SUİTDER
SDÜ İNSAN VE TOPLUM BİLİMLERİ DERGİSİ
Suleyman Demirel University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Sayı/Issue	63-Haziran 2025 / 63-June 2025
Makale Bilgisi/ Article Info	İnceleme Makalesi / Review Article
Başvuru Tarihi/ Submitted Date:	10 Ocak 2025 / 10 January 2025
Kabul Tarihi/ Accepted Date:	17 Nisan 2025 / 17 April 2025
Atıf/Citation:	Biderci Dinç, D. (2025). Posthuman Body in Nights at the Circus by Angela Carter. *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İnsan Ve Toplum Bilimleri Dergisi* (63). 41-62
DOI:	10.35237/suitder.1617233
Benzerlik / Similarity:	%8

Posthuman Body in *Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter*

Angela Carter'ın Sirk Geceleri Romanında Posthüman Beden

Derya BİDERCİ DİNÇ**

Abstract

This study aims to analyse the posthuman body in Nights at the Circus (1984) by Angela Carter from the perspective of posthuman feminism. Posthuman feminism explores the humanist ideology that hierarchically categorises and separates human and nonhuman, man and woman, self and other. It offers perspectives on the meaning of being human, which is a historical construct, and the complexities of gender, species, and identity, blurring the boundaries between the categories of human, species, and gender. Nights at the Circus can be read alongside posthuman feminist philosophy in its attempt to destabilize the limits of humanist rationalism to reckon alternative subject positions. This study explores how Carter deconstructs and reconstructs what it means to be human, female and other in the novel. The main character, Sophia Fevvers, has a body that is between human and nonhuman, as she is a woman with the wings of a bird. Her hybrid body is a posthuman body that is constructed with bodily ambiguity. Her embodiment transgresses beyond being human, there is no separation between her body and nature. Fevvers's posthuman body gives her freedom.

Keywords: *Angela Carter, Boundary, Hybrid, Posthuman Body, Posthuman Feminism.*

Öz

Bu çalışma, Angela Carter'ın Sirk Geceleri (1984) romanındaki posthüman bedeni posthüman feminizm çerçevesinde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Posthüman feminizm, insanı ve insan olmayanı, kültürü ve doğayı, benliği ve ötekini ve erkeği ve kadını hiyerarşik olarak kategorize eden ve ayıran insan merkezli hümanist düşünce geleneğiyle ilgilenir. İnsan, tür ve toplumsal cinsiyet kategorileri arasındaki çizgiyi bulanıklaştırarak, tarihsel bir yapılandırma olan insan olmanın ne anlama geldiğine ve cinsiyet, tür ve kimliğin karmaşıklığına dair bakış açıları sunar. Sirk Geceleri, alternatif özne konumlarını hesaba katarak hümanist rasyonalizmin sınırlarını istikrarsızlaştırma girişiminde bulunan posthüman feminist felsefeyle birlikte okunabilir. Bu çalışma, Carter'ın romanda insan olmanın ne anlama geldiğini, kadınlığı

* This article is the revised and developed version of the unpublished conference presentation entitled "Posthuman Body in Angela Carter's Novel *Nights at the Circus*" orally delivered at the 8th BAKEA Conference in 2023.

** Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, İstanbul Topkapı Üniversitesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, İstanbul/TÜRKİYE, E-Posta: deryabidercidinc@topkapi.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-9443-7136.

ve ötekiliği nasıl yapı bozuma uğratıp yeniden inşa ettiğini inceler. Ana karakter Sophia Fevvers, insan ve insan olmayan arasında bir bedene sahiptir çünkü kuşkanatlarına sahip bir kadındır. Onun melez bedeni bedensel belirsizlikle inşa edilmiş bir posthüman bedendir. Bedensel varoluşu insan olmanın ötesine geçer, bedeni kesin sınırlarla doğadan ayrılmamıştır. Fevvers'ın posthüman bedeni onu özgürlüğe kavuşturur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Angela Carter, Sınır, Melez, Posthüman Beden, Posthüman Feminizm.*

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to explore the posthuman body from a posthuman feminist perspective in *Nights at the Circus* (1984) by Angela Carter. Angela Carter is known for her feminist sensibility, magical realism, sexual politics, and socio-political criticism. She engages with contemporary politics, power relations, and cultural issues, particularly those that affect females' lives and always questions the established notions of patriarchal understanding. She reflects on the changing gender roles and women's social status and lives after the world wars. She has developed a significant approach to defining females and their roles in the social and literary world, presenting a counter-image of women in social construction and literary works. She is a highly effective feminist writer who promotes her ideas about empowering women. Her female characters who take on empowered roles struggle for gender and political equality and reclaim their sexuality.

Carter's works, including *The Passion of New Eve, Love, The Shadow Dance* and *The Bloody Chamber*, "*have received considerable critical acclaim*" (Binding, 1982, p. 40). In these works, she explores themes such as the construction of gender in a patriarchal society, female resistance to patriarchy and experience of liberation, female identity, body, and history. In her controversial writings, through her outrageous imagination, she deals with constructing the identity of females and portrays strong and unusual female protagonists to enact her feminist beliefs. She empowers her female characters in her writings to free them from traditional gender roles, social norms, male oppressive forces, and related power dynamics. In most of her works, Carter has revised mythologies, legends, and fairy tales and exploring how they have reinforced restrictive gender roles. She has subverted the construction of the image of woman in mythical, historical and other traditional narratives, which are explicitly offered as an achievement of Western patriarchal culture. She has reimagined and reconstructed archetypal and mythical images of women, attributing feminist perceptions.

In *Nights at the Circus,* Carter disrupts the conventional binaries underpinning Western thought, overturns gender dynamics, redefines societal structures and reveals her feminist statements. She reads images and roles placed on women by patriarchal power in new ways. She deals with the gender issue concerning the objectification and suppression of the body, creating a world with different bodily forms featuring a posthuman female protagonist. And she upholds a more inclusive and interrelated understanding of identity, agency, and power. *Nights at the Circus* provides a ground for exploring the interrelations between posthumanism and feminism, especially in their challenge and reconstruction of traditional conceptions of identity, gender and body. This study focuses on how the posthuman feminist conception of being human or woman is reflected in the novel. It examines how Carter employs fantastical and surreal narratives to challenge humanist notions of identity, exploring the boundaries of human and gender subjectivity, and how human experience, gender, and the body can be reimagined and reconstructed in a posthuman world. Therefore, it contributes to contemporary posthuman feminist discourse by revealing how the novel disrupts binaries and offers new possibilities for understanding the body of women as transformative, monstrous, hybrid, and empowered, rather than subordinate and objectified in a changing world. It emphasises the novel's contribution to expanding the possibilities of human and feminine identity, highlighting Carter's suggestion that femininity can be dynamic and fluid through her reimagining of the female body in both literature and society.

1. Theory of posthuman feminism

Posthumanism, a relatively new category of thinking, is grounded in the previous philosophy: humanism. It engages with the features and deficits of humanist conceptions and goes beyond conventional humanism. Humanism is a philosophical thought which has conceptualized humans and human privileges by placing human reason at the centre of the universe and applying binary divisions. The humanist ideals, based on binaries of human-nonhuman, male-female, and culture-nature and the superiority of reasonable man, have been discursively constructed by Western thought. "*European culture since the sixteenth century – one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it*" (Foucault, 2005, pp. 421-422). It describes man as the measure of the world and rejects the interconnectedness of all life, characterizing each life as separate from others. This creates an unequal relationship between humans and nonhumans, frequently ending up with nonhumans being excluded and reduced to 'the other.' Transformation into otherness influences divisions between humans and nonhumans; the centralized humans have represented 'the self,' receiving positive characteristics such as rationality, morality, and civility, while the others' essential identity has been neglected, their voice is silenced, and their vulnerability is exposed to control and exploitation.

After the 1960s, the Enlightenment humanists' attitudes and claims about human beings' perfection created disillusionment in society and the intellectual sphere. As Foucault points out, "*Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end*" (2005, p. 422). With the emergence of post-structuralism as a response to discursive constructions, rethinking the discourses of Enlightenment humanism has become necessary, as nothing is definite. Basic humanistic concerns, ideas, and values, the essence of the human, and the homogenizing discourses have recently been criticized by contemporary cultural and literary theories such as postcolonialism, feminism, environmentalism, and posthumanism. The construction of man as the measure of all beings by humanism has been deconstructed; what it means to be human has been discussed by various scholars. The complex transformations of human culture and philosophy as well as the meaning of being human in the course of extensive paradigm shifts are investigated by posthumanists. Although the prefix 'post' of posthumanism sounds like the end of humanism, it is the end of the stable definitions attributed to humanism; it challenges the ideas and values of humanism, disregarding a human-centred universe. In this framework, posthumanism is a break from or going beyond humanism. In *How We Became Posthuman*, Katherine Hayles relates posthuman to superseding and transcending the human, writing, "'*Post,' with its dual connotation of superseding the human and coming after it, hints that the days of 'the human' may be numbered*" (1999, p. 283). It induces a non-uniform, unfixed, non-essentialist, and nonhomogeneous subject connected with and relevant to animals, earth, and machines. This signifies the end of human-centrism and becomes the main subject in posthumanist thinking. In her work, *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti describes a genealogy from humanism to posthumanism in history. She states, "*The posthumanist perspective rests on the assumption of the historical decline of Humanism but goes further in exploring alternatives, without sinking into the rhetoric of the crisis of Man. Instead, it elaborates on alternative ways of conceptualizing the human subject*" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 37). Braidotti approaches posthumanism within the framework of politics and economics. Socio-economic forces, scientific-technological developments, and environmental challenges dislocate human centrality and require new definitions and practices of what it means to be human. She claims that posthumanism appears along with capitalism, asserting that what we used to know as humans is now entailed in a political economy of commodification and consumption. Moreover, she examines the social constraints imposed on 'the other' and the outcomes of these restrictions by referring to the qualities attributed to human beings and combining them with the doctrine of humanism that has inspired progress. She underpins humans' capability of discrimination, which accelerates suppression and control, and human beings' role as moral and civilized ones has been disintegrated.

Posthumanism questions the anthropocentrism that keeps human beings separate from and superior to nonhumans. It advocates that how people define themselves should not be based on what

culture offers them. The academician Cary Wolfe writes, "*Posthumanism in my sense is not posthuman at all—in the sense of being "after" our embodiment has been transcended—but is only posthumanist, in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself*" (2010, p. xv). For Wolfe, posthumanism is not a rejection of humans, the accumulation of knowledge of human beings and nonhumans should be revisited, reviewed, and rethought within the cultural and philosophical contexts. Examining the conception of the very human and finding the essence of humans are the main purposes of posthumanism; therefore, it has raised the questions about the meaning of human and human transformation. Rather than dealing with a particular type of being, it reveals the disappearance of the humanist subject and promotes a more inclusive and fluid understanding of identity that comprises all beings' technological, biological and ecological interconnectedness and agency. It recognises the interactions between humans and species, technologically distinct identities. Posthumanism aims to free human beings from the accepted notions of humanism, crossing borders of Cartesian binaries or foundations and blurring the boundaries between binaries. It is also about human beings' inclination towards change: it is a matter of becoming. In this regard, the concept of human gains new significance; humans as rational and moral beings have been distorted, and new alternatives have been proposed.

Concurrently, feminist theory has criticized humanist ideals of androcentrism, and its critique of male-centred perception and socio-cultural identities becomes a complementary tool to decentralise and deconstruct the binaries. Along with this, posthuman feminism emerges as a relatively new intersectional approach and theoretical framework that mingles posthuman ideals and feminist issues, such as gender roles, inequality, and oppression in patriarchal systems. Posthuman feminism, which surfaces at the culmination of the posthuman and feminist theories, critiques humanism that idealizes and situates human beings at the centre of the ethical ground for control of the nonhuman. This intersectional approach resonates with multiple contemporary feminist theorists like Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Karen Barad. Their notions of feminism offer new perspectives on identity, gender roles, agency and species. Braidotti states that "*the emphasis on 'post' in the posthuman rather implies a move forward, beyond the traditional understanding of the human, so that analysis of contemporary power and knowledge becomes an essential part of the feminist posthuman project*" (2022, p. 22). While evaluating and redefining concepts such as human and nonhuman, man and woman, body and mind, culture and nature, and self and others, feminist posthumanists transcend traditional notions of human essentialism.

Posthuman feminists, while overcoming sociological and biological constraints that evolved them into humanists, particularly focus on gender and body. They question how gender norms intersect with the posthuman. Drawing from feminist theorists such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Judith Butler, posthuman feminists claim that gender is a construction or performance rather than an inherent biological or essential quality, and gendered expectations construct the body. Their claim to dissociate gender from biology provides new possibilities for women to realize their body sensations, live within their bodies, and express their identities. Feminist theorists state that the body of a woman and gendered identity are the constructs that are subject to constant transformation and arrangement.

The body is an interdisciplinary concept studied in diverse disciplines, including biology, anthropology, medicine, philosophy, sociology, and the arts. The interpretation of the body has gained posthumanist layers with new perspectives. Posthumanist Cary Wolfe's statement that "*We can no longer talk of the body or even, for that matter, of a body in the traditional sense*" (2010, p. xxiii) suggests that the body can no longer be thought of in a conventional sense. This idea is related to cultural and philosophical shifts in how the self, identity and embodiment are understood, particularly in relation to postmodern, technological and psychological frameworks. The body's relationship with posthuman feminism is related to specism, machine intelligence, immortality, ageing, and prostheses in artificial intelligence and biotechnology studies. This relationship has been

discussed in social sciences, particularly in gender studies in literature, which focus on the body of a woman.

In posthuman feminist thought, the body has been explored beyond its traditional and physical understanding; it is not a biologically determined entity, it can be reimagined and redefined through social constructs such as gender, biological manipulation such as cloning, and technological developments such as protheistics and cyborgs.

> "*Posthuman feminists aspire to nurture and implement the ongoing process of unfolding alternative and transformative paths of becoming…possible posthuman futures …will include solidarity, care, and compassion. We need to do so while rejecting universal and fixed notions of who "we" are and respecting differences of location and power.*" (Braidotti, 2022, p. 21)

Posthuman feminists reject the universal and fixed notions of being human and the division between natural and cultural human bodies. They believe that the body has been technological, racialized, gendered and hybrid accumulations of natural and cultural worlds. The body could be perceived as something that goes beyond just flesh and body, integrating with technological and nonhuman systems. As stated by Clarke & Rossini, "*for some time now, analytical attention has shifted from 'the body' in its normative singularity to bodies in their plurality and entanglement with nonhuman actors*" (2017, p. 154). Posthuman forms or bodies that rub off social and biological differences forge a more fluid, complex and inclusive existence.

Posthuman feminists propose a broader, inclusive understanding of embodiment, identity and agency that interrelates both self and other, human and nonhuman, man and woman. In essence, interrelatedness is the main principle of posthuman feminism, which underpins the inclusion of other and othered bodies and identities. It applies many possibilities in itself to present a vision of the unity of human and nonhuman entities while providing the outcomes of maintaining the binary division of humanism. Posthuman feminists offer a more adequate analysis of contemporary power relations and invoke the possible practices of alternative and transformative becoming and renew subjectivities. It is important to note that they interrogate power dynamics and the imposed roles from the perspectives of marginalized and othered identities. They undertake how the marginalized and othered bodies such as queer, racialized, disabled, among others can be rewieved in ways to question societal expectations of gender.

As such, *Nights at the Circus* can be analyzed from the viewpoint of posthuman feminism, contributing to current debates about gender issues, mainly regarding the female body. Female figures' bodies, specifically Fevvers's, become a site where feminist posthuman promises and possibilities can be explored. It outmodes essentialism in the humanist sense and disrupts conventional gender roles, presenting a world full of female posthumans whose embodiment of fluid identities challenges the binary divisions. It transcends the conventional narratives bound by realistic bodies to explore the fluid dynamics of gender and species in posthuman reality. In short, Carter points out that the body of women can be transformative, monstrous, hybrid and empowered rather than being subordinate and objectified. Her main character, Fevvers, half bird and half woman, embodies posthuman feminist qualities such as fluidity, hybridity, potential transformation and interrelatedness.

2. Posthuman female body in *Nights at the Circus*

This part explores how Carter offers new insights into the intersections of gender, species, and otherness, how she produces a posthuman body and produces a posthuman body challenging traditional notions of identity, gender and corporeality. It argues that Carter employs the posthuman body in a transgressive way that transcends gender and corporeal limitations. The corporeal boundaries of human beings that are based on traditional dichotomies of human beings and nonhumans are blurred in the novel. Through the life story of the female protagonist, Sophie Fevvers, Carter deconstructs the dominant cultural construction of species and gender modes of

thinking by juxtaposing fact and fiction, fantastic and realistic, man and woman and human and animal. She constructs Fevvers with bodily ambiguity, a sense of selfhood, and interiority as she performs her life story.

The narration revolves around the story of Fevvers, recounting her adventures as a circus aerialist in London and St. Petersburg in 1899. By setting her novel at the close of the 19th century, Carter critiques the ideas and institutions of the nineteenth century that shape and discipline female subjectivity, identity and body and constructs Fevvers as a product of the new era. As pointed out by Stoddart,

> "*Fevvers herself is representative of this multiple historical reference. She is the product of archetypal nineteenth-century institutions (the brothel, the music hall stage and the circus), yet we are also frequently reminded that she stands ever-poised on the brink of a new and promising twentieth century, something that is reinforced by the self-consciously twentieth-century narrative voice that articulates her as a woman of modern confidence.*" (2007, p. 8)

In addition, Carter deals with the politics and cultural debates of 1980s Britain, shaped during Margaret Thatcher's prime ministry, particularly those referring to women's lives. Her writing engages with socio-political matters of the day indirectly through allegories, fantasies and myths. In the novel, Carter combines the Victorian, modern and mythological periods, blurring their distances and distinctions to contemplate the problems and challenges faced by women. She critiques humans' past and present and imagines what a possible human or new woman might be like in the future. *Nights at the Circus* is one of "*her fiction, established Carter as a writer whose works of the past were associated not merely with the present, but also, paradoxically, with the future*" (Gamble & Watz, 2025, p. 1). Unlike the Western conception of the self, which historically depended on the sameness and separateness of humans and nonhumans, Carter asserts an understanding of being in which relations among bodies matter. She values connectedness between humans and nature rather than separateness and proposes alternatives to sameness. As put forward by Rosi Braidotti,

> "*The human of Humanism is neither an ideal nor an objective statistical average or middle ground. It rather spells out a systematized standard of recognizability – of Sameness – by which all others can be assessed, regulated and allotted to a designated social location. The human norm stands for normality, normalcy and normativity. It functions by transposing a specific mode of being human into a generalised standard…This standard is posited as categorically and qualitatively distinct from the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others.*" (2013, p. 26)

Braidotti critiques the humanist notion of the human, arguing that humanism defines a standardised and ideal norm for being human against which all individuals are compared, classified, and assigned social roles. It promotes a type of sameness while subordinating those defined as' the other' in terms of gender, race, or other characteristics. In her exploration of the central themes of posthuman feminism, Carter defies the human norm as described in the quotation. Her posthuman feminist stance exposes discursive decoding of the essences of femininity and species and "*suggests ways in which these essences can be reconfigured through an exuberant reappropriation of dominant discourses*" (Bristow & Broughton, 1997, p. 59). Carter highlights how norms of race, gender and species are performed and exaggerated in the circus. Metaphorically, the circus appears to be a place of deconstruction of the concepts of sameness, otherness, and normalcy, as described in Broidotti's quotation. She provides a stage for characters who go beyond singular, standardized human norms and those of othered identities, particularly socially abjected women: the unruly, bizarre and runaways who grapple with identity problems within patriarchal systems. She accounts for alternative subject positions in accordance with a posthuman vision of human identity as hybrid and independent.

Fevvers exemplifies the posthuman feminist challenge of biologically constructed gender identity and role. She is an impressive representative of those posthuman beings with her wings. Carter recounts Fevvers's posthuman experiences, bringing about her experience of self in the

process of becoming and shifting in relation to other species, bodies and agencies. Fevvers is a famous and unique aerialist of her time. After all, her body is entirely different from that of humans. Being a woman with real wings is biologically impossible; therefore, her wings' being real or artificial becomes the concern of the media, the public, and the men. On the other hand, despite her wings, she is not an animal. Fevvers, who represents the image of the bird-woman, embodies the intersection of human and nonhuman bodies. Her corporal hybridity, which transgresses boundaries of the human and animal dualities, disrupts gendered and species-specific norms. Her wings become literal and symbolic markers of her posthuman identity. Fevvers' catchword "*Is she fact or is she fiction?*" (Carter, 1984, p. 1) refers to her obscure existence. Throughout the novel, Fevvers does not provide an exact answer to whether her being a real human or a mere fiction. She is a woman with wings, an aerialist and a giantess, vulgar and sublime. She is described as,

> "*Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states, being on the borderline of species…Lady of the hub of the celestial wheel, creature half of earth and half of air, virgin and whore, reconciler of fundament and firmament, reconciler of opposing states through the mediation of your ambivalent body, reconciler of the grand opposites of death and life.*" (Carter, 1984, pp. 47-48)

Her embodiment of two oppositional identities makes her identity misidentified from the Enlightenment traditions of reason. She emerges as a character whose embodiment is resilient enough to be categorized or defined. Her bodily features, survival, and power depend on keeping this resilient ground in the middle of these two sides. This emphasizes that the boundaries between identity categories are performative, fluid and arbitrary. She builds her identity on the slick ground, passing from one to another to keep her identity vague and unclear.

It is impossible to pin Fevvers down, designate or specify her identity. Lizzie describes her as "*the pure child of the century…the New Age in which no woman will be bound down to the ground*" (Carter, 1984, pp. 12-13). Her body combines two oppositional identities. Defining her identity can kill her, so she wards herself off from being either. Her identity can be interpreted in the light of Haraway's concept of the cyborg, a hybrid entity that defies clear categorisation. Posthumanist Donna Haraway states that "*to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many*" (1991, p. 74). Haraway suggests that identity is fluid, hybrid and multiple; a singular identity is insufficient to describe the complexity of human experiences. Carter's critique of essentialism resonates with Haraway's broader philosophical project; she highlights the idea of accepting a different perception of being human and proposes a being in a vital web of interrelations and entangled agencies. Fevvers prefers a different subjective position that transcends the limits of rational humanism; she realizes her sense of being is related to interconnectedness and a multiplicity of beings. She constructs "*posthuman relational ethics at the in-depth structures of our subjectivity by acknowledging the ties that bind us to multiple 'others' in a vital web of complex interrelations*" (Braidotti, 2022, p. 297).

Fevvers's characterization, which exemplifies the posthuman femininity, can be interpreted as a phase in creating a subjective identity for women rather than the potential essentialism of female identity. She tries out the limits of body, gender roles and identity and gains female subjectivity by blurring the boundaries of imposed identity or playing with her image. She transcends the human body and challenges traditional representations of femininity. Her subversion of essentialist notions of identity and gender roles assigned by patriarchal society makes her a posthuman feminist icon. Her bodily hybridity, fluidity, ambiguity and boundary-breaking are associated with becoming.

For the most part, Fevvers is portrayed from the perspective of an American journalist, Jack Walser. During the interview in the circus, he observes her from the perspective of patriarchal society that constructs gender and gender performance with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its boundaries and consolidating the gender roles and identities. This does not align with the following idea.

> "*Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.*" (Butler, 1999, p. 178)

According to Butler, gender, rather than being an internal essence, is figured and performed through people's bodily gestures, manners, behaviours, and routine actions such as sitting, talking, eating, or dressing. While Walser is observing her, Fevvers subverts her gender identity and traditional expectations; her bodily performances reverse the patriarchal idea that gender identity is defined by the repeated performance of gendered actions.

Walser, who is affected by the poster that objectifies her, does not believe in the possibility of her owning both the arms and wings of a bird. He says, "*Now, wings without arms is one impossible thing; but wings with arms is the impossible made doubly unlikely- the impossible squared*" (Carter, 1984, p. 6). He represents the modern rational viewers; the viewers' system of meaning, an inherently sensible and gendered construct, places a woman within the rational, social and patriarchal construct and denies her existence other than the one it has defined. Walser interviews Fevvers to uncover the mystery surrounding her. He first observes her body to see whether her wings are real and to report it in his news story. "*Walser is here, ostensibly, to 'puff' her; and, if it is humanly possible, to explode her*" (Carter, 1984, p. 4). As an aerialist with wings, Fevvers is expected to be like an angel: slimmer and shorter. However, Walser is surprised that she is very tall and overweight; he does not compare her to an angel due to her giant body. Fevvers rebuffs the long-standing myth about circus aerialists' bodies with her enormous, inelegant and indecent body. Her body size and weight make her movements slower than an ordinary aerialist. Her unusual and extraordinary body and slowness make her body a visual object that attracts the modern rational viewers. In addition to her physical appearance, Fevvers' facial beauty is beyond the patriarchy's beauty standards. She has "*exceedingly long and abundant hair*" (Carter, 1984, p. 44) and eyelashes, "*a good three inches*" (Carter, 1984, p. 22). Walser observes Fevvers' masculine manners; he says, "*The blonde guffawed uproariously*" (Carter, 1984, p. 1), and she eats and drinks too much. When she unwomanly guffaws or devours something, she wears her undergarments and silk stockings, which are in the dirt in the messy room. Her manners, behaviours and actions, including her eating and drinking habits, and the clothes in her dressing room, are not the repeated performances or stylization of femininity, but create a disillusionment of a fixed gendered self.

Fevvers's excessive body and her manners, behaviours and actions parody the ideals of femininity and beauty inscribed on female bodies in a patriarchal culture. She does not allow her body to be docile or conditioned to conform to external expectations and norms. This can be related to Susan Bordo's discussions on how societal pressures shape the identities and bodies of women. In her analysis, Bordo argues that a set of social, cultural and psychological mechanisms transforms the women's bodies into "*docile bodies-bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, and improvement*" (1993, p. 166). She points out that activities such as diets, make-up and dress are so pervasive in the lives of females as their routine, and they are heavily loaded with cultural expectations and norms. She writes, "*Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress—central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women, we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification*" (Bordo, 1993, p. 166). Through self-modification, in patriarchal societies, women become increasingly concerned with themselves in a way that they become distracted from social activities and engagements. Fevvers challenges and subverts those ideals of femininity and expectations of beauty in her quest for agency.

To elaborate further, Carter parodies discursively constructed and inherently gendered patriarchal norms. Fevvers's body and manners disturb the demands of normalization; she rejects fitting into the norms of gender, identity and body. Her identity is constructed to create a constructive otherness; her otherness disturbs and destabilises the notions that femininity depends

on. She "*disturb[s] identity, system, order, upsetting the boundary between clean, contained, aesthetic femininity and fetid, fluid, unfettered femaleness. Carter has created [her] own aesthetics of abjection*" (Munford, 2006, p. 155). Her excessive body size and manners create the feeling of abjection which is open to the male audiences and dissolves the femininity of her physical appearance, for instance; she lets her fart sound loud (Carter, 1984, p. 3) and has a nauseating smell. Carter creates a metaphoric bond between bodily abjection and the female, which explicitly shows the non-identical resemblance between the female and the grotesque. "*Everything about this creature is sublime excess…suggesting not only her deliberate production of unnaturalness but also the prosthetic grotesque*" (Russo, 1994, p. 160). As the body of excess, Fevvers's body is transformed into something unusual, freaky and unruly, and her physical states of impurity make her abject. Carter underpins Luce Kristeva's concept of abjection. Kristeva defines abjection as a philosophical, psychological and cultural concept where societies reject or ostracise certain subjects, figures and bodies as 'the other', threatening or contaminating the identity. She states that abjection "*is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, and order. What does not respect borders, positions, and rules? The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite*" (Kristeva, 2024, p. 4). Abjection shares a kinship with posthuman feminism in that it accepts the complexity of identities and bodies that do not fit neatly into essentialist humanist categories. In the same way, Fevvers's abjection is not merely about her physical uncleanliness; her abjection refers to what disrupts the system of order and structures central to how people make sense of the world. To rephrase, her abjection violates the common sense of the clean self or the categories that keep social and moral order. It disrupts the boundary between self and other, human and nonhuman, man and woman and refuses to fit into established positions. Carter "*revalue[s] the positive potential of contamination as a breakdown of unitary and confining categories*" (Gustar, 2004, p. 360). Her transgression makes her an abject and repulsive being. She occupies a liminal space that is hard to define and understand. As a result of this, she is seen as a threat to the norms of the patriarchal society; to suppress this sense of threat, she is objectified by the spectators who watch her in astonishment. Although Walser feels disturbed by her giant body, he overcomes his feeling of threat when she is near because he makes her bodily strangeness an ultimate mysterious spectacle to be looked at and observed in intricate detail.

From Walser's perspective, the narrative unfolds through Fevvers's voice. Fevvers recounts her life story in a fragmented and shifting way, presenting diverse versions of her experiences and identities. Her storytelling reflects the concept of retold stories that challenge the authority of a dominant, singular narrative that reinforces fixed and binary identities. Carter offers a discursive analysis and modern retelling of gender issues in historical, religious and mythical narrations. She realizes the power of storytelling as a significant way of denouncing the cultures that mark women and animals as the other. This can be related to Haraway's statement that "*The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities*" (Haraway, 1991, p. 175). Haraway highlights the transformative power of narratives and their roles in reprehending established structures of identity and power. Carter's use of the literary technique of retelling reflects an approach to deconstructing binaries, exploring the fluidity of narratives and identities and bringing the myth into a new realm. Her reimagining and retelling of mythology in a parodic manner subverts and redefines naturalized binaries and fixed identities of the mythical and archetypal female images and gender roles encoded in myths. Mythical narrations construct a stereotypical image of females for the generations, particularly of gendering the female body. They confine the bodies of women within two definitions: being either passive, submissive, sexually attractive or monstrous and destructive. They idealize the feminization of the body and reflect emotionally exaggerated female figures who do not control their bodies. She undermines the construction and modification of female images, particularly their bodily depictions in myths and their versions.

> "*Her writing takes for granted not only the past constructedness of gender but also its logical corollary, that it is continuously being constructed, not least in fiction…Her most impressive achievement is to write fantasy, which refuses to obey this time-honoured and insidious rule.*" (Sage, 1992, p.177)

Carter critiques the ways that gender norms have been constructed and assumes that gender is not only a product of the past but is constantly reinforced through fictional narratives. She crafts fantasy narratives that rebuff adherence to the conventional rules and expectations surrounding gender.

Carter touches upon certain aspects of these narrations, re-inscribing women whose voices and achievements are ignored and silenced into the absences and gaps of the patriarchal narrations. Fevvers is called Cockney Venus, Helen of the High Wire and Madonna of the Arena. She represents the secrets of mythical female figures: Venus, Madonna and Helen, these names reflect her posthuman hybrid and fluid embodiment. From posthuman feminist point of view, her performing diverse roles allows her to fluidly navigate the boundaries of mythical and human existence and "*degrade traditional values by fusing ethereal, sacred idols with lowly, profane, working class (op)positionalities, which apply myths as stage personas to be performed with hard labour, physical effort and sweat, introducing material reality into the mystified, disembodied abstractions' realm*" (Kerchy, 2008, p. 154). Fevvers's inelegant, profane body reverses the airy and demure mythical formation of females. She is the epitome of mythical women and the othered women of the modern world. Fevvers "*represents both a mischievous bringing down to earth of an assortment of female myths (Helen of Troy, Venus, 'L'Ange Anglaise'), while also foregrounding the voices of previously unheard women: the working class, prostitutes and circus aerialists*" (Stoddart, 2007, p. 21). Although Carter uses explicit names, patterns, and elements of myths, she reimagines familiar figures in new ways, covering them up in a late twentieth-century consciousness and sensibility.

Fevvers answers Walser's questions to satisfy his overwhelming curiosity and defy his intention to prove her wings fake. He calls her "*a freak*" (Carter, 1984, p. 95). She narrates her life story and the reality of her unusual body to him as she chooses; hereby, she gains control over her self-definition, challenging the traditional male-centred narrations of women's lives and histories. "*Walser becomes at once Fevvers's amanuensis and a narrator in his own right. As part one draws to a conclusion, he finds himself turning more and more into a recording instrument for Fevvers*" (Finney, 1998, p. 167). Her captivating storytelling begins with her roots and birth in London; she claims to have an unusual origin as she was hatched from an egg rather than being conceived. She says, "*Hatched; by whom, I do not know. Who laid me is as much a mystery to me…But hatch out I did*" (Carter, 1984, p. 10). To prove that her being hatched, she states that she does not have a naval. Like Helen of Troy, Fevvers was not born into this world but hatched. Helen of Troy is the daughter of Leda and Zeus. Zeus, in disguise as a swan, rapes Leda. Helen, hatched from one of the eggs that Leda produced is implied to be a hybrid embodiment, the daughter of a woman and a god disgused as a swan. Like her, Fevvers exists at the threshold between human and animal. Carter's retelling of the myth of Helen of Troy provides a posthuman reimagining of the traditional narration.

Carter problematizes Helen of Troy's story by rewriting Helen's character into a new posthuman form and body. By doing so, she de-mythologizes Helen by creating her distorted version: Helen of the High Wire. The bodies of mythological Helen and Helen of the High Wire define their identities. In the myth of Helen of Troy, gender stereotypes of patriarchy, which masculinise males' bodies and sexualise females' bodies, are promoted. Helen's body has feminine beauty and delicacy. When compared to Helen of Troy, Carter's Helen is depicted as "*twice as large as life*" (Carter, 1984, p. 6), stronger, huger, and rougher. Fevvers refrains from the entrapment of having a fragile and idealized body that is regulated according to society's beauty standards. She lacks conventionally feminine facial features, manners, and voice. Carter subverts Helen of Troy's beauty, charm, sexuality, and love. Fevvers "*looked like a dray mare than an angel… Her face, broad and oval as a meat dish, had been thrown on a common wheel out of coarse clay; nothing subtle about her appeal*" (Carter, 1984, p. 4). Carter's depiction of Helen of the High Wire parodies the patriarchal discourses

that construct a gendered, sexualised and seductive image of the female body. "*She intends her display of appetite to be witnessed... she is an artist of appetite*" (Dennis, 2008, p. 210). Fevvers's messy hair, dirty clothes, shameless and endless appetite for food shocks and drives Walter away as her deviation from the norms of femininity de-sexualizes her body.

> "*[H]er mouth was too full for a riposte as she tucked into this earthiest, coarsest cabbies' fare with gargantuan enthusiasm. She gorged, she stuffed herself, she spilled gravy on herself, she sucked up peas from the knife; she had a gullet to match her size and table manners of the Elizabethan variety. Impressed, Walser waited until at last her enormous appetite was satisfied.*" (Carter, 1984, p. 10)

Moreover, Carter transforms the passive Helen into a freedom fighter who goes beyond the norms of female beauty and docility. Helen of the High Wire, a symbol of female empowerment, gains her power and reputation from her body and performance. She also manipulates and escapes from the male gaze and the spectators' commodification of the female body.

Fevvers "*has avoided all conventional rites of passage*" (Bristow & Broughton, 1997, p. 63) in her life. She narrates that when she was a baby, she was abandoned on the steps of Madame Nelson's brothel and brought up exclusively by prostitutes. The women accept her without questioning her biological origin. She does not have a past, blood ties or actual parents, but in the brothel, there are parental figures who have a great impact on her. Carter subverts and parodies the idea of a traditional family model, based on the unity of father and mother, by presenting prostitutes as parental figures and a brothel as the house where Fevvers was brought up. Fevvers becomes one of the daughters of the prostitutes, she says, "*There I was reared by these kind women as if I was the common daughter of half a dozen mothers*" (Carter, 1984, p. 10). The brothel where Fevvers spends her youth does not fit into the idea of a brothel created by a patriarchal culture. It is described as

> "*a place that, like its mistress, turned a blind eye to the horrors of the outside, for inside was a place of privilege in which those who visited might extend the boundaries of their experience for a not unreasonable sum.*" (Carter, 1984, p. 13)

Carter constructs a utopian community, a reserved and unconventional area for women within the walls of the brothel, which disregards the norms and horrors of the outside. Although it is a house of prostitution by night, Ma Nelson's motherly presence creates a little female community by day. The women speak and care for each other to remind themselves of their shared presence. Fevvers lives in connection to the other women; there is no patriarchal figure in this wholly female world. Carter prefers a brothel that is a woman's commune or academy for the education of Fevvers to a family structure. A girl only learns to obey her father's rules and become a mother like her mother in a traditional family structure. However, Fevvers learns how to survive as a woman, control her sexuality and love, and use her wit and charm to navigate the world from these intellectual and political prostitutes. The prostitutes give her a taste of freedom. Fevvers learns to reclaim her body and sense of agency and solidarity through sisterhood. The impact of growing up in a brothel on her life is so strong that even after years, the brothel remains a paradisiacal place for her.

Furthermore, her surrogate mother, Lizzie, does not take a traditional maternal role in her relationship with Fevvers. Lizzie, who provides severe Marxist feminist and Foucauldian counterpoints, has affected her notions of freedom, heterosexual love, money and marriage. She states, "*Marriage? Pah!"…"Out of the frying pan into the fire! What is marriage but prostitution to one man instead of many? No different! D'you think a decent who'd be proud to marry you, young man? Eh?*" (Carter, 1984, p. 10) She reflects her feminist critique of traditional gender roles and institutions, particularly marriage. According to Lizzie, motherhood and marriage are the institutions that restrict the women's freedom. Marriage is not a romantic ideal or socially celebrated bond, yet it is a form of subjugation, a way for a woman to sacrifice her body and money to a man. Her comparison of a prostitute and a wife suggests that women are commodities and are reduced to their sexual and domestic roles; they are expected to serve a man's needs. Both are engaging in sex as a type of trade,

while the prostitute apprehends her position within the society and economic system and the contract she has made, the wife does not gain anything. Moreover, Lizzie teaches Fevvers how to be free from the idea of a woman who is related to her reproductive function and identified with nature. She states, "Unless this tableau of a woman in bondage to her reproductive system, a woman tied hand and foot to that Nature"(Carter, 1984, p. 167). Carter refers to contraceptives and the law that permits abortion, which facilitated women's taking part in public areas in the 20th century.

> *"[Lizzie] speak[s] very much to our times when notions of mothering and fathering are so much a part of political agendas…the threat of the perpetuation of an essentialized, naturalized concept of motherhood, employed for political purposes as it always has been, confronts us yet again."* (Bristow & Broughton, 1997, p. 146)

Carter is concerned with the symbolic meaning of motherhood in a patriarchal culture. Patriarchy regards maternity as a woman's destiny, so she seeks alternatives to the configurations of subjectivity beyond that of the traditional mother-daughter relationship. In the novel, freedom from obligatory motherhood allows women to gain other identities. Feminist philosopher Luce Irıgaray argues that ignoring the maternal symbolic order, which subdues daughters in patriarchal societies, offers the construction of alternative identities.

Favvers narrates how her grotesque body and wings make her a visual object in various instances throughout her life. She tells the story of the growth of the wings on her shoulder around seven. After the appearance of her wings, her form changes, and she becomes a visual object that males look at. She claims to be "*a tableau vivant from the age of seven on*" (Carter, 1984, p. 11). Lizzie and Ma Nelson liken her to Cupid; she is given a toy bow and arrow to imitate Cupid for the male customers in the foyer of the brothel until her adolescence. After her first successful flight in puberty, she imitates a work of art; acting as a living statue of Winged Victory, holding the admiral's sword. Accordingly, she becomes a parodic representation of a historical figure: an admiral of the fleet. Consequently, Carter subverts the centrality of men in official histories. She offers herself as a tableau vibrant and perfection of the statue; she fills in the missing parts of the sculpture "*mutilated by history*" (Carter, 1984, p. 20).

Fevvers's life changes dramatically after the sudden death of Ma Nelson in an accident. Fevvers and Lizzie go to Battersea and have financial problems as all the money they save is burnt. Fevvers, who needs to earn money, works as an extraordinary woman figure in Madame Schreck's Museum of Women Monsters. In the 19th century, many unusually embodied women were commodified by entrepreneurs for the bourgeoning commerce and entertainment. Women who do not conform to mainstream ideas of physical appearance are often objectified and exhibited for public consumption. *"Within modern capitalism, displays of ethnically and physically unusual people were a source of profits and entertainment in dime museums, street fairs, sideshows, and the more spectacular exhibitions*" (Weiss & Cohen, 2003, p. 129). The museums evoke a sense of spectacle where these exhibitions are reduced to curiosity and novelty and transform unusual humans into commodities. In the novel, like the brothel, the museum is an alternative market where the bodies of females are commoditised; men pay for their spectacle, services and the idea of sex.

Carter takes women's financial deprivation and victimization in a patriarchal society at the centre of her narration. The women in Fevvers's early life became prostitutes out of financial necessity. Like the prostitutes, Fevvers earns her living as her unusual body is her profitable investment. Irigraray deals with women's bodies' use and exchange value and exploitation in the marketplace, she claims "*The use, consumption, and circulation of their sexualized bodies underwrite the organization and the reproduction of the social order, in which they have never taken part as "subjects*" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 84). She states that the sexualisation of women's bodies is integral to how social order is maintained. In the same way, Carter points to how the sexualisation of certain bodies is entwined with power structures in society. She critiques how social systems exclude women from

full participation in social, political and economic spheres and deny their subjectivity and how women are reduced to their bodies, which are presented, marketed and exploited.

Females with strange physical oddities or symbolic deformities share a similar fate of being presented as ideas of difference in the Museum of Women Monsters. They are exposed to the male eyes, which project both horror and fascination upon women's bodies, which are then explicated as freaks or nature's wondrous whimsies. Madame Schreck, who looks at women through men's eyes, regulates women's social interactions and controls their use value and profit. She also poses the ultimate threat to their subjectivity. In the exhibitions, she presents women's bodies as erotic objects to to satisfy the perverted desires of the wealthy men. While men hold the look, women become the passive spectacles in the museum. The male gazers explore the somatic boundaries of what is expected of an ordinary woman. Their unusual bodies push the spectators' understanding of order into chaos. The spectators' failure to place their bodies into their system of understanding kindles fear and awe of the unknown. The women's creating horror and wonder in human beings signifies a posthuman future.

In a patriarchal culture, the social roles available to women are limited and often contradictory. Every female character is confined to two images: a virtuous and idealized angel, and a stigmatized and feared monster. These extremes leave little room for individuality, forcing women to constantly navigate between being ideal and feared. Within this pattern, they become an essentialized construct of their nature that must be controlled or repressed. "*It is debilitating to be a woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels, they must be monsters*" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2020, p. 53). In the patriarchal ideology, the ideal women are passive, submissive and self-sacrificing angels, and those who do not conform to the societal standards of femininity are the female monsters. From a rational humanist perspective, binary oppositions such as human /nonhuman, man/woman, and subject/object are decentered in the description of female monsters. The bodies of the females in the museum blur distinctions and dissolve the concept of fixed identities into dynamic and interconnected networks. As a result of their bodies being different from the normal human body, they are pushed to the periphery and dehumanized as monsters. The museum is described as a "*lumber room of femininity*" which is full of "*dispossessed creatures, for whom there was no earthly use*" (Carter, 1984, p. 40). The women's physical uniqueness seems to challenge the established categories and capture their viewers' collective imagination. The women embody all that attracts and repels their audience. Their bodies' production of anxiety and delight keeps male clients visiting the black theatre. Through their gazes, male clients objectify the bodies of women and reduce them to the state of a commodity; they assume domination over them and inflict their hidden fears, erotic pleasures and fantasies on women's bodies. They satiate their deviant desires by looking at different women, monsters and making love to some of them. Irıgaray's feminist critiques of sexual norms that are constructed to restrict women's subjectivity and autonomy fit within the analysis that highlights how patriarchal society reduces the female monsters in the museum to the role of a tool of male pleasure. Irigaray states,

> "*Woman, in this sexual imagination, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies. That she may find pleasure there in that role, by proxy, is possible, even certain. But such pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man.*" (1985, p. 25)

The women in the museum, such as Fanny Four-Eyes, Sleeping Beauty, Wiltshire Wonder, Albert/Albertina Cobwebs, among others are the ultimate embodiment of abjection, posthuman boundary creatures and female monsters because they exist in a hybrid space and prove possibilities for identity, which is celebrated by posthuman feminism. They are in a state of tableaux vivants, showing off their bodies, which disrupts the traditional humanist view of women or do not comply with society's expectations of manners, behaviours, beauty, biology, etc. They gradually assimilate into the male gaze as they become more aware of the power and the inevitability of the gaze. They

say, "*We are the whores of mirth…their leisure as our labour*" (Carter, 1984, p. 69). Their abjection challenges the conventional narrative of femininity. Fanny Four-Eyes, who should have had nipples, has eyes; she "*saw too much of the world altogether*" (Carter, 1984, p. 40). She sees more than men and reverses the male gaze that observes her body as a visual object. Albert/Albertina was a bipartite. Carter reimagines Sleeping Beauty whose predetermined fate is controlled by patriarchy in the fairy tale, distancing it from its past versions through parody; Carter's Sleeping Beauty "*in her fourteenth year, the very day her menses started…never wakened, not until noon; and the day after, not until teatime; and the day after that*" (Carter, 1984, p. 36). Her deformity is sleeping; she resorts to sleeping to keep herself from being controlled by patriarchy. She refuses to be woken up by a prince's kiss; she gets up from her perpetual deep sleep to carry out her basic bodily functions, such as filling a bedpan, and her excremental and menstrual pollution makes her an abject. Her female flow and fertility diminish as she sleeps; therefore, she frees herself from the process of womanhood. She is a living corpse, affirming Kristeva's "*the most sickening of wastes*" (2024, p. 4). These women's bodily anomalies are a form of passive resistance to the Victorian stereotyping of femininity. This represents how certain human beings, particularly women who challenge gender norms, are often treated as abnormalities or curiosities rather than being recognized for their humanity. They are confined to a space like a brothel or museum where they are observed as mere objects for public consumption but never fully accepted or understood. Through these women, Carter presents a reflection on identity, the human condition and social expectations surrounding gender.

Fevvers reclaims and embraces her body through its so-called monstrous connections to other females. She is one of the tableau vivants, visual objects displayed in the museum, stripped of subjectivity. She is described as

> "*Marvellous, indeed, but a marvellous monster, an exemplary being denied the human privilege of flesh and blood, always the object of the observer, never the subject of sympathy, an alien creature forever estranged… As an anomaly, she would become again, as she once had been, an exhibit in a museum of curiosities.*" (Carter, 1984, p. 95)

Fevvers's description as a marvellous monster juxtaposes fear and wonder. She is described as both unsettling and captivating. Her decision to accept her monstrous nature symbolizes her rejection of attachment to usual categories of existence. She challenges the traditional boundary between human and nonhuman, which is requisite for humans' privileged identity. Hence, she is a monstrous threat to reason and patriarchal control. However, there is something beautiful in her anomaly, a recognition of wonder in difference, she turns into an object of curiosity and fascination. "*Despite the fact that the horrific often recontains challenges to the status quo by scaring people into submission and solidifying the boundaries of the "normal;' the horrific can also function as a site of resistance and subversion*" (Alaimo, 2000, p. 176). Alaimo explores the dual nature of horrific in relations to social norms, it has potential for both reinforcing and rejecting the status quo. To maintain the boundaries of "*normal*", those in power use fear-based control to solidify boundaries and make the normal seem safe and desirable, and discourage nonconformity by making deviance appear abnormal and dangerous. On the other hand, horror functions as a medium for social critique and transformation. Just as Fevvers's grotesque body dissolves the rigid boundaries between human and nonhuman and lacks stability, it is associated with the unknown and the deviant, which creates a sense of fear towards anybody who steps outside of established norms. In this respect, Fevvers claims freedom and agency by embracing her monstrousness. Her body provides her with more chances for intervention in her nature. The association of a woman's body with nature and animality motivates women to resist and fight against the normative ideas of gender, identity and body in the novel.

Carter presents a relation between the representation of the human body and its possible implications for hybrid bodies in terms of gaining subjectivity and individual freedom from society's expectations and limitations. Fevvers embarks on a journey to discover her subjectivity, so she leaves behind her immobile roles in the brothel and museum and joins Kearney's circus, a modern version exhibiting what is unusual. She acknowledges her difference, and her being other and displaying

her body becomes a means of power, particularly financial power, for her. She reverses her objectification by the male gaze into her financial, sexual, and sensual benefits and controls her fate, thoughts and feelings. She takes part in the financial exchange system of the patriarchal culture. Luce Irıgaray critiques the commodification of the female body, which is pushed to a point where the value is connected to the extent of exploitation. She argues that "*Prostitution amounts to usage that is exchanged. Usage that is not merely potential: it has already been realized. The woman's body is valuable because it has already been used. In the extreme case, the more it has served, the more it is worth*" (1985, p. 186). This reflects the capitalist logic of exploitation and commodification: the more the body is used, the more it becomes valuable. A female body is not valued for its inherent qualities but for how much it has been used by males.

However, Fevvers profits from her unique body and gains theatrical fame in Petersburg as an object of wonder and admiration. Her choice of showing off her unusual body as a circus aerialist to the audience proves that she transforms into a self-determined, self-made and empowered twentieth-century woman who hardly escapes from imprisonment, idolization, and death. Mary Russo discusses taboos around the female body. She highlights that when a female makes a spectacle out of herself with her unruly body, she disrupts the limits of social constructions, stating, "*Making a spectacle out of herself had more to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries*" (Russo, 1994, p. 53). Similarly, Fevvers embraces and finds value or meaning in disorder, distortion and excess, these elements create a space for exploring the margins of society's human experience. According to the phallocentric discourse of identity, she is an object of gaze, an excess and a freak. Rather than hiding to avoid being described as a monster or being objectified, Fevvers voluntarily chooses to expose her body to the male eyes by displaying her body as an aerialist. In her performances, she escapes from the norms and discourses of the patriarchy by being a fantastical creature or a posthuman being. She says, "*From fourteen to seventeen, I existed only as an object in men's eyes…since it is not to the mercies of the eyes of others that we commit ourselves on our voyage through the World*" (Carter, 1984, p. 22).

Fevvers feels the authority of the males' gaze over her body; however, she is aware that the males' gaze is necessary for her to have an identity. She displays her body as an art object and performs with her corporal signs in exaggerated terms: "*Her hair was hidden away under the dyed plumes that added a good eighteen inches to her already immense height*" (Carter, 1984, p. 6). The deliberate and excessive display of Fevvers's body reveals the artificiality of her construction as a woman and expresses her desire for a different subjectivity. Her bodily performance undermines the essentialized association between body and gender. She reverses the discursive construction of femininity, exaggerating the feminine style attributed to women. She manipulates her specular objectification to her advantage and calls on to be looked at, she says, "*Look at me! With a grand, proud, ironic grace, she exhibited herself before the eyes of the audience as if she were a marvellous present too good to be played with. Look, not touch*" (Carter, 1984, p. 6). Her performance is more than showing off, it is a kind of self-aware charm. She accepts her spectacle while subtly parodying the audience's fascination with her. She shows herself as something extraordinary, marvellous and rare to be gazed at, but also somewhat untouchable. She sets a distance between herself and the audience, withholding intimacy. Her self-display is a deliberate act of control over how she is gazed at and how much she allows herself to be touched or consumed by others. Her identity is shaped by the audience's gaze, "*the discipline of the audience that kept [her] in trim*" (Carter, 1984, p. 165). The audience constrains and maintains her identity and limits her autonomy; on the other hand, the audience's gaze and attention compel her to remain in a certain state. Although the men confine her within the conventional definitions and classify her into roles, she acquires agency and autonomy, controlling the male gaze. Fevvers provides the tension between personal autonomy and the demands of being a public figure.

Fevvers learns to navigate her public and private selves within the confines of societal expectations. For example, she frees her body from the confines of her corset. Carter, by using the corset, which painfully constrains a woman's body, alludes to Queen Elizabeth and Thatcher's public images of powerful women. She creates Fevvers as a fictional reflection of Thatcher, who tears apart

familiar symbols and conventions about the meaning of being a woman and defies the fixed and eternal concepts. Fevvers appears as a powerful commercial public image that flies in the face of traditional perceptions and categorizations. "*Her power in the public realm also draws on her manipulation of male mythologizing of women and confirms that she understands 'the importance of mythic construction and the value of publicity*" (Stoddart, 2007, p. 10).

Her reconstruction or reinvention of herself aligns with the idea that gender can be reconstructed and performed in empowering ways. Fevvers flies free of the power of the patriarchal figures who try to captivate, rape or murder her. For example, Grant Duke who is a "*collector of all kinds of objets d'art and marvels. Of all things…best toys- marvellous and unnatural artefacts*" (Carter, 1984, p. 110) thinks that Fevvers's body is suitable for his gallery as an extraordinary and expensive object to be looked at in a cage. He reduces animals to human artefacts, and in the same way, he desires to transform Fevvers, the winged woman, into a human artefact by confining her in a cage. After seeing an ice sculpture of a bird in a cage, Fevvers senses the duke's plan to imprison her and turn her into a Fabergé egg. Moreover, Christian Rosencreutz, who names her Flora, Azrael, and Venus Pandemos, desires to make her a mythical sacrifice to contribute to men's immortality and ego. She struggles with the constraints and tyrannies and refuses to take the tragic role of passive victim or threatening femme fatale. "*Fevvers revels in her sexuality, literally rises above those who seek to harm and imprison her, flies free of both mythic and social constraints*" (Munford, 2006, p. 197).

Nights at the Circus is "*Angela Carter's fin de siècle fantasy anticipates the new century as an era of radical transformation and change*" (Carroll, 2000, p. 187). The narration reviews the advances towards the 20th century. Fevvers, who begins her journey in the 19th century, withdraws from the symbols of the 19th-century patriarchy, the brothel and the Museum of Woman Monsters and heads to the 20th century. From the wreckage of the crashed train, she comes up as a new woman who is neither submissive nor aggressive. She appears as a proto-feminist who establishes her self-confidence and gains power and independence by relying on her inner essence. She says,

> "*My being, my me-ness, is unique and indivisible. To sell the use of myself for the enjoyment of another is one thing; I might even offer freely, out of gratitude or in the expectation of pleasure, and pleasure alone is my expectation from the young American.*" (Carter, 1984, p. 165)

Carter interrogates gendered power structures, presenting a new paradigm of femininity. For example, she subverts masculinity in the legend of Helen of Troy in which Zeus the male god tricks and rapes the female, Fevvers is not raped or tricked by the male. She erotically observes Walser's body, she is the new woman who plays tricks and seduces a man in disguise. She reverses her object position as a woman to her advantage by being involved in the object-subject dichotomy. Although Walser has come just for an interview to learn the reality of her embodiment, he is fascinated by Fevvers. As a result, he follows her on her circus tour to Petersburg as a clown in the circus. After Ex-convicts attack their train during their journey, the circus train crashes in the wilderness of Siberia. The ex-convicts surround those who survived the attack. Meanwhile, one of Fevvers's wings is broken, and the ex-convicts who relate Fevvers to their queen help her. During this period, she becomes aware of falling in love with Walser. After the attack, Walser is found by women who escape from a panopticon prison. Walser, who has lost his memory, becomes childlike and seemingly mad and loiters helplessly through the Siberian wilderness until a shaman who appears to be transgressing Western concepts of rationality finds him. Fevvers and Walser reunite and get married at the beginning of a new century, which implies a new order regarding gender relations. Walser "*starts as a sceptical observer of Fevvers but who is during the novel broken apart and remade into a 'New Man' fit to love Fevvers as a representative New Woman*" (Bristow & Broughton, 1997, p. 62).

Carter creates a new world order in which females who have no history, definition and models become free from the bounds, beliefs, history and binaries of patriarchy. Fevvers becomes a new woman in the new era and "*represents a new beginning for women*" (Punday, 2002, p. 807). Lizzie states the infinite possibilities of self-definition for Fevvers, she says, "*You never existed before. There's nobody*

to say what you should do or how to do it. You are Year One. You haven't any history and there are no expectations of you except the ones you yourself create" (Carter, 1984, p. 115). She transgresses conventional gender boundaries and hierarchies in the culture, dismantling anthropocentric and patriarchal power dynamics that resonate with the concerns of posthuman feminism. Fevvers undergoes a series of transformations from a tableau vibrant to a monster, from an attractive aerialist to an autonomous woman; her transformations in terms of societal role and gender identity reflect posthuman ideas of the potentiality of the body being flux and fluidity of identity. Her transformation deconstructs social expectations and reconstructs femininity. In line with Butler's idea, "*Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler, 1999, p. 179). Fevvers performs diverse roles to prove how her gender is socially constructed.

To sum up, Carter, who is among the prolific contributors to posthuman feminist discourse, deals with feminist concerns about identity, gender and body. *Nights at the Circus* provides a rich landscape for examining the posthuman condition. Carter disrupts traditional notions of humanism and femininity, creating fixed categories or hierarchical views of identity. By dealing with female figures, she blurs the boundaries of what it means to be a woman. The bodies of the female figures represent the undoing of conventional binary oppositions underpinning Western thought and modern institutions. Carter reimagines women's bodies as entities that foster a more inclusive, broader approach to gender, identity and body. The protagonist Fevvers's corporeal particularity disrupts the accepted norms, values, boundaries and essentialism, defined by humanism and presents a critique of the patriarchal structures that bound women's bodies and construct women's identities. She figures the borderline between human and nonhuman, man and woman, wonder and freak and common and uncommon, she stands on a fragile and shifting area between internal and external boundaries. Fevvers's body, which generates fluidity, hybridity, and inclusiveness, makes her appear as a posthuman female, as a new woman.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the way Carter's narrative depicts a posthuman feminist re-imagining of the body in *Nights at the Circus,* a story about a woman who was hatched from an egg and happens to be winged. The narrative moves from Sophia Fevvers's childhood to her being a great aerialist in Petersburg and joining Colonel Kearney's circus on its Grand Imperial Tour. Afterwards, the narration develops into the Siberian section following the train crash in the wilderness. To engage with the problems the females encounter, Carter engages with the different periods of her life and her roles as a winged aerialist, an object of the gaze, an excess, a freak, a carnivalesque figure and a proto-feminist. Through Fevvers's tale, Carter parodies and subverts the representation of female figures in traditional narratives and questions the embodiment of a woman's association with certain stereotypical forms. As a bird-woman, Fevvers has a body that cannot be easily identified or acculturated. Throughout the novel, she rejects defining her body as fact or fiction, real or artificial, human or animal. Her rejection of being either situates her outside the binary logic. Fevvers's hybrid construction of woman and bird destabilises the established humanist notions of identity and embodiment. Her hybrid construction of human and non-human crosses the boundaries of social norms imposed on women. This study investigates how the novel mainly deals with boundaries and how these boundaries are disclosed. Fevvers and other females who move beyond boundaries of what is considered feminine are abjected and have different configurations of female subjectivity. Fevvers has created alternative identitiesin response to the changing conditions. Her posthuman body facilitates the possibility of revision and subversion of the patriarchal perception of gender.

Carter's choice of protagonist functions as a mechanism for deconstructing the traditionally constructed norms. She replaces the traditional world with a new world order, which includes

posthuman bodies. In this respect, she explores the essence and validity of humanism and shatters traditional views on pure human essence. Fevvers imitates that femininity imposed on her bodily boundaries of human beings is no longer based on traditional dichotomies of human and nonhuman. She deconstructs the definitions of the human as autonomous, superior to or disconnected from nature and the association of a woman's body with nature, which functions as a source of othering and violence against women. She highlights the idea of humans still being part of nature. She approves of posthuman perceptions that underline agency in interconnected relationships with multiple other beings. Moving towards the future with confidence, she becomes a new woman who metaphorically flies from the discourses that define women as passive objects of the male gaze. She states that all women will break free from the constraints placed on their bodies and minds, and she will no longer endure such sufferings. In the end, Carter suggests a utopian vision in which women are going beyond the limits set by traditional gender roles.

Genişletilmiş Özet

Angela Carter yirminci yüzyılın sonlarında İngiltere'nin önde gelen kadın yazarlarından biri olmuştur. Eserlerinde, feminist duyarlılık, büyülü gerçeklik, sosyal ve siyasi eleştiriye yer vererek edebiyatın cesur ve farklı seslerinden birisi olmuştur. Özellikle kadınları ve kadınların hayatını etkileyen kültürel tartışmalarla ilgilenmiştir. Ataerkil toplumda toplumsal cinsiyetin inşasını sorgulamış, kadınların ataerkil düzene karşı direnişi ve özgürleşme deneyimlerini eserlerinde ele almıştır. Carter, eserlerinde kadınların karşıt imajını sunarak, onların toplumdaki ve edebiyat dünyasındaki yerlerini tanımlamaya yönelik bir tutum sergiler. Eserlerindeki kadınlar sıra dışı ve güçlendirilmiş roller üstlenerek, geleneksel toplumsal rollerinden, sosyal kalıplardan, erkek baskıcı güçlerinden kurtarmak için mücadele ederler. Carter eserlerinin çoğunda cinsiyet rollerini pekiştirmeyi amaç edinen mitoloji, peri masalları ve diğer geleneksel anlatılarındaki kadın imgesini yeniden yapı bozuma uğratarak yeniden inşa ederek yazar. Batı medeniyetinin temelini oluşturan geleneksel ikiliklerin arasına çekilen kesin çizileri eserlerinde kaldırır.

Sirk Geceleri romanında doğal ve değişmez olarak yapılandırılan ve geleneksel anlatılarla pekiştirilen toplumsal cinsiyet dinamiklerini, kadınlara yüklenilen imgeleri, kadın bedeninin tasvirinin netleştirilmesini ve bastırılmasını ele alarak altüst ediyor. Fraklı bedensel formlara sahip insanlardan oluşan bir dünya yaratıyor ve posthüman bedene sahip bir kadın kahramanın hayatı üzerinden hem sosyal hem cinsiyetçi sorunlara değinerek, ataerkil yapının kalıplarını yıkıyor. Cinsiyet, kimlik ve güç konusunda daha kapsayıcı bir anlayışı sunmaktadır.

Bu çalışmanın amacı Angela Carter'ın *Sirk Geceleri* (1984) romanındaki beden kavramını posthüman feminist açıdan incelemektir. Çalışma, posthüman feminist insan ya da kadın olma anlayışının romana nasıl yansıdığına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışmanın birinci bölümünde posthüman feminist kuramın kısaca anlatılasından sonra ikinci bölümde Carter'ın romanda kullandığı posthüman feminist teknikler incelenmektedir. Bu bölüm, romanın yakın metinsel incelemesidir, Carter'ın cinsiyetler ve türler arasındaki etkileşimleri nasıl ortaya çıkardığına ve değişken, esnek kimlikleri nasıl romana nasıl yansıttığına dair içgörürleri ele almaktadır. Esas olarak ana karakter Sophia Fevvers'ın insanlardan tamamen farklı olan bedeniyle Carter'ın insan ne demek ve ne olmaktadır anlayışını nasıl anlattığını araştırtır.

Nispeten yeni bir düşünce kategorisi olan posthümanizm, önceki Batı düşünce anlayışı olan hümanizmine dayanmaktadır. Posthümanizmin 'post' ön eki her ne kadar hümanizmin sonu gibi görense de hümanizme atfedilen sabit tanımların sonudur. Hümanist anlayışın özellikleri ve eksiklikleri ile ilgilenir ve geleneksel hümanizmin ötesine geçer, bir nevi hümanizmden kopuş ve uzaklaşmadır. Hümanizmin tarihsel yapılandırması olan ve evrenselleştirilmiş insan ve insan-merkezci anlayışı ile ilgilenir. Hümanizm, insan aklını evrenin merkezine yerleştirerek ve insan ve insan olmayanın aralarına kesin çizgiler çekerek ayırır, bu ayrımla insanı ayrıcalıklı bir konuma, merkezi bir konuma yerleştirir. İnsanı, cinsiyetleştirilmiş, türleştirilmiş, doğallaştırılmış diğerlerinden kategorik ve niteliksel olarak farklı öne sürer. Evrendeki tüm yaşamın birbirine

bağlılığını reddeder. Bu da insanla insan olmayanlar arasında eşit olmayan bir ilişki yaratır ve insan olmayanların dışarıda bırakılıp öteki konumuna indirgemesiyle sonuçlanır. Posthümanizm, insan merkezciliğin sonunu işaret eden ve yeni alternatiflere daha olumlu bakan bir anlayıştır. Başak bir deyişle, insan öznesinin kavramsallaştırılmasının alternatif yollarını detaylandırır.

Hümanizmin erkek merkezli ideallerini eleştiren feminist kuram ile posthümanizmin kesişmesiyle ortaya çıkan posthüman feminizm insanı ve özellikle erkeği idealize eden ve insan olmayan veya kadını kontrol etmenin etik zeminini ortaya koyan hümanizmi eleştirir. İnsan ve insan olmayan, erkek ve kadın, zihin ve beden, kültür ve doğa, vb. kavramları ve bu kavramların arasına çekilen sınırları değerlendirip yeniden tanımlarken, geleneksel insan kavramlarının ötesine geçer. Posthüman feministler, alternatif ve dönüştürücü oluş yollarını ortaya çıkarmaya yönelik devam eden süreci beslemeyi ve uygulamayı arzularlar. İnsanın ne olduğuna dair evrensel ve sabit kavramları reddederler, güç dinamiklerini, dayatılan rolleri, ötekileştirilmiş kimliklerin bakış açısından sorgularlar. İnsanı ve insan olmayan, erkek ve kadın, kültür ve doğa arasındaki kesin sınırları bulanıklaştırıp birleştiren daha kapsayıcı ve dinamik bir kimlik anlayışı önerirler. Doğal ve kültürel bedenler arasındaki ayrımı reddederler, bedenin doğal ve kültürel dünyaların, teknolojik, ırksal, türsel, cinsiyetçi ayrımların melez birikimleri olduğuna inanırlar. Posthüman bedenler biyolojik ve sosyal farklılıkları ortadan kaldırırlar.

Angela Carter'ın *Sirk Geceleri* adlı eseri özellikle kadın bedeni ve kadın bedeninin nesnelleştirilmesi başta olmak üzere toplumsal cinsiyet meselelerine ilişkin güncel tartışmalara katkı sağlayan posthüman feminist açıdan tartışılabilir. Esnek kimliklerin vücut bulmuş hali ikili ayrımlara meydan okuyan posthüman kadınlarla dolu bir dünya sunmakla beraber anlatım ana karakter Sophia Fevvers'in hikâyesi etrafında dönmektedir. Fevvers'in 1899'da Londra'da canlı tablo ve St. Petersburg'da bir sirk sanatçısı olarak yaşadığı maceraları anlatırken kadın öznelliğini, kimliğini ve bedenini şekillendiren ve disipline eden 19.yüzyıl sosyo-politik fikir ve kuramlarını eleştirir. Fevvers'i modern dönemin bir temsilcisi olarak kurgular. Mitler, peri masalları ve kinayeler aracılığı ile geçmişin ve günün sosyo-politik konularına değinir.

Kuşkanatlarına sahip olan Fevvers posthüman bedenlere sahip olanların etkileyici bir temsilcisidir. Romanda Carter, Fevvers'in posthüman deneyimlerini anlatır. Kanatlarına rağmen Fevvers bir hayvan değildir aynı zamanda onun bedeni insanlardan tamamen farklıdır. Fevvers'ın insan ve hayvan ikililiklerinin arasına çekilen sınırları ihlal eden ve sınırları aşan bedeni ile cinsiyete ve türe özgü kalıpları bozmaktadır. Fevvers bedeniyle insanın özerk, doğadan üstün ve kopuk olarak tanımlanmasının ötesine geçer. İnsanların hala doğanın bir parçası olduğu fikrini vurgular.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alaimo, S. (2000). *Undomesticated ground: recasting nature as feminist space*. Cornell University Press.

Binding, T. J. (1982). *Firebird 1: Writing today*. Penguin Books.

Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable weight, feminism, western culture, and the body*. University of California Press.

Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Policy Press.

Braidotti, R. (2022). *Posthuman feminism*. Polity Press.

Bristow, J. & Broughton, T. L. (1997). *The infernal desires of Angela Carter: fiction, femininity, feminism*. Longman Inc.

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble feminism and the subversion of ıdentity*. Routledge.

Carroll, R. (2000). Return of the century: time, modernity, and the end of history in Angela Carter's "Nights at the Circus." *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 30, 187–201. https://doi.org/10.2307/3509252

Carter, A. (1984). *Nights at the Circus.* Vintage.

Clarke, B. & Rossini, M. (2017). *The Cambridge companion to literature and the posthuman*. Cambridge University Press.

Dennis, A. (2008). "The spectacle of her gluttony": the performance of female appetite and the Bakhtinian grotesque in Angela Carter's "Nights at the Circus." *Journal of Modern Literature,* 31(4), 116–130. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25167573

Finney, B. H. (1998). Tall tales and brief lives: Angela Carter's "Nights at the Circus." *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 28(2), 161–185. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225490

Foucault, M. (2005). *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences*. Taylor and Francis e-Library.

Gamble, S. & Watz, A. (2025). *Angela Carter's futures: representations, adaptations and legacies.* Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Gilbert, S. M. & Gubar, S. (2020). *The madwoman in the attic: the woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*. Yale University Press.

Gustar, J. (2004). Re-membering Cassandra, or Oedipus gets hysterical: contestatory madness and illuminating magic in Angela Carter's "Nights at the Circus." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 23(2), 339–369. https://doi.org/10.2307/20455193

Haraway, D. (1991). *A cyborg manifesto: science, technology, and socialist feminism in the late twentieth century*. Routledge.

Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How we became posthuman: virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics.* The University of Chicago Press.

Irigaray, L. (1985). *This sex which is not one*. Cornell University Press.

Kristeva, J. (2024). *Powers of horror: an essay on abjection*. Columbia University Press

Kerchy, A. (2008). *Body-text in the novels of Angela Carter: writing from a corporeagraphic point of view*. The Edwin Mellen Press.

Munford, R. (2006). *Re-visiting Angela Carter: texts, contexts, intertexts*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Punday, D. (2002). Narrative performance in the contemporary monster story. *The Modern Language Review*, 97(4), 803–820. https://doi.org/10.2307/3738613

Russo, M. (1994). *The female grotesque: risk, excess and modernity*. Routledge.

Sage, L. (1992). *Women in the house of fiction: post-war women novelists*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Stoddart, H. (2007). *Angela Carter's Nights at the Circus*. Routledge.

Weiss, G. and Cohen, J. J.(2003). *Thinking the limits of the body*. State University of New York Press.

Wolfe, C. (2010). *What is Posthumanism?* University of Minnesota Press.

SUİTDER
SDÜ İNSAN VE TOPLUM BİLİMLERİ DERGİSİ
Süleyman Demirel University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Makale Bilgileri:	
Etik Kurul Kararı:	*Etik Kurul Kararından muaftır.*
Katılımcı Rızası:	*Katılımcı yoktur.*
Mali Destek:	*Çalışma için herhangi bir kurum ve projeden mali destek alınmamıştır.*
Çıkar Çatışması:	*Çalışmada kişiler ve kurumlar arası çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.*
Telif Hakları:	*Çalışmada kullanılan görsellerle ilgili telif hakkı sahiplerinden gerekli izinler alınmıştır.*
Article Information:	
Ethics Committee Approval:	*It is exempt from the Ethics Committee Approval*
Informed Consent:	*No participants.*
Financial Support:	*The study received no financial support from any institution or project.*
Conflict of Interest:	*No conflict of interest.*
Copyrights:	*The required permissions have been obtained from the copyright holders for the images and photos used in the study.*