Crones, Care Homes, and Crises

'the material culture of growing older' in Leonora Carrington's *The Hearing Trumpet* (1977)

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Abstract: *This chapter examines the titular hearing trumpet of Leonora Carrington's novella as a crucial yet under-explored object in her surreal narrative. Turning to the 'material cultures of growing older', this chapter examines the more-than-human objects and spaces at play in Carrington's novella in relation to her fantastical representations of older age. To address the materiality of the hearing trumpet, this chapter is broken into three sections exploring the themes of self-identity, institutionalism, and hybridity as mediated through material objects. By exploring the material-spatial arrangements in the novella a new perspective emerges on how Marian, as narrator, circumvents the chronological life span: her journey suggests that time passing is not to be feared but rather represents an opportunity for growth and futurity enhanced by the material cultures of growing older. Overall, I suggest that in Carrington's novella, the hearing trumpet not only changes Marian's life as an assistive technology but also, in the end, takes her beyond cultural inscriptions of older age, offering readers a vision of a proto-post-human figure whose task is to rebuild a post-apocalyptic earth.*

Keywords: *Leonora Carrington; material culture; Surrealism; post-humanism; care*

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Introduction

The titular hearing trumpet of Leonora Carrington's novella is a crucial yet under-explored object in her surreal narrative, which follows nonagenarian Marian Leatherby as she moves into a mysterious care home. Marian, as the narrator of *The Hearing Trumpet* (1977), relays the strange events that unfold at Lightsome Hall, a care institution for older women that becomes a site of mysterious happenings, presided over by a cult-like figure head and a portrait of a winking nun. From here, a diverse group of older women go on a quest to reclaim the Holy Grail and, in turn, save the world from ecological disasters with the help of a magic parallel realm, a swarm of bees, and a majestic wolf-woman. Work has been done in restoring the crone and old age as symbolically important in Carrington's work (Chadwick, 1993; Smith, 2005; Wallraven, 2015) but in this chapter, I propose using the material cultures of growing older (Lovatt, 2021; Höppner and Urban, 2019; Alftberg, 2018) to examine the more-than-human objects and spaces at play in Carrington's novella in relation to her fantastical representations of older age. I examine how the material-spatial arrangements in the novella allows for a new perspective on how Marian, as narrator, circumvents the chronological life span: her journey suggests that time passing is not to be feared but rather represents an opportunity for growth and futurity enhanced by the material cultures of growing older.

As we age, material objects might "compensate or replace parts of the ageing body and its altered abilities" (Alftberg, 2018: 23). From in-home camera surveillance (Cozza et al, 2021), to walking frames (Alftberg, 2018) and Viagra (Joyce and Mamo, 2006) a multitude of technological and biological supplements have been developed in the twenty-first century to support the ageing process, which, in turn, prompt questions about the role and place of objects in care relationships. A new materialism approach demonstrates how physical *things* are active agents in the complex relationships enacted between people, objects, technologies, social organisations and more (Fox, 2016; Lovatt, 2018; Cozza et al, 2021). Scholars interested in the materialities of ageing are alert to the meanings of objects for older adults' construction of identity and the emotional ex-

change between bodies and non-human materialities (Wanka and Gallistl, 2018; Twigg, 2007). A material approach helps researchers "define aging not as linear courses, but as co-formations taking place within relational processes that constantly re-shape the experience of age and aging" (Höppner and Urban, 2018: 8). Introduced in the opening pages, the hearing trumpet might be symbolically considered as a more-than-human technology that highlights the active role that *things* play in constructing an identity for older adults (Cozza et al, 2021) as Marian begins an intense search for the self in increasingly surreal surroundings. In relation to the novella, a material perspective allows a focus on the more commonplace aspects of Marian's experience of ageing, refocusing a perspective on how an everyday object puts her both in conversation with embodied realities of ageing as well as the magical and esoteric turns the novella takes.

For Joyce and Mamo (2006), technology and science act at ever more complex interactions in the relationship between ageing and care, where an increasing desire to live beyond the body creates a "graying [of] the cyborg" (99). The posthuman cyborg, as defined by Donna Haraway (1985), acts as a hybrid symbol that connects animals, organisms, machines, and technology. Carrington's art and literature often embraces liminal and fluid connection between the human and non-human, and in *The Hearing Trumpet* hybridity becomes a crucial tool for circumnavigating the tyranny of the institution. For Lyon (2017), Carrington's work "makes posthuman thinking possible" (168) as her worlds embrace a diverse multiplicity that takes the hybridity of organic life, technology, animality as a given.

Starting from a place of hybridity, the more-than-human objects in *The Hearing Trumpet* take on qualities beyond their expected capabilities, it is in no small part influenced in part by Carrington's commitment to the transformative potential of feminist, avant-garde writing and the carnivalesque mode she embraces (Suleiman, 1990). An interest in transformation runs throughout Carrington's career: from her long-standing interest in Celtic mythology (see: Barber, 2018) and her early career alongside Surrealists such as Max Ernst, to her move to Mexico in the 1940s, which brought her into contact with magical realism and

the marvellous alongside comrades such as Remedios Varo. Even so, within Carrington's fantastical and surreal symbolism, there remains a grounding in the ordinary, particularly in her fiction, which "resists the very flight into fantasy to which its absurdities beckon" (Eburne and McAra, 2017: 4). The everyday nature of the hearing trumpet also speaks to Surrealist concerns such as Marcel Duchamp's concept of the 'ready-made' and general interest in the *objet d'art*, which asked viewers to reimagine the normative function of any given found object (Ades, 2021). These objects – from Duchamp's famous *Fountain* (1917) to Joseph Cornell's assemblage works that pieced together found bottles, trinkets, and photographs – confirmed "the reality of other dimensions: dream, desire, imagination, or memory" (Ades, 2021: 270). That the hearing trumpet is found in a flea market by Marian's friend, Carmella, imbues it with an everyday surrealism that Carrington riffs on through a feminist and fantastical lens.

To address the materiality of the hearing trumpet, this chapter is broken into three sections exploring the themes of self-identity, institutionalism, and hybridity as mediated through material objects. First, I examine how Carrington presents the hearing trumpet as a subversive everyday object of empowerment, as she uses it as a potent tool to counteract the ageist perspectives of her family. Second, I explore the care home setting as an institution that has the potential to destroy Marian's identity, as well as a site that holds the secrets to her spiritual self. Third, I suggest by the end of the novel, ageing has become a building block for the future through a hybrid post-human perspective, reinscribing the older body with cultural power and social visibility in the face of crisis. In Carrington's novella, the hearing trumpet not only changes Marian's life as an assistive technology but also, in the end, takes her beyond cultural inscriptions of older age, offering readers a vision of a proto-post-human figure whose task is to rebuild a post-apocalyptic earth.

The Hearing Trumpet as More-than-Human Technology

The novella opens with the gifting of a hearing trumpet to Marian by her loyal friend, Carmella, who prophetically proclaims from the first page: "Your life will be changed" (3). Marian's life is *practically* changed as the hearing trumpet is an object with a specific use as a hearing aid device. Hearing trumpets are a funnel-shaped devices that collect sound waves to channel the sound into the ear, providing directionality towards the sounds the user most wants to hear (Verwaal, 2021). Marian's trumpet magnifies her hearing to supernatural proportions, picking up 'a cricket chrip[ing]' (Ochoa, 2010: 76) in the distance. Alongside it's enhanced qualities, the hearing trumpet is also described as being "encrusted with silver and mother o'pearl motives and grandly curved like a buffalo's horn" (1). The decorative nature of the trumpet suggests a traditional item, highly visible with its shining exterior and grand curves. The old-fashioned design of the trumpet indicates certain associations. By the late 19th century, hidden hearing aids were becoming the norm, and Sweet (2017) outlines how women, in particular, had begun to regard medical prosthetics as an invisible intervention that should be hidden from view. In contrast, Marian enjoys using an object that draws more attention to her ageing status, revelling in the "aesthetic presence" of such an "exceptionally pretty" item (3). The trumpet may be ostentatious, but it is not merely decorative, as Marian notes that the trumpet "magnified sound to such a degree that ordinary conversation became quite audible even to my ears" (3). Artner (2019) suggests that although Material Culture Studies often emphasise the ambiguous nature of things, the symbolic or metaphorical properties of material objects should not be overlooked, particularly pertaining to objects that might reproduce specific ideas about being older. Carrington deploys the metaphorical associations of the hearing trumpet in order to subvert them, using the connotations of the hidden nineteenth-century hearing aid to embrace the ornamental visibility of her hearing aid device. Carrington's subversive use of the hearing trumpet suggests that the symbolic meaning emphasised by the object – making visible an older woman with altered abilities – is a central aim of the novella. Furthermore, in a novella

interested in the comedic voice of its narrator, the hearing trumpet offer light relief: despite being an ostentatious object it often goes unnoticed by those around Marian. In one illustration, as the family gather to talk about Marian, the trumpet intrudes into the frame allowing her access to a space usually kept from her. The family, however, fail to notice and continue with their conversation.

The failure of Marian's family to notice and listen to her triggers a series of events, as they discuss sending her to a care home. Her son, Galahad, is passively convinced "it seems the sort of place to send her, she will be quite well cared for there" (15). His wife, Muriel, more forcefully feels "[s]he ought to have been put away long ago", whilst her grandson, Robert, can't wait to "pack her off" (15). The language used by the family turns Marian herself into a type of object, to be packed and put away. They do not suspect that Marian has the agency or ability to listen in. As Natalya Lusty (2017) suggests, the act of eavesdropping is a crucial theme in the novella, and the hearing trumpet is the key object that empowers Marian to overhear people speaking about her. Lusty argues that Carrington is interested in recasting "the roles of storyteller and listener [...] a relationship constructed around the objectification of the passive other" (2017:pg). From her position as narrator, Carrington gives Marian the power to debunk presuppositions about her experiences and the trumpet is a key tool for her advocating for herself, as she subverts and challenges the expectations that others have about her age. When Galahad tells her "you are going away on a nice holiday", Marian is forewarned and able to reply "My dear Galahad, don't tell me such silly lies. You are sending me away to a home for senile females" (23). The family's vague language – the "sort of place" to be "put away" – is spoken in crude terms by Marian, who brings to light that which the family would rather allude to.

Indeed, Marian's view of herself sits in stark contrast to her family, as she says to them: "you all think I am a repulsive old bag and I dare say you are right from your own point of view" (23). Living in the space of the paradox of ageing– seen as abject but unseen as a social agent (Woodward, 2006) – Marian uses the hearing trumpet as a way of regaining power in the novella's opening. In the face of her family's con-

descension, Marian declares her individuality and sets up a riposte to the social invisibility of older people by claiming that she is happy as she is. Marian is consistently framed as a *thing*, as she further overhears her grandson describing her as a "drooling sack of decomposing flesh" (15). In this comment, her grandson reduces Marian to an object who "can hardly be classified as a human being" (10). Rosina, the maid, also ignores Marian, who says "'I do not believe that she puts me in a human category'" (4). Marian cannot be "classified" or categorised in her grandson or Rosina's eyes as 'human'. However, just as the hearing trumpet is reinvigorated from a decorative "specimen" to useful technology, so too does Marian take a stance for her own worth from the very first page: "Here I may add that I consider that I am still a useful member of society and I believe still capable of being pleasant and amusing when the occasion seems fit" (1). As Suleiman (1990) suggests, there is a dynamic of empowerment in the novella, as Carrington rewrites and shifts expectations of old age: "Only by having the old 'senile' crone tell her own story is the contradictory effect achieved. Marian's sharp wit counteracts her 'decomposing flesh' and her dependent status is belied by her narrative mastery" (169–170). This narrative mastery is facilitated by the hearing trumpet, allowing her to overhear and respond to the reductive, ageist perspective of her family and advocate for herself as a useful person.

In Carrington's novella, the tension "between *being in* the body (a material, biophysical state) and imagining or culturally constructing the limits, desires, and possibilities of the body" (Joyce and Mamo, 2006: 104) is bridged in the opening pages by the fantastical hearing trumpet. Her family view Marian as inhabiting an abject body but she pushes at these limits and reframes the possibilities of her embodiment: she shares how although her "rheumatics have bent [her] skeleton somewhat" this does not prevent her from taking walks or sweeping her rooms. She has no teeth and refuses to wear dentures but reasons "I don't have to bite anybody and there are all sorts of soft edible foods easy to procure and digestible to the stomach" (3). It is in these first pages that we see how Marian's sense of self – a confident, practical, funny, engaged older woman – is set at odds against her family's perspective. Marian might bear symbolic markers of older age but is far from defined by them. As

she arrives at the care home, a further search for the self allows Marian to imagine new possibilities set against the restricting impulses of the institution.

Objects in the Fantasy Care Home: Search for the Self

Carrington was alert to the ways in which space and place impact on the search for the self, having documented her own experience of institutionalisation at a Santander asylum in *Down Below* (1944). In *The Hearing Trumpet*, Marian is faced with the potential damage of such an institution to her individual self. In Goffman's (1961) study of the "total institution" he defined spaces such as asylums, prisons and even care homes as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life' (xiii).[2] A prolonged stay in a "total institution" may have the effect of effacing personal identity, as control is exerted in a number of ways, including the confiscation of personal possessions (Jones and Fowles, 2008). Indeed, Carmella notes to Marian that she will not be allowed to bring her cats as "[i]nstitutions, in fact, are not allowed to like anything" personal, "[t]hey don't have time" (21). The imposing austerity of the institution is emphasised as Marian arrives, noting the "front door was a massive lump of wood studded with iron lumps that might once have been heads" giving the effect "more like a medieval castle than the hospital or the prison I had expected" (28–29). The lumpy door, with its indiscriminate and weathered iron heads, suggests those that enter will be worn down into homogeneity. Before her arrival, Marian imagines Lightsome Hall as a violent place of "police hounds, grey walls, machine guns" (20). The care home is presented as even more imposing than an institution: it is an impenetrable fortress. Dr Gambit's ethos follows "the grim knowledge of what is better for other people and the iron determination to better them whether

2 Find reference to care home

they like it or not" (16). Carrington riffs on the Lightsome Hall as a potential prison, fortress, and religious order: a "total institution" thrice over as Carmella worries it is a "morally sinister" (17) place.

The pathway between personal development and institutional destruction is emphasised when Marian is allotted a tower to live in, reminiscent of a lighthouse or watchtower. She finds that the only real furniture she has been given is a wicker chair and small table and "[a]ll the rest was painted" (30). Marian tries to open a painted wardrobe and take a book off the painted bookcase to no avail. The *trompe l'oeil*, another artistic technique embraced by Surrealists, makes it seems as if the furniture is three-dimensional when, in fact, it is painted onto the wall. The psychological effect of the "one-dimensional furniture" on Marian has "a strangely depressing effect, like banging one's nose against a glass door" (29). In this care home room, objects are strangely absent: there are no personal touches to suggests this is Marian's new home, nor any assistive technologies. The lack of materiality suggests Marian will need to trust her own intuition in the institution, divining what is real and fake and which senses to trust. So, too, must the reader decide what is real and what is fantasy. Narrative instability is a feature of Surreal fiction, and the novel encourages the reader to be as alert as Marian to the "multiple voices and possible imaginaries, undermining any hierarchy of reality.' (O'Rawe, 2017: 199). What appears on the surface to be a strange setting begins to open up a series of personal signs and symbols for Marian, as Byatt notes "[t]hese walled placed are internalized, becoming maps with signposts pointing towards a spiritual goal" (Byatt, 1996: xi). The tower takes us beyond the medical, spiritual, or social settings usually associated with care for older people and, radically, become the site of a fulfilling agency for the older women who live there.

When faced with the fear of institutional life, characters in other "care home stories" (Chivers and Kriebernegg, 2017) might seek to get away, telling "fantastical stories of escape" (Life, 2017). Early in the novel, Carmella advises "[in] case they lock you up in a tenth-storey room" that Marian "take a lot of those ropes you weave, and escape. I could be waiting down below with a machine gun and an automobile" (26). Marian soon finds fault with such an escapade, as Carmella imagines

their final destination as "join[ing] a gang at an expensive seaside resort and go on tapping telephone writes for horse race winners" (29). Carmella's fantasy could almost be the type of care home narrative Chivers (2015) describes, an "escape narrative" (136) where the older residents become fugitives and offer a satisfying possibility of adventure. In care home narratives such as this, Goffman's "total institution" is subverted, as characters "challenge ageist stereotypes and decline narratives fervently" (Kriebernegg, 2017).

A similar subversion of the "total institution" (Goffman, 1961) takes place in *The Hearing Trumpet*. If the "total institution" is marked mainly by its uniformity, the care facilities provided at Lightsome Hall are marked by their randomness. In sociological studies, researchers have found that nursing homes were "rarely described in detail" and instead became "associated with physical and mental incapacity" (Biggs et al, 2001: 660). Carrington offers an abundance of surreal details: the older women's houses are made up of "incongruous shapes" that emerge as "Pixielike dwellings shaped like toadstools, Swiss chalets, railway carriages, one or two ordinary bungalows, something shaped like a boot, another like what I took to be an outsize Egyptian mummy." At first, Marian intuits a threatening undertone to these fantasy home, worrying that "[a]ll those eccentric huts outside began to take on a sinister meaning. Nursery rhyme bungalows to trick the old ladies' families into thinking we led a childish and peaceful life" (34). Towards the end of the novella, it is revealed that an even more sinister reasoning undergirds the foundations of Lightsome Hall, as Dr. Gambit has chosen each bungalow's design based on "what he calls the azimuth vibrations from the lower nature" so that residents can "watch the workings of our own nasty nature" (143). Dr. Gambit has designed the fantasy bungalows as a method of self-policing. However, although he seeks to create a "community overinterested in manipulating its inmates" (Byatt, 1996: xiii), the wardens consistently underestimate the older women's autonomy.

With Carmella's warnings in play, Marian begins to pack for Lightsome Hall as if readying for an escape or an adventure. Previously, Marian has mentioned that she always wanted to travel to Lapland and so she decides to take:

> "[…] a screwdriver, hammer, nails, birdseed, a lot of ropes that I have woven myself, some strips of leather, part of an alarm clock, needles and thread, a bag of sugar, matches, coloured beads, sea shells and so on. Finally […] a few clothes to prevent things rattling about inside the trunk". (26)

These seemingly random objects are brought together as "something seemingly useless might become essential under specific circumstance" (1) and later Marian advocates "one never can know what might be useful, I never throw anything away" (25). A dilemma many older adults face when leaving for care facilities outside of the domestic home. Goffman (1961) defines an institutional "identity kit" as a "set of the individual's possessions that has a special relation to the self". For Goffman

> "The individual ordinarily expects to exert some control over the guise in which he appears before others. For this he needs cosmetic and clothing supplies, tools for applying, arranging, and repairing them, and an accessible, secure place to store these supplies and tools – in short, the individual will need an 'identity kit' for the management of his personal front" (27).

For Marian, control over her fate is exerted by packing for Lapland, and she takes "cosmetic and clothing supplies" in the form of coloured beads, strips of leather, and clothes; "tools for applying, arranging, and repairing them" comes in the form of the needle and thread, screwdriver, hammers and nails, and the "accessible, secure place to store these supplies and tools" "a practical tin trunk" (25). There are also, of course, items that have no practical use (seemingly) such as the strips of leather, part of an alarm clock, and birdseed. Indeed, Marian has lots of items that others might not deem 'useful' but for her are important to her sense of self. As she packs for the institute, she notes "[o]ne has to be very careful what one takes when one goes away forever" (26). For Cruz (2022), Marian's decision to pack the items she would have taken to Lapland reframes the care home as a potentially utopian space, a setting she might "reimagine and rebuild with the use of her own hands" to create an "object of her most profound desires" (6). As the next section suggests, Carrington's

'care home story' works against temporalities of decline, loss, and abjection often associated with the care home setting (Gilleard and Higgs, 2011; Gullette, 2011). Instead, the revolutionary possibilities of Marian's identity kit find a new context in the crisis that unfolds towards the end of the novella.

Post-human Hybridity and Objects in a Crisis

The opening of the novella refers to the trumpet as a "fatal" (25) instrument and further calamitous connotations are alluded to when Marian compares the trumpet to the Angel Gabriel's although, Marian recalls, "I believe he is supposed to blow his and not listen through it, that is, according to the bible, on the last day when humanity rises to ultimate catastrophe." (25). Marian's survival kit takes on a more literal meaning at the end of the novella, when a "New Ice Age" is visited upon the older women. The link between Lightsome Hall and Lapland is stronger than Marian first suspects. One key plot point (if anything so linear can be applied to Carrington's work) is a search for the Holy Grail that is undertaken midway through the action. Marian's narrative is superseded by a short-story-within-a-short-story that follows the action of a winking nun: Dona Rosalinda Alvarez Cruz della Cueva. The nun loses the holy grail as it is taken on a route through Dublin to London, via underground bunkers that shelter only the wealthy, passing through the hands of religious clergy and witches alike. We are told the grail holds "the elixir of life [that] belonged to the Goddess Venus" (114). Recovering the grail leads to a series of events that brings ecological destruction to Lightsome Hall, as the poles shift to bring an eternal winter.

Marian's search for the self and the grail moves forward when she comes face to face with an alternative version of herself in a liminal chamber below the ground. Here, she comes face to face with a version of herself. At first, she writes her alter-ego "may have been a hundred years older or younger, she had no age" in contrast Marian feels "my age upon me like a load of stones" (172). Marian is told to jump into the broth to be boiled alive but as she steps into the cauldron, she cannot tell which

version she really is. After she steps out of the broth, Marian is reinvigorated "climbing to the upperworld as spry as a mountain goat" (176). Avoiding death, Marian's exchange with her alternative self removes age as a "load of stones" and casts chronological time out. The women become ageless as an indiscriminate amount of time passes where "[d]ays and nights were distributed unevenly" (178). Orenstein reads the final section of the novella as a feminist retelling of the grail quest, one where women "wrestle the grail from the hands of patriarchy" (182). The grail quest might also be read as an anti-ageist quest. *The Hearing Trumpet* situates the eternally older women as the only people capable of rebuilding the world after the apocalyptic breakdown. Finding the grail does not dispel the ice age immediately, nor does it grant eternal life to those who find it but rather, it seems to signal an ongoing late life for the women. Metamorphosis and cyclical change are central components of Carrington's concept of ageing. Moorhead (2017) also gestures to Carrington's portrayal of ageing: "Later-life women combine female intuition, lived wisdom and insightful logic: they are perhaps the only human creatures to bring these elements together" (230). In bringing the elements of intuition, wisdom and logic together, though, Marian suggests that an intergenerational shift will occur to give power to non-human life, as the New Ice Age will pass "till the planet is peopled with cats, werewolves, bees and goats. We all fervently hope that this will be an improvement on humanity" (199). In *The Hearing Trumpet*, we see this ethos come together as Carrington navigates the chronological limitations of the human body by extending Marian and the other older women's lifespans in the face of ecological disaster and bestowing future power to the natural world.

The shifting stories-within-stories allows Carrington to open up more post-human possibilities, particularly as the New Ice Age works as an opportunity for a more equal relationship across species lines. In one of Carrington's most well-known pieces 'Portrait of Max Ernst' (c.1939) she explores biomorphic transformations, depicting Ernst as a furry mammal with curled fin, where one stockinged foot emerges from the burgundy pelt. Behind him is an icy world, where a horse (a symbol often acting as a representation of Carrington) stands frozen. In the novella,

Carrington introduces Anubeth, a similar hybrid creature who exists in the icy world, a "wolf-headed woman" whose "tall body was finely proportioned and, apart from the head, entirely human" (190). Arriving on an ark, Anubeth's arrival does not see animals traipse in two-by-two but rather arrive in a fully formed duality, signalling a departure from the binaries of human/animal. As Cruz suggests, the dehumanisation of Marian earlier in the narrative could be read as a form of "ageism and speciesism" displayed in "hierarchical views of the biosphere that connect animals and the older population on the lower level of the same power structure" (2). The shift towards an apocalypse ironically offers hope, and as Cruz further suggests, it allows the older women to find freedom in "a posthuman community, where animals and people, mostly women, coexist peacefully" (7). The New Ice Age signals a time where human and non-human become fully integrated, allowing the older women to take charge of their surroundings, vanquishing both the ageist attitudes and the institutional control that characterised the opening of the novella.

The integration of Marian with the hearing trumpet also occurs at the end of the novella. By fusing a more-than-human technology with the older body, Carrington's novella celebrates the cyborg's hybrid form. As Lee and Sowerby (2020) note, Marian is a character "who refuses to conform to any of the social norms, who finds happiness in regression, who moves forward by eschewing action, who refuses progress in material terms". As such, Marian's status as an unclassifiable 'thing' might be reframed as representing the more-than-human power she holds, as "a prophetic model for [the…] posthuman" (Lee and Sowerby, 2020: 123). A post-human integration of body and technology is further implied by the illustrations that accompany the novel, drawn by Carrington's son, Pablo Weisz Carrington. The illustrations depict the trumpet as a part of Marian's body. The hearing trumpet is fused with Marian, and she becomes a cyborg, as Haraway (1985) defines: "[a] hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (5).The exaggerated size of the trumpet is in proportion to Marian's height, her arm fitting perfectly into the curvature of the trumpet as if it was an extension of herself. As Marian becomes fused with hearing trumpet she finds she

no longer needs it to function as the useful-decorative object it entered the narrative as, instead she develops "a premonition of sound which I could translate afterwards through the trumpet" (148). Entering into a symbiotic relationship with the trumpet that turns sound waves into experiences, where howling becomes "a new sound… strangely reminiscent of mince pies" (187). Marian has assembled mind, body, and spirit as one experience, facilitated by, but not dependent on, her trumpet.

It is in this final section of the novella that the importance of a materiality of ageing through seemingly random objects becomes clearer. As the care home collapses around them, the older women are tasked with rebuilding the earth. Carmella reappears at the end of the novella to help the care home rebuild in the face of the New Ice Age. The objects she brings to help include:

> "[…] sheepskin cloaks, top books, oil lamps, oil, umbrellas, caps, jerseys, flower pots with plants, and twelve agitated cats amongst which I recognised my own rejoicing" (163–164)
> [Also:]
> "[…] 'Mushroom spore. Beans, lentils, dried peas and rice. Grass seed, biscuits, tinned fish, miscellaneous sweet wines, sugar, chocolates, marshmallows, tinned cat food, face cream, tea, coffee, medicine chest, flour, violet capsules, tinned soup, sack of wheat, work basket, pickaxe, tobacco, cocoa, nail polish, etc, etc.' There were enough provisions to face a siege" (165)

That Carrington takes time to list such an array of objects suggests their importance. The list juxtaposes the ostensibly useful items (oil lamps, sheepskin coats, dried foots) with the seemingly frivolous (nail polish, marshmallows, twelve agitated cats). Just as Marian's initial packing seemed like random assemblage of odds and ends, Carmella's objects become important items in the context of world re-building. To repeat Marian's practical assertion in the opening page: "one never can know what might be useful" (25). The playful array of objects suggests that a 'materiality of older age' can include any *thing*. Carmella and Marian's surrealist kit bags reject a view of older age as a time of stagnation, where an individual might stop "acquiring new objects… or replacing

old things because life is near its end" (Ranadaa and Hagbergb, 2014: 111). Carrington deploys the apocalyptic action of *The Hearing Trumpet* to ultimately question what a 'useful object' (and by extension, the 'useful user') might look like. The ending of the novel opens up an alternative vision of utopia and world re-building that begins from the position of a post humanist older age.

Conclusion

The hearing trumpet – as a symbolic material object – helps Marian to subvert the cultural construction of the older body by reshaping her embodied experience of ageing. The trumpet empowers Marian to be able to speak up and challenge her family's ageist views when they will only use euphemisms. As an assistive technology, the hearing trumpet allows Marian the chance to plan and question the care home setting she moves into. In Lightsome Hall, Carrington sets the homogenous institution against the rebellious non-conformity of its residents. At first, Marian and Carmella are wary of the institution, thinking of it in terms of a prison or cult that must be escaped. As Marian begins to explore, however, she finds that the one-dimensionality of the setting belies a deeper more esoteric secret. In an ironic twist, Marian's survival kit – modelled on her imagined freedom in Lapland – proves to be precisely the most useful things she could have brought, as the novel ends with the coming of a New Ice Age. Marian's search for the Holy Grail – ostensibly for everlasting life – suggests a critique of anti-ageing temporalities by making a dystopian trope – the apocalypse – a moment of progress and opportunity that suspends chronological time. Carrington reformulates older age as a site of feminist commune and ecological stewardship, rebuilt with the help of hybrid humans and an assortment of random objects. The 'materiality of older age' in this novel, then, takes us beyond the assistive technologies and personal items often focused on and into the realm of fantastical, post-human possibilities. The culmination of the novella embraces a more-than-human world populated with wolf

women, bee goddesses and winking nuns that exists symbiotically and relationally alongside the older women at the core of its narrative.

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