
Angela Carter's *Nights at The Circus*: A Feminist Spatial Journey to Emancipation and Gender Justice

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Abstract

*Mobility can be considered as a natural characteristic of human beings, regardless of gender, sex or geographical roots. Within the feminist postmodern context, mobility ushers women in a new world based on gender equality and tolerance. Angela Carter's *Nights at The Circus* displays a female character who achieves her New Woman status while traveling from one country to another, as a circus aerialist. Fevvers' train journey from London to Siberia, together with her lover, empowers her female being. Space proves to be a substantial prerequisite for the achievement of the human subjectivity whether the female or the masculine one. Carter's heroine succeeds to overcome the patriarchal misogynist attitude that surrounds her professional career and ends by achieving her female subjectivity. Besides, she triumphs to metamorphose Walser from the traditional male figure who looks to debunk Fevvers' claimed bird origin, into the new postmodern man who believes in gender equality and surrenders to Fevvers' love. All along their journey, Fevvers, Walser and other female characters, undergo a deep transformation at the level of their personal growth and subjectivities. They overcome their culturally internalized beliefs, to be prepared for a life based on equal principles and free from the imposed patriarchal cultural constraints.*

Keywords: *Mobility; Female Subjectivity; New Woman; Gender Justice; Gaze; Freedom.*

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Introduction

Mobility is a rich concept that engulfs copious meanings and lends itself to a plethora of studies, as it can be related to the human inner psyche as well as the physical displacement and body movements. In all cases, we feel that “no path has been determined in advance, no distance laid down, no enchainment prescribed” (qtd. in Miller 151), hence the human feelings of an unprecedented freedom. The relationship between mobility and freedom is reciprocal in that mobility brings up freedom and the latter is achieved through change and movement whether physical or psychological. The desire to move and escape the chains of settlements is innate to the human nature. The feeling of being free to think or to move from one place to another leads to progress and inspiration. Within this framework, this article will explore a convergence between female mobility and freedom. In Angela Carter’s *Nights at The Circus*, the females’ spatial mobility leads to their mental and spiritual emancipation and traces a threshold to attain their independent female subjectivity.

In contradistinction to the bygone literary depictions of women as passive creatures who seek shelter in their households, the underhand article will attempt to consider emancipated female characters who give themselves up to a boundless spatial adventure. The relationships between women’s liberation, their realization of gender justice and their spatial flexibility have not been thoroughly and conspicuously explored within literature. *Nights at The Circus* is a novel about female postmodern dislocation and constant mobility. Compared with her other works mainly: *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Bloody Chamber*, the writer achieves innovation in *Nights at The Circus* when she excels in creating an unprecedented female character who evades all patriarchal rules and, more importantly, succeeds in metamorphosing her lover; Walser into the new man who believes in gender equality.

My approach to the theme of space, mobility and female emancipation tends to be different from the previous academic researches, in that it dwells on a gender reconciliation between the liberated new woman and the transformed new man. Hence, contrary to the preceding scientific writings which depict the antagonistic relation between females and males who seek to impose their patriarchal and ideological grip on the former, my article will try to highlight a more tolerant, lenient and equal gender relationship based on love and justice (Imran and Hart 2019). The female character’s flight and spatial journey is studied from an aesthetic angle envisaging the interrelation between the female body and soul and their reciprocal interaction through movements and performance. Likewise, the limelight in my research paper will be the delineation of the female body and soul through space and mobility as a backlash to the dogmatic and confining traditional patriarchal discourse and scope.

The book clearly shows how women’s liberation from their spatial confinement and traditional locations inspire them to liberate themselves from the crippling systemic patriarchal order. What is more, new definitions of femaleness and transformations of gender relations are attained by the end of the female characters’ journey. Space and mobility prove to be part and parcel of gender relations, taking into consideration the traditional prescribed locations for males and females that worked previously to widen the gap between both of them.

Analysis

Women have been traditionally considered as “the angel[s] in the house” (Wolf 58), as Virginia Wolf asserts, while their male counterparts are promoted to discover the outside world. However, this “angel” indulges in a revolutionary journey to re-appropriate her natural freedom. In this context, Wolf avers: “it was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her” (qtd.in Davis 142). The feminist rebellious movement has demonstrated that gender hierarchies and role divisions are culturally- constructed rather than innately given. The feminist postmodern female overcomes the interiorized patriarchal

ideologies by metaphorically killing the submissive female part in their personalities. What Wolf actually connotes by “ I killed her” is the fact of subduing the ideological male ascribed part of herself, so as to write and express herself without cultural taboos. The figurative language of “killing her” encapsulates the new woman¹'s insurgent attitude without which, women would remain eternally ancillary to the patricentric jurisdiction.

Gender outcomes [...] are about equitable decision-making power, shared control over assets and income, personal safety, mobility, equitable interpersonal relations and having voice and agency. They are about transforming the relationship between men and women so that women as well as men are able to claim and exercise their human rights. (Abbot 8)

With the resurgence of the contemporary feminist trends in the late 1960's² and more accurately with the advent of the postmodern feminist alliance, various postfeminist scholars, critics and writers like Angela Carter, Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva and Lorna Sage have interrogated and reapproached gender relations, by blurring binaries and portraying female heroines who are licensed to opt for their freely chosen spaces, jobs and style of lives to achieve their mental emancipation and promote gender justice. Studying it from a global angle, during the twentieth and twenty- first centuries, significant transformations have covered gender liaisons, family relationships and social political and economic structures, accordingly, power balance has been adapted and adjusted at all decision-making levels. In *Nights at The Circus*, the female characters come to terms with themselves and attain their releasing following their constant mobility. They undertake a circus journey during which they undergo a spiritual and psychological metamorphosis accompanied by a physical emancipation, reflecting the inborn mobile human nature. Ultimately, I will divide my forthcoming analysis into two parts: The first will deal with the female psychological and spiritual escapism and mental mobility within the boundaries of the limited brothel, while the second part will tackle the Siberian experience, as a utopian destination, where the characters fulfil their dreams to bring off gender equality, freedom and individual female and male subjectivities.

To start with, Fevvers is typically associated with mobility and displacement. Her name mirrors her bird -origin that permits her to metaphorically fly and overcome her traditional male -defined place. From the inception, she is presented to the reader as a hatched woman, rather than born. She has no roots that hold her to the ground, however described as a feathered female, born to be mobile and to fly over the bygone metaphysical traditions. The fact of appropriating wings, similar to birds, asserts her dislocation and geographical flexibility. Introducing herself to the American journalist Walser, Fevvers announces: “I never docked via the normal channels, sir, oh, [...] but, just like Helen of Troy, was hatched” (Carter 3). The divulgence of the secret of being hatched holds up the heroine's spatial mobility. She doesn't bear any relation to her female predecessors who have been dominated by the patriarchal order and who used to be bound to the conjugal relations and to households. From her birth, Fevvers severs with the past female generations and embarks on a neo-feminist postmodern journey. Mobility procures Fevvers with freedom and escape from the male domination. Via the symbolic body of Fevvers, Carter advances her principle of “the constructedness of femininity” (Sceats qtd.in Sttodart 84). Femininity is a culturally- invented and internalized abstract precept that helped to enslave

¹ New woman is a concept deployed to refer to the females of the late 19th and twentieth centuries who have resisted the patriarchal ideologies and have sought to gain a foothold in the world by asking for their human rights and notably gender equality.

² “Women's movements include single-issue campaigns such as those for abortion rights ; more- based campaigns as the working women's Charter movement in Britain in the 1970's ; and the mobilization of particular categories of women. [...] The issues around which independent women's movements have emerged include civil rights, especially suffrage ; equal political, economic and sexual rights ; social purity and temperance ; anti-slavery ; lesbianism ; disability ...” (Sonya etal. 290-91)

women and downgrade them to an inferior position compared to males. Carter emancipates the female body from the previously imposed archaic ideological chains by designing Fevvers' mythic body. "Feminists have sought to move beyond the constraints of the body. The female body limits women's capacity for equality and transcendence; it is a hindrance to be overcome, an obstacle to be surmounted if equality is to be attained" (Grosz15).

Part of the systemic patriarchal domination, the female body has been viewed as metaphorically hindering women from seeking an independent life based on their free will. This fact can be explained by the biological nature of the female body and motherhood obligations that restraint women from taking a firm foothold in the cause of gender equality (Imran 2019). Hence, Carter creates a fantastic female body which is competent enough to escape the grip of patriarchal chains. Fevvers' gigantic body is severed from the traditional submissive female category which accepted wholeheartedly to be "the angel of the house". Her newly acquired fanciful body is detached from any spatial location that might limit her progress and improvement. It is a gigantic female body, purposefully fashioned to surmount the geographical barriers and excel the masculine potentiality. Fevvers is presented to the reader as a circus aerialiste capable of flying by means of her distinctive wings which are the reason behind her fame.

She was twice as large as life [...] intended to be seen, not handled. Look! Hands off! Look AT ME! She rose up on tiptoe and slowly twirled round, giving the spectators a comprehensive view of her back: seeing is believing [...], her wings spread, too, a polychromatic unfolding fully six feet across, spread of an eagle, a condor, an albatross fed to excess. (Carter 13)

The character of Fevvers is designed to perform within the circus and her body is sketched to actively move beyond the constraints delineated by the powerful dominant group. What is appealing in Carter's writing is the liberation of the female body which paves the way for women's mobility and freedom and inducts them into gender justice. Her volatile body ushers her into economic social and spatial mobility, whereby she chokes gender inequity and gains her new woman subjectivity. Fevvers "body is to be looked on, "not handled"" (13). Carter's creation of the character of Fevvers is a double-edged weapon: on the one hand it conveys the character's ability to fly and trespass the patriarchal limits and on the other hand it, implicitly, connotes the female body's victimization by the male gaze³, since her body is designed to be looked at. The performance and mobile nature of Fevvers do not proscribe the male dominance, rather they incite the masculine gaze that reassures the viewers of their power and virility.

To take it from a psychoanalytical perspective, gaze at its core meaning implies the intrusion upon someone's freedom and privacy. This is, actually, one aspect of Carter's feminist postmodern writing, as she ensures to delineate the limits of the postmodern feminist agenda, despite the unprecedented progress achieved by late twentieth century feminist activists. In *Nights at The Circus*, the writer figures out a neo female status that evades the patriarchal norms and views of women by transforming the traditional male figure into a more moderate and tolerant male, who does believe in gender justice and have confidence in the equal human rights. At this level, we come to underscore one innovative aspect in the present academic paper by highlighting the new postmodern gender relationship which is built on equity, mutual concern and empathy, at variance with the conventional, long-established hostility and dissension between the previous female and male generations, as it has been depicted and analyzed in copious foregoing academic writings. The new woman's liberation, body movements and

³ "In Freudian theory the gaze is theorized in terms of voyeurism and exhibitionism, the active and passive forms of scopophilia, or the drive to look. For Freud scopophilic drives play an important part in the quest for the mastery of the world. In the 1970s Film Theorist adopted the term for their theorization of SPECTATORSHIP. Laura Mulvey's classic essay 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' (1989a) utilizes the concept to explore the power relations of looking and represents the cinematic gaze as inherently masculine" (Sonya, et al 102)

performance through space generate an equal gender relationship and help to transmute the patriarchal figure into a loving equal partner to Fevvers.

Hence, Carter is inclined to be didactic [...]. In this respect she is deeply a political writer. Part of that politics has to do with the intersection between individuals and society, and one of the chief mechanisms of interaction, manifest in much of Carter's writing, is performance. (Sceats qtd. in Sttoddart 84)

For Carter, performance and mobility are powerful enough to fight against gender inequality and to correct the socially- interiorized female image. The heroine is designed to perform at the circus and to break the chains of patriarchy, though she cannot detain her male spectators from gazing at her female body. Fevvers' status of the postmodern new woman enables her to break free from the masculine spatial imprisonment, despite her entrapment by the male gaze. She undertakes a long spatial journey, accompanied by Colonel Kearney's circus, to end by achieving her new woman position. Each time she feels entrapped and endangered by a masculine threat, Fevvers resorts, successfully, to her female body as a weapon to set her free. Narrating her life circumstances to Walser, she recalls her experience at Madame Schrek's museum of monsters. Under the pressure of financial necessity, she joins the museum where she meets the masculine pervert visitors, who pay visits in order to fantasize at the grotesque characters without daring to touch them. Among these men, she reminisces the political figure: Mr Rosencreutz, who purchases her in order to martyrize her and extort from her female body, a rejuvenating -substance. As it comes in the narrative, he reveals a secret to her;

Artephius, invented a cabbalistic magnet which secretly sucked out the bodies of young women their mysterious spirit of efflorescence. [...] By applying a concentration of these spirits to himself by his magic arts, and continually rejuvenating himself, it [will be] spring all year long with [...]. (Carter 90)

Fevvers' unbounded body allures Mr Rosencreutz and promises him to preserve his male rejuvenation. This female body, which has been confined and enchained by the imposed male ideology, triumphs to challenge the binary opposition between "mobility /immobility [that] stand[s] at the core of traditional gender ideologies, which are infused with notions of space, place and mobility" (Hanson 9). Fevvers' fantastic body helps her to soar overhead and to escape her planned death. In contradistinction to the patriarchal divisions, Carter's heroine is showing permanent mobility while ensnaring the male ones within the confines of immobility, as evidence of the unnatural divisions of gender roles. Fevvers' mobility and ability to fly are the core reasons behind her survival and escape from Rosencrantz's clutch. "Quick as a flash, [...] I was off and out of that casement like greased lightning [...] I took refuge in a nearby spinney, in the top branches of an elm" (Carter 95-96). Fevvers emblematic wings hint to the female potential to glide over the masculine control by initiating their spatial mobility that certainly brings out their mental and spiritual mobility. The heroine who stands as the writer's prototype of the new woman eludes the masculine grip, thanks to her fantastic wings that ensure her physical movement.

All along the novel, the heroine resorts to mobility in order to attain her feminist goal of equal gender relations, with the new woman and the new man as equal partners. In this case we can assume that "mobility shapes gender [and] is empowering, and because it is empowering, more mobility, especially for women, is a good thing" (Hanson 9). Postmodern feminist writers such as Carter, have forged the idea that the essential essence of a woman is to attain gender justice and to indulge in spatial and mental mobility rather than to take roots in a specific household.

One prominent aspect of mobility in the novel is the presence of the train⁴ as an ongoing means of transport and which takes Fevvers to her final destination, where she realizes her feminist ambition. The deployment of the train is very telling since it reflects the mobility of the characters and their transformation into equal partners who overcome the metaphysical dogmatic beliefs and cling to postmodern feminist principles of gender equality and newly-acquired subjectivities. Besides, one important symbolic implication of the train is to convey the individual's clash between his/her inner yearnings and the socially imposed taboos and regulations that stand between the individual and his/her desired wishes (Imran et al. 2020). Thus, the train is allegorical for the characters' tormenting states of mind, notably, Fevvers and Walser who are torn between their personal desires and social obligations. During the rail road journey, Fevvers feels agonized by Ma Nelson's advice to evade Walser's love, for fear to be entrapped within the grips of conjugal obligations. Fevvers' consciousness is split between following her foster's mother advice or pursuing her love adventure and desires. Similarly, the American journalist Walser is torn between his professional task to divulge Fevvers' fake wings and his immense love for her. Thence, the train does not only convey their eagerness for freedom and mobility, as it does also symbolize their psychological dilemma and split between their outward collective commitments and their inward intimate eagerness.

Their journey ends in Siberia, following the train crash. Their new location far from the civilized British culture is a remote, uncivilized but a utopian⁵ land where Walser: Fevvers'lover endures a mental metamorphosis before regaining the position of the new man who seeks gender equity and dismantles the rigid binaries separating men and women. It is in that forgotten part of the world that Fevvers as well as Walser succeed to surpass the chains of the culturally- constructed gender relations which relegate women to an inferior position to males. In that primitive nature, Fevvers triumphs to transform Walser into the new man who abides by the principle of gender equality before marrying him.

The mobility of both characters help them find new meanings for gender relations and to etch a postmodern gender construction that preserve the different subjectivities of females and males separately. In this case, space and mobility help greatly to disentangle the social and cultural roots behind gender hierarchy. The American journalist who begins his journey as a traditional patriarchal figure and looks to reveal the fakeness of Fevvers' wings, ends by loving her as his equal mate, after she transmutes him into the new man. In this context he concludes: "Jack, ever an adventurous boy, ran away with the circus for the sake of a bottle in whose hands he was putty since the first moment he saw her. [...] now, hatched out of the shell of unknowing [...], I shall have to start all over again" (Carter 348-49).

Similar to Fevvers, Walser is hatched in Siberia and cuts off with the long- established patriarchal regulations. He goes through a mental and psychological transformations that initiate him into the world of gender justice. The lovers' steady travelling helps them to change their internalized gender tenets and to embrace their relationship regardless of the installed gender hierarchies. Through mobility, they come to understand the fluid nature of human beings and they thrive to reveal the cultural roots, lurking behind the construction of the gender divisions. Arriving to Siberia, they undergo a complete mental and ideological modifications which assist them to accept each other's equal, though peculiar and different subjectivity. Contrary to the traditional power-based gender relations which have been dealt with at length in various feminist writings. Fevvers and Walser have embarked on their pilgrimage, as already culturally -designed characters, and finish it as self - conscious new postmodern man and woman who believe in gender equality and acknowledge the distinctive male and female

⁴ Gary Jahn interprets the symbolism of the train as a "representation of the requirements and privileges of the social in the context of the thematic exploration of the conflict between the desires of the individual and the restrictions placed upon the gratification of those desires by the social." (qtd in Gary L 28)

⁵ Utopia "Sir Thomas More was the first to apply this word [...] to a literary genre where he named his imaginary republic Utopia (1516), a pun on *eutopia*, 'place (where all is) well'." (Cuddon 957)

subjectivities. They accomplish their gender mutability thanks to their volatile essence and physical mobility which procure them with mental mobility and personal emancipation.

Shifting my focus from the study of Fevvers to the other female characters, we come to the conclusion that their mobile nature secures them a feminist subjectivity, from which they have been deprived all along their years in the brothel. As a case in point, referring back to the prostitutes in Ma Nelson's brothel, these women create their own personal space where they practise diverse cultural activities during their free time and before the arrival of their clients. The setting seems to be incongruous for the performance of refined leisure and constructive activities such as playing music and reading, nonetheless the girls explored the space efficiently and turned its immoral aspects into educational, aesthetic and enlightening ones. The very same space which confines them within the patriarchal grip is overturned to become a cultural site where the prostitutes teach the male visitors various political and social issues. This example illustrates the females' mental and spiritual emancipation despite their physical and spatial limitations. In *Nights at The Circus*, the presentation of the brothel is extremely sarcastic since it reveals an opposite image to the socially viewed one. Carter's depiction of the setting and its atmosphere completely differs from the image conveyed by other writers belonging to previous literary trends, notably the Victorian age. She portrays not only the bad side of the brothel, but also affirms the positive human relations between the girls and their highly sophisticated and elegant manners and interests. The females are cultivated and politically active, looking to ensure their feminist subjectivity and to create their own personal feminine space within the male dominated brothel. Carter advances the argument that even the patriarchal claustrophobic space can be surmounted by the female characters who endeavour to liberate their minds and spirits even though physically imprisoned. With regards to the sisters in the brothel, claustrophobia is then surmounted mentally rather than physically, as a mutinying process to withstand male control.

Fevvers' portrait as depicted by her foster mother: Lizzie is the symbolic image of the new woman who is "a well-formed human female" (Carter 33) and capable of flying over the patriarchal wreckage, by comparison to the conventional submissive woman who resembles "a tiny pigeonlet" (33), unfit to hover highly and unleash her female body. Ironically speaking, Lizzie draws Fevvers's future on a paper, symbolizing her potential to fly as a "pigeonlet", though she is still incarcerated in a male space. The brothel, as a space for sexual activity, is sarcastically inverted into a cultural locality where the female characters "bent over their books" (33) and give free vent to their hobbies and artistic inclinations. This is to hint to the female revolutionary potential and ability to mentally escape the male incarceration, even though enclosed within a male supervised and guided space. As Wolf suggests "a woman must have [...] a room of her own" (1), where to release her female aptitude and unbreak the chains of the limited patriarchal space. In the brothel, the prostitutes succeed to create their own female worlds where they indulge in exploring their productive talents and culturally competing their male visitors. Within this particular male space, the prostitutes thrive to establish a counter - male space that preserves their individual female subjectivities. At this level, Carter succeeds to invert the patriarchal spatial divisions. The brothel is changed from a dismal location of lewdness into a vivid and vigorous place where the females enjoy their lives despite their masculine confinement.

Until the hour of eight, when work began [...] the girls kept to their rooms and the benign silence might be interrupted only by the staccato rattle of the typewriter as Grace practised her stenography or the lyric ripple of the flute upon which Esmeralda was proving to be something of a virtuoso. (Carter 42)

Undoubtedly, space in *Nights at The Circus*, is tightly linked to the females' subjectivities. It has no meaning without an interconnectivity with the females' 'spiritual and subjective worlds. However, with the death of the brothel's manager, the prostitutes find themselves compelled to leave the location, where they face new job opportunities and aspire

to leadership that preserve their dignities and singular female subjectivities. Ma Nelson's ex-prostitutes "celebrate the diversity and richness of the ways that women, often blocked by sexism and patriarchal norms, have found to resist and change the public agenda and empower others." (Sinclair 28). Their spatial mobility unfolded for them new feminist scopes for a postmodern feminist future, grounded mainly on equal gender relations. Most of them undertake more socially decent jobs and thrived financially by setting their own businesses, independently from males. When they usher from the brothel to the outside social world, they experience the first step towards gender equality and the safeguard of their perpetual female liberation. Leaving their previous location, the girls realize that "the limitations of women's mobility, in terms both of identity and space, has been [...] a crucial means of subordination" (Massey qtd. in Roberson 73). They realize their previously male dominated positions only after retiring from the brothel and experiencing freedom for the first time in their lives. This long-standing discussion around the interconnectedness of patriarchal dominance and women's spatial confinement can, thus, be resolved by the significance of the female spatial and mental mobility, as the foregoing steps before attaining gender justice. In this case, the spatial limitations of the brothel, contrary to Siberia, do not mirror the girls' sense of subjectivity which finds freeway in their mental emancipation.

The females' longing for escapism from the civilized world into the wilderness of Siberia, can be understood as a challenge to the heteronormative patriarchy. In this context, spatiality is defined as an extension of the females' subjectivities and a stage for the performance of the subjects. "Carter deploys spatial [...] metaphors considerably [...] to capture the states of emancipation [...] entrapment and repression encountered by the characters" (Hock Soon Ng 414). The novel's events take place mainly in two substantial spatial settings: the brothel where the females fail to attain their subjectivities or extend them as a continuation to the milieu and then comes Siberia, the utopian environment which is associated to and mirrors their subjectivities. During the train crash, Ma Nelson lost her "Father time" referring to her clock. Figuratively speaking, the characters indulge in a timeless adventure in the wild Siberia where they mould their new subjectivities and shape gender relations, mainly following Walser's oblivion. The place is a utopian one since all characters come to terms with themselves as well as with the others and procure gender justice.

The changing of locations comes about the females' release from the patriarchal material site. Similar to the other females within the novel, the prostitutes emancipate their female bodies and souls from the masculine control. Space and mobility are of great import in the female journey of liberation. Within the same novel, we are presented with a group of female prisoners who escape their confinement and take refuge in Siberia as well. They are jailed because they killed their husbands due to their atrocious and violent male demeanor. The female prison consists of deadly confined cells that cripple the female body and prevents it from growth and improvement. The limitation of space negatively affects the physical presence of many of the prisoners to the point of death.

During the hours of darkness, the cells were lit up like so many small theatres in which each actor sat by herself in the trap of her invisibility in those cells [...]. The Countess, in the observatory, [...] sat in a swivelling chair. She varied her speeds so that the inmates were never able to guess beforehand at just what moment they would come under her surveillance. (Carter 248)

Being jailed and gazed at during the whole day, the female prisoners feel suffocated and hindered from physical movement. The lack of freedom yields a new female retaliation notably under the gaze of the Countess. The latter submits the prisoners to her fixed gaze for the sake of dehumanizing and humiliating them. The act of gaze is inherently unjust since it empowers the person who gazes and undermines the position of those who are gazed at. What's remarkable is the correspondence between the cells and theatres to connote the theatricality of the prison, and that power relations between the prisoners and the controller is a mere theatrical

performance that can be overturned at any times. What strikes the reader first, while scrutinizing the description of the cells, is the tight connection with Michel Foucault's illustration of the prison and its detailed characteristics. Carter seems to design her prison image following the Foucauldian perception of the panopticon. In his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault depicts the panopticon as it comes:

By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. [...] Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap. (200)

The similarities between Carter's female prison and the Foucauldian panopticon are so conspicuous to the extent of revealing Carter's heavy intertextual reliance on previous literary reviews dealing with power relations. The deployment of such diction as "cells" "small theatres" "surveillance" "capture" "trap" conveys the lack of freedom and the strangling atmosphere. The heavy reliance on gaze, control and surveillance bears the torturing conditions that the prisoners are living in. The invisible Countess points her gaze to all the theatre-like cells and the prisoners, who undergo an unhuman torment, fall short to predict when they are gazed at. Comparable to Foucault, Carter denounces the misuse and overuse of power whether from a male dominant power or, in the case of the female prisoners, from a female dominance. Similarly, both writers stress the theatricality of the panopticon which implies that the correlation between the dominating part and the dominated counterpart is a circumstance of theatrical playing and transient performance that might be revoked. The female prisoners impersonate the actresses, while the Countess stands watching and plays the role of the unique spectator. However contrary to the staged dramatic performance, the prisoners are forced to play undesirable roles that usurp their freedom, intrude upon their privacies and threaten their lives. As Foucault asserts: "[power is] visible and unverifiable" (201). In the context of *Nights at The Circus*, the Countess embodies the visible power though she is invisible to the female prisoners. They are aware of their limited freedom and the presence of the Countess' gaze and authority but feel impotent to determine the very spatial location of this overwhelming commanding. Again, as it is agreed on by both Foucault and Carter, the exploitation of intense power yields insurrection among the inmates who progress toward being more and more conscious of their conquering distress and resort, as an adverse reaction, to the same weapon inflicted upon them which is the power of gaze. The prisoners avail themselves of a reciprocal gaze, seeking to consign each other a revolutionary message via their female telepathic powers, prior to moving on to desire as a reverse reaction to the patriarchal oppression. The aforementioned source of female persecution is deployed, by the prisoners, with its boomerang effect to kindle the blaze of freedom and spread love amid themselves.

Desire, that electricity transmitted by the charged touch [...] the stale air of the House of Correction lifted and stirred, was moved by currents of emancipation, of expectation, that blew the ripened seeds of love from cell to cell. [...] Contact was effected, first, by illicit touch and glance, and then by illicit notes. (Carter254)

Notwithstanding the strained control of the Countess and the smothering atmosphere within the female house of correction, the inmates find a way to rebel and break out of the jail. They create a unique feminine way of writing, using their menstrual blood whereby reuniting despite the countess' tight control. They revolt against her, succeed to run away from the prison and liberate themselves from the claustrophobic cells. The restriction of female liberty by confining the body brings forth revolution and total emancipation in the Siberian land. The re-appropriation of the physical freedom procures the prisoners with a chance to evade the masculine world and hold their destiny as a female community to mend their painful past. Once more, the female

physical mobility and their bolt for freedom lead to their mental, ideological, spatial and sexual emancipation.

It was an army of lovers who finally rose up against the Countess on the morning when the cages opened for the final exercise hour, - opened and never closed. [...] The prisoners came forth and all turned towards the Countess in one great, united look of accusation. [...] They locked up her door, took away the key. [...] They left [her] secured in her observatory with nothing to observe any longer but the specter of her own crime. (255-56)

The writer's choice of a female guard and not a male figure is meant to show that power relations and the binary dichotomy between the dominating and the dominated are mere cultural precepts and gender rules, presiding with no natural or innate roots. The binary of the preeminent masculinity over the controlled femaleness is verified to be a masquerade, maintained to uphold the profits of the patriarchal groups. The inmates escape the jail and lock the Countess in her observatory cell, forcing her to submit to the same torturing gaze experience which they went through. The female prisoners 'case is of a paramount importance to the whole novel seeing "its emphasis on the power of the human gaze to control and socially imprison its objects has important ramifications for fevvers who, after all, makes her living from courting the gaze of her paying customers" (Sttodart 24).

As I have already noted in the prior part of this article, even Fevvers who is equipped with wings to get over the patriarchal restrictions, is captured by the male gaze. Accordingly, the writer implicitly holds the patriarchal society accountable for the females' detainment and exposition to the dehumanizing and intimidating gaze. The victims have been stifled, ill-treated and tormented by their ex-husbands to the extent of committing mariticide as a way to free their souls and bodies. Unexpectedly, they find themselves entrapped within the cells of the Countess' house of correction, subduing her fatal gaze. Insurgence is evinced to be the sole process to insure mobility and freedom.

Conclusion

To sum it up, this article has attempted to study the relationship between spatial mobility and women's advancement and the achievement of female subjectivity. The analysis has focused on two chief sections: The primary one has covered the oxymoronic condition of the girls who have been spatially restrained and mentally emancipated within the brothel. The text examination has proved the characters' strong determination to create a counter male space by liberating their mental process. The second part has dealt with the females' spatial emancipation in the utopian Siberia, successive their train crash. Thus, we have deduced that the females' realization of their subjectivities comes as an extension to the physical mobility and release. Mobility serves the female characters to build their subjectivities and achieve gender equality regardless of the traditionally imposed restraints. Taking into consideration the fact that the feminist writing heritage has covered the patriarchal dominance over women, the antipathetic masculine/ female relation and the females' attempts of escapism from male dominance and space, my research paper has tried to adopt an original tendency by introducing a new harmonious gender relationship, grounded on justice and love which paves the way for the birth of the new man and new woman.

Additionally, this article has attempted, via an experimental perspective, to aesthetically represent the female body through performance and to reproduce the interrelationship between the female soul and body by exploring the open space. Studying *Nights at The Circus*, we come to the conclusion that physical mobility yields psychological, spiritual and even sexual emancipation. The female characters evade brothels, male households, prisons and seek emancipation in their journey. Freedom, female and male subjectivities and gender justice are attained in the wilderness of the unbounded Siberia. By the end of the novel Fevvers and Walser accomplish their cherished principle of gender equality, following their physical mobility and spatial release which yield their rebirth as postmodern new man and new woman.

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