming at establishing a further link with the narrator's youth (which she often acknowledges was spent in France) for, although in English the word has come to mean "a token of remembrance", it comes from the French use of the verb *souvenir*, meaning "to remember". However, for some readers the word might evoke an even more interesting connection since the Latin origin of the word is "subvenire" ("sub-venire"), to come from underneath, from the depths. "*Souvenirs* from the far past rose" is thus linked with Barbara de Tartarus, the Goddess of the Underworld who will come from the depths to reclaim her Holy Cup. Repetition (of the word "souvenir") or allusion (through etymology, as in this instance) serves to relate apparently unconnected items of the text. In the sentence "Negresses have different sorts of *souvenirs* from us" Christabel Burns, the Negress, becomes connected with the recovery of the Magic Cup and later in the text the reader will realise that her role in such a retribution is indeed crucial. Repetition, therefore, structures the extract both at the surface level and at that of the formation of characters and actions. The unexpected use, and re-use, of a rare word such as "souvenir" testifies to the intention of the author to show the reader, who cannot fail to notice it, the multiple meanings of the word, from its most primary meaning (a keepsake) to the most unanticipated ("souvenir" comes to mean the forthcoming arrival of the goddess).

What is more, it is implied in this process that the allocation of meaning can arise only with the reader's consent, since it is his/her attention and collaboration that provides the cohesion for the text. Indeed, the multiplicity of meanings attributed to the signifier is provided as one of the reasons why Marian has never written poetry:

At times I had thought of writing poetry myself but getting words to rhyme with each other is difficult ... There are so many words, and they all mean something. (1991: 21)

Yet the text implies that the problem resides not in the fact that they all "mean something" specific, but that they all have more than one meaning. Word meaning in proper names, for example, is important for its significance. Marian makes several references to the meaning of proper names: "The Moorheads, ... as their name implies, took a prominent role in the crusades" (1991: 91). This assumes once more the collaboration of the reader, for when Marian is talking about her ancestors, she is making an implicit comment, not only about who they were, but about how they behaved: they decapitated Moors during the Crusades and subsequently stole their properties. The role of word meaning is crucial in the example that follows:

"A Rose is a secret, a beautiful Rose is a Great Lady's Secret, a Cross is the parting or the joining of the Ways, this is the meaning of Abbess Rosalinda Alvarez Cruz della Cueva's name." (1991: 73)

The text is playing with the name of the Abbess and the playing goes beyond translating the literal meaning of words from Spanish into English by making explicit choices when translating. "Rosalinda" means indeed "beautiful rose" and that has been translated quite literally. However, "Cruz", which means literally "cross", has been elaborated into the "the parting or the joining of the Ways", choosing only one of the various meanings of "cross" (such as an ancient instrument of torture, a market-place, a mixture). This is important for the theme of the existence of multiple worlds (created through personal choice and through decisions about the actions one is to perform and the people with whom one is to associate) is one of the main themes of the narrative, and it is at "the parting or the joining of the Ways" where personal decisions are taken and thus new universes created.

Implicit in the text is another of the functions of repetition: to suggest the meaning of the signifier through the various sequences where it appears. That there is a breakdown between signifier and signified is metaphorically implied in Marian's comment when she is packing her trunk to go to the institution:

They [cardboard boxes with different labels] did not, *of course*, contain what the labels said, but different odds and ends which agglomerate with *time*. (1991: 20)

The labels are used to hide Marian's possessions from her daughter-in-law. The cardboard boxes do not contain what the labels (signifiers) imply. The content of the boxes is varied (Marian refers to "different odds and ends") and this content (signified) has been accumulated through "time". The reader is the one responsible for allocating meaning to the sign since there is no precise relationship between signifier and signified. If time is responsible for the multiple meanings ascribed to the signifier, the signifier itself is also subject to the passing of time, as one of Marian's anecdotes suggests:

Georgina Sykes occupied a circus tent, or rather a cement representation of a tent with red and white stripes. The words "lk n and njoy he ow" were painted over the door, and for a long time I thought these were some mysterious foreign words. Actually it read "Walk in and enjoy the show," but time and ivy had overgrown the words. (1991: 31)

In Marian's anecdote nothing is what it looks like: the circus tent is rather a "*cement representation*", apparently as solid and unmistakable as the signifier, but actually leading to confusion. Later, the signifier itself, the written word ("Walk in and enjoy the show"), becomes affected by time ("lk n and njoy he ow"). Although the latter signifier has been charged with a history, it is its present articulation that attracts Marian in the first place since its aspect of "mysterious foreign words" renders it open, yet again, to further interpretation. Time acts upon signifier and signified, constantly redefined and amplified, and the constant reinterpretation of words and even of whole stories is the aim of the novel. Particular words allude to other texts, such as the name of Marian's son, Galahad. In the opening pages of the novel Marian says: "I live with my Galahad, mostly in the back yard" (1991: 3). Galahad is such an unusual name that the reader cannot fail to make a mental connection between this Galahad and the chaste knight of the Arthurian legend. Given this initial impression, the next sentence in the text is intended to mislead the reader, for *The Hearing Trumpet's* Galahad seems to be not at all chaste: "Galahad has a rather large family" (1991: 3). Accompanying the text, one of Carrington's illustrations for the Virago edition of the novel presents Galahad and his family discussing how to get rid of Marian; hanging on the wall behind them is a painting of the Last Supper showing Jesus handing a cup to his disciples. Many Catholic

households have a similar painting in the dining-room and the reader might reject at this stage the hinted sub-plot of the narrative (the search for the Holy Grail) as an unlikely development of the old ladies' diatribes. However, the words "Cup" and "Last Supper" keep reappearing but often as elements lateral to the plot. This is the case, for example, in the humorous name of the rat poison that will kill Maude: "I shall ask her to buy me some packets of '*Last Supper*' rat poisoning. It is the most virulent and they die almost at once" (1991: 62).

Here the repetition operates at the level of the reader's textual memory. In the case of Dr Gambit's speeches, the institution's spiritual leader often alludes metaphorically to the Holy Grail; to Marian he says that "Natacha is the *Pure Vessel*" (1991: 38) and later advises her: "First be Humble. A full *cup* cannot receive" (1991: 39). These allusions require not only the reader's textual memory but the reader's ability to associate those different verbal signs that have similar signification.

The allusion to external sources (New Testament or the Arthurian legend) soon ceases and these items become the subject of internal repetitions, so that rather than intertextuality the reader finds intratextuality.<sup>9</sup> In the following pages I shall concentrate on the repetition of the following series: "North/Lapland/Poles", the dyad "Bees/Queen Bee" and "Cup/Grail/Vessel". This is in order to show that in each instance of recurrence the first meaning of the word is redefined in two ways: by the current context in which it is placed and by its relation to previous occurrences in the text. Repetition appears as a series of connected words rather than single words because the repetition of the element relies not on lexical similarity but on association at the level of meaning. The aim of this third function of repetition is to refute the apparent closedness of the sign and to assert that each repetition is intended to enhance difference rather than sameness.

Marian states in the opening pages of the novel that she longs for the north: "I am beginning to be afraid that I never will get back to *the north*" (1991: 2). "The north" is not for Marian equivalent to its accepted meaning (a region or part north of any given

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<sup>9</sup> This term is borrowed from Harris (1990).

point). For Marian the north is synonymous with the region of Lapland as she makes evident in the following paragraph: "Then I would join my lifelong dream of going to *Lapland* to be drawn in a vehicle by dogs, *woolly dogs*" (1991: 3). Her longing remains a constant throughout the opening description of her life and lifestyle: "I must say I would be fairly happy if I did not feel so much nostalgia for *the north*" (1991: 8). Her friend Carmella, who, the reader knows by now, has telepathic powers, comforts her by hinting that she might eventually get there: "'You might escape to *Lapland*,' said Carmella" (1991: 13), and in this paragraph Lapland and the woolly dogs reappear: "Then what about *Lapland* and the *furry dog team*?" (1991: 13). Marian is so obsessed that, when packing to go to the institution, she includes everything that she thinks one might need in Lapland (which includes such bizarre items as a screw driver, part of an alarm clock, coloured beads and sea shells): "Institutions like the far *north* are also cut off from civilization and you never know what people might want" (1991: 20). Marian's longing for the north is constantly verbalised throughout the novel: "I sometimes find myself imagining that I am strolling through a whispering *birch forest* somewhere in *the North*" (1991: 57). Even when analysing her dream (where she is reading the *Tales of Hans Christian Andersen*) she makes a connection between the tales and Lapland: "The book. Now I can see it, the *Tales of Hans Christian Andersen*, the *Snow Queen*. The *Snow Queen, Lapland*" (1991: 15). Here, the semantic association snow/Lapland provides a subtle link between the two very different acts (reading "The Snow Queen" and wanting to go to Lapland). In Marian's subsequent transcription of the dream, the reader finds the first connection between "the north", a powerful female figure, and the need for retribution:

There is nothing I can do about it unless I can solve the *Snow Queen's* problem. She is the Sphinx of *the North* with crackling *white fur* and diamonds on the ten claws of every foot ... Somewhere, sometime, I must have betrayed the *Snow Queen*, for surely by now I should know? (1991: 16)

Soon the word "north" appears surrounded by all the other words that have been previously appearing in the text such as "snow", "Lapland" and "white woolly dogs":

There is nothing I love so much as *snow* lit by moonlight. For years I have wanted to go to *Lapland* just to be able to sail along in a sledge drawn by those

*white woolly dogs* and admire the *snow*. Further *North* they use reindeer which also give milk. (1991: 57)

As the reader's mind runs through them and through the technique of repetition these disconnected and multifaceted items are divested of personal connotations and invested with a "collective" link provided by the writer. The reader is made aware that such frequency is becoming increasingly meaningful.

The second series, that of the "Bees/Queen Bee", is already a recurrence of the previous series, in that the Queen appeared related to the snow in the Snow Queen. However, during the first half of the novel, this series and the one "'North/Lapland/Pole" remain mostly independent. When Marian arrives in the institution she begins an obsession with the bee pond almost as strong as that with Lapland: "The place I preferred was what we called the *bee pond* ... This secluded spot was the haunt of thousands of honey *bees*" (1991: 31-2). The use of the word "haunt" is interesting since, although it is used here as "a place often visited", it might hint to the reader that the bees are somehow a phantom that appears. Indeed they are. They are the embodiment of Santa Barbara de Tartarus, the Goddess of the Underworld. When Santa Barbara de Tartarus takes a physical body at the moment of regaining possession of her Holy Cup, her body is that of a gigantic bee:

Then it seemed that the cloud formed itself into an enormous bumble *bee* as big as a sheep. She wore a tall iron crown studded with rock crystals, the stars of the Underworld. (1991: 117)

Marian often sits by the bee pond: "I was sitting by the *bee pond* trying to teach myself crochet ... I had stopped to admire *the bees* and envy them such efficient industry" (1991: 60). For Marian the bee pond is a place of daily life rather than a holy temple and there is no irreverence in throwing cigarette ends into the pond (1991: 64). When Marian and the rest of the women decide to rebel against the Gambits, the venue of their revolutionary meetings will be precisely this pond. They all identify with the bees, as is acknowledged by Georgina: "'The place creeps with ovaries until one wants to scream. We might as well be living in *a bee hive*" (1991: 33). The women discover that they are related to the bees when, in their preparation to retrieve the Grail, they all have the same experience as Marian:

I looked into the mirror. First I saw the face of the Abbess of Santa Barbara de Tartarus grinning at me sardonically. She faded and then I saw the huge eyes and feelers of the *Queen Bee* who winked and transformed herself into my own face ... Holding the mirror at arm's length I seemed to see a three-faced female whose eyes winked alternately. One of the faces was black, one red, one white and they belonged to the Abbess, the *Queen Bee* and myself. This of course might have been an optical illusion. (1991: 138)

The force of the passage is not undercut, as Suleiman notes, by the "self-deprecating humor" of the final line (Suleiman 1990: 177). Marian's recognition of herself as the Queen Bee and the Abbess is achieved through the use of the mirror. The mirror in this text does not hint at the construction of the ego or at a confused mental state but at the function of repetition itself, as Marian's image is repeated by the piece of polished obsidian. Bees have been recalled in all these passages, but their significance has changed. Marian first acknowledges: "I could sit amongst the *bees* for hours on end and feel happy, although why they pleased me so I cannot tell" (1991: 32). Gradually, through the series of repetitions the mysterious importance of the "bees" becomes comprehensible. For Marian, the meaning of the word "bee" changes: from being merely "industrious insects that produce honey and live by the pond" they become the embodiment of the Great Goddess. The text makes it obvious, through repetition, that the process of giving meaning to words is relative and subjective. Thus, the signification of the word "bee" is different for Marian and for the reader, and within Marian's own discourse "bee" is continuously being redefined through the different contexts where it appears.

The third sequence of repetitions is that of "Cup/Grail/Vessel". By the second half of the novel, allusions to external sources are no longer being placed laterally to the text, as has been shown above, such that internal repetition becomes an unconcealed invitation to reinterpret the original source:

He let me understand that the Knight Templars in Ireland were in possession of the *Grail*. This wonderful *cup*, as you know, was said to be the original *chalice* which held the elixir of life and belonged to the Goddess Venus. She is said to have quaffed the magic liquid when she was impregnated with Cupid ... The story follows that Venus, in her birth pangs, dropped the *cup* and it came

hurtling to earth, where it was buried in a deep cavern, abode of Epona, the Horse Goddess. (1991: 91)<sup>10</sup>

The reinterpretation of the past is necessarily overt if the reader is to learn about the quest of Marian and her friends:

Seth, the son of Noah, was supposed to be the first to march upon the sanctuary of this Goddess. The priests were murdered and *the Grail* was stolen, the sanctuary desecrated ... Later stories sprang up around *the Grail*, and its magic was erroneously attributed to Christian sources. (1991: 92)

The series seem to be moving in a circle as they start overlapping. In the following quote a link between the sequences "North/Lapland/Poles" and "Cup/Grail/Vessel" appears:

A light wind rustles the leaves of the *birch trees* [at Lapland], the air is fresh and cool. As I stroll along I become aware that I have a purpose, and soon with a thrill of joy I know what it is. I must find a *magic cup*. (1991: 57)

Later the series "Bees/Queen Bee" and "Cup/Grail/Vessel" are connected:

The monstrous *Queen Bee* slowly revolved over the water, beating her crystalline wings so rapidly that they emitted a pale light. As she faced me I was thrilled to notice a sudden strange resemblance to the Abbess. At that moment she closed one eye, as big as a tea *cup*, in a prodigious wink. (1991: 117)

In this last instance, repetition operates only at the surface level (for "tea cup" does not refer literally to the Grail). However, the repetition of verbal elements does not stop at the level of the surface narrative. It becomes evident that, often, verbal repetition entails repetition at the deeper level of the narrative since such a repetition is of a semantic, and not phonetic nature (the elements in the series analysed are connected not by verbal similarity but by semantic similarity). I have first presented the repetition of each of the series as it appears in different discourses. However, the three different series appear in specific segments of the text combined so that, finally, they appear together in a circular manner:

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<sup>10</sup> The name of Epona (the Horse Goddess), the fact that she is a triple being and that there is a cult to her in Ireland, are present in Graves's work:

Demeter as a Mare-goddess was widely worshipped under the name of Epona, or "the Three Eponae", among the Gallic Celts, and ... relics of the same cult survived in Ireland until the twelfth century. (Graves 1952: 382)



Propelled by a supernatural intelligence, the swarm of *bees* whirled into the house and returned in a few moments carrying the *Holy Grail*, which they bore off to some secret part of our cavern, leaving a trail of *honey* in their wake which glittered like gold on *the snow*. (1991: 158)

Apart from the general comic tone of the novel, this type of repetition is particularly "revolutionarily" comic. In a way, the technique in itself is comic. North/Cup/Bees do not have a consequential meaning. Carrington shows her awareness that words and their meaning can be deconstructed. Yet, she chooses to exemplify this, not with words such as "life", "death", "dreams" or "madness" but with nonsensical and frivolous words to which she attaches utmost importance. Moreover, the repetitions of series and their subsequent combination through intratextuality mark the thematic and verbal cohesion of the text. The novel thus appears as an intricate, organised system, as indeed in a beehive. She has achieved the creation of patterns of equivalence and symmetry by introducing and then reiterating analogies between different signs and images. Interestingly the use and reuse of these items aim at eventually emptying the image. It has been shown in the first instance (Snow, Lapland, Snow Queen) that the effect of repetition was meant to substitute the reader's previous associations with new ones. In the case of these two other series (Bees, Cup) the aim is to demystify "sense". Bees, cups and snow mean nothing at all, yet they are humorously presented as brimming with meaning. Repetition undermines hierarchy and therefore seriousness. Carrington can then proceed to play with miscellaneous recall, chronological development and spatial stability since, for the reader, the poise, balance and coherence of the text are based on the already familiar recurrences.

### **The repetition of situations and allusion as repetition**

The repetition of situations also takes place both at the lexical level as well as at the level of meaning. There are three types of repeated situations in *The Hearing Trumpet*. The first is when one character recalls an event that has been already mentioned by him/her earlier in the narrative. This is one of Marian's anecdotes:

Arriving in Biarritz, I remember, in a *snowstorm* in the month of February. Mother took the weather as a personal insult, she believed the Riviera was on the equator, *snowfall* in Biarritz convinced her that *the poles were changing places* and the earth was falling out of its orbit. (1991: 64-5)

Apart from the repetition of words such as *snowstorm*, *snowfall*, or *poles* (which gives meaning to the memory as well as validating its inclusion in the story) Marian's mother's conviction is so unbelievable that the reader cannot pass it unnoticed. Indeed, such an anecdote is inserted as a prophecy for later. When the poles do indeed reverse Marian recalls it again:

Suppose my mother's idea that Monte Carlo was on the equator and that snow in Biarritz meant the poles were changing was really a prophecy? The effects of such a change would be disastrous to many inhabitants of the planet. My mind reeled. (1991: 124)

The language of the two passages underlines the links between them, both incidents demonstrating the same geometrical exactness in the organisation of the elements. The main elements in the two paragraphs remain unchanged: "snow(fall) in *Biarritz*" which meant "the poles were changing" are both repeated *verbatim*. The differences include the incorporation of Monte Carlo in the second situation, the substitution of "earth" by "planet" but most importantly a dislocation of two elements related intimately not at the visual level but at a semantic level. In the second paragraph we read: "My mind reeled" which might give the impression of Marian's thoughts rotating speedily - precisely what the earth would do if, as the first paragraph says, "the earth was falling out of its orbit". The effect of this type of repetition of situations is to validate and to reinterpret linearly the events narrated. Here, only the reader's textual memory is needed, not the reader's association, since Marian herself interprets the recurrence ("Suppose my mother's idea ... was really a prophecy?")

The second type of repetition of situations occurs when Carrington plays with the fact that different narrators, narrating apparently different situations in different historical moments, narrate extremely similar situations. This is the case, for instance, in the event that occurs twice in the novel: the visit of Taliessin.<sup>11</sup> The first time the reader encounters this character is when reading the Medieval Latin document which refers to

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Graves deals at large with the legend of the sixteenth century poet "Taliessin, the chief of the bards" (Graves 1952: 76)

the adventures of Doña Rosalinda in Ireland and her aborted attempt to steal the Grail from the Knights Templar:

A wandering bard seeking shelter has just arrived at the Rath of Conor, he calls himself Taliessin ... The Bard Taliessin has kept us amused with humorous songs of the earthquake. (1991: 96)

Later in the novel, when the poles have completed their reversal and Marian and her friends are wondering how to find the Grail, they receive the unexpected visit of a postman named Taliessin, whose only remainder of his past life as a bard is a guitar:

Walking along the faint track ... came the postman. He wore an ordinary postman's uniform and carried a satchel for letters. The most remarkable object about him was the guitar slung over his shoulder ... "My name is Taliessin," said the postman. "I have been carrying messages all my life, which has been a long one." (1991: 142-3)

The character of the "bard" symbolises two of the items that mark the development of the novel: memory and repetition, characteristic of the oral tradition. Taliessin proceeds to tell the women stories about the respective situations of humans in different parts of the planet and the ladies are particularly amused by the description of the earthquakes that have devastated "the ancient fort of the Templars, the Rath of Conor" (1991: 144). This phrase has already occurred. The most striking fact is that the narrator of the second situation, Marian, has read and transcribed for the reader the narrative that recounted the first situation. However, Marian fails to mark the repetition as significant. This is because she has come to consider repetition as the law that organises the world. Contrasting with her point of view, the reader sees the repeated situation of Taliessin's visit from two different angles. On the one hand, s/he may notice behind the repeated situation the subjective governing conscience of a "real author" (Carrington) that wants her/him to acknowledge such an obvious repetition. On the other hand, s/he becomes aware of the conscience of the narrator (Marian) who does not consider it a subjective but an objective event: for Marian, repetition is that which *happens*.

In the repetition of situations the dichotomy between surface narrative and deeper narrative becomes problematic. Verbal repetition is not in this instance an aspect of a character's or narrator's idiosyncrasy. The meaning of the repetition of situations

and events in *The Hearing Trumpet* is provided by the reader. The reader's own memory of the text is put to the test and needed as if it were an accomplice. Thus, the reader is caught in the intricacies of the relations between the appearance of a sign and its interpretation, and becomes progressively entangled in the narrative as the relationships between signifier/signified grow in complexity. These two types of repetition of situations work with the purpose of invoking a cyclical pattern; they are based on the similarities of the situation and the reader is struck by their similarities, not by their differences.

However, once the pattern of repetition and cyclical organisation is established, the reader may notice a third type of repetition: that which emphasises change and evolution. This is the case in the descriptions of Marian's physical appearance. From the opening lines Marian is introduced as a being that does not belong to the human category:

The maid, Rosina, is an Indian woman with a morose character and seems generally opposed to the rest of humanity. I do not believe that she puts me in *the human category* so our relationship is not disagreeable. (1991: 2)

Although she is describing herself, Marian makes very clear that this is the vision "others" have of her. If the maid and her own family consider Marian inhuman, this may be extended to include the perspective of the rest of the world:

Not that he [Galahad] lacks ordinary human sentiment, simply that he considers kindness to *inanimate creatures* a waste of time. He may be right, but on the other hand the maguey cactus seems alive to me, so I feel I can also make claims on existence. (1991: 9)

The social body of which Marian is a member stifles and ultimately ejects her, not for reasons of morality, but merely because Marian's decrepit appearance does not fit with the established norm held by the social body: "'Grandmother,' said Robert, 'can hardly be classified as a human being. She's a drooling sack of decomposing flesh'" (1991: 10). Marian is the "monster of Glamis" (1991: 10) who dreams of nothing but Lapland. The social body rejects her. The repetition recurs and Marian appears to become an isolated figure: "'You all think I am a repulsive old bag and I dare say you are right from your own point of view'" (1991: 18). Now Marian is acknowledging that the judgements about her are made from another point of view; soon, she will not allow

other voices in the text to make judgements about her physical appearance. She makes them herself, which empowers her eventually to change the discourse: "There I was nodding away in my terrible old carcass" (1991: 18). Pushing a comparative reading further, it can be found that some elements in the description at the beginning of the novel can be set in opposition: while Marian is "inhuman", "isolated", and said to be "dying and decomposing", the rest of humanity is "human", "communal" and "active and young".

She later encounters other women like herself at the institution and she becomes part of their group. She achieves living in Lapland; she no longer houses an "ancient creaking brain" (1991: 128) but, together with all the other women, she seems inspired by some marvellous power, "which poured energy into our decrepit carcasses" (1991: 117). Emphasising the change, the world that rejected her is about to be destroyed. Marian depicts humanity as inhuman:

After I die Anubeth's werecubs will continue the document, till the planet is peopled with cats, werewolves, bees and goats. We all fervently hope that this will be an improvement on humanity. (1991: 158)

If the attributes in the description at the end of the novel are summarised, it can be observed that they are fundamentally the same ones as in the beginning, only inverted: now Marian is "human", the rest of humanity is "inhuman"; she belongs to a "community", she is "active" and "young" whilst the rest of the world is "dying and decomposing".

Through repetition and through links established between diverse elements, the description of the protagonist has been modified from the original description (whereby Marian was inhuman, isolated and dying) to the description at the end of the novel (whereby Marian is human, part of a collective and active and young). The opening and final pictures of Marian are inversions of each other. Moreover, ugliness is projected on to those who at the beginning despised her. Such humorous (if vengeful and impossible) inversion of attributes aims at subverting the laws of time and history. If in theory repetition is used to emphasise and fix meaning, this inverted picture is achieved, ironically, through patterns of repetition. This is because this particular use of repetition

of situations is not aimed at marking equivalence and symmetry but at highlighting difference.

The use of references to characters and events of other literary works, without their explicit identification, serves not only to illustrate the subject further but also to mark the difference between the text alluded to and the subject of the present context. Since by its very definition, allusion has the effect of repetition, a difference between constructive and destructive allusions can be distinguished. The allusion to the Galahad of the Arthurian legend, as has been shown above, is intended to be recognised by the majority of readers, yet there are certain other allusions that require a more specialised knowledge. For example, the image of the three Marians stirring a cauldron might remind the reader of the three witches of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. By the time the reader gets to this passage in *The Hearing Trumpet* there have been several allusions to Shakespeare's play. At the beginning of the narrative the reader finds Marian's grandson calling her "the monster of Glamis" (1991: 10) (at the beginning of *Macbeth*, Macbeth is greeted by the witches as the "thane of Glamis" (Shakespeare 1992: 8; I.3.48)). In Shakespeare's play the "mistress of the three witches' charms" is Hecate, who represents in mythology the goddess of the infernal regions and the guardian of witches. In the novel the goddess of the infernal regions bears various names, one of them being Hecate: "Epona, Barbarus, Hecate" (1991: 95). The arrival of Marian at the cavern and the view of herself upon a hearth is, however, the passage that presents the most striking similitude at the verbal level with Shakespeare's text. Carrington's passage reads:

A long gallery ... looked over into a great round chamber hewn out of the rock. Carved pillars supported an arched roof which was faintly lit by the fire in the centre of the chamber. The fire seemed to burn with no fuel, it leapt directly out of a cavity in the rock floor ... Beside the flames sat a woman stirring a great iron cauldron. (1991: 136)

Shakespeare's passage reads: "A cavern and in the midst a fiery pit with a boiling cauldron above it ... they stir the cauldron." (Shakespeare 1992: 53; 4.1). Allusion in *The Hearing Trumpet* is not meant as an interpretative tool but rather as an example of the multiple ways in which literary texts are inseparable from other texts. *The Hearing Trumpet's* verbal surface appears as a patchwork of other texts and it is the presentation

of allusion in a new context that makes the allusion meaningful. In this sense, the reader finds that there is no veneration for the original author of the passage, in this case Shakespeare; *Macbeth* is there for readers and writers to "use" and Carrington does indeed "use" the text. Not only is there no explicit acknowledgement of the original text, but there is a certain playfulness with Shakespeare's play. There is a moment of confusion between Carmella and Marian when Carmella says that she is going to take her money to the institution:

"I shall bring luxury with me. Like that mountain that went walking after somebody whose name I can't recall."

"It was Dunsinane Forest and Shakespeare said it went walking," I said, wondering if I might be mistaken.

"Forest or mountain, no matter" said Carmella. (1991: 125)

In this instance Carmella is confusing two different sources: on the one hand she might be referring to *Macbeth* and the prophecy made by the weird sisters that Macbeth would never be vanquished until Birnam Wood had come to Dunsinane; on the other hand (and still connected with prophecies and prophets) she is referring to the mountain of the popular saying "If the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain." On the background semantic level the confusion is apparently created by the words "prophet" or "prophecies"; in the surface level of the text the disjunctive appears in the dyad "mountain" (as mentioned by Carmella) / "forest" (as mentioned by Marian). There is no authority in this newly created blend of texts. Marian provides her answer not knowing whether she is accurate ("I said, wondering if I might be mistaken") and Carmella takes her answer as not meaningful, since accuracy is not what matters to her but the message ("Forest or mountain, no matter"). Within this passage a new blended-text is being assembled, but its authors (Carmella and Marian) do not want recognition for their creation. They have recontextualised both *Macbeth* and the popular saying and, as happens with other sources, it soon becomes the source of internal repetition. The final words of *The Hearing Trumpet* read:

According to Carmella's planisphere we are now somewhere in the region where Lapland used to be and this makes me smile ... If the old woman can't go to Lapland, then Lapland must come to the Old Woman. (1991: 158)

This passage taken in isolation does not present an obvious allusion to *Macbeth*. However, there is an allusion obvious to the reader within the whole text and that allusion is provided by the previous passage. With this playfulness and circulation of texts and sources Carrington is questioning the authority of texts and she leaves hers open for use, repetition and play.

### **Multiple worlds and Time**

Warner argues that cyclical and circular images in Carrington's writing are an expression of safety:

The wheel, the island, bounded and circular and enclosing forms at once safe and confining, return again and again in her [Carrington's] stories and her images. (Warner 1989b: np)

Yet in *The Hearing Trumpet* circularity is not always a metaphor for safety. Cyclical history is presented as occlusive and therefore negative. The novel refers to periods of "progress" (even though the notion of progress is brought into question) followed by periods of barbarism. Paradoxically, progress is for Carrington that which is traditionally understood as barbarism, for example, "barbarous women" (Santa Barbara de Tartarus) are strong in moments of progress. After the desecration of the Goddess's temple the world enters a disastrous phase, to be followed by one of regeneration. This view of circularity is exemplified through *The Hearing Trumpet's* explicit references to the use of time in the Bible, as when Marian argues that her mother is still young: "A hundred and ten is not such a great age, from a biblical point of view at least" (1991: 3). In another explicit reference to biblical chronology, *The Hearing Trumpet* mentions the Flood:

Everybody knows that the whole bible is inaccurate. True, Noah did go off in an ark, but he got drunk and fell overboard. Mrs. Noah went aft and watched him drown, she didn't do anything about it because she inherited all those cattle. People in the bible were very sordid and a lot of cattle in those days was like a bank account. (1991: 64)

There is also a reference to the second great time marker in the Bible, the Last Judgement, which implies the end of time:



This [the hearing trumpet] made me think of the Angel Gabriel although I believe he is supposed to blow his and not listen through it, that is, according to the bible, on the last day when humanity rises to ultimate catastrophe. Strange how the bible always seems to end up in misery and cataclysm. (1991: 20)

Carrington rejects the notion of Fate and Providence. The text questions repeatedly the validity of the Bible's truths for, as Marian testifies, "Everybody knows that the whole bible is inaccurate." The theory of Cyclical Time is occlusive and destructive if viewed as that which stresses sameness. Cixous writes in this respect: "To change without ever changing: the delusion of History" (Cixous 1982: 242). Carrington longs for change, which is for her the first maxim of universal wisdom. Change is linked to life, to regeneration after death, for only the dead (or divinities) are unchangeable. A longing for change is a longing to overcome the fear of the passing of time and the fear of death.

Kristeva contends that the existence of "a woman's language" is "highly problematical" since it is "more the product of a social marginality than of a sexual-symbolic difference" (Kristeva 1986: 200). However, she resists the patriarchal dominant discourse that prevails in Western culture. She envisions a feminist resistance that could change the course of Western civilisation. This change can only be possible "without refusing or side-stepping [the] socio-symbolic order". The resistant discourse must "explore the constitution and functioning of this contract". Obviously, although other groups would benefit as well, it would be mainly women who would benefit greatly from this proposed mode of resistance which "leads to the active research, still rare, undoubtedly hesitant but always dissident". This research should attempt:

to break the code, to shatter language, to find a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract. (Kristeva 1986: 200)

Kristeva suggests that a point of departure would be to denounce the sacrificial character that forms the patriarchal contract by which women's voices have been suppressed by patriarchal discourse:

women are today affirming - and we consequently face a mass phenomenon - that they are forced to experience this sacrificial contract against their will. (Kristeva 1986: 200)

From this affirmation a revolt might eventually occur, although society will understand it as murder. As Kristeva points out: "What remains is to break down the resistance to change" (Kristeva 1986: 201).

Change, for Carrington, appears to be as extraordinary as a miracle. Most of the circular patterns of Carrington's novel highlight destruction and powerlessness, they do not denote "safety". Change is the power to escape circularity. The role of time in the process of articulation and in the production of meaning seems to me to be the main message of *The Hearing Trumpet*, for there is, implicit in the text, the idea that the traditional concept of the passage of time denies change and makes it illusory. The circular repetition of history and of nature's patterns implies a definition of chronology and history as simple re-enactments, and repetition is like a condemnation to eternal identical return: that is, if repetition and circularity are about occlusion and sameness, for, as Marian says: "I must not give up hope, *miracles* can happen and very often do happen" (1991: 2). Marian wants to see repetition as a constructive technique, as change, and she wants to take repetition as a move towards difference (which could be why the novel is regarded by many as a utopia). In this sense change, when it occurs, is miraculous, unexpected, and indeed, the words "change" and "miracle" often appear together in the text. When referring to the hearing trumpet she has given to Marian so that she is able to hear the decisions taken about her, Carmella exclaims: "'A *miracle!* ... Your life will be *changed*'" (1991: 5). Carmella's comment is at odds with Muriel's (Marian's daughter-in-law's) who sees no need to tell Marian about her being taken to the institution: "'Told?' said Muriel in surprise. 'She doesn't have any idea where she is, I don't think she will even notice the *change*'" (1991: 10).

Thus, already in the opening pages the reader finds that, regarding time, a whole web of ideas is presented: stability and change, the rational and the miraculous, the inaudible and the audible, sameness and change. A "miracle" in the strict sense of the word is what Mary Magdalen, Jesus of Nazareth and the Abbess perform, thanks to the ointment extracted from the Magic Cup (1991: 75, 78). However, for Marian, the fact that there can be change to the cyclical pattern of absolute repetition is repeatedly termed a "miracle":

Who knows, something tells me that I am going to see a lot of America and I am going to be very sad there unless a *miracle* happens.

*Miracles, witches, fairy tales, grow up, Darling!* (1991: 17)

Time as change and evolution is pejorative and thus rejected by those around Marian, but she insists that there must be something other than the chronological presentation of events:

Personally I think that time is unimportant and when I think of the autumn leaves and the *snow*, the spring and the summer, the birds and the *bees* I realize that time is unimportant, yet people attach so much importance to clocks. (1991: 25)

The denial of the significance of clocks in this passage is significant. Kristeva has written:

As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations. (Kristeva 1986: 191)

Since language is "considered as enunciation of sentences (noun+verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending)" (Kristeva 1986: 192) a link between language and linear time, which Kristeva correlates to the time of history, can be traced. Yet, Kristeva refers here to the fact that there exists in the symbolic a space other than that marked by linear time. She identifies two dissimilar times: monumental (eternity) and cyclical (repetition), in opposition to linear time, hence to language. These times are associated with the feminine insofar as they are associated with motherhood and reproduction. If the repression of the feminine is a pre-condition to the acquisition of language, monumental time and cyclical time are repressed within linear time. However, Kristeva signals to a generation of women, "artists or writers", that have undertaken the exploration "of the dynamics of signs":

Essentially interested in the specificity of female psychology and its symbolic realizations, these women seek to give a language to the intrasubjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past. (Kristeva 1986: 194)

The language of female subjectivity inscribes mythical memories and "the cyclical or monumental temporality of marginal movements" (Kristeva 1986: 195). Similarly, patterns of memory and repetition in *The Hearing Trumpet* do not imply

sameness but enhance difference. Marian alludes to her own reconceptualisation of time in the following passage:

Time, as we all know, passes. Whether it returns in quite the same way is doubtful. A friend of mine who I did not mention up till now because of his absence told me that a pink and a blue universe cross each other in particles like two swarms of *bees* and when a pair of different coloured *bees* hit each other *miracles* happen. All this has something to do with time although I doubt if I could explain it coherently. (1991: 21)

The passage implies that there is more than one universe: there is a pink one, and a blue one; maybe, stereotypically speaking, a feminine (pink) one and a masculine one (blue). Only when these two universes (these two subjectivities, these two perceptions of time) hit each other, they "give a language to the intrasubjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture", that is, in Marian's words, change occurs and thus "*miracles* happen". Moreover, within the hypothesis of Multiple Universes,<sup>12</sup> the notion of "time-warps" is crucial to the use of time in the novel. Time leads to separate experiences and every single decision creates a new universe with a time of its own. Time in this case is working on multiple levels. Time can be multilayered, and separate events lead to different endings, and with each of them there is a story to be written.

This possibility is the one that marks the ending of the novel. By the end Marian has to take the momentous decision of going up or down a winding staircase:

"Up or Down?" asked Christabel ... Up or Down? Before I gave a reply I leant over and tried to stare into the darkness. I could see nothing ... "Down," I replied at last. (1991: 134)

Because she has gone down the staircase, Marian finds her other self stirring a cauldron and the magical change will take place. But a question springs to Marian's mind:

Although it seemed absurd I put it into words: "Who would I have met if I had gone to the top of the tower?"

She laughed ... "Who knows?" (1991: 137)

This event encapsulates the *dénouement* of the story. It refers to the explanation of the name of Rosalinda Cruz della Cueva, as we saw above, in that this is the moment of

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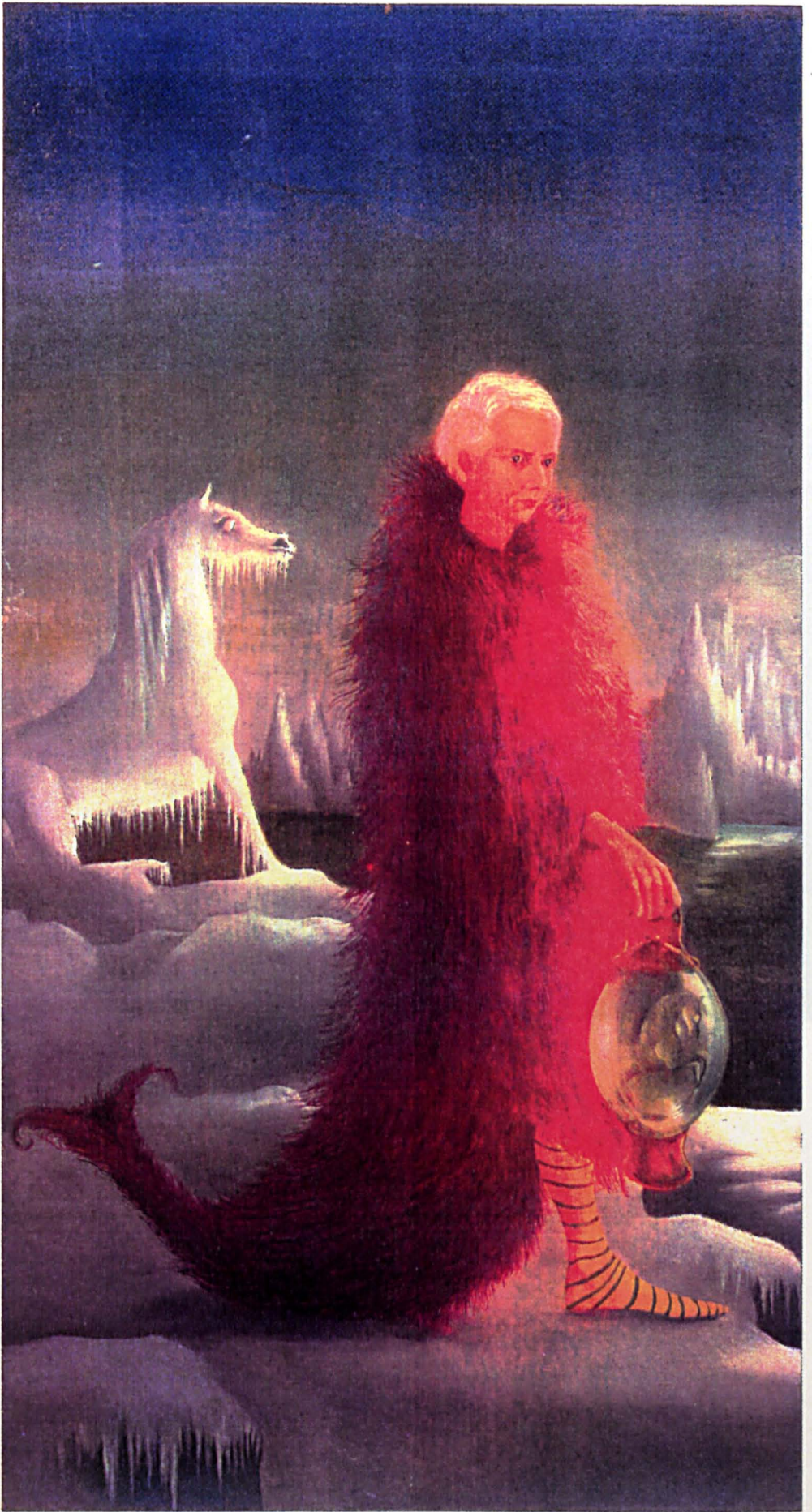
<sup>12</sup> The hypothesis of Multiple Universes postulates that our Universe is the set of all beings that have existed, that exist and that will exist, and includes all incidents of the past, present and future. According to this hypothesis, this colossal assemblage is not unique; it is but one of all the possible combinations of incidents and beings and it exists along with other universes with other combinations.

"the parting or the joining of the ways". Now change is possible and this precise combination (of Marian's going down the staircase and meeting herself) opens up the possibility of recovering the Grail. The passage implies that had Marian gone up, a whole new development of the story would have followed. Moreover, this vision of time and space brings about the possibility of change. Thus, what seemed an immutable accepted truth at the beginning of the narrative: "They say you can see the pole star from here and that it *never* moves" (1991: 8) becomes debatable and subjective by the end of the novel: "I really believe the poles are changing places" (1991: 125).

Carrington works and reworks her own motifs in her writing and often she reconstructs and reshapes well-known myths. Her uniqueness can be seen by observing her whole *oeuvre*. Although the themes she chooses to address appear again and again throughout writings that develop over forty years (women in love, women painting, women being rejected or idealised), the form and style in which she addresses them mature increasingly. *The Hearing Trumpet* is the culmination of a long journey. If the constructions and the motifs do not vary greatly over the years, their mood and style do. What started as a powerful but gloomy and "Gothic" voice becomes, in later texts, a playful, witty and, above all, highly ironic voice. The texture of the narratives becomes increasingly rich through allusions and intertextual references. Instead of herself being the source of meaning, as she is in the early works, Carrington relies more and more on the reader to be the one to allocate meaning. As her tragic-comic writing is transformed into a comically monstrous, ingenious and alluring writing, we ourselves experience and help to direct these strange, textual journeys, which go in and out of time and space.



Figure One  
Leonora Carrington, *The Inn of the Dawn Horse (Self-Portrait)*, (1936-7)



**Figure Two**  
**Leonora Carrington, *Portrait of Max Ernst* (1939)**

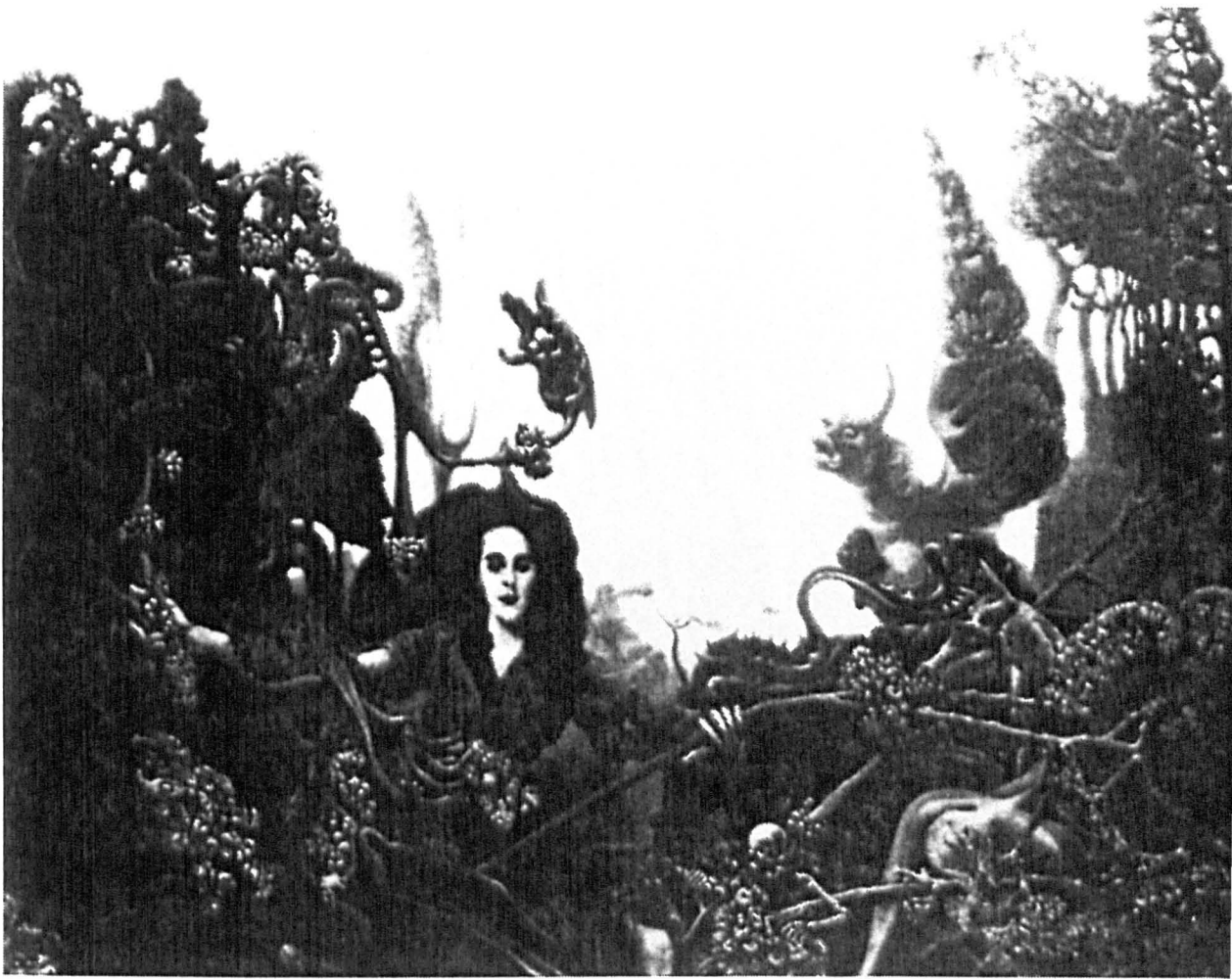


Figure Three  
Max Ernst, *Leonora in the Morning Light* (1940)





Figure Four  
Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst, *Rencontre* (1944)



Figure Five  
Leonora Carrington, *The Drue* (1992) [TV footage]

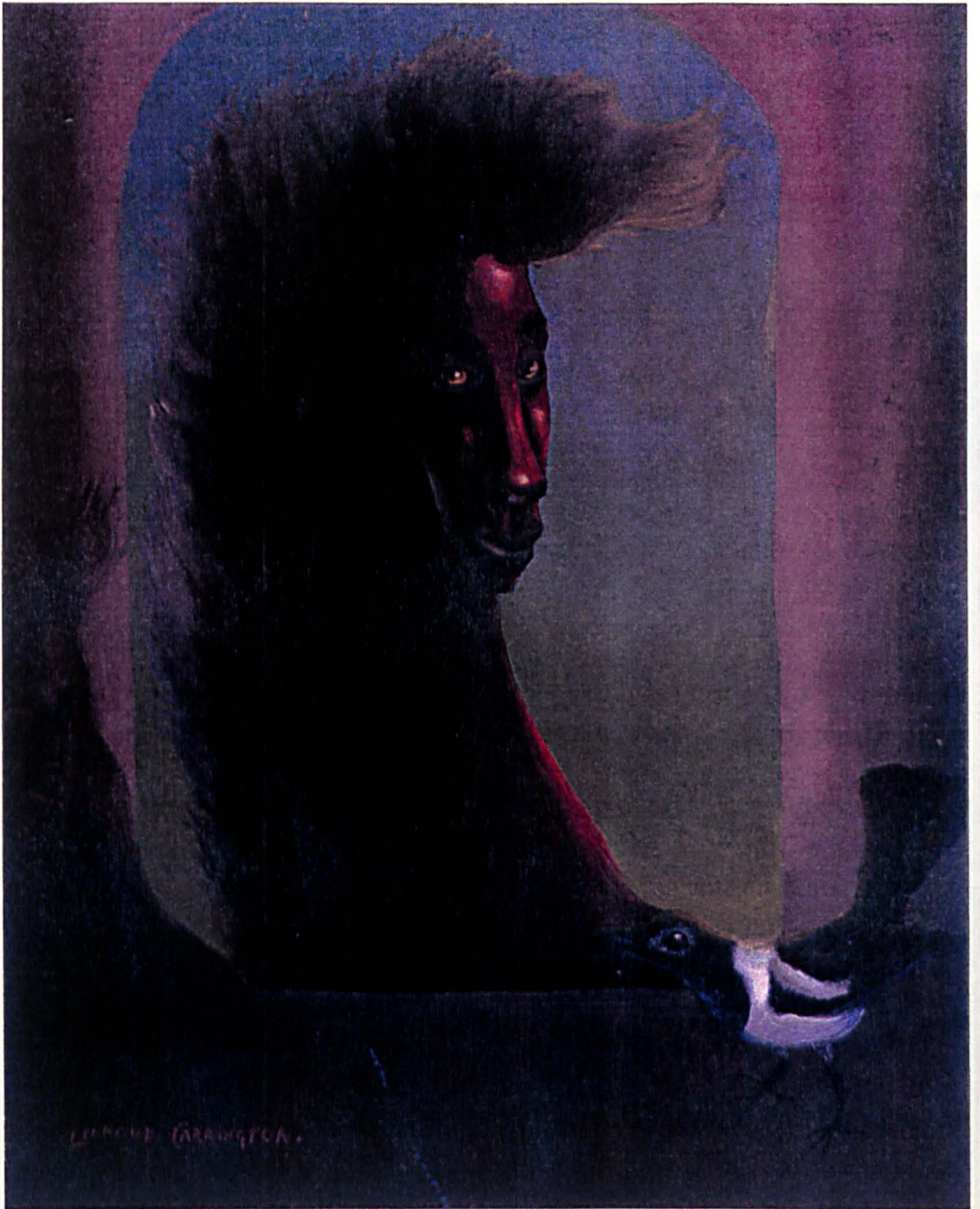


Figure Six  
Leonora Carrington, *Femme et Oiseau* (1937)

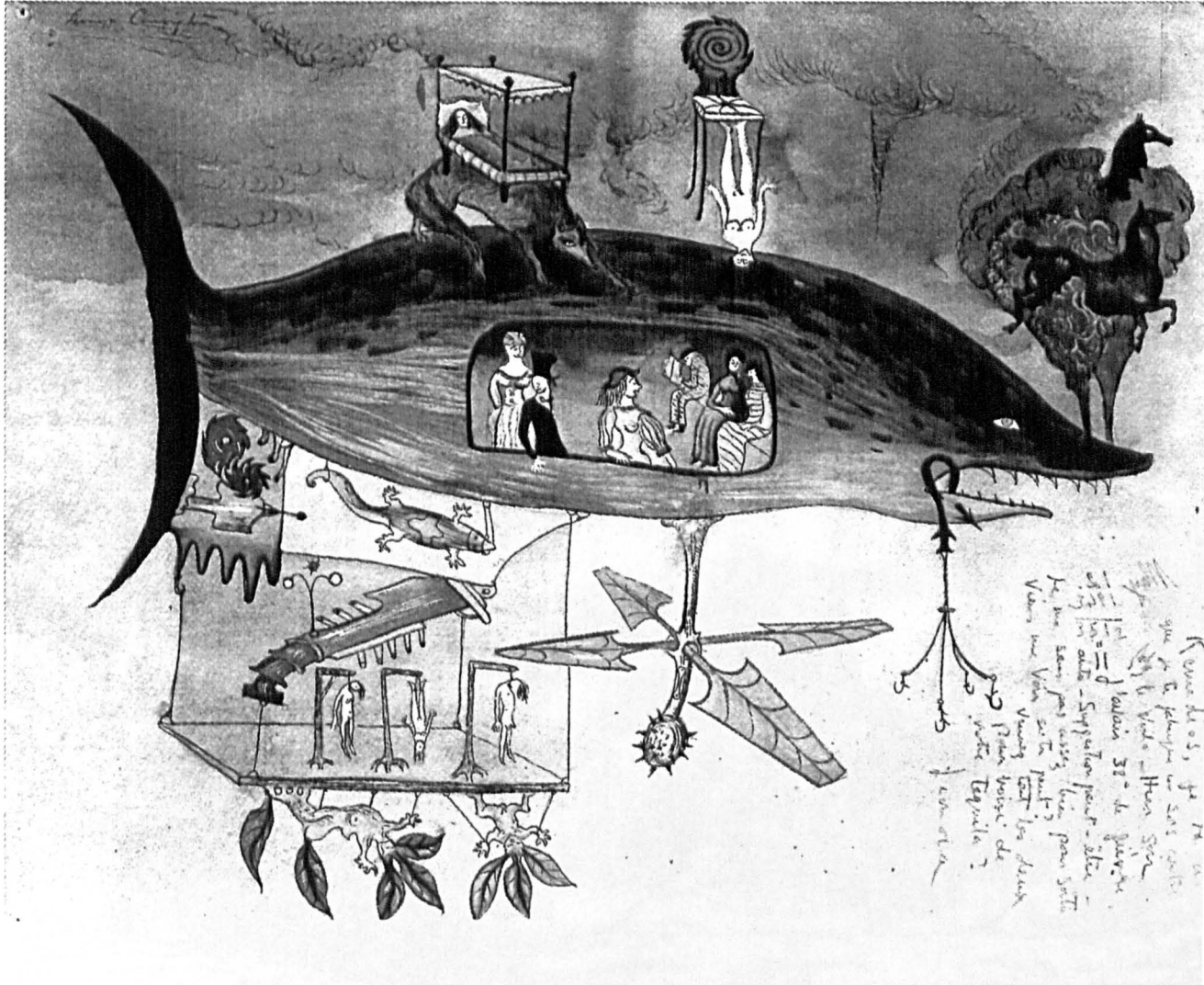


Figure Seven  
Leonora Carrington, *Tiburón* (1940s)

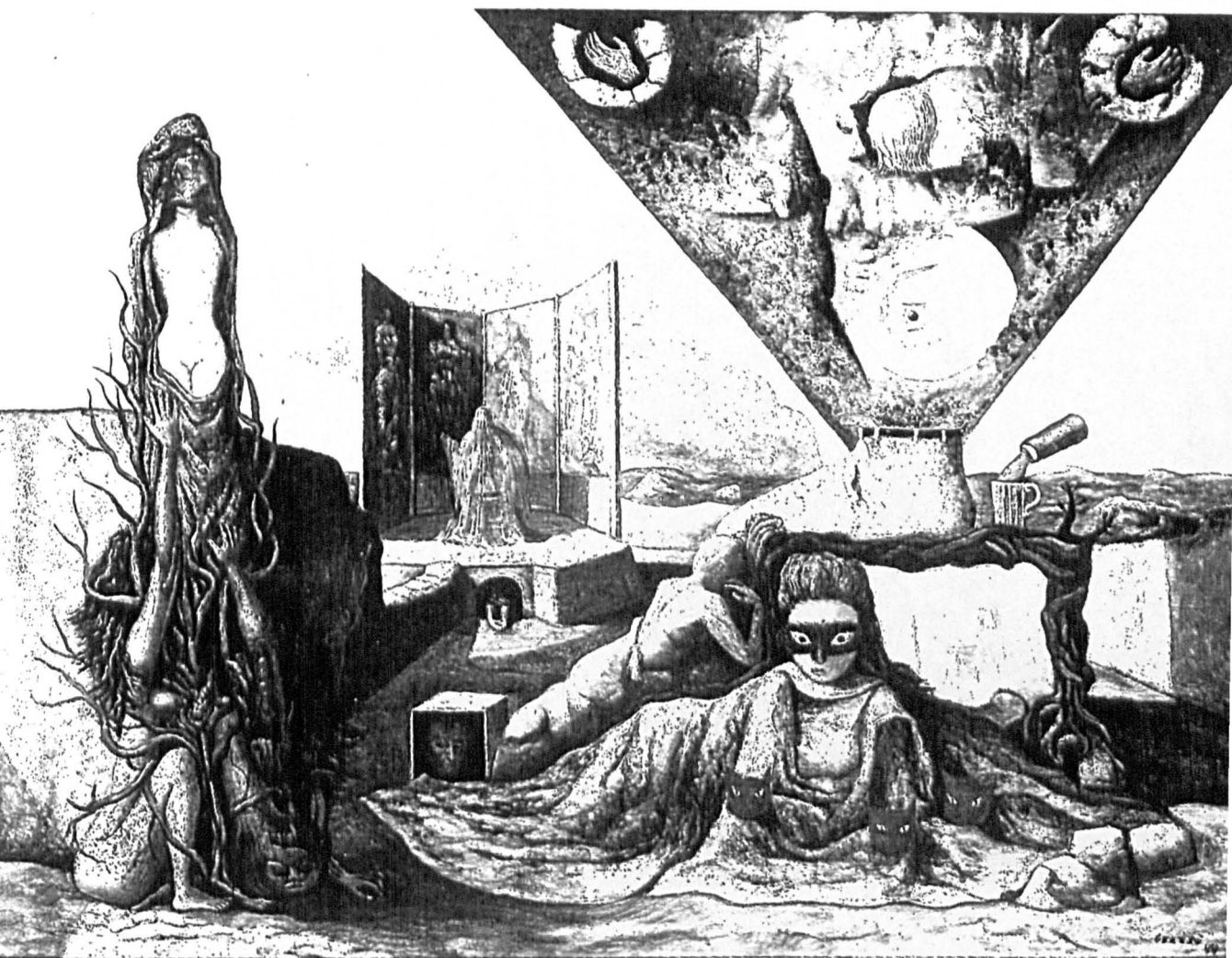


Figure Eight  
Gunther Gerszo, *Los días de la calle Gabino Barreda* (1944)

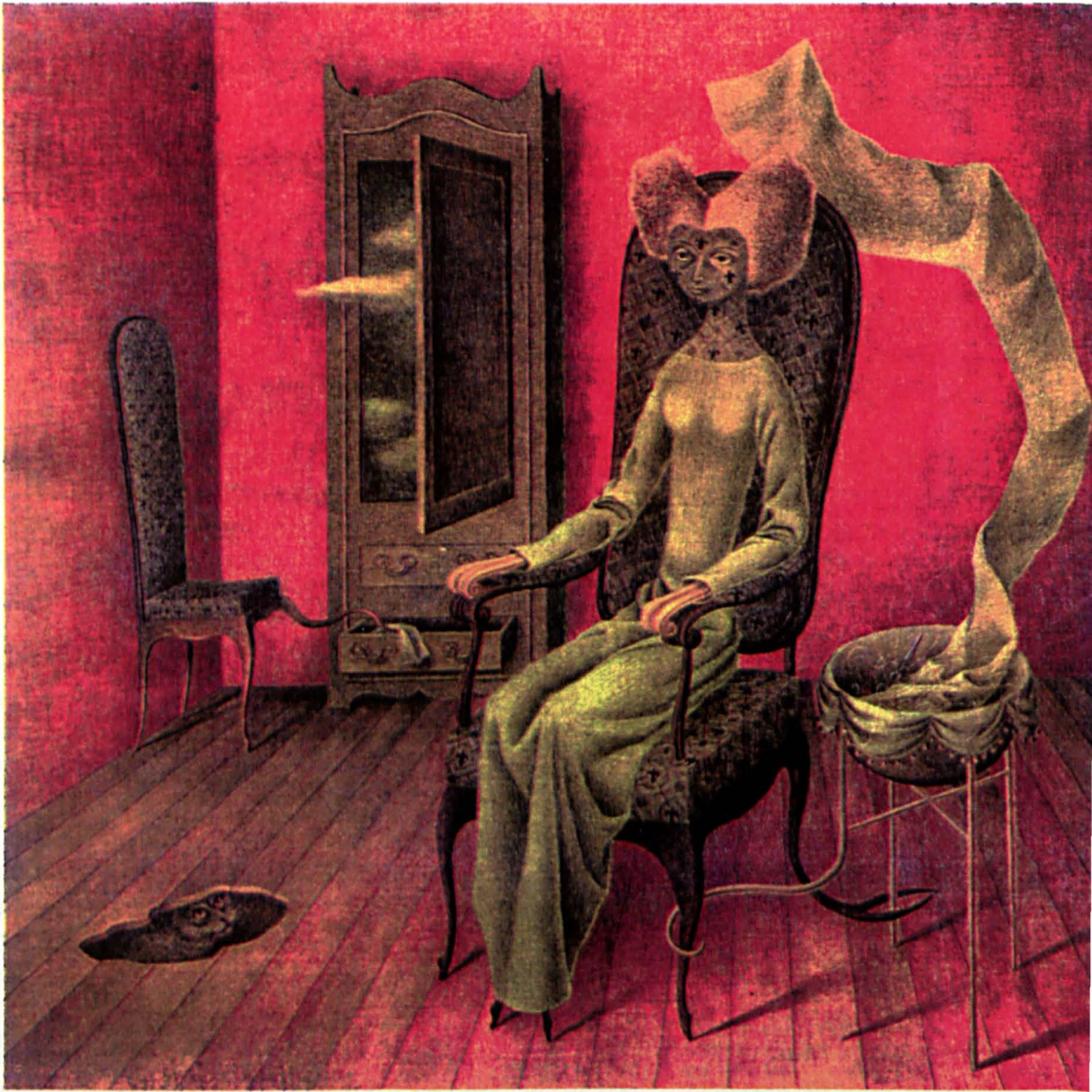


Figure Nine  
Remedios Varo, *Mimesis* (1960)

## Appendix I

This Appendix provides further factual information on Chapter Four: The Personal and the Historical. The first part consists of a transcript of my interview with Dr Morales and the second part registers my efforts to verify the part that Harold Carrington and ICI employees played in Carrington's internment.

### Interview with Dr Luis Morales Noriega

Dr Luis Morales Noriega is the doctor at Santander who, together with his father, Dr Mariano Morales, treated Carrington in 1940. I contacted him after having found his telephone number through the telephone directory. His response was very warm and he showed great interest in my work.

The interview took place in Dr Morales's home in Santander on 21 December 1995. Dr Morales lives in a big chalêt in a renowned residential area of Santander, opposite the impressive Hotel Real. The grounds of the mental institution have now become a municipal park.

When I carried out my interview Dr Morales was recovering from a cerebral thrombosis that had occurred just weeks before my visit: his speech was difficult to understand and his mind often wandered. Yet he could remember with extraordinary clarity certain facts. He was surprised that I knew not only of his existence but the names of his father, Frau Asegurado, Mercedes, José and other members of the staff. Each time I asked him whether certain characters had really lived or been interned in the asylum or whether certain conversations had taken place, his surprise was total and he asked me how I acquired those facts. In each instance I reminded him that I knew of them through Carrington's narrative (whilst mentally confirming their existence, I marvelled also at her acute memory).

Some of the data he provided, though apparently false, could only be confirmed by Carrington herself. When I told him that I read certain metaphors of maternity in Carrington's text and I asked him whether he knew of Carrington's pregnancy, miscarriage or abortion during or before her stay at the clinic, he replied categorically: "Max Ernst never had sexual contact with her!" What follows is a translated transcription of my conversation with Dr Luis Morales:

*Dr Morales asked me about my research and how I came to study in England. Most surprisingly, he repeatedly asked me "Who is your father?" Knowing that my father's professional status would not interest him I answered briefly to his direct question: I told him my father's complete name and professional status; he obviously had expected him to be a personality. A nurse brought us two coffees and I soon moved on to enquire about Carrington.*

J.S.: What is your opinion of Leonora Carrington's writings and paintings?

L.M.: Leonora Carrington was a prophet of the present revolution. And I say the word prophet because she foresaw the changes of this revolution through intuitive mechanisms. In general, all Surrealists anticipated and understood the confusion of the present world. In Leonora Carrington's case what is interesting is how she expressed Surrealism.

J.S.: What do you mean by "the present revolution"?

L.M.: Art is a metaphor for the intellectual artist. The Surrealists didn't know what they wanted, but they painted it, since all art is a metaphoric production of the sensorial order and of unconscious intellectual drives, with utility for oneself and for society. Chance doesn't exist, chance is each individual's desire to get free.

*At this point he asked me again about my interest in Carrington, how I knew of his link to her, and by which means I had found him. I told him about "Down Below", about directory enquiries and of our conversation in early December when he had invited me over.*

J.S.: What was, in your opinion, the cause of Carrington's crisis?

L.M.: Surrealism corresponded to a historical period, to a period of revolution. Carrington is critical of Surrealism and, in my opinion, the "schizophrenic condition" she suffered is linked to that historical period. Moreover, Carrington and Ernst empathised in a period of crisis and her family took advantage of Ernst's incarceration to separate her from the German. To this end, they were prepared to do anything and they had influences that were often invisible.

J.S.: In what state did Carrington arrive at the institution?

L.M.: Leonora Carrington came to us with catatonic schizophrenia diagnosed by various doctors. But, this was only a reaction. Everybody thought she was demented, I didn't. Instead I diagnosed demented schizophrenia ["esquizofrenia demenciada"].

J.S.: How did you become Carrington's doctor?

L.M.: I didn't intervene, they made me intervene. The war seemed to be ending but nobody was clear which side would win, whether the allies or the Germans. I was then very young and a gentleman contacted me. That was suspicious, my practice has been very important since, but at the time I had barely any experience. I think they believed that because I was young I would be easily manipulated. Well, my first diagnosis was that she wasn't a mentally ill person, she is not now and she has never been. I maintained my assessment firmly and that surprised many people: I said it was "symptomatic" madness. For me Leonora provided an extraordinary lesson. Because of my views about her I was considered disturbed myself. Leonora Carrington changed my mode of thought regarding mental illnesses. ["Para mi Leonora Carrington supuso una lección impresionante. Yo mismo pasé por desequilibrado. Cambió mi mentalidad ante los estados mentales"].

*I asked him who was "the gentleman" who contacted him and in what way had he been considered disturbed. He did not expand on this and instead he told me that Carrington had been released thanks to her uncle, a very famous man who had been the last viceroy of India: "Carrington came from a very influential family, you know. She was the niece of the last Viceroy of India." This fact surprised me for he even provided the name of Samuel Hoare as Carrington's uncle and as the last Viceroy of India. At first I wondered whether Carrington had been telling him the tall tales her mother used to tell; otherwise it might well have been due to the fact that he appeared deeply impressed with Carrington's background as well as distressed by the influence of the Carringtons and the power of ICI over Leonora's life (and to some extent over his own life as well). Only later did I discover that although the last Viceroy of India had been Mountbatten, Samuel Hoare had been Secretary of State for India during the 1930s (he was appointed in 1931) before he was appointed ambassador to Spain. He did in fact help Carrington in her release from the institution (see Chapter Four).*



J.S.: How would you explain Leonora Carrington's reference to "the Holy Trinity" when explaining her relationship with you and your father?

L.M.: Well, it is because I, in her treatment, employed the classical racial ideas of Christian Catholicism. Of course, I redirected them: I used charity and love. This is because I advocate the unitary knowledge of science.

J.S.: Why did you treat Carrington with drugs if you thought she was not mentally ill?

L.M.: I used Cardiazol as a chemical substitute for electroshock. Cardiazol was an Austrian drug of Jewish origin that helped to let go ["El Cardiazol, de origen judaico-vienés, ayudaba a descargar"]. She needed to let go. I used it medically as a treatment for the creative Leonora. Art, if it is not properly channelled, provokes all types of illnesses: respiratory, intestinal or mental. In the case of Leonora Carrington it was symptomatic schizophrenia.

*Whilst I was noting that he often employed dated Francoist terminology and the fact that most of his statements were confusingly sprinkled with terms such as "race", "Catholicism" or "unitary sense", he told me that until then (he was eighty-six years-old at the time) he had been very active, seeing one patient a day and reading avidly. His daily exercise was, moreover, to seek contentment in the search for humility. He asked me if I was a religious person myself.*

J.S.: There is a passage in "Down Below" where Carrington narrates having driven the undertaker's horse carriage. Did this really happen?

L.M.: As I was aware of the love that Leonora Carrington professed for horses, I asked an acquaintance of mine, Nereo, the only person in Santander who had horses then, if he would let Leonora ride: he was the undertaker and Leonora drove the undertaker's carriage.

*He then said I was not the only one who had contacted him: some researchers from Chicago had telephoned him a couple of times regarding her, as she was very famous in America. I agreed with him and told him that she was becoming increasingly famous in England as well. We talked about The Hearing Trumpet. The novel had been published in Spanish that year and at the beginning of the interview I had presented him with a copy - he told me he had not read it. Then we moved on to talk about "Down Below" and how accurate it seemed to be.*

J.S.: Have you been in contact with Carrington since she left Santander?

L.M.: Yes, we wrote to each other and we had telephone conversations. Leonora sometimes loved me and sometimes hated me. She sent me a painting which hangs in my study.

*At that point one of Dr Morales's two daughters came in to ask me to cut my interview short as her father was convalescent. I soon started to leave but he asked me to go with him to his study. I was increasingly anxious as I understood that he would get tired. But he moved stubbornly towards the study and his daughter and I helped him get there. He asked me if I could read German to give me some articles. His daughter was with us now and he wanted to move around the room in search of his papers. His daughter continued to comment on his ill-health and the reliability of his information. Confronted with the possibility of jeopardising his health, I thought it best to leave. I thanked him*

warmly. When I left I had the impression that he was disappointed as he looked as if he would have liked to talk for much longer.

## Contacting ICI

On 1 April 1997 I had a telephone conversation with Mrs Sheena Russell, the Librarian at the ICI group head quarters. On this first search she could find no records on Harold Carrington, Van Ghent or Gilliland. I asked if the archive was open to the public and I offered to consult the records myself. She answered that visitors were only accepted on appointment and since there was nothing for me in the records I could not be invited. Following this conversation I sent her the following letter:

Julia Salmerón  
English Department  
University of Hull  
Hull HU6 7RX

Sheena Russell  
The Library  
ICI group HQ  
9 Millbank  
London SW1 P3GF

4 April 1997

Dear Mrs Russell

My name is Julia Salmerón and I am writing a Ph.D. in the English Department of the University of Hull about the British writer Leonora Carrington. It says in her biographies that Carrington's father, Harold Wilde Carrington was, during the 1930s and 1940s, a major shareholder of ICI and I would like to know if you could confirm this fact for me. According to her own accounts, she spent the year 1940 in Madrid where she saw regularly employees of Imperial Chemicals: she mentions Gilliland as the head of the ICI in Spain and another name, Van Ghent. Could you please confirm if these people were employees of ICI? I would also like to know, if possible, the address of the ICI in Madrid during 1940. I would be extremely grateful if you could provide me with this information and any other that you may find in relation to Leonora Carrington and her connection to ICI. Hoping to hear from you, yours faithfully:

Julia Salmerón

As I obtained no reply, four months later I wrote a second letter:

Julia Salmerón

...

Sheena Russell

...

9 August 1997

Dear Sheena Russell,

I am writing to you in reference to the research I am doing on Leonora Carrington. In April 97 we had a telephone conversation and subsequently I wrote you a letter (dated 4 April 1997) requesting further particulars. It may be that the letter never got to you or it may be that your search was unfruitful, but could you please write back to me with any information regarding the following questions?

I enclose copies of printed sources where it says that Harold Wilde Carrington was, during the 1930s and 1940s, a major shareholder of ICI: could you confirm this fact for me? Carrington's daughter, Leonora, spent the year 1940 in Madrid where she saw regularly employees of Imperial Chemicals: she mentions Gilliland as the head of the ICI in Spain and another name, van Ghent. Could you please confirm if these people were employees of ICI at the time? All information (even if it is prior or following 1940) you can supply me about Harold Wilde Carrington, Gilliland and van Ghent is critical for my research and it will be acknowledged in the thesis.

I would be extremely grateful if you could provide me with this information and any other that you may find in relation to Leonora Carrington and her connection to ICI. Hoping to hear from you, yours faithfully:

Julia Salmerón

Again, no reply followed this letter. Finally, on 8 October 1997 I had another telephone conversation. Mrs Russell said there "appeared" to be no records of the people I mentioned, could Carrington have made it all up? I answered that it looked unlikely, as I had been able to ratify most of the other events and names of "Down Below" except these. Mrs Russell did not discard the possibility that they might find something. She had passed the information to their Public Relations department and she was still waiting for the answer. She took my address and telephone number and said she would call me back the following day with the results of that search. She never phoned back.

## Appendix II

Mexico. D.F. 30 December, 1958. Chihuahua 194.

Dear Zebra, your letter plunged me into a dilemma because, as you know my love of precision I wouldn't know how to send you biographic dates without using the most precise up-to-date methods. Recently I have acknowledged the infernal and deliberate false information written in my passport and, tragic ham-pink document, my birth certificate.

So, after having examined the original manuscripts written on Vatican bishop skin, I took possession of the following indisputable calculations:

(9\_9- 9-9-9-9-9-9-9(\*) Q Q -9, -9 -9 = Q Q 9) That is to say: two antelopes minus a hive of wild bees multiplied by a dozen little chocolate monsters gives you the same results, strange things, Artificial Insemination.

Yes, Dear Zebra, you must not despise after knowing my purely scientific origins. I was born by artificial insemination in the following manner:

My mother was a ravishing young bride, thrown into a languishing desperation because of the Anglo-Britannic iciness of her husband, wandered on a crescent-moon-lit night into the conjugal laboratories on the vast and luxurious stable which made up part of the family state. These laboratories were the favourite place for my grand uncle Julep Edgworth inter-seminary games.

Tired by these wanderings, heavy with sadness and chocolate, stuffed pheasants, pureed oysters 'a la creme' and other such delicacies that she gobbled up non stop to fill the void produced by her husband's icy disposition, she laid languorously on a special contraption which she took as an armchair.

Just imagine, this Special Contraption was precisely the last invention of my uncle Julep. The high precision artefact packed full of nine hundred gallons squared of seminal secretions from all the male animals on the property. Not only the splendid stallions of the Arab race, the royal pigs, the little roosters and the huge 'coqs-a-vin' but also hedgehog after hedgehog terribly mixed with bats and common, everyday ducks. Tact prevents me from recalling the bio-chemical reactions of my mother. In short, [a pregnancy] a swollen belly that got bigger and bigger until at its largest it was a frightening magnitude and it burst with such a quake that the vibrations were felt around the whole island.

Thus I was born.

Amazed by the fortuitous results of his experiments my uncle Julep kept me in the special fridge where other monsters waited to be stuffed and immortalised in the showcases which adorned the walls of my uncle's apartment. He had dreamt of converting me in a rather artistic fashion into an inkpot, (because I was a member of the family after all). His dreams were frustrated by the atrocious way in which I clutched on to earthly life. It was then that they decided to educate me in a convent as the most appropriate place for my indefinable species.

You are aware of the thrilling details of this education according to the old Christian customs in which I have participated with my pure but multi-adulterated, faithful and neo-barbarous nature. I recall with tenderness the collective flagellation when the mother superior disguised all the nuns alternatively as Napoleon - the Sun King, the Sun King - Napoleon, never any variation. The summer nights when we were reunited at the grotto of the Little Teresa, Little Carmelite Flower, to witness the ecstasy of our Saint Directress with supernatural meetings of defunct ecclesiastic dignitaries who manifest themselves in the form of little off-white monkeys with roving fingers. So many memories. How to condense my experiences into a letter? How to convey

transgression upon transgression of which the last will be a gentle senile decline into the  
eight tender but hairy arms of my past?

Let us discreetly and silently allow the big cobweb to fall like a bride's veil over  
my defunct virginity.

Ex opolorum pan excelsus veribitarum. Amen.

Dear Zebra, I wish you a profitable and happy year for 1958, because this time  
they decided to repeat the same year due to a lack of any other events.

Lots of love from me, Chiqui and the children.

Translated from the French by Gaelle Sobott-Mogwe.

Mexico.D.F. 30 Decembre, 1958. Chihuahua 194.

Cher Zebre,

Ta lettre m'a plongee dans une dilemme car, comme tu connais mon amour de la precision je ne saurais t'envoyer des dates biographiques sans employer les plus precises methodes modernes. Recemment j'ai reconnu la deliberation infernale des fausses informations ecrites sur mon passport et, funeste document rose-jambon, mon acte de naissance.

Donc, apres avoir faites consulte les documents en manuscrit sur peu d'evêque qui se trouve au Vatican, je me suis mise en possession des indiscutables calcules suivantes:

(9\_ 9- 9-9-9-9-9-9-9(\*) 0 0, -9, 1, -9 = 0 0 9.) c'est a dire; deux antelopes -une cruche d'abeilles sauvages multipliees par une douzaines de petits monstres en chocolat donne la meme resultat, choses etranges, L'imsemination Artificielle.

Oui, Cher Zebre, tu ne dois pas me meprise depuis que tu sais mon origine purement scientifique.

Je suis nee par insemination artificielle de la maniere suivante;

Ma Mere comme ravissante jeune mariee, preci-pitee dans une languissante desesperation a cause du froideur Anglo-Britannique de son mari, a promener par une nuit de Lune croissante dans les laboratoires conjoint aux vastes et luxuriantes granges qui faisait partie des proprietees familiales. Ces laboratoires etaient le lieux favori des jeux inter-seminaires de mon grand oncle Julep Edgworth.

Fatiguee par ce promenade, lourde de tristesses et de chocolats, de faisans truffes, de purees d'huitres a la creme et d'autres friandises quelle goinfree sans cesse pour pouchee les vides produit par le froideur de son epoux, elle s'etendait languoureusement dans une machine speciale qu'elle prenait pour un fauteil.

Figures-toi, alors, que cette Machine Special etait precisament le dernier invention de mon Oncle Julep. L'artefacte de haute precision chargee de neuf cent gallons carres de secretions seminales de tous les animaux males de la proprietees. Non seulement les etalons splendides de races arabes, des porcs royales des petits coqs et des gros coqs-a-vin, si non de herissons apres herissons terriblement melangees de chauves souris et de vulgaires canards. Par delicatesses je ne souvirais pas les reactions bio-chimiques de ma mere. En somme, une grossesse de plus en plus grosse a eteindre une comble d'ampleur effrayante.

qui eclatât avec un tel fracas que les vibrations étaient ressenties dans l'île entier.

Je naquisse alors.

Émerveillé des résultats fortuites de ses expériences mon Oncle Julep me gardait de la frigidaires/ particulier ou d'autres monstres attendait d'être immortalisées empailées dans les vitrines qui entourées les appartements de mon Oncle. Il avait songé de me convertir d'une façon assez artiste en encrier, (Car j'étais membre de la famille malgré tout.) Ses fins était frustré par l'atroce manière que je m'accrocha à la vie terrestre.

C'est alors qu'on décida de m'éduquer dans un couvent comme endroit appropriée de mon espèce indéfinie.

Tu es au courant des détails mouvementées de cette éducation selon les vieilles coutumes chrétiens dont je participee avec ma nature pure mais multi-adultérée, fidèle et néo-barbare. Je me rapelles avec tendresse les flagellations collectives lorsque la mère supérieure déguisée toutes les nonnes alternativement en Napoléon-Roi Soleil, Roi Soleil-Napoléons, jamais de variations. Les nuits d'été chaudes que nous nous réunissions au grotte de la petite Terese, Petite Fleur Carmélite, pour témoigner les extases de notre Sainte Directrice aux rendez vous surnaturelle des difuntes dignités ecclésiastiques qui se manifestaient en formes de petits singes blanchâtres aux doigts ambulantes. Que de souvenirs. Mais comment condense mes expériences dans une lettre? Comment saurais-je transmettre de transgression à transgression dont le finale serait une douce gâtisme dans les huit bras tendre mais poilus de mon passé?

Laissons tomber discrètement et en silence le gros toile d'araignée ce me voile de mariée sur ma difunte virginité.

Ex opolorum pan excelsus veribitarum. Amen.

Cher Zebre, je te souhaite une profitable et heureux années de 1953, car ce fois ci ils ont décidé de répéter la même années par faute d'événements.

Je t'embrasse bien fort avec Chiqui et les enfants



## Bibliography

This bibliography includes all works cited in this thesis, as well as a number of critical studies which are directly relevant to the study of Leonora Carrington. It is introduced by a list of letters and interviews conducted.

### Letters and interviews

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Interview with Marina Warner by Julia Salmerón Cabañas, Hull (UK), March 14, 1994.

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