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Noor A. Asif
Scripps College

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WOMEN SURREALISTS: MUSES OR SEEKERS?

by

NOOR ASIF

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Surrealism

Basics of Surrealism

French artist and writer Andre Breton gave birth to Surrealism in 1924, during a tumultuous time in which artists and intellectuals were reflecting on the carnage of World War I and desired to be released of the aura of disillusionment that had spread across Europe. Surrealism seeks to illuminate one's interior psyche in an attempt to transcend modernity and its contaminative institutions. Due to its popularity and the plentitude of influential artists that have emerged out of it, Surrealism continues to exist today in its own way. Essentially, Surrealism is a movement that relies on dreams, trance-like states, and automatism as ways of achieving the Marvelous, a realm of higher existence that enhances one's creative potential through unease.

Firstly, it is vital to understand the Marvelous, for it is the reason that Surrealism exists. The Marvelous can be explained as “the production of disquietingly anti-rational images that disrupt positivist and other restrictive ways of thinking and being, thereby provoking all who behold them to come to grips with their own ‘inner reality’ and its relation to the external world.”¹ Furthermore, at its core, the Marvelous is perceived to be a state that epitomizes “the incurable human malaise” or sense of unease, and is “recognizable by the revelatory shudder it evoked in those who experienced it.”² In other words, the Marvelous is akin to man's uncontaminated unconscious. It is a genderless, exploratory realm that is free of censorship and institutionalization.

Despite its seemingly sepulchral description, the Surrealists aspired to access the Marvelous. They believed it to be a realm of truth in which man could unleash his creative

¹ Rosemont, Penelope. *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998. xxxiii. Print. The surrealist revolution series; Surrealist revolution series.

² Bohn, Willard. *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvelous*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002. 129. Web.

potential without the interference of post-WWI modernity and its hindrances such as reason, capitalism, and materialism. In contrast to a realm of absolute beauty or paradisiacal aspects, the Marvelous allows man to learn the truth of his unconscious self through its chaos and disquietude, deplete of all constructs, systems, and the comfort that they may bring.

For Surrealists, symbolism provided a wealth of knowledge about the Marvelous, especially within dreams and trance-like states. Symbols can be either created by an artist through an unconscious internal channel that is trying to make itself known to its maker, or can be interpreted in order to learn more about one's unconscious. In this way, Surrealists tried to see and understand symbols in both their waking hours, sleeping hours, and hours in between in which they would enter trance-like states that released their minds from reality. In this way, symbols provided a road to and through the Marvelous.

Additionally, Surrealists placed a great deal of importance on automatism, a practice that emphasized “the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.”³ For example, a Surrealist poet would compose a few lines out of the first words to come to his mind, or a group of Surrealists would get together and play games that enhanced their level of spontaneity and mental freedom. In this way, automatism was not limited to one craft; rather it was utilized by all Surrealists regardless of whether or not they made art, wrote literature, or preoccupied themselves with intellectual thoughts and conversation. Surrealists also experimented with drugs and hypnosis as a means of getting closer to the state of uneasy, uninhibited reality that is the Marvelous. Thus, the uncensored mind was given free reign to explore its creative potential through these techniques, games, and experiments.

³ Bradley, Fiona. *Surrealism*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997. Print. Movements in modern art; Movements in modern art (Cambridge, England).

Since the movement's inception in 1924, the Surrealists produced a great deal of artwork, many of which remain influential to this day. Artists like Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, and Rene Magritte created works inspired by their dreams, loaded with visual symbolism and otherworldliness that sought to criticize the modern world's dull uniformity and reliance on institutions.

Apart from Frida Kahlo, women Surrealists are wholly unknown in popular culture in comparison to these male artists who developed a near cult following over the decades. This neglect brings to light Surrealism's inherent misogyny, which can be attributed to the influence of Sigmund Freud, whose ideas Breton heavily borrowed from when writing the *Manifestoes of Surrealism*.⁴ Not only did Freud inspire both automatism through his use of free association and symbolism in dreams in his work fittingly titled *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), but he also paved the way for Surrealism to be a sexist movement, particularly in its beginning stages.⁵

For instance, Freud's *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) dissects the case of Anna O., a woman who suffered from several symptoms including eating disorders, mood swings, paralysis, amnesia, and bodily pain.⁶ Freud diagnosed her with Hysteria, a common diagnosis for misunderstood women throughout the centuries. Decades later, many Surrealists were noted to have said that Hysteria was a "supreme means of expression," and therefore linked to the Marvelous.⁷ In this way, Freud's ideas led the Marvelous to be incorrectly gendered and given feminine attributes that women have been historically ascribed with, including madness, mystery, irrationality, and a perverse beauty.

⁴ Breton, André, Richard Seaver, and Helen R. Lane. *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972. Print. Ann Arbor paperbacks; Ann Arbor paperbacks. Written between 1924 and 1929.

⁵ Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. [1st ed.]. New York: Basic Books, 1955. Print.

⁶ Breuer, Josef, and Sigmund Freud. *Studies on Hysteria*. New York: Basic, 1957. Print.

⁷ Bates, David. *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent*. London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2004. Print.

Additionally, the Marvelous has been visualized as a female entity throughout the decades. Breton introduced the mannequin, which was explicitly modeled after the female body, as a modern symbol of the mysterious realm that is the Marvelous. This idea was inspired by the Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico, who frequently painted headless, limbless mannequins within unsettling Italian ghost-towns. Its “eerie presence would become one of the hallmarks of Surrealism.”⁸ The mannequin is disturbing due to the fact that it represents a vulnerable female body, who cannot protect herself due to her lack of limbs. Its dismembered figure evokes a sense of inhuman uneasiness that is characteristic of the Marvelous.

Furthermore, the image of the mannequin influenced the emergence of *la femme enfant*, or Lolita-esque image of a sexualized young girl that many Surrealists incorporated into their work. Much like the Mannequin, a feminized figure that cannot defend itself and exists for the sake of onlookers, *la femme enfant* is also a representation of female vulnerability and childish naivety. Additionally, children were perceived by the Surrealists to be the epitome of innocence and purity, because they were untainted by the social structures and institutionalized ideas that the Surrealists loathed and strived to find an escape from. In this way, *la femme enfant* could lead the Surrealists towards the Marvelous because the figure embodied the carefree, unstructured mentality that the Surrealists sought after.

Ultimately, the idea of Hysteria in conjunction with the image of the mannequin and *la femme enfant* led to the idea of woman as a Muse while men were predominantly seekers. The notion of the Muse has existed since the Classical era, when it was believed that muses were the “nine goddesses regarded as presiding over and inspiring learning and the arts.”⁹ For the Surrealists, this definition evolved into one in which the Muse became “a person (often a female

⁸ Bohn, Willard. *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvelous*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002. 129. Web.

⁹ "muse, n.1.a" *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 13 December 2015.

lover) or thing regarded as the source of an artist's inspiration."¹⁰ Therefore, the man, as the seeker, could unlock his creative potential by interacting with a Muse, who provided an avenue through which the seeker could achieve the Marvelous.



One of the most significant Surrealist works that embodies the collective, male-dominated mentality towards the idea of the Muse is René Magritte's *je ne vois pas la femme cachée dans la forêt*,¹¹ which translates to "i do not see the woman hidden in the forest." In this photomontage, we see an image of a naked woman whose body looks more sculptural than human, emphasizing the Surrealists' interest in mannequins. She is surrounded by headshots of the Surrealists, including Breton and Magritte, whose eyes are all closed as if they are in a dream-like state. In an interview, Magritte said that despite the fact that Breton's eyes are closed in the image, "one can't forget that his mind was seeking the Truth through poetry, love and liberty."¹² To further enhance the men's role as seekers who are using the Muse to help them pursue their mission, the image is captioned with a quote by Baudelaire that says, "Woman is the

¹⁰ "muse, n.1.a" *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 13 December 2015.

¹¹ Magritte, René. *Je ne vois pas la [femme] cachée dans la forêt*, in *La Révolution surréaliste*, Paris, no.12, December 15th 1929

¹² "Surrealism: Andre Breton." Musée Magritte Museum. INEO Media System, n. d. Web. 5 Dec. 2015

being who projects the greatest shadow or the greatest light into our dreams.”¹³ Additionally, the title of the piece makes clear that the Woman who has the ability to unleash the creativity of these men is obscured by the forest, or the Marvelous. In this way, Woman, the Marvelous, and nature are connected. However, at the same time, it is important to note that the Marvelous was initially intended to be genderless, even though it came to be achieved through a feminized interpretation by the Surrealist men.

Surrealism and Women Artists

The misogyny that is inherent in this connection between women, the Marvelous, and nature can be attacked for pages and pages. However, my thesis seeks to illuminate the Surrealist women who have boldly utilized the idea of the Muse and the ultimate Woman—not individual women—for their own benefit. Perhaps some of the most notable and successful efforts in consolidating the triumphs of Surrealist women are the works of historians and critics like Whitney Chadwick, Penelope Rosemont, Susan Suleiman, and Gloria Orenstein. These women acknowledge that Surrealism was a heavily male-dominated and sexist movement, but also point out that the movement appealed to women on multiple levels. Chadwick makes this most clearly understandable when she says,

...although the conflicts confronting women in the movement were great, they need not eclipse either the powerful attraction of Surrealism for a significant group of young women or its continuing appeal to subsequent generations of artists (male and female) who have sought to explore the unconscious as a sight of meaning...

The young women who joined the Surrealist circle...saw Surrealism as supporting their desire to escape what they perceived as the inhibiting confines of middle-class marriage, domesticity, and motherhood.... They saw Surrealism, rather than direct political action, as their best chance for social liberation.¹⁴

¹³ Bradley, Fiona. *Surrealism*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997. Print. Movements in modern art; Movements in modern art (Cambridge, England).

¹⁴ Chadwick, Whitney, and Dawn, Ades. *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998. Print. 5.

Susan Suleiman is more critical of Surrealism, when she comments on the fact that the Surrealist movement did not include a single woman during its most flourishing initial stages. She argues that Surrealism was invented to strictly be a men's club; it excluded women until it weakened over the decades and was, in essence, forced to accept the contributions that women made. She bitterly proclaims, "...it remains to be asked what Surrealism brought to women. In a negative perspective, one could argue that it brought them nothing, since by the time they came to it, the movement's truly dynamic moment was over."¹⁵ However, she also concedes that the movement "was able to provide both a nourishing environment" for women "in the form of group exhibitions and publications, and a genuine source of inspiration."¹⁶

Gloria Orenstein perhaps has the most unique argument about Surrealism. She involves ideas about the Goddess and shamanic ritual into the work of Surrealist women artists. Orenstein devoted seventeen years of her life throughout the 1970s and 1980s researching contemporary Surrealist women artists who had been incorporating the image of the Goddess in their work. She calls these artists feminist matristic artists because they use images of the Goddess, and women in general, in order to reclaim their identities as creators and artists after centuries of male-centric suppression. In this way she builds upon the work of Chadwick and Suleiman, who tried to show the ways in which Surrealism allowed women to express themselves free from any social standards, by bringing to attention the idea of the Goddess in order to illustrate the significance of women as creators.

My own theories about Surrealism and its relation with women are founded upon the incredible work that these women have published. I believe that Surrealist women were empowered by the fact that Surrealists achieved the Marvelous through feminized means like the

¹⁵ Suleiman, Susan Rubin. *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-garde*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990. Print.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Muse or *la femme enfant*: it meant that women had the ability to navigate the Marvelous like men, or even more so, just by virtue of being a woman and understanding the feminine experience. Furthermore, this entailed that Surrealist women had the advantage of being, in the words of Surrealist anthologist Penelope Rosemont, “sources of revelation, as provokers of wonder, dreams, and freedom,” whose intellectual agency allowed them to delve into their own femininity in order to attain the higher reality that Surrealism was devoted to unlocking.¹⁷ In contrast from Surrealist men who relied on the image of woman to lead them to this superior realm, Surrealist women were able to look within themselves in order to comprehend the Marvelous. Some recognized their identity as both a Muse and a creator, and thus realized the Goddess within them by reconciling the two. This meant that instead of a man following them into the Marvelous, women could instead follow themselves.

Ironically, Surrealist women often reversed the idea of the muse by exploring their feminine unconscious through the objectification of men, as well as their association with their men peers. Therefore, I do not believe that Surrealism was inherently sexist; rather, institutionalized gender dynamics of the time period, which were probably ingrained in the minds of Surrealists like Breton because of Freud-like figures, made the structure of the movement implicitly discriminatory against women, and in turn suppressed their artistic achievements in comparison with those of men.

As a way to further explain my theories of Surrealism, I will be focusing on the works of Dorothea Tanning and Leonora Carrington, two influential Surrealist women artists who contributed both art and literature to the movement since the 1940s. Though they are quite different as artists, and never quite got along on a personal level for a variety of reasons, both

¹⁷ Rosemont, Penelope. *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998. xiv. Print. The surrealist revolution series; Surrealist revolution series.

Tanning and Carrington overturned patriarchal Surrealist ideologies through their work. They can be united in their reclamation of the female as creator and artist in the face of a history of men who may have believed otherwise. First, I will investigate the work of Tanning, specifically her novel *Chasm: A Weekend*, followed by the work of Carrington, including her novel *The Hearing Trumpet*. Both of these works, in combination with their artwork, and the narrative of empowered Surrealist women artists and the Goddess, will help unfold the crux of my argument regarding women Surrealists.

Chapter 2: Dorothea Tanning

Biography

American painter, printmaker, sculptor, writer, and poet, Dorothea Tanning wore many hats during her 101 years of life. Born in 1910 in Galesburg, Illinois, to a Swedish family, Tanning began to develop her artistic skills as a student at the Chicago Academy of Art in 1930. In 1936, Tanning experienced a pivotal moment in her life as an artist when she came across an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City called “Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism.”¹⁸ This show “sparked her interest in Surrealism” and motivated her to get involved with the movement and in so doing, pursue a serious career as an artist in the fine art world.

Tanning’s paintings became quite popular, especially within the circles of European Surrealists, like Max Ernst, who were taking refuge in the United States during World War II. By including her within their groups, Tanning became quite active in the Surrealist movement, “as a writer as well as a painter” and “also took part in the International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris in 1947.”¹⁹ Tanning also collaborated on *VVV*, a magazine whose short-lived life was devoted to spreading Surrealist practices to the masses. In 1946, Tanning married Ernst and moved to Sedona, Arizona, where she delved into painting inspired by the desert landscape around her.

Tanning was most known for the ways in which she used enigma, nature, and childhood in her work. These themes are very prevalent in her both her artwork and literature, including *Chasm: A Weekend*. Critic Victoria Carruthers writes, “Tanning develops imagery that seeks to explore the nature of feminine (and childhood) physical and sensual experience, collapsing the boundary between reality and fantasy in favor of a fluid imaginative universe in which all

¹⁸ Rosemont, Penelope. *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998. Print. The surrealist revolution series; Surrealist revolution series.

¹⁹ Ibid.

possibilities can potentially exist.”²⁰ Tanning is not afraid to show disturbing or triggering imagery, and does so in an eerily dreamlike manner that exhibits the influence that the Surrealist movement had on her since her early stages as an artist. For instance, Tanning incorporates a great deal of symbolism in her work; “this visual code, or visionary language, contains symbols or knowledge of the cult of the Great Goddess, the pagan religion that proclaims the image of the woman...as the primary life source.”²¹ Tanning’s symbolism often manifests in the form of animals and plants, “combining elements of nature with the human life cycle” and especially the female experience. Furthermore, Tanning employs the use of young girls, which critic Paula Lumbarb explains as being perhaps “a response to the Surrealist ideal of ‘la femme enfant’ ...the works are testimonies to an inward searching, to a confrontation never touched upon by her male colleagues.”²² In this way, Tanning used her art form as a means of striving towards a greater understanding of herself as a human being and woman. Through her artwork and literature, Tanning embraced herself, and other women, as being Muses through which she could attain the Marvelous.

Setting is also incredibly important to understanding Tanning’s work and her mission as an artist. For Tanning, the desert and the gothic were two significant settings, because the former represented the vastness of nature and its secrets, while the latter allowed her to deconstruct patriarchal systems. Carruthers further articulates that “feminist [scholar] Susan Suleiman,” among others, is “attracted to the gothic for its potential to subvert patriarchal culture through anti-realism, the depiction of altered physical and non-human states and an interest in feminine

²⁰ Carruthers, Victoria. "Dorothea Tanning and her Gothic Imagination." *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 5 (2011): 1.

²¹ Lumbarb, Paula. "Dorothea Tanning: On the Threshold to a Darker Place." *Woman's Art Journal* 2.1 (1981): 50..

²² Lumbarb, Paula. "Dorothea Tanning: On the Threshold to a Darker Place." *Woman's Art Journal* 2.1 (1981): 50.

experience.”²³ Tanning is unique in that she combines both the desert and the gothic in her works. This produces a world in which patriarchal institutions are being swallowed by the eternal enigma that is the desert.

I believe that Tanning’s success was partly due to the fact that she had a relatively unique perception and execution of Surrealist ideology, in that her artwork and literature parodies the movement while still maintaining its hallmarks, such as the Muse, *la femme enfant*, and the Marvelous. Her work both embodies and pokes fun at male-generated, Surrealist ideologies, and consequently takes ownership over it. At the same time, however, it is important to note that though Tanning focused a great deal on the female experience, she also strived to keep a public distance from it. When Gloria Orenstein was preparing for her dissertation on Surrealist women, she had approached Tanning to be one of the artists that she would focus on. Tanning refused, saying that she did not want to be seen as a feminist artist.²⁴

Tanning’s paintings exemplify her ideas quite strongly, due to the fact that they are very figurative and contain whimsical though disturbing narratives that tackle issues about sexuality, dreams, and gender relations. Her early work from the 1940s most clearly encapsulates Surrealist ideologies, mostly because that it was around that time that she was most involved with the movement. However, her work after the 1940s continued to exhibit Surrealist images, like *la femme enfant*, and other abstracted female bodies, in addition to a general ambience of dreams.

²³ Carruthers, Victoria. "Dorothea Tanning and her Gothic Imagination." *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 5 (2011): 1.

²⁴ In addition to a plentitude of incredible stories, Orenstein informed me of this over lunch one day.



This painting, titled *Voltage*,²⁵ is one of Tanning's earliest works that exhibits a Surrealist aesthetic. For instance, the subject of the painting is a headless woman who is naked except for the gauzy scarf that loosely wraps around her body. It is unclear where she is situated; all that can be said is that the background is dark and slightly tumultuous, as if it was composed of waves. The headless woman holds a small pair of glasses that have eyes embedded into them. A braid of blond hair seems to be attached to her left nipple, extending upwards into the nothingness atop her severed neckline.

The image of the headless woman brings to mind the image of the mannequin, a dismembered female body that the Surrealists often used to symbolize the Marvelous. In this way, it is as though Tanning is appropriating the mannequin as a woman painter, in order to exert control and take ownership over the female figure in a world in which male artists often exploit it.

A decade later, Tanning's work continues to illustrate some Surrealist ideologies, like *la femme enfant*. As previously mentioned, *la femme enfant* becomes one of Tanning's most

²⁵ Tanning, Dorothea. *Voltage*. 1942. Oil. N.p.

repetitive motifs. A painting that incorporates such imagery is *The Guest Room*²⁶, which she painted between 1950 and 1952.



This painting shows a nude girl standing by the door of a bedroom, almost like a guard. Behind her, one can see a girl in bed with a doll. The dark hooded figure in the background signifies that the events unfolding in the painting are ominous. The shattered porcelain and the short, pseudo-masculine figure whose head is completely covered by dense cloth, further illustrate that something is not right at all.

The aura of unease that this painting permeates signifies Tanning's interest in combining the gothic, a genre concerned with structure intermingled with fantasy, with the oddness of dreams. She paints a naked *femme enfant* to perhaps take ownership over the figure and make it untouchable for Surrealist men. She also provides a narrative about female sexuality, especially among young girls, that many Surrealist men often omit from their works. She does so by setting a scene in her painting, and adding characters who seem to be self-possessed and acting out of their own accord. Meanwhile, Surrealist men often paint women or young girls for their own

²⁶ Tanning, Dorothea. *The Guest Room*. 1950-1952. Oil. N.p.

exploration, without providing them with any agency. In this way, Tanning strives to truly explore the female experience, by lending her characters an aura of self-control and narration

Tanning's *Chasm: A Weekend*

Chasm: A Weekend, feels more like a lucid dream than a novel. It takes place at a desert estate, called Windocte, in the contemporary Southwest. The estate is owned by a mysterious man named Meridian, who lives with his granddaughter, Destina, and her nanny, Nelly. Meridian regularly hosts dinner parties and invites guests from all over the world to partake in games, intellectual conversations, and sexual activities—often in that order. In this way, his parties are similar to those of the early Surrealists. Yet there is something sinister about Meridian; he lures attractive, female guests by their curiosity, collects their hair, and conducts sexual experiments on them in his secret laboratory in order to attain a higher understanding, which I argue is Tanning's take on the male Surrealist desire for the feminized Marvelous. For Tanning, the seeker's journey towards the Marvelous is either genuine or contrived, depending on the authenticity of one's intentions. For example, in the case of Meridian, his exploration of the Marvelous is tainted and prompted by his abhorrent lust.

The novel focuses on a weekend-long dinner party to which Meridian invites a beautiful young woman named Nadine and her fiancé Albert Exodus. Throughout the novel, Nadine becomes increasingly drawn to Meridian, and neglects Albert. Tanning creates an interesting reversal of Surrealist ideas when it becomes clear that while Nadine is Meridian's Muse, Meridian becomes her Muse, as well. In this way, Tanning invents female characters who act as both Muses and Seekers. Moreover, lonely Albert strikes up a conversation with the seven-year-old Destina, who changes his life and consequently becomes his Muse.

Destina reveals her deepest secret to Albert: she is visited every night by a friend, who happens to be a lion. Albert becomes obsessed with the idea of this lion that serves as a symbol of the Marvelous. Although he is disgusted with Nadine's submission to Meridian, Albert invites her to accompany him on a search for the lion one night. This triggers Meridian to frantically search for Nadine until Nelly, who secretly loves Meridian, kills him out of jealousy. Meanwhile, Nadine and Albert hide near the edge of a cliff where they see Destina instead of the lion. This angers Nadine, because she begins to believe that Albert was lying to her about the lion. In a blind rage, she pushes him off the cliff and he dies. Shortly after, Nadine tries to run back to Windcote and instead comes face to face with the lion; she panics and accidentally impales her head on a rock. The lion mauls her face, leaving her to die. In the aftermath of all of this, Destina reunites with her great grandmother, and the two move out of the estate and live happily ever after.

If the story sounds like it is difficult to follow, that's because it is. Like many Surrealists, Tanning loads every scene with an incredible amount of symbolism and underlying meaning, which lends the novel a dream-like quality. In this way, Tanning is inviting her readers to join her characters on a search for the Marvelous, by forcing them to unpack her writing and its symbolic imagery. In addition to a search for the Marvelous, Tanning's novel seems to pull the reader into an exploration of Surrealist ideologies as parodies, particularly concerning the Marvelous and the notion of the Muse. Tanning further twists these ideologies by incorporating female Muses who turn into Seekers, as well as rendering the Marvelous as a dangerous place that should only be sought after by well-intentioned and mentally capable individuals.

The novel begins with a tangential preface titled "Destina Descending: Chronology" which explains the complicated lineage of the novel's seven-year-old Destina. In 1682, Destina

Kirby married a man named Tray Thomas. They had a daughter who they also named Destina. Thomas loved his daughter so much that “he declared that no female descendant of theirs should ever be called otherwise.”²⁷ Hence, for the next four centuries in Europe and upon their arrival in America in the 1930s, the female descendants of Destina and Tray Thomas were named Destina.

The significance of little Destina as a character in this novel relies on the unpacking of her name and maternal history. The name Destina is an alteration of the word “destiny” which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as a supernatural or divine “power or agency by which, according to various systems of philosophy and popular belief, all events, or certain particular events, are unalterably predetermined.”²⁸ Additionally, Destiny is also associated with the three Fates, whose responsibility was “to determine the course of human life.”²⁹ In this way, the significance of the name Destina is similar to that of a Muse; both serve to guide humanity and are characterized as having supernatural or divine powers.

Destina’s name and its connotations of predestination, in combination with her maternal history, make her identity appear timeless and expansive. The fact that all of her female, maternal ancestors are named Destina, and her male ancestors are from all over the Western world including from Italy, Austria, England, and America, highlights the timelessness of her identity as well as the physical expansiveness of her maternal history. Additionally, because all of the women in her family are named Destina, it creates an element of solidarity and oneness within her female lineage; it is as though all of the individual Destinias can be grouped together into one Destina, just as the Surrealists obsessed over the idea of “woman” rather than individual women. In this way, Tanning is bringing to mind the idea of the Goddess, who is also a figure of intense expansiveness and presence, across time and borders. It is as though Tanning is using the

²⁷ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 7.

²⁸ II. 4. a. (oed)

²⁹ II. 4. a. (oed)

character of Destina to equate the Goddess with the Muse, as both being avenues through which one can achieve the Marvelous.

Moving on, the dynamic between the characters in this novel allows Tanning to parody and overturn Surrealism as a male-dominated movement, whose proponents believed they could access the Marvelous simply with a female Muse. Tanning creates a world in which both men *and* women are extremely foolish, and will lose themselves completely rather than finding the Marvelous. For instance, the lion kills Nadine, who kills Albert. Likewise, Meridian is murdered. Meanwhile, Destina is the only achiever of the Marvelous.

The idea of the Muse as embodying agency and experiencing a self-awakening is made clear through the character of Destina, and her interactions with Albert. Though she is seven-years-old, Destina attracts the attention of Albert and inadvertently becomes his Muse. He is taken aback by her eyes, and “wondered how it could be that he, Albert, felt such confusion, looking into them, twin lamps in a dark nowhere, disembodied and unbearable.”³⁰ This description of Destina’s eyes harkens back to the characterization of the Marvelous, specifically in relation to the mannequin, due to its ‘disembodied’ nature and the state of uneasiness that it evokes. Thus, Destina’s eyes momentarily lead Albert into a state of the Marvelous, and in this way, she is a Muse. In this instance, it is obvious that Albert is overwhelmed by the girl’s presence; he feels himself deteriorating under her gaze. As this first interaction progresses, Albert again finds his gaze to have “lost itself in the eyes, the throat, the hair, the white dress.”³¹

It can be said that Destina is much like *la femme enfant* in this novel, because she is a young girl who seems to possess a deeper knowledge that adults or those seeking may not have.

³⁰ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 56.

³¹ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 58.

Destina envelopes Albert into her world by giving him the opportunity to see what secrets she holds in her children's treasure box in the following passage,

And he allowed himself to be led away once more. Trancelike, his spirit possessed by an overwhelming torpor, he did her bidding like a dog. Sitting beside her, the perfume of her presence enveloping him in a haze, he watched her open the box while her words as she prattled came to his ears as unearthly music. That the objects were of a surpassing strangeness affected him not at all...nothing reached him but the eerie silver web of her voice and the superb reality of her nearness.³²

At this point, Albert is completely under her mercy due to her rich, otherworldly presence. Even though the objects that she shows him are dismembered animal parts and eyeballs—nightly gifts from her friend, the lion—he is immersed by her physical proximity to the point where nothing else seems to exist. Moreover, despite Albert's sexual attraction to the little girl as *la femme enfant*, he feels the need to be her “friend” so that he can “speak her language, share her secrets” beyond the treasure box and her childish dialogue because they may lead him to the Marvelous.³³ In this way, Albert views Destina as an “unearthly” being who contains a vast amount of secret knowledge that he greatly desires. He wants to understand her spirit because he recognizes that nothing else seems to matter to him while she is near him; she is his only source of knowledge and inspiration. Thus, she is his Muse.

At the same time, however, Tanning twists the trope of *la femme enfant* in order to paint Destina as a seeker, too. She writes, “from the tender strands of Destina's childish wonder she weaves a tapestry as fragile as spider silk, adequate to her needs. She gazes at the world with trust, a trust just barely colored with wariness.”³⁴ In this way, Tanning uses the idea of *la femme enfant* as being innocent and naïve towards the world, but manipulates the concept by giving

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 87.

Destina an agency of her own through her “childish wonder.” Due to her identity as a child, her motives for seeking are pure and unmarked by the greed that the adults in this novel possess and which I will touch upon later. Therefore, Destina’s identity as *la femme enfant* allows her to access the Marvelous.

It is implied that Destina almost considers Albert to be her Muse, but instead decides against it. She is aware of the impact she has on him, and wonders if “she receive[d] something in return? ...Did [he]...brand on her spirit a comparable mark? Whatever he was, she trusted him.”³⁵ Moreover, even though Destina enjoys the company of Meridian, he “talked always in strangely exalted phrases that she didn’t understand or even listen to, preferring the chorus of voices that came from sand and scrub on paloverde hills.”³⁶ In this way, Destina respects the contributions that adults in her life have made, but she chooses to rely on herself for insight and understanding. For Destina, in addition to her own daydreams and childish thoughts, nature, including its creatures like the lion, are her true Muses. At night, she ponders her thoughts and waits for the lion and nature to show her their secrets so that she may learn from them.

It may be strange to think of Albert’s obsession with this little girl while his fiancée Nadine is at the dinner party, too. Tanning ascribes Nadine with the characteristics of a Seeker. During her childhood, she “thought only of escape” and made it her reality as a young adult by moving to California where her beauty invoked “that sudden silence and intake of breath” by passersby.³⁷ Tanning makes clear that Nadine is aware of her own beauty, and its ability to make her exempt from working for anything. Her aspirations lie more in regards to “*l’avenir*,”³⁸ or an eternity in which her narcissistic self can indulge in dreams. Tanning suggests that Nadine’s

³⁵ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 86.

³⁶ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 87.

³⁷ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 27-28.

³⁸ French for “the future”. Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 27.

preoccupation with “a future that would be played out someday soon in very different surroundings” lent her a “baffled, absent air” which causes people to view her as “positively ethereal.”³⁹ In this way, Nadine is a Seeker; despite the fact that her beauty is publicly affirmed, she is continually dissatisfied with her current reality and hopes for a vastly different future.

However, there is something peculiar about Nadine; she is not authentic and is thus a foil to Destina who is a true and actualized Seeker and Muse. For instance, Tanning writes, “[Nadine] deeply believed that she loved nature” to the point where she would “look around at her pleasant rooms with a sigh of disdain (and with not a thought of her daddy’s regular checks that paid for them)” and desired to be in a place “where she was the only human presence (with possible guides).”⁴⁰ Additionally, “she called herself an explorer,” a term that was “very loosely defined, although her closet contained the proof” with its “safari garments” and other “wistful never-used paraphernalia of someone who expects to brave the elements.”⁴¹ In this way, Nadine is an inauthentic seeker, who doesn’t understand exactly what she is searching for, and definitely is not prepared to handle it alone in all its chaos and truth. She desires beauty and adventure, but Tanning’s *Marvelous* is anything but beautiful and fun; rather it is dangerous and wild.

In addition to posing as a Seeker, Nadine is also painted as a Muse, especially in relation to Meridian and Albert. Tanning emphasizes this in the early days of Albert and Nadine’s love affair, when Albert would view Nadine as if “she was a plant;” her “long pale hair...smelled, he told himself, like young vines.”⁴² In this way, Nadine is compared to nature, which has ties to both the Muse and the *Marvelous* as seen in Magritte’s “*Je ne vois pas la cachée dans la forêt*,” previously seen in this paper’s introduction. The connection to nature implies that Albert may

³⁹ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 28.

⁴⁰ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 29.

⁴¹ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 29.

⁴² Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 33.

see her as more of a source of pure, organic life, as a plant is often thought to be, rather than as a human being. Due to the fact that Albert is a painter, it can be said that Nadine was Albert's Muse, and that their relationship benefited her too because she so likes being admired. Additionally, later on in the novel, Meridian obsesses over Nadine to the point where he cuts off her hair so that he can use it for his experiments. It is implied that her hair contains powers that will help Meridian achieve a higher reality of some sort, which is Tanning's humorous and literal presentation of the relationship between seeker and muse.

Tanning goes on to play a joke on the role of the muse by critiquing Nadine's narcissism. When Nadine "looked at her face in the glass she was overcome by a sort of awed beatitude that stayed with her as she walked away and for hours afterward hindered the pursuit of any coherent thought."⁴³ Tanning goes so far as to say that Nadine's beauty was "a necessary vision, even a prophecy."⁴⁴ In other words, Nadine appears to be her own Muse, yet only on a superficial level because self-reflection causes her to lose herself in her own ethereal, dreamy beauty and persona, rather than providing an avenue towards the Marvelous. In turn, Nadine symbolizes a seeker whose intentions are fueled by narcissism and escapism, instead of by a desire for transcending a higher reality in order to achieve the truth that is the Marvelous. The fact that the lion kills Nadine further illustrates the fact that Nadine is simply not cut out for Tanning's marvelous, a realm full of dangers and realities that such a vain, self-absorbed person like Nadine would not be able to understand.

In Tanning's world, the Muse can be male while the seeker, no matter how inauthentic, can be female. This is exemplified by the dynamic between Meridian and Nadine. Nadine finds Meridian's offer to stay at Windcote for a weekend to be "utterly tempting" because it would

⁴³ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 30.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

provide her with “another kind of experience—in her words, the unknown.”⁴⁵ In other words, Nadine believes that Meridian can lead her to the Marvelous, which implies his role as her Muse. Meanwhile, Meridian’s reasons behind inviting Nadine are far more insidious and rather perverted. He is overcome by her beauty and wants to collect her hair in order to perform some sort of experiment on her that will enable him to attain the Marvelous. Nadine is increasingly drawn to him, even after the experiments, because she believes that Meridian holds a truth that will help her attain the Marvelous. Due to her own vanity and foolishness, Nadine cannot see that Meridian is actually depending on her for the same end goal.

Tanning criticizes the formulaic logic of Surrealists who believed that a female Muse could lead them to the Marvelous, through the character and ambitions of Meridian. It is important to note that Meridian’s obsession with hair is due to the fact that his wife died long ago, leaving him in constant despair. In the beginning of the novel, he is seen immersing his face in a mostly covered package from which emerges hair. It remains unclear whether a body is in the package, or if it is simply full of hair. Regardless, hair is incredibly important to Meridian, because of its feminine qualities of beauty, and its plantlike ability to grow. Thus, hair is a source of life.

Despite all of this, Tanning makes it clear that Meridian’s search for the Marvelous is deeply flawed. After Nadine’s first day spent at Windcote during which she allows Meridian to cut her hair, Tanning writes,

For Meridian there was only one guest, Nadine Coussay. She was radiance itself with her cap of cropped pale hair—he almost closed his eyes, thinking of the long strands cut that very afternoon, for him. He had found the only candidate he could contemplate for the extravagance waiting in the laboratory.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 32.

⁴⁶ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 25.

Although it never becomes quite clear what the “extravagance waiting in the laboratory” is, it is implied that Meridian is attempting to conjure the Marvelous through a perverse combination of science and sex. In this way, Meridian is trying to create a contrived and artificial version of the Marvelous for his own use, because he is incapable of having an actual, transcendent experience on his own.

Tanning continues to criticize the efforts of Surrealists who desire to reach the Marvelous, through the character of Albert. Like Meridian, Albert, too cannot seem to achieve the Marvelous and continues to be in denial about his yearning for it because he does not want to appear foolish like Nadine or Meridian. As an artist, it is in Albert’s nature to seek out a source of infinite, pure creativity. Tanning writes in detail about Albert’s attempts at a variety of painting and drawing experiments, including painting his entire forearm blue and drawing hundreds of invisible pencil drawings on black paper.⁴⁷ However, “these experiments produced nothing but further opacity, and no sign was offered to appease his demons.”⁴⁸ Upon meeting Destina, Albert is blown away by the precocious girl’s insight yet childishness, and is inspired by her to journey towards the Marvelous.

Yet, at the same time, Albert’s efforts are tainted by judgement and pompousness that many young men may exhibit when they think that they are smarter than others, especially young women and old men like Nadine and Meridian. Although Albert catches his flaws—for instance, he exclaims to Nadine ““Here I am pontificating again!””—he is still guilty of undermining Nadine’s desires as a human being, by openly criticizing her submission to Meridian, and believing himself to be more pure than her.⁴⁹ In this way, Albert is contaminated by his self-righteousness and inability to truly correct himself, despite his attempts to take more notice of his

⁴⁷ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 43-44.

⁴⁸ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 44.

⁴⁹ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 115.

behavior. He seems to be far more preoccupied with judging Nadine; he tells her, ““I pity you, Nadine. I pity you because you’re doomed to disappointment and despair. That sound portentous? Do you think I don’t know what you’re looking for, hoping for? Maybe you don’t know what a beaten path you’re setting out on. Thousands have been there before you.”⁵⁰ Here, it is clear that Albert is criticizing Nadine for desiring the same thing that he is desiring, too. It is as if Albert is jealous, or threatened, by Nadine’s yearning for the Marvelous, and believes that only he is capable of succeeding towards it because of his new friendship with Destina. In turn, Albert can be likened to the early Surrealist movement that involved men who underappreciated and completely omitted the thoughts of women because they believed themselves to be true seekers, as men. This is not in defense of Nadine, because as we have seen, Nadine is guilty of plenty of things herself. Rather, their interactions express Albert’s faults and thus his incapacity to attain the Marvelous.

The fact that Albert, Meridian, and Nadine all meet their demise around the same time is Tanning’s way of punishing her characters for foolishly trying to reach the Marvelous through inauthenticity and wrong intentions. Due to the fact that the Marvelous is a realm of truth and integrity, as much as it is chaotic, I believe that Meridian, Albert, and Nadine all failed because their reasons for achieving the Marvelous were inherently flawed. For example, Meridian’s unrelenting lust for Nadine warped his longing for the Marvelous, and made it a vulgar quest. In Nadine’s case, she greatly wanted to be an adventurous seeker who wanted to learn something outside of herself. However, she fell in the trap of her own self-absorption and vanity, rather than completely giving herself away to untainted purity that the Marvelous has to offer. As for Albert, he was the closest out of the three to the fruits of the Marvelous; however, he certainly got ahead of himself by assuming that his interactions with Destina marked him as special, thus enhancing

⁵⁰ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 115.

his level of pretentiousness and criticism of others, which thereby prevents him from successfully arriving at the Marvelous.

The only person who seems to survive the tragedies that unfold at Windcote is Destina, who is in a sense adopted by her maternal grandmother, whose name is also Destina. Therefore, the novel ends with the perpetual existence of the lineage of Destina's, a lineage that seems to transcend time and survive despite the dangers of the world. In this way, Tanning is trying to express the infinite existence of the Goddess, whose presence is manifest through nature, like the desert, and Destina's lineage. The novel's final scene closes with Destina entering the desert with her horse; as she looks out onto the desert after the deaths of Albert, Meridian, and Nadine (her childishness makes her oblivious to this knowledge) she thinks to herself "clearly now, there was no reason to tell anything. There was nothing left to tell."⁵¹

⁵¹ Tanning, Dorothea. *Chasm: A Weekend*. London: Virago, 2004. Print. 156.

Chapter 3: Leonora Carrington

Biography

Unlike Tanning, who overturns Surrealist ideologies by making use of parody, Leonora Carrington is more preoccupied with how women can find empowerment through Surrealism, while also destroying patriarchal values that the movement initially embodied. Carrington embraces her identity as a woman to be her source of creativity rather than a site for male-generated excavation. Her life story is demonstrative proof of this. She was born in England in 1917, and spent her childhood in rebellion to the point where she was expelled from school twice. Her parents finally sent her to art school in Florence, Italy, with the hopes that her behavior would improve. Ironically, her education in Italy served to be the impetus in establishing her life of utmost creativity and neglect of social standards.⁵²

In 1936, Carrington first gained exposure to the Surrealist movement when she attended the International Exhibition of Surrealism in London. A year later, she met Max Ernst and they eloped to France, about a decade before he would fall in love with Tanning—hence the reason the two women never really got along. During World War II, Ernst fled to the United States; this sent Carrington into a sheer mental breakdown which caused her to be institutionalized. Finally, she sought refuge in Mexico, and continued her artistry until her death at the age of 94.⁵³

Carrington's work dealt with Surrealist attributes, like Hysteria, the Muse, and the Marvelous, in unique ways that promoted a feminist, matristic ideology. She unabashedly explored mental illness, and what some Surrealists would call “hysteria,” as a serious and horrific experience that could deeply inspire the person who underwent the trauma rather than

⁵² Aberth, Susan L., and Leonora Carrington. *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2004. Print.

⁵³ Aberth, Susan L., and Leonora Carrington. *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2004. Print.

her onlookers, like the male Surrealists who were fascinated by Hysteria. In fact, with the help of Breton⁵⁴, she began to document her mental illness in her artwork, and recognized it to be extremely influential in her creative process. She also challenged the idea of the Muse as a young, attractive woman or femme enfant by incorporating into her work the Crone, or elderly woman figure whom I will discuss later on.

Leonora Carrington's Artwork

Leonora Carrington is best known for her contributions to the Surrealist movement as a painter. In order to establish a foundational understanding of her mission as an artist and writer, it is vital to investigate her artwork and what it expresses. Even though she was a prolific artist whose oeuvre is quite large, I will focus on a handful of her paintings in order to articulate the significant aspects of her work in relation to my thesis.

In her earliest works, Carrington painted androgynous figures because they represented a freedom and expression that she felt society inhibited her from experiencing due to her gender, throughout her adolescence and early adulthood. It was only until she participated in the Surrealist movement that she was able to shed these preconceived notions of power associated with masculinity and androgyny, and instead embrace a feminine power of her own. She expressed this through highly imaginative representations of mystical, feminine beings who sought to transcend the social standards that she found so repressive in her early life. In so doing, Carrington realigned power dynamics in relation to gender, and redefined the concept of the

⁵⁴ Breton had a change of heart throughout his life, in which he began to appreciate the work of women on a deeper level, and began to see them as equals and contemporaries. Though Carrington still admits that she felt him to be patronizing at times, he did aid her in realizing the significance of her hysteria in terms of her artistic process.

Muse. Heavily inspired by her mental state and life experiences, Carrington embraced herself as her own Muse and created out of herself.⁵⁵

Carrington's paintings emerged out of Surrealist practices, like liminal dream states, that she regularly made use of. According to Orenstein, Carrington's source of inspiration from which her paintings would emerge came out of herself. Amid the limbo-like state between sleep and awakeness, in which reality is veiled by the confusion of one's dreams in addition to the perturbances of one's surroundings, Carrington would catch glimpses of beings within imagined environments. She would translate these intermediary visions into oils on canvas.

Because her subject material arose out of a half-dream state, it is not surprising that symbolism is so inherently important in Carrington's work. Additionally, one can argue that her art emerged out of the Marvelous, for the Marvelous is a state of chaos and unconscious truths much like the state between sleep and wakefulness. In this way, Carrington had the ability to unlock her creative potential by accessing the Marvelous. The Marvelous, in turn, allowed her to envision feminine power free from submission and institutions.

Perhaps the best critical work to draw from in order to fully interpret Carrington's work is Gloria Orenstein's book titled *Reflowering the Goddess*, an extensive academic dissection of the history of the Goddess as a religious figure of art, culture, and creation who has been utterly abandoned and suppressed due to the emergence of an Abrahamic, patriarchal God. Orenstein discusses how the Goddess's suppression throughout our history can be compared to the suppression of women in general throughout time. She goes on to say that "the Goddess has always symbolized creation and therefore, by extension, the Goddess also represents artistic

⁵⁵ Aberth, Susan L., and Leonora Carrington. *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2004. Print.

creation.”⁵⁶ However, due to the emergence of patriarchal, Abrahamic religions, the Goddess was erased, therefore expunging the roles and rights of women as creators and artists.

The Goddess, and occult religion in general, is incredibly important in understanding Carrington’s work. In a sense, it is as though Carrington is attempting to both destroy patriarchal values and enhance the presence of a female creator, or Goddess, in her works. As previously mentioned, she incorporates many female figures in her work, as well as animals that represent different aspects of herself as a woman and creator.



A painting that exemplifies Carrington’s ideas concerning the binary between the patriarchy and women artists and creators is the above painting, titled *Rarvarok*.⁵⁷ This painting shows three predominant and separate groups of figures. On the left, one can see three men clad in dark attire. On the right, there is a horse carriage in which sits the White Goddess, a persona that Carrington incorporated in her artwork several times. In the foreground in front of the carriage is a woman who appears to be going mad, and writhing on the floor.

According to Orenstein, the men “on the left are the Priests, Rabbis and Choir Boys of the Judeo-Christian religions” which entails that they are symbolic of patriarchal, Abrahamic

⁵⁶ Orenstein, Gloria Feman. *Reflowering the Goddess*. Place of Publication Not Identified: Teachers College. Print. 6.

⁵⁷ Carrington, Leonora. *Rarvarok*. 1963. Oil.

religions that suppressed the Goddess throughout history.⁵⁸ They seem to be “judging” the woman on the floor, who seems to be in a state of absolute possession.⁵⁹ It is implied that the woman on the ground is having a profound vision of the White Goddess in the carriage; this means that the image of the Goddess is a product of the woman’s mind. Additionally, the carriage is indeed a “death chariot;” the woman is having a vision about death and the arrival of the White Goddess of life and death.⁶⁰ Orenstein further explains that “in Carrington’s mythic vision death is a passage to another dimension, one in which encounters with the lost tribes and races that worshipped a Goddess...transpire.”⁶¹ The use of a hysterical woman expresses Carrington’s admiration and respect for such states of mental insanity, because she believed them to serve as pathways towards the Goddess, and eventually the Marvelous. It is as though, in addition to being patrons of Judeo-Christian religions, the men are also representations of early Surrealist men who gazed upon the plight of women in attempt to find glimpses of the Marvelous without truly understanding or respecting what these women were going through.



When it comes to animals, Carrington employs a great deal of them in her work as representations of various facets of her personality. For instance, in the painting above, titled

⁵⁸ Orenstein, Gloria Feman. *Reflowering the Goddess*. Place of Publication Not Identified: Teachers College. Print. 45.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

*Self-Portrait*⁶², the viewer can see Carrington in a room with a hyena, and a rocking horse.

Outside, a white horse can be seen galloping freely in the forest. Carrington frequently uses hyenas and horses in her paintings. The hyena, for instance, represents “her subversive rebellion against traditional femininity” as well as “the intrusion of the wild into a domestic space.”⁶³ Meanwhile, the image of the white horse symbolizes her “love of freedom and desire to escape the stultifying class background” that permeated her upbringing.⁶⁴ The fact that the viewer can see both a white rocking horse and a real white horse outside shows that Carrington felt herself to be trapped in a domestic sphere, but truly longed to be free in the natural world.

Art Historian and Carrington specialist Susan Aberth provides more insight into the significance of the horse in Carrington’s work when she writes,

Epona, the Celtic goddess that appeared to her followers on a white horse, would be an important feminine archetype for Carrington later on in Mexico, particularly after reading Robert Graves’s 1948 Celtic study *The White Goddess*. Although it is uncertain if she specifically identified the white horse with Epona at this early date, it is certainly a possibility, considering her mother’s and grandmother’s great interest in Celtic legends.⁶⁵

Aberth’s research on the significance of the horse, particularly the white horse, in Carrington’s paintings sheds light on and ties back into Carrington’s interest in the Goddess. Due to her maternal family’s lineage, Carrington feels a kinship with this animal that is associated with the Celtic goddess, which, in turn, implies that Carrington felt herself to be affiliated with the notion of the Goddess.

A painting that combines Carrington’s use of animals and attempts to deconstruct patriarchal values that the male-dominated Surrealist movement embodied is *Portrait of Max*

⁶² Carrington, Leonora. *Self-Portrait*. 1937-1938. Oil.

⁶³ Aberth, Susan L., and Leonora Carrington. *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2004. Print. 31-32.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 33.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 32-33.

Ernst.⁶⁶ Carrington had a serious and tragic affair with Surrealist Max Ernst, who left her due to political conflicts, and eventually married Dorothea Tanning years later. During his relationship with Carrington, the two artists supported each other's artistic development in the countryside of France. In 1939, Carrington painted *Portrait of Max Ernst*, a work that I believe represents Carrington's ironic stance towards Surrealist ideologies pertaining to the male seeker and the Muse.



In this painting, one can see Max Ernst clad in an eccentric, furry red cloak with a fish tail. One of his feet protrudes from the cloak, covered in a bright yellow sock with green stripes. He is holding a lantern and seems to be exploring the icy landscape around him. Behind him is a white horse that appears to be frozen and resembles the terrain.

Even though this painting is of Carrington's lover, it is also a way for her to make fun of both him and his misogynistic contemporaries who propagated anti-feminist, Surrealist tendencies. The first thing that many people notice is Ernst's extended foot, clothed in the obscenely yellow sock. When I sat across Gloria Orenstein during our meeting, I asked her if she

⁶⁶ Carrington, Leonora. *Portrait of Max Ernst*. 1939. Oil.

thought that Carrington was being ironic by painting Ernst in such a manner. Orenstein exclaimed something along the lines of, “Of course! His sock is ridiculous!” Abert quotes critic Fiona Bradley, who takes the reading of this painting further, by exploring some of its deeper ideas. She writes,

Carrington’s *Portrait of Max Ernst* recreates the male artist as a mystical figure of transformation and rescue. Bird-like and also fish-like, Ernst is a vivid splash of colour, capable of liberating and reviving both the frozen horse behind him and the one trapped in the glass of the lantern he carries. If the bird and the horse may be read as totemic substitutions for Carrington and Ernst, the picture perhaps reverses conventional Surrealist male/female behavior. Carrington may be claiming Ernst as her ‘muse.’⁶⁷

My own interpretation of the painting builds upon the insight that Bradley provides. I agree that Carrington is positioning Ernst to be her Muse, and that there is a Surrealist gender reversal because Carrington, as a woman, is painting her male Muse. However, at the same time, I believe that Carrington layered more than one interpretation in this painting.

The icy terrain brings to mind Carrington’s fascination with Lapland, a Finnish city inhabited by the Sami people, an indigenous group that Carrington was drawn to because of the shamanic, healing knowledge that some Sami individuals possess as a part of their heritage. The landscape, in addition to Ernst’s lantern and pondering gaze, imply that Ernst is on a mystical, shamanic journey. Furthermore, the presence of the white horse again serves as a figurehead for Carrington, herself. She has inserted herself in the painting with Ernst in her spirit animal form. However, what is most notable about this representation of the white horse in contrast with her other works is that the white horse appears frozen into the icy land around it. Thus, the white horse, Carrington, and the landscape are one. Moreover, Ernst’s exploration of the land can be extended to an exploration of Carrington. Finally, as Ernst is a Surrealist who sought out the

⁶⁷ Aberth, Susan L., and Leonora Carrington. *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2004. Print. 42.

Marvelous, it can be said that in this painting, he is navigating the Marvelous that is embodied by the landscape, white horse, and Carrington herself.

I believe that this painting showcases some of the most significant aspects of Carrington's work that are also pertinent to *The Hearing Trumpet* and her other literary works, to which we will now turn.

Leonora Carrington's Literary Work

Carrington's literary work is as imaginative and visional as is her visual artwork. Literature allows Carrington to elaborate on her opinions concerning gender and patriarchal structures. For Carrington, women are extremely significant as creators and saviors because of their connection with the Goddess. Meanwhile, men are painted as destructive, negative entities who are completely out of harmony with nature and a deeper understanding of the universe. Men are responsible for creating horrible institutions that go against nature, in an attempt to acquire more power and control over the earth and its inhabitants so as to feed their egos. Oftentimes, the men in her works make things get out of hand, leaving women to clean up the mess and thus raise to power. In other words, women succeed out of the failures of men as the rightful leaders, creators, and saviors of the world.

One of Carrington's more rare works of literature that embodies these notions is her unpublished play titled *Opus Siniestrus*.⁶⁸ The play explores a world in which women have died out and been survived by malicious, power-hungry men who are on the search for new sources of existence in order to propel life on earth. The play is extremely bleak, in that it does not seem to have a happy ending. *The Hearing Trumpet*, on the other hand, lends the power of women more triumph. The novel continues Carrington's theme of woman as creator and savior, oppressed by the patriarchal structures set in place by men. It was published in 1977, during the crux of the

⁶⁸ Carrington, Leonora. *Opus Siniestrus*. New York: Theatre of Latin America, 1973. Print.

feminist matristic artist movement when women artists were embracing their identity as women and found it to be a source of inspiration, deplete of patriarchal values.

The novel is from the point of view of an old woman named Marian Weatherby, whose personality was inspired by Carrington's contemporary and close friend Remedios Varos. Marian's son and daughter-in-law decide to send her away to a nursing home because they find her to be an embarrassment and burden due to the fact that she is practically deaf. Before she leaves, Marian's friend, Carmella, gives her a trumpet that she uses as an efficient hearing aid. The nursing home is an unusual one because of its gothic aesthetic and structure; it is inhabited by eight old women who each live in a unique housing situation. For example, one woman lives in a building that is modeled after a large boot. Marian is struck by a painting of a nun in the dining room, and with the help of one of the other women, learns that the nun was a Goddess worshipper who used her pious facade to try to steal the Holy Grail for the Goddess. The Goddess, in turn, appears to Marian and the women as a Queen Bee composed of a large swarm of smaller bees. Post-Apocalyptic events ensue, leaving the women stranded at this nursing home and destroying the world around them, until the Goddess sets things in order again, with the help of Marian and her friends.

In stark contrast to the concept of the Muse as a young, beautiful woman from whom Surrealist men can learn from, Marian is an old woman who learns through herself and from the other old women surrounding her. Marian's old age and personality make her fit into the category of the Crone, an archetype for a wise, old, yet unattractive woman that the Surrealist men often shunned or disregarded because of her appearance and age. The Crone is the most significant character type in Carrington's novel, in which out of the twelve characters, eight are Crones. I argue that the Crone is a representation of an older woman who has found solace

within herself as a creator and intellectual, and is thus her own Muse. Through self-reflection, the Crone can achieve the Marvelous.

In her chapter titled “Patriarchal Symbol Systems as Decoys,” Orenstein articulately explains the significance of the Crone, especially in relation to Carrington’s work, when she writes,

In her extensive study of the Crone, Barbara G. Walker (1985) connects the Crone to Sophia and Minerva, Goddesses of Wisdom, and recalls her specifically as that aspect of the Great Goddess of Old Europe, referred to by Marija Gimbutas (Gimbutas, 1982) as the second aspect of death and regeneration.

The Crone has always been associated with the aspect of the total cycle of life, death, and regeneration represented by Death, and it is for this reason that the Crone has been so forcefully denied and despised. In a culture that despises death, it is obvious that older women will be rejected and demeaned.

Yet, Walker tells us that ‘an important point about these traditions of the knowledge-giving, civilization-creating Crone’ is that her intellectual gifts were not based solely on what is now called ‘feminine intuition,’ emotion, or unconscious responses. She was equally credited with analytical intelligence of the sort that has become stereotyped as ‘masculine.’⁶⁹

Firstly, the Crone has been associated with wisdom; by virtue of their old age and self-reliance, these old women possess a great deal of valuable knowledge. Likewise, the Muse is a figure through which one can achieve the Marvelous, which is also a form of wisdom. Crones are also representatives of death, in that Crones are elderly women whose lives are coming to a close. However, because they are on the brink of stepping across the threshold to death, these women experience a form of rebirth in the sense that old age lends them a new awareness that they did not previously have. Old age, and the loneliness that comes along with it, allows for Crones to shift inwards, causing their perspective to become anew and unshackled from social

⁶⁹ Orenstein, Gloria Feman. *Reflowering the Goddess*. Place of Publication Not Identified: Teachers College. Print. 57.

standards. Thus, it is almost as if the process of aging has made them more susceptible to accessing the Marvelous and utilizing its gifts for their own good.

In a sense, the Crone is a much more realistic representation of what a Muse should actually be, because while Muses possess routes towards the unconscious and its gifts, Crones possess an “analytical intelligence of the sort that has become stereotyped as ‘masculine’.”⁷⁰ This is not to say that Crones rely on patriarchal structures and systems in their thought process, but that they have a more clear understanding of their experiences which allows them to come to a deeper understanding more easily. It is unfair that this type of thinking is “stereotyped as ‘masculine’” because all women should be seen as having the capacity to intellectualize and make decisions in this way, rather than exist in some sort of dream land that must be deciphered by over confident and self-righteous men, like the early Surrealists. Furthermore, by making Crones, such as Marian Weatherby and her friends, the main characters of her novel, *Carrington* is challenging the concept of the Muse because for once, old, unattractive women, rather than vulnerable yet beautiful female figures, are able to behold the power and secrets of the Marvelous for themselves. They also keep their insight amongst themselves, unlike the Muse who exists for the sake of seekers. Crones seek for themselves, through themselves.

Most importantly, *Carrington's The Hearing Trumpet* is an example of a feminist artist work that seeks to promote the image of the Goddess, and thus the image of woman as a creator, rather than woman as a mere Muse. In fact, it can be said that by recognizing the Goddess within herself, a woman can become her own Muse and therefore gain access to the Marvelous through herself. This act of self-recognition and self-reliance is a prevalent theme throughout the novel. Tracing the Crones' journey to finding the Goddess in themselves, within a patriarchal world,

⁷⁰ Orenstein, Gloria Feman. *Reflowering the Goddess*. Place of Publication Not Identified: Teachers College. Print. 57.

can help further explicate my argument that seeks to show how Surrealist women overturned patriarchal, Surrealist values and reclaimed their own identity as artists rather than just Muses.

Before we further investigate the novel, it is important to understand the character of Marian, outside of the context of her identity as a Crone. Marian is 92 years old and quite content with the smaller things in life, including her cats, her endearingly obnoxious neighbor, Carmella, and her garden. She lives in Mexico with her son and his family, but dreams of going back to England and eventually Lapland⁷¹. Her grandson, Robert, describes her as a “‘drooling sack of decomposing flesh’.”⁷² She is aware that her looks have most definitely faded, but takes pride in it; she admits, “I do have a short grey beard which conventional people would find repulsive. Personally I find it rather gallant.”⁷³

In this situation, Robert can be likened to the patriarchy, and thus the early figures within the Surrealist movement, because of its role in belittling unattractive women, especially Crones, and unfairly elevating young, beautiful woman to the point of dehumanization. Instead of succumbing to patriarchal pressures, Carrington has created a character who defies these insults and instead takes ownership of them. In this way, Carrington is reclaiming a feminist identity, like that of the Goddess that transcends age and beauty, and instead depends on one’s self-possessed logic and ability to create. At the same time, however, it is clear that Marian definitely has room for improvement in terms of understanding her true purpose and significance, outside of her identity as a caretaker of her cats and plants. She has yet to become in tune with the Goddess within her.

⁷¹ Recall Carrington’s fascination with Lapland and the Sami people.

⁷² Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 15.

⁷³ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 5.

The presence of the Goddess figure becomes clear early on in the novel, through Marian's spiritual inclinations. When reflecting on her nostalgia for the north, such as England, Marian thinks, "They say you can see the Pole Star from here and that it never moves. I have never been able to find it."⁷⁴ The Goddess has often been associated with the Pole Star, due to the fact that it is a guiding star, and can be related to connections between women and spirituality within the history of matriarchal religions. The fact that Marian has never been able to find this Pole Star shows that she is spiritually out of touch with herself, even though she desires to be otherwise. In this way, she is not in harmony with the Goddess within herself, and thus her ability to understand her purpose within the universe around her as a creator and savior is lacking. However, as she learns about her imminent move to Santa Brigida, the nursing home, her spiritual connection with the Goddess, and thus herself, becomes stronger. She begins to see her purpose in life, and in the lives of others, as a creator and savior. Thus, she begins to embody an extension of the Goddess herself, and thus not a passive Muse or useless Crone.

Marian's self-development and growth, in terms of finding the Goddess within herself, becomes initially noticeable right after she finds out that her family wants to send her away to a nursing home. Upon receiving such horrific news, Marian seeks solace from the Goddess figure, Venus. Marian imagines that she is experiencing a "death grip on [her] haggard frame as if it were the limpid body of Venus herself."⁷⁵ In other words, she is willing to stand true to herself, no matter how hard the institution may try to eradicate her sense of self.

Marian builds a relationship between herself and the Goddess when she thinks about the Snow Queen during a cheerful reverie of her youth that is disturbed by an eerie premonition. Almost like a foreshadowing of what she will undergo later in the novel, Marian thinks,

⁷⁴ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 11.

⁷⁵ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 17.

Feeling so strong and happy is very dangerous, something horrible is about to happen and I must find the solution quickly.

All the things I love are going to disintegrate and there is nothing I can do about it unless I can solve the Snow Queen's problem. She is the Sphinx of the North with crackling white fur and diamonds on the ten claws of every foot, her smile is frozen and her tears rattle like hail on the strange diagrams drawn at her feet. Somewhere, sometime, I must have betrayed the Snow Queen, for surely by now I should know?⁷⁶

Firstly, Marian puts herself at the center of the dilemma that her premonition poses. She knows that only she can resolve the chaos that is to come; this illustrates the fact that Marian knows that her actions are consequential and not worthless as her family may believe them to be. She recognizes herself as a potential savior of something grandiose. Most importantly, Marian implies that her identity as a savior is dependent on the Snow Queen, who is another form of the Goddess. In other words, Marian can only save her world from disintegrating if she understands the Snow Queen's mystery and finds the solution for it.⁷⁷

While Marian is slowly recognizing the significance of the Goddess within her own self development, she is surrounded by patriarchal structures from her time at home, to her new experiences at Santa Brigida. The institution is run by an overbearingly patriarchal couple, Dr. and Mrs. Gambit. Their methodology and way of life can be related to that of the early male-dominated Surrealist movement, in that it is patronizing and suppressive towards women, especially Crones, and strives to achieve a higher truth, much like the Marvelous.

Santa Brigida's patriarchal values are made clear to readers far before Marian even steps foot on its premises, when her daughter-in-law, Muriel, says, "Santa Brigida is run by the Well of Light Brotherhood and they are financed by a prominent American Cereal company."⁷⁸ It is important to note that Carrington, like other Surrealists, was against capitalistic ventures and

⁷⁶ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 21.

⁷⁷ She describes the Snow Queen as a figure frozen in sorrow, who represents the "Sphinx of the North" (Carrington 21). The reference to the North can be related to Marian's fascination with England, Lapland, and the Polar Star.

⁷⁸ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 15.

much preferred an organic system of life that promoted creativity rather than dehumanized it for money-making purposes. Furthermore, when one thinks of Carrington's previous works like *Opus Sinestrus*, the fact that Santa Brigida is run by a Brotherhood and funded by a capitalist enterprise is enough to cloak the institution with an aura of corruption and evil. Marian's panic at the news is made clear when she says,

‘O Dear Venus (I always pray to Venus, she is such a brilliant and recognizable star) what is the ‘Well of Light Brotherhood?’ that sounds more terrifying than death itself, a Brotherhood with the grim knowledge of what is better for other people and the iron determination to better them whether they like it or not.’⁷⁹

This passage clearly shows how the Goddess figure is a source of solace for Marian, while a Brotherhood is a source of anxiety and impending doom. This is in line with Carrington's theme of matriarchal figures as saviors and creators while patriarchal figures are representatives of destruction and evil. Additionally, by illustrating men in such fashion, Carrington is critiquing the men in her life, as well, including the early Surrealists. She is accusing them of being as oppressive towards women as they were creative.

In this novel, the most prominent example of a male, Surrealist figure is Dr. Gambit, the psychiatrist who runs the institution that is the Well of Light Brotherhood. Dr. Gambit uses Christian teachings to keep his elderly, female patients regulated and in check with his own rigid values. Upon Marian's first night at Santa Brigida, Dr. Gambit introduces her to the institution by saying,

‘Today for the benefit of a new member of Our Little Society I shall outline the basic principles of Lightsome Hall. Most of you have been here for some time and are thoroughly acquainted with our Purpose. We seek to follow the inner Meaning of Christianity and comprehend the Original Teaching of the Master. You have heard me repeating these phrases many, many times, yet do we really grasp the meaning of such work? Work it is and Work it shall remain. Before we begin to get even a faint glimmer

⁷⁹ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 16.

of Truth we must strive for many years and lose hope time and time again before the first recompense is awarded us.’⁸⁰

For Dr. Gambit, Work will lead his pupils to gain entry into the realm of Truth. Similarly, the Surrealists desired to achieve the Marvelous, which they understood to be a realm of Truth. Yet, Dr. Gambit believes that Work, in conjunction with “the Original Teaching of the Master,” or Christ, will help his pupils become enlightened.⁸¹ The rigidity of Dr. Gambit’s teachings, in addition to the fact that he is a male figure whose theories are ingrained in a patriarchal, Abrahamic religion, paint him in a negative light. Especially because of Carrington’s own values against institutionalization and the patriarchy, it becomes clear that Dr. Gambit is not a figure of ingenuity, and his system for reaching the Marvelous is flawed.

Moreover, it is clear that Dr. Gambit’s rhetoric is extremely didactic and rigid; he lays out his “outline” of teaching as if it were a sermon he has programmed. He is also condescending towards his pupils, all of whom are older women; unfortunately this is not surprising because as previously mentioned, Crones have been greatly looked down upon due to their old age and relative unattractiveness. This becomes obvious when Dr. Gambit asks if his pupils truly understand the concept of Work, despite the fact that he has repeated himself several times.

Dr. Gambit’s techniques for achieving the Truth are questionable due to their underlying lack of genuineness. He believes that “the Key to the understanding of Inner Christianity” is “Self Remembering.”⁸² When one of the women says that she feels shame because she sometimes forgets to Remember herself, Dr. Gambit replies, ““The very fact that you observe this fault in your own character is already an improvement... We Remember Ourselves in order

⁸⁰ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 36.

⁸¹ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 36.

⁸² Ibid.

to try and create objective observation of Personality’.”⁸³ This may seem to be helpful advice, yet the way that Dr. Gambit interacts with these women reveals otherwise. Self Remembering is his way of making the women suppress their natural instincts and true personal attributes, so that they instead become unoriginal and unobtrusive beings. In this way, Dr. Gambit’s realm of the Truth is actually a guise for motivating these women to blindly obey him and thus not disturb his way of life.

For Carrington, Dr. Gambit’s teachings are extremely dangerous and debilitating because they prevent these Crones from living up to their full potential as women, creators, and saviors. According to Susan Aberth, Carrington is quoted to have said, “‘If you are in a condition of social inferiority, I think it affects you very much creatively...You might have incredible visions but you might be too bashful to show them. Your creativity becomes inhibited.”⁸⁴ Due to Dr. Gambit’s power at the institution, the women feel like they have to abide by his rules; after all, he controls how much they eat, what time they have to go to sleep, how many hours of exercise and recreational activity they are allowed to get, and so on. For this reason, many of the women are afraid to speak out against him, and instead strive to follow his teachings. Like the woman who felt shame in forgetting to Remember herself, these women are trapped in his teachings which actually serve to destroy their ability to understand themselves.

These women may feel their “social inferiority” even more acutely due to the fact that Dr. Gambit is also a psychiatrist, in addition to being a religious authority. He uses his title as doctor to further instill compliance in his pupils. It can also be said that Dr. Gambit is a Freud-esque character, which enhances his similarities to the early male-dominated Surrealist movement. This is made clear when Georgina, one of Marian’s more self-aware peers, says,

⁸³ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 37.

⁸⁴ Aberth, Susan L., and Leonora Carrington. *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2004. Print. 38.

‘Gambit is a kind of Sanctified Psychologist...The result is Holy Reason, like Freudian table turning. Quite frightful and as phoney as Hell. If one could only get out of this dump he would cease to be important, being the only male around, you know. It is really too crashingly awful all these women...’⁸⁵

Like Dr. Gambit, Freud also focused on treating female patients, and simultaneously took advantage of them by using his identity as a doctor and knowledgeable man. Additionally, like the Surrealists and Freud who were invested in the idea of hysteria because of the secrets that the psychotic state seemed to contain, Dr. Gambit also finds female psychotic states of delusion and grandeur to possess a great deal of knowledge, despite his attempts to suppress it.

This contradiction becomes clear with the character of Natacha Gonzalez, one of the Crones whom Marian lives with. Natacha is known throughout the institution to have the ability to interact with other dimensions and spirits. She intrudes into Marian’s private appointment with Dr. Gambit in a state of absolute fury, and claims that a higher being informed her that one of the Crones was a threat to the institution. Dr. Gambit repeatedly tells her, “Be serene, Natacha, remember your Special Mission,” but when this is not enough to subdue Natacha who continues to warn him about the dangerous gossip she has overheard, he says, “What sort of gossip, Natacha?—you are blissfully calm and Serene—What sort of gossip?”⁸⁶ This shows that while Dr. Gambit is devoted to teachings of peace, truth, and serenity in order to keep his pupils obedient, he also aware that some of them, like Natacha, may know of a greater knowledge that he is greedy for. Marian catches on to this and comments on how “Dr. Gambit had a most unexpected attitude to Natacha;” their encounter left him “looking so distressed” that Marian “felt sorry for the poor man.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print.42.

⁸⁶ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 64.

⁸⁷ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 65.

While Dr. Gambit's desire to help his pupils gain entry into the realm of the Truth is comparable to the Surrealists' yearning for the Marvelous, it is important to note that Dr. Gambit and the Surrealists utilized different techniques to achieve the same end-goal. For example, the Surrealists practiced automatism and unshackling themselves from rules and institutions. Meanwhile, Dr. Gambit encourages his students not to "interpret Higher Planes and their mysteries before [she] can extricate [herself] from Automatic Habits."⁸⁸ Instead, he promotes self-discipline through institutionalized guidelines, such as religion. In this way, the character of Dr. Gambit is a way in which Carrington can criticize patriarchal institutions and dogma that sought to suppress women yet simultaneously exploit them for their own use.

In order to protect Marian from the patriarchal institution that is the Well of Light Brotherhood, and aid her in her journey towards the Marvelous and recognition of her power as a woman and creative being, the Goddess appears in three physical forms: as the nun, the Queen Bee, and as a reflection of each of the Crones, including Marian. The first representation of the Goddess that appears in the novel is the nun, whom Marian initially sees in a painting in the dining room during Dr. Gambit's first speech. Marian recounts,

While he spoke I was able to examine a large oil painting on the wall facing me. The painting represented a nun with a very strange and malicious face... The face of the nun in the oil painting was so curiously lighted that she seemed to be winking, although that was hardly possible. She must have had one blind eye and the painter had rendered her infirmity realistically. However the idea that she was winking persisted, she was winking at me with a most disconcerting mixture of mockery and malevolence.⁸⁹

Throughout the novel, the nun becomes an increasingly important Goddess figure, and Carrington even devotes a lengthy portion of the novel to her life story. First and foremost, it is important to note that the nun is not meant to be a negative entity, even though at first glance

⁸⁸ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 58.

⁸⁹ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 37.

Marian uses words like “malicious,” “strange,” “mockery,” and “malevolence” to describe her face and gaze. The fact that Marian perceives the nun to be such a disturbing figure demonstrates that she is still out of touch with the Goddess, and is therefore under the influence of patriarchal systems that would condemn the nun. However, her curiosity regarding the nun’s identity and facial expression, despite the fact that she should be giving Dr. Gambit her full attention, shows that she is continuing to wake up to the mysteries of the Goddess that haunt Santa Brigida.

Marian is further enlightened about the mysteries of the Goddess, and thus is closer to the Marvelous, when one of the Crones, named Christabel, gives her a book that recounts the history of the nun, whose actual name is Doña Rosalinda Alvarez della Cueva. The biography makes it clear that the nun lived centuries ago and was in fact a witch who was striving to get her hands on the Holy Grail for the Goddess. After Marian finishes reading the book, things begin to spiral out of control at the institution. Natacha and one of the other Crones poison a fellow Crone—who turns out to actually be a man in disguise—which inspires the other Crones to begin a hunger strike.

One day, Marian is visited by Carmella, who mysteriously tells her to organize a midnight meeting with the other Crones. The meeting takes place at the institution’s bee pond. Though hungry, the Crones find themselves in a state of elation and ritualism. They each receive biscuits that resemble fortune cookies, in that each one contains a scrap of paper with writing on it. Strangely enough, Marian’s says “Help! I am prisoner in the tower.”⁹⁰ Christabel begins to lead a ceremony, in which she recites a chant about the Goddess. After the chant, “it seemed that the cloud” above them “formed itself into an enormous bumble bee...she wore a tall iron crown studded with rock crystals...As she faced [Marian] [she] was thrilled to notice a sudden strange

⁹⁰ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 147.

resemblance to the Abbess.”⁹¹ Here it becomes obvious that the nun is an important Goddess figure who seems to transcend time and body.

The invocation of the Queen Bee causes the weather to become extremely cold; though they are in Mexico, they are soon engulfed in snow. The snow does not cease and they are soon stranded in a post-apocalyptic world. One night, they experience an earthquake that destroys part of the building, and see a winged body surge out of one of the unused towers of the institution. The Crones decide to investigate, but once they are inside the tower, Christabel mysteriously urges Marian to explore alone. This scene in the novel is perhaps the most important, as it is when Marian finally actualizes her full potential as a woman who has the Goddess within her.

Marian ventures downstairs into a chamber and sees a cauldron, behind which stands a woman who is an exact duplicate of Marian, herself. Obviously, Marian is taken aback, and observes that “she may have been a hundred years older or younger, she had no age. Her features...were more intelligent...she carried herself with ease.”⁹² The woman invites Marian to climb into the cauldron she is stirring, by saying “‘Jump into the broth, meat is scarce this season’.”⁹³ Marian resists but her body moves against its will, and soon enough she is in the cauldron. After experiencing “a mighty rumbling followed by crashes,” Marian finds herself standing in the chamber alone, stirring the pot in which she sees her own body.⁹⁴

She finds a mirror and has a revelatory experience in which it becomes clear that Marian has finally succeeded in finding the Goddess within herself, and thus recognizing her self-worth and purpose. She looks into the mirror and first sees the face of the nun. Marian recounts that the face of the nun “faded and then I saw the huge eyes and feelers of the Queen Bee who winked

⁹¹ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 148-149.

⁹² Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 172.

⁹³ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 175.

⁹⁴ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 176.

and transformed herself into my face.”⁹⁵ Then Marian holds the mirror at arm’s length and sees “a three-faced female whose eyes winked alternatively. One of the faces was black, one red, one white, and they belonged to the Abbess, the Queen Bee and myself.”⁹⁶ Upon going back upstairs to the real world where her friends awaited her, Marian realizes that her body feels much more youthful and sprightly, and she feels mentally more at ease. When she reports her experience to her friends, who all seem to have had similar experiences in the past. “And they all spoke together, Ourselves, the Queen Bee and the Abbess of Santa Barbara de Tartarus!” as if they were all one and the same with the Goddess.⁹⁷ They immerse themselves in happiness and rejoice at their collective feat at establishing solidarity with the Goddess.

The Hearing Trumpet is a tale of spiritual self-development and growth in which the protagonist, Marian, becomes immersed in a convoluted series of events that led her to experience an awakening. In the beginning of the novel, Marin is stuck in a state of uncertainty regarding her self-worth and purpose. She admires the Goddess, but there seems to be a distance between herself and the Goddess which slowly but surely is bridged together during Marian’s time at Santa Brigida. By intermingling Surrealist tropes, like the Muse and the Marvelous, with patriarchal systems and the notion of the Goddess, Carrington provides for readers a story that expresses her own unique version of Surrealism as a woman artist and creator. For Carrington, women can achieve the Marvelous by understanding themselves, through themselves and their own experiences. In this way, each woman in this novel is her own Muse, out of which she can create and live up to her full potential.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 178.

Epilogue

When I had the privilege of meeting Gloria Orenstein, I asked her many questions about Leonora Carrington and Dorothea Tanning. Orenstein shared with me a story in which she first approached Carrington for her dissertation about feminist Surrealist artists in the early 1970s, only to be turned away by the artist, who did not want to get involved with academia. Sometime later, Carrington had a sudden change of heart and spontaneously flew from Mexico to New York to meet Orenstein, and the two became very close friends. Unfortunately, Orenstein was unable to form such a bond with Tanning, because of her insistence on not being labeled as a feminist artist. However, Orenstein did reveal that if Carrington and Tanning were alive, the former would have been very “jealous” of being in the same thesis paper as the latter; any time Tanning was brought up in conversation, Carrington would completely disregard her contemporary woman artist. Despite their animosity towards each other, which I assume was triggered by the fact that Max Ernst left Carrington and eventually settled down with Tanning, the work of the two artists beautifully complement each other and provide viewers and readers a deeper understanding of women within the Surrealist movement.

Firstly, both Tanning and Carrington use tropes of gothic novels in their works to set the scene. As previously mentioned, several feminist scholars believe that the gothic allows women artists to dismantle patriarchal ideologies because of the fact that the gothic lies on the threshold between reality and fantasy. This state of limbo is a realm in which patriarchal values cannot exist, because such values rely on the anti-fantastical, the monotony of daily life. In this way, the gothic allows both Tanning and Carrington to freely explore their own Surrealist ideas and interpretations of the Marvelous, the Muse, and more.

Moreover, landscape is important for both Tanning and Carrington. Tanning's work takes place in the desert, an environment of incredible expansiveness that seems to stretch forever on the horizon. The beauty of the desert, with its intense sunsets, serenity, and darkness, allows Tanning to explore her ideas of the Marvelous. Carrington, on the other hand, is more interested in icy landscapes like that of Lapland. Upon the invocation of the Goddess in her novel, Carrington thrusts her characters into a world of snow. Marian seems to appreciate this, for the last quote of the novel is "If the old woman can't go to Lapland, then Lapland must come to the Old Woman."⁹⁸

Within their respective literary worlds, Tanning and Carrington both create characters who are continuously seeking. Both artists make sure that women are the predominant seekers of their novels. In Tanning's work, Nadine and Destina are two of the most dominating seekers, even though Nadine is inauthentic in her methods and intentions. In Carrington, Marian is on a perpetual search in order to discover the mysteries of the institution she is trapped by, so as to further understand herself and the universe around her. In this way, Tanning and Carrington overturn patriarchal ideologies of the Surrealist movement that limit the concept of seeking to men and prefer women as Muses.

The idea of the Muse is also prevalent and subverted in the works of both artists. In her novel, Tanning makes it clear that any living creature can be a Muse, whether they are a man, woman, or child. Carrington adds to this by inserting the Crone into the equation as a Muse-like figure who exists for herself, and not anyone else. Tanning takes things further by using the character of Destina to suggest that *la femme enfant* can be a Muse for herself, as well. Tanning and Carrington imply that the Muse does not need to be gazed upon by a man; one can be her own Muse and observe herself in order to attain a greater truth or the Marvelous.

⁹⁸ Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York: St. Martin's, 1976. Print. 199.

The Marvelous manifests quite differently in the works of Tanning and Carrington. For Tanning, the Marvelous is a dangerous place that only those who truly deserve it can reach. It is deeply tied to the breadth and mystery of nature and its creatures, and thus can only be accessed by someone who is in harmony with the environment around them and has a pure sense of curiosity. Only Destina can truly attain the Marvelous, because as a child she is continuously wondering about the world without any resentment or tainted perception. For Carrington, the Marvelous seems to reside within one's self, and can be accessed through self-awareness and self-actualization, which includes finding the Goddess within one's self.

The Goddess makes an appearance in both of their works. For Tanning, the Goddess is deeply embedded in the fruits of nature because of nature's cycle of life and death that the Goddess symbolizes. Meanwhile, Carrington's work incorporates the Goddess more overtly through literal representations, such as the Queen Bee and the nun. Regardless, the Goddess is incredibly important to both Tanning and Carrington, because She represents the notion of women as artists, creators, and beholders of greater truths.

Finally, both Tanning and Carrington have created works of literary art that succeed in overturning Surrealist ideologies that have previously suppressed women. Their work exhibits female characters, like Destina and Marian, who triumph in their journey towards the Marvelous. Their achievements are made through themselves, through self-reliance and an untainted perception of the world around them. The difference in age between Destina and Marian simply shows that access to the Marvelous is not limited to one type of person. Rather any woman has the ability discover the wonders of the Marvelous for herself, in order to become a creator in her own right.

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