Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
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Fabio Jarbeson da Silva Trajano

Writing Beyond the Edges: Appropriation, Rewriting and Blurring of Genres in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*

Rio de Janeiro
2010

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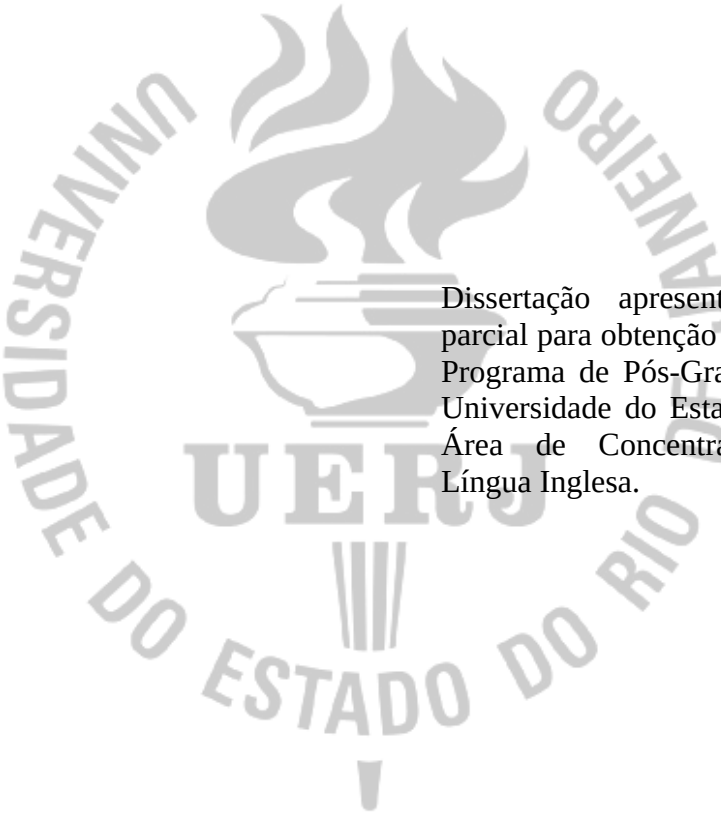

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Rio de Janeiro

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DEDICATION

To all those who, one way or another, to a greater or lesser degree, have already been or are still victimised on the basis of, *inter alia*, gender, race, sexual orientation, class, nationality and age by the taxonomical 'truths' constructed and perpetuated by patriarchy by means of, among other things, religious, political and military institutions as well as, perhaps worst of all, the family.

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There are some people I would like to thank:

First of all, I have to thank the family of my heart: my motherly friend Carla Branco, my brotherly friend Glalber Dias, and all the other relatives who although not related by blood, have been far more special than that to me: the twin brothers Marcinho ET and Luciano, Fernando Rocha, Cristiano Batatinha, Fabrício Cazuza, Daniele Nazário, Eduardo Lourinho, Claudinéa Alves, Jessé Dedéu, Flavinho, Régis Sereno, Alex Rodrigues, Carlinhos Rodrigues, Samantha Borchear, *Dona* Lourdes, Marzio Ramone Finoti, Hemerson Valentim, Cristiano Baita, Katiúscia Castro, Gabriela Fróes – my very first friend in Rio –, Lívia Jacob, Claudinho Crô, Paulo Félix, Isabela, José Paulo and his mother *Dona* Maria. Last but not least, my dear niece Sarah Trajano de Rosa, the first wise child in the family. Thank you all VERY MUCH for your love, support and encouragement through all these years. I would never have been able to make it without any one of you. I love you all guys!!!

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Without *all of you*, this dissertation would not have been possible. Thank you all very much!!!

Ye shall know that truth is not what it seems and *that* truth shall set you free.

Stanley Fish

Is not this whole world an illusion? And yet it fools everybody.

Angela Carter

It is a characteristic of human beings [...]
that if they don’t have a family of their own, they will invent one.

Angela Carter

RESUMO

TRAJANO, Fabio Jarbeson da Silva. *Writing beyond the edges*: appropriation, rewriting and blurring of genres in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*. 2010. 122 f. Dissertação (Metrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2010.

O objetivo desta dissertação é investigar e analisar a transgressão e o borramento de fronteiras de gênero (categoria narrativa) e sua conexão com a emancipação do sujeito feminino no nível da narrativa nos dois últimos romances de Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus* e *Wise Children*, à luz da teoria da intertextualidade paródica. O tipo de opressão pela qual passam as narradoras/protagonistas Fevvers e Dora Chance bem como as outras personagens femininas em ambos os romances mostra-se intrinsicamente relacionada às restrições ideológicas e formais tradicionalmente impostas aos gêneros (categoria narrativa) pelo patriarcalismo. Estas são precisamente as normas e regulamentos que Angela Carter se propõe desvelar, questionar e minar de forma a preparar o caminho para novas alternativas bem como diferentes possibilidades de futuro tanto para homens como mulheres. A principal contribuição desta dissertação está em sua tentativa de relacionar gênero (categoria narrativa), gênero (determinação sexual) e mudança social a fim de encorajar mais pesquisas sobre o poder político que subjaz a pós-moderna reescritura ou 'reinvenção' e borramento de gêneros (categoria narrativa) praticada pelo sujeito feminino.

Palavras-chave: Pós-modernismo. Intertextualidade paródica. Borramento de fronteiras. Gênero (categoria narrativa). Gênero (determinação sexual).

ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate and analyse the transgression and blurring of genre boundaries and its connection with the emancipation of the female subject on the level of the narrative in Angela Carter's last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, in the light of parodic intertextuality theory. The sort of oppression the narrators/protagonists Fevvers and Dora Chance as well as the other female characters undergo in both novels turn out to be intrinsically related to the ideological and formal constraints traditionally imposed on genres by patriarchy. These are precisely the norms and regulations Angela Carter sets out to unveil, question and undermine so as to pave the way for new alternatives as well as different future possibilities for men and women alike. The main contribution of this dissertation lies in its attempt to relate genre, gender and social change in order to nourish further research on the political power underlying postmodern female rewriting or 'reinvention' and blurring of genres.

Keywords: Postmodernism. Parodic intertextuality. Blurring of boundaries. Genre. Gender.

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INTRODUCTION?

Welcome to the Ludic Game! [1]
Angela Carter

Be advised [...]: this writer is no meat-and-potatoes hack;
she is a rocket, a Catherine Wheel [2]
Salman Rushdie

The borders between literary genres have become fluid: [...]
there is no simple, unproblematic merging [3]
Linda Hutcheon

What is it about the journalist, fictional writer and essayist Angela Carter that makes her such an enchanting, prolific, spellbinding postmodern writer who died rather too soon? Is it the manner and extent to which she engages her reader to the point that s/he becomes the author's collaborator? Could it be the precision and great insight with which she chooses and appropriates the textual past with the intention of making as transparent as possible the oppressive mechanisms patriarchy constructs and strives to preserve for posterity? Or would that be her categorical effort to democratise language and culture so as to put an end to traditional dichotomies and undermine the perpetuation of hierarchies on the basis of, among other things, gender, class and race? Perhaps it amounts to a little bit of this, a little bit of that, but it certainly has to do with the singular artistry with which Carter manages to put to question all the 'Big Books'[4], their writers, as well as those readers who endorse their 'universal truths', whose ulterior purpose is to enforce limits by means of disempowering cultural and ideological discourses that aim at relegating the 'others' to oblivion. To put it simply, as Haffenden claims, Carter is "[a] wry and exact cultural commentator, she is concerned above all else with the 'material truths' of our world" (Haffenden: 1985, p. 76).

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, "[l]anguage is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin: 1982, p. 294). Nonetheless, some 'others' have not

[1] Carter: 1993a, p. 103.

[2] Rushdie: 2002, p. 37.

[3] Hutcheon: 1990, p. 9.

[4] It is worth noting the clear allusion Carter makes to the biggest of the 'Big Books' in Western culture in *Nights at the Circus* before unveiling Mr Rosencreutz's ulterior reasons to be against women's suffrage: "[...] he [Mr Rosencreutz] was reading in a big book, like a Bible" (Carter: 1993a, p. 74).

been heard to by patriarchal historiography, much less given a voice. In reality, they have sometimes been literally silenced by force. Needless to say, that is what Carter does through her work: she empowers these 'others' by giving them a chance to make their different experiences and perspectives known. In a similar vein, she extracts and brings to light the latent and restrictive content from the traditional discourses and forms patriarchy throughout the times has imposed. In this way, as far as gender is concerned, Carter dematerialises the produced, materialised and replicated idea of womanhood that invariably works to the detriment of the female subject in such a manner and to such a degree that it perfectly accords with Stanley Fish's ironic statement about the biggest of the 'Big Books' in Western culture: "Ye shall know that truth is not what it seems and *that* truth shall set you free" (Smith; Watson: 1998, p. 34; Fish: 1990, p. 448; John 8:32).

All in all, the fact is that to define is to circumscribe and that is certainly the very last thing Carter wants to be done either to her or to her art. Therefore, it seems the best course of action, one which Carter would most pleasurably take, is get to know about her life and *oeuvre* – in particular of her last two novels analysed in this dissertation, namely *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991) – and leave conclusions to each reader according to what sort of content and experience s/he can contribute to it. As Elaine Jordan states about "noticing [Carter] differently":

> The meaning is not fixed, and that unfixedness, open to interpretation, is as political as having a point to enforce. The process of reading is meant to act on and in the reader, whoever they are, however situated, without enforcement: 'How do you like these possibilities? What do you want? What will you do?' (Jordan: 1992, p. 177-78).

Angela Carter, née Stalker, was born in Eastbourne, in 1940, daughter to Hugh Alexander Stalker, a journalist from Scotland, and Olive Stalker, who died nearly twenty years before her husband. Carter was born in wartime, which forced her maternal grandmother to gather her grandchildren in the coal-mining village of Wath-upon-Dearne, in South Yorkshire, to protect them from the German blitzes. From that moment on, her grandmother became an important influence in Carter's life, and so did World War II and the memories of it. Carter herself acknowledges her grandmother's role in her life when she claims that "she effortlessly imbued me with a sense of my sex's ascendancy in the scheme of things, every word and gesture of hers displayed a natural dominance, a native savagery, and I am very grateful for all that" (Carter: 1977, p. 43).

As an adolescent, Carter had to tackle anorexic problems attendant on low self-esteem. Her first job experience was at eighteen as a junior reporter for the *Croydon Advertiser*. At

that time, her peculiar sort of journalism was already "marked by the same playful, sharp-witted style which is discernible throughout *Nights at the Circus*, as well as a facility for moving through a wide range of extremely diverse subject areas [...] and cultural values" (Stoddart: 2007, p. 3-4). In 1960, Carter married Paul Carter and moved to Bristol, where she studied English and specialised in medieval literature at Bristol University. Carter's first novel, *Shadow Dance* (aka *Honeybuzzard* in the US), was published in 1966, but only after her second novel, *The Magic Toyshop*, did she receive the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1967. Soon after that, in 1968, Carter won the Somerset Maugham Award for her third novel, *Several Perceptions*, and used the proceeds of the award to evade her by now failing marriage and travelled to Japan where she lived from 1969 to 1972. Not surprisingly, Carter's height, complexion and hair heightened her sense of 'otherness' in Japan. As she herself states: "In Japan, I learned what it was to be a woman, and became radicalised" (Gerrard: 1995, p. 23). In addition, it was in the Land of the Rising Sun as well that Carter became really interested in the Japanese art of *irezumi* (tattooing), on which she wrote an article.

Back to England things were not that easy: besides divorce she had no publisher. Even though she had written a novel while she was in Japan, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (aka *The War of Dreams* in the US), published in 1972, it did not sell well, and neither did *The Passion of New Eve*, published in 1977, the same year she married Mark Pearce, with whom she had one son, Alexander Pearce, born in 1983. Indeed, it was only after the publication of *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), a collection of rewritten fairy tales, that Carter drew the attention of reviewers and the general reading public again, as well as of feminist critics. In the 1980's, with the publication of *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and the filmic adaptation of "The Company of Wolves", directed by Neil Jordan, in 1985, as well as *The Magic Toyshop* for Granada TV two years later, Carter was definitely established as a well-known writer. During the period comprising the late 1970's and the 1980's, Carter also worked as a writer in residence at universities in England and abroad including the University of Sheffield, Brown University, the University of Adelaide and the University of East Anglia (Sage: 2007, p. ix-x).

Finally, Carter wrote *Wise Children* (1991), by far the most Shakespearian of all her works and also her swansong, before her untimely death from lung cancer in 1992, at the age of fifty-one. In effect, literature faced the loss of a great writer who not only inscribed in her work the blurring of boundaries but lived it out herself:

> I think I must have started very early on to regard the whole of western European culture as a kind of folklore. I had a perfectly regular education, and indeed I'm a rather booksy person, but I do tend to regard all aspects of culture as coming in on the same level (Haffenden: 1985, p 85).

Of course Carter's *oeuvre* is much richer than the works mentioned thus far. Thereby, maybe it is a good idea to furnish some more details about it. To begin with, the 'Bristol Trilogy', as Marc O'Day calls it, is made up of *Shadow Dance* (1966), *Several Perceptions* (1968) and *Love* (1971). According to O'Day, it is in these three novels that the reader can partly grasp the milieu in which Carter's reappraising of the boundaries between valued and valueless starts taking place. Moreover, "[t]he Trilogy mixes realism and gothic [sic], in a way that fits quite neatly into the revival of a domesticated gothic [sic] in the sixties; [...] it shows clearly how the sixties were a laboratory [...] in the relativisation of all kinds of values" (O'Day: 1995, p. 57). With regard to *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), Carter's first commercial success, the novel appears to have more in common with *Heroes and Villains* (1969) in the sense that they not only deal with intertextuality as the others, but turns it into a theme in order to make women's sexual and social subordination visible as cultural constructs (Peach: 1998, p. 97). However, it is worth observing that *Heroes and Villains* has also got a strong Gothic aura with "a heavily ironic form of parody" (Gamble: 2001, p. 51).

While Carter was in Japan, a period some critics consider a watershed in her career, she wrote a novel, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, and *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (aka *Fireworks: Nine Stories in Various Disguises* and *Fireworks*), published in 1974, her first collection of short stories and articles. Although both works were written abroad, Elaine Jordan prefers likening *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* to *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) due to their portrayal of how the creation and enforcement of common myths occur so that homogeneity can be attained. Interestingly, narrators who are outsiders in relation to the prevailing social boundaries are the ones responsible for depicting "the deliberate construction of communal myths" (Jordan: 1995, p. 207; Peach: 1998, p. 100). With respect to *Fireworks*, Sarah Gamble describes it as "an entire collection of traveller's tales, records of a journey not just into another culture, but also into the dark and dangerous landscape of taboo" (Gamble: 1997, p. 104).

In 1979, perhaps the most controversial text in Carter's *oeuvre*, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* was published. Actually, a number of feminist reviewers found it difficult to accept the association between a feminist writer and one of the world's most infamous pornographers, to wit the Marquis de Sade. At any rate, Carter's style in this work of non-fiction is that of a quintessential postmodern writer: attraction and repulsion in

tandem for de Sade's work while using and abusing his pornographic heroines as a means to ironise the female plight in the patriarchal world (Gamble: 2001, p. 112; Wisker: 2003, p. 66; Sage: 2007, p. 38). Carter's works of non-fiction also include *Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings* (1982), *Expletives Deleted: Selected Writings* (1992) and *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writing* (1997). In 1979 also, Carter published an anthology of short fiction, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, which earned her the Cheltenham Festival Literary Prize. All of the stories in this collection are rewritings closely based upon fairytales or folk tales and are surely a result of Carter's work as a translator of *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (1977) into English. After that, Carter also translated some other tales by Perrault and two by Madame Leprince de Beaumont, found in the author's *Sleeping Beauty and Other Favourite Fairy Tales* (1982).

After "The Bridegroom" (1979), an uncollected short story featured in *Burning Your Boats: The Collected Short Stories* (1995), a posthumously-published collection of all of the author's short fiction, Carter wrote *Black Venus* (aka *Saints and Strangers* in the US), an anthology of short stories published in 1985 which include the well-known "Black Venus" and "The Fall River Axe Murders", both pieces of historiographic metafiction and the author's attempt to give voice to stories untold. In the former, Carter deconstructs Baudelaire's idealised lover Jeanne Duval: "[c]ompounded with Baudelaire's imperialism, this shattered history of Duval's amounted to an obliteration of her autonomy, an obliteration of her identity itself – an identity which Carter reinscribes by stressing [...] Duval's sheer humanity" (Day: 1998, p. 179). In the second short story, Carter recreates a famous murder case which took place in 1892, in Fall River, Massachusetts, in which Lizzie Borden killed her father and stepmother in an apparently inexplicable fit of rage.

In addition to all the works seen so far, Carter also wrote poetry, a couple of children's books and dramatic works. With regard to her dramatic works, which stand out considerably in her *oeuvre*, they are comprised of *Come unto These Yellow Sands: Four Radio Plays* (1985), *The Curious Room: Plays, Film Scripts and an Opera* (1996) and *The Holy Family Album* (1991). Last but not least, she wrote *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991), which are the primary sources of this dissertation's investigation.

First, "a picaresque and allegorical story revolving around the career of Fevvers the *aerialiste*" (Haffenden: 1985, p. 77), *Nights at the Circus* does justice to the wandering serial formula by its clear-cut division into three sections: London, Petersburgh and Siberia. The story begins at the turn of the century (1899) with the Californian reporter Jack Walser interviewing the winged trapeze artist Fevvers, who has just arrived from a European tour, in

her dressing room. In fact, this part focus mainly on Fevvers's past and, in spite of doing the writing, Walser is not the only one in charge of the narrative: "She [Fevvers] subjected Walser to a blue bombardment from her eyes, challenge and attack at once, before she took up the narrative again" (Carter: 1993a, p. 54). According to the "Cockney Venus", she was hatched and left at a brothel's door in a basket surrounded by broken eggshells and had the looks of any other baby except for yellow fluff on her back. The baby is taken in by Lizzie and becomes daughter to all the harlots of the whorehouse run by Ma Nelson. As a child, Fevvers's only job is to pose as a living statue of Cupid, but as soon as she sprouts wings in adolescence she becomes "Winged Victory" wielding a sword. When Ma Nelson dies, her brother inherits the brothel and the "houseful of whores" is homeless for he wants to turn it into a hostel for fallen girls. To his surprise, though, the sisterhood burns the place down before leaving.

Lizzie takes Fevvers to her sister's house and they help run the family ice-cream parlour. At first everything is fine, but all of a sudden the family goes through hard times and Fevvers has to accept Madame Schreck's proposal to work at her "museum of woman monsters", a combination of freak show and brothel. During her stay there, Fevvers is visited several times and afterwards bought by Mr Rosencreutz, who unsuccessfully tries to sacrifice her in a ritual with the purpose of obtaining eternal life. Back home, Fevvers has the pleasure to see that all her colleagues have fled the "lumber room of femininity" and been sheltered by Lizzie's sister, Isotta. Shortly after that, Fevvers decides to try the high trapeze at the Cirque d'Hiver and becomes a success in Europe. Once the flashback moment is over, Fevvers tells Walser she has been invited to join Colonel Kearney's Grand Imperial Tour and the reporter decides to convince his chief to let him go: "let me invite you to spend a few nights at the circus!" (Carter: 1993a, p. 91).

In the second part, Petersburg, Colonel Kearney decides to hire Walser as a clown after consulting his pig Sybil. The reporter is then introduced to the circus crew and takes his place in "Clown Alley". While Walser is the focus of an "anatomy lesson" and The Strong Man and Mignon are having sexual intercourse, a tigress bursts in and Walser saves Mignon. Later on, Walser evades "the clown's malign fiesta" and meets Mignon abandoned in the streets. Walser takes Mignon to Fevvers's hotel room and, despite her jealousy, the *aerialiste* gives her shelter and introduces her to the Princess of Abyssinia who decides to perform an act in which Mignon and Walser dance with tigers. The circus is a real success until its last night, when everything goes wrong. First, a drunken Buffo tries to kill Walser, now the Human Chicken. Next, the Princess of Abyssinia has to kill a tigress which attacks Mignon

out of jealousy. Ultimately, it is Fevvers who saves the show with her presentation. But right after that she gets into trouble for she goes to see the Grand Duke and narrowly escapes becoming part of his personal collection of *objets d'art* and marvels by clambering aboard a toy train which turns out to be the one taking the circus folk to Siberia.

As the train crosses the Siberian wilderness, the railway track is blown up by outlaws who kidnap everyone, except for Walser who is buried unconscious under the wreckage. Walser is rescued by one of the murderesses who had fled the panopticon prison for female criminals, but he is soon left behind when "the shapes of men", the rescue party, approach. Walser, who has lost his wits, runs into the woods and becomes an apprentice to a primitive tribe's shaman. The circus crew is taken to the leader of the outlaws, who believes Fevvers can intercede with the Tsar on their behalf. The moment he learns that it is not the case, the deceived outlaws sink in gloom. Lizzie encourages the clowns to get rid of their lethargy and they enact the dance of death which invokes a blizzard that blows the clowns and the outlaws off the face of the earth. Those left of the circus group leave the outlaw camp and stumble across a run-down music school in which they meet the Maestro. Fevvers has a brief encounter with Walser and the native tribespeople, who flee after her desperate and unsuccessful attempt at flying with a broken wing. After that, everyone goes their separate ways: Fevvers and Lizzie set out to find Walser, Mignon, the Princess and the Strong Man remain with the Maestro, and Colonel Kearney decides to find the way back home along with his pig and an escapee they met along the way. Fevvers finds Walser and they talk of love for the first time. The novel 'closes' with the two of them together and Fevvers's laughter engulfing the whole world.

The whole story of Carter's last novel, *Wise Children*, takes place on 23rd April, Shakespeare's birthday and also the day on which the narrator Dora Chance, who is writing her memoirs, and her twin sister Nora Chance, both illegitimate by birth and profession, celebrate their seventy-fifth birthday. Moreover, it is the day on which their father Melchior Hazard as well as his missing and possibly dead twin brother Peregrine Hazard become a hundred years old. The novel starts having a dramatic turn when Dora's nephew, Tristam Hazard, goes to their house desperate because his pregnant lover, the Chance sisters' goddaughter Tiffany, the first black in the family, has disappeared owing to Tristam's unwillingness to take on responsibility. So as to furnish background information, there takes place a flashback narrative in which family history is told since the patriarch Ranulph Hazard, whose wife, Estella Hazard, started an affair with Cassius Booth. In this manner, a history of

questionable paternities begins with the birth of Melchior and Peregrine in the US, twins who are adopted by their aunt when their father kills himself after shooting his wife and her lover.

However, only Melchior goes back to England with his aunt for little Peregrine vanishes into the US. It does not take long until Melchior leaves his aunt and goes to live with Ma Chance, in whose house he gets Pretty Kitty pregnant before departing. Kitty dies after delivering the twins Dora and Nora, and Ma Chance raises the illegitimate sisters. One day Peregrine visits them and starts playing the father role by supporting the sisters financially and giving them love. On one of their outings, Peregrine takes the sisters to watch Gorgeous George, a clown who has the map of the British Empire tattooed in pink on his torso. On the same day, the sisters get to know Melchior, who totally ignores them. To make matters worse, Peregrine goes bankrupt and disappears, so the sisters have to begin working at twelve. Meanwhile, Melchior marries Lady Atalanta Hazard who gives birth to the twins Saskia and Imogen, much probably the ones responsible for their mother's transformation into Wheelchair years later. On their seventeenth birthday, the Chance sisters are invited by Melchior to take part in a Shakespearean play. Peregrine is back by now. At the party for the play, there occurs a fire which does not end up in tragedy thanks to Peregrine, who saves Nora and Melchior's paper crown. Eventually, a Hollywood producer, Genghis Khan, decides to produce a filmic adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Back to present time, the police phones the Chance sisters to inform them that a body has been found and they believe it is Tiffany's.

Then, the past narrative is resumed: the sisters go to the US to film *The Dream*. They are introduced to Genghis Khan's wife, Daisy Duck, who first has an affair with Peregrine and later with Melchior. Actually, that is the perpetration of her revenge on Genghis for deceiving her on their wedding night by giving her a million dollars and sending the money back to the bank the next day. In return, Genghis wants Nora to have his child, but she refuses on account of her infatuation with Tony. Hence, Nora prevails on Dora to marry Genghis. Since their arrival, though, Dora has had romantic encounters with Irish, a poet who has taught her how to write and feels desolate once he realises their relationship is over: "he did wonders for my grammar, not to mention my grasp of metaphor, as witness the style of this memoir" (Carter: 1993b, p. 120). A triple wedding is arranged, but Genghis ends up marrying his ex-wife who undergoes cosmetic surgery to look like Dora, Nora fails to marry Tony because his mother does not think she is a good match, and Melchior's and Daisy's marriage lasts until their honeymoon. The sisters return home with Ma Chance who has come to rescue them.

World War II begins and Ma Chance dies victim of a German blitz. Peregrine returns from his travels for Saskia's and Imogen's birthday bringing as gift butterflies which he named after them. To his disappointment, the girls turn down his present. Conversely, Melchior's present turns out to be far more surprising: he announces his marriage to Saskia's best friend, who becomes My Lady Margarine. The Hazard sisters get hysterical and Melchior slaps Saskia, who cannot count on her father's allowances anymore. Right after that, Peregrine leaves the party to never be seen again. Later on, Lady Atalanta is found in her house an invalid at the bottom of the staircase after being forced to sign her home and remaining money over to her daughters. As a result, she becomes Wheelchair and spends nearly thirty years living in the Chance sisters' basement.

Again in the present, the Chance sisters and Wheelchair go to Melchior's birthday party. Along the way, Dora meets Gorgeous George, who has become a beggar, and gives him £20 to spend on drink. At the party, Melchior at long last admits he is Dora and Nora's father. Some characters unexpectedly attend the party: Daisy Duck and the so-thought to be dead Peregrine and Tiffany. Peregrine arrives magically surrounded by butterflies, introduces Wheelchair to everyone, and finally produces a trunk from which Tiffany steps out ready to refuse Tristam's marriage proposal. Next, Saskia confesses to having poisoned the cake to kill Melchior so that her lover Tristam would not eat it. Soon after that, Wheelchair upstages the Hazards when she makes it public that she has cheated on Melchior and that her daughters are Peregrine's and not Melchior's. Surprisingly, Dora and Peregrine have sex and virtually bring the house down. After that, Peregrine takes out of his pocket two twin babies – a baby boy and a baby girl, Gareth Hazard's children and the first wise children in the family –, and gives them to the Chance sisters. Decided to live at least another quarter of century, Dora and Nora take the babies home and the novel 'ends' with the reiteration "[w]hat a joy it is to dance and sing!" (Carter: 1993b, p. 232).

As this quick view of Carter's *oeuvre* shows, she is indisputably a postmodern writer to the core. Effectively, her postmodern challenge and its contradictory enterprise is clear in the manner she absorbs and modifies the textual past by concurrently inscribing and critically confronting it in a real compromised connection and critical distance from predecessor texts which is typical of the postmodern paradox. Furthermore, as Susan Suleiman puts it:

> From this perspective, postmodernist fiction can be defined *formally* as a hyperselfconscious mode of writing that insistently points to literary and cultural antecedents or (as we say in the trade) intertexts; and *thematically* as a kind of fiction that reflects, implicitly or explicitly, on the historical and social present in its relation to the past and, if possible, the future (Suleiman: 1995, p. 103).

Notwithstanding, it is necessary to point out that the focus here is rather cultural than social. Thus, the social is relevant in relation to the manner and extent to which it informs and even moulds the cultural as, for instance, the widespread consumerism and access to TV that considerably contributes to the blurring of boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow cultures, which is another postmodern feature in that "[...] the postmodern partakes of a logic of 'both/and', not one of 'either/or'" (Lyon: 1994, p. 58; Hutcheon: 1990, p. 49). In fact, that is exactly the difference between postmodernism and postmodernity: "[a]s a rough analytic device it is worth distinguishing between postmodern*ism*, when the accent is on the cultural, and postmodern*ity*, when the emphasis is on the social" (Lyon: 1994, p. 6).

In addition, albeit the past can turn out to be "deeper than the sea, more difficult to cross" (Carter: 1993b, p. 112), Carter strives to disrupt this opaqueness by bringing to the spotlight those women who were relegated to the shadows of history. Always bearing in mind new and different future possibilities, she does so by giving utterance to the plurality of their voices and experiences. In this sense, Carter unquestionably resembles the Roman god Janus since she has an eye in the past, but the other in the future in a way that is also typified, *inter alia*, by final indeterminacy through an open-ended narrative which, Carter claims, "makes you start inventing other fictions, things that might have happened [...]. It's inviting the reader to write lots of other novels for themselves" (Haffenden: 1985, p. 90-91). It is noteworthy that besides the fact that the postmodern concept of the ever in progress construction of the postmodern subject endorses this open-endedness, it is underpinned by Ihab Hassan's 'indetermanence', in which he attributes indeterminacy to postmodernism as an immanent component (Hall: 1996, p. 608; Hassan: 1993, p. 152-53). Even though this indeterminacy might seem a drawback at first, it has to be taken into consideration that "[p]ostmodernism may not offer any final answers, but perhaps it can begin to ask questions that may eventually lead to answers of some kind": "[f]or what is 'natural' and 'unnatural', sir?" (Hutcheon: 1993, p. 262; Carter: 1993a, p. 61).

It goes without saying that this past return prepares the ground for the rewriting of textual days of yore with a female hue in Carter's work. Inasmuch as there is this constant dialogue among Carter's texts and a myriad of other ones, Julia Kristeva's concept of 'the intertextual' is essential for a better understanding of how every text is in itself a mosaic of "quotations without inverted commas" resulting from a process in which there takes place the incorporation and transformation of a text into another one with a specific goal, either deconstructive, conservative or any other (Rose: 1993, p. 178, 183; Barthes: 1977a, p. 160). Indeed, this:

> Postmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context. [...] It is not an attempt to void or avoid history. Instead it directly confronts the past of literature – and of historiography, for it too derives from other texts (documents). It uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and then subverting that power through irony (Hutcheon: 1990, p. 118).

As a matter of fact, Carter's allusion to The Winged Victory of Samothrace to which Fevvers is compared is a good example of double-voiced female rewriting full of underlying symbolic meaning. In opposition to the historical statue which has been mutilated by patriarchal history, Carter empowers her "Winged Victory" with strong limbs and a phallic sword so that she can live up to the expectations of being "the pure child of the century that just now is waiting in the wings, the New Age in which no women will be bound to the ground" (Carter: 1993a, p. 25, 37). As Linda Anderson states: "[s]ince language is 'phallocentric', that is, it subsumes the feminine into a masculine 'universal', women's difference is produced in terms of an absence or gap within language, which can also be used as a subversive space" (Anderson: 2004, p. 87). Thereby, it is precisely by filling in these gaps with either the abject or phallic swords, phallic pens, inversion of positions during the intercourse or any other attribute deemed as masculine and that invariably stands for power that Carter's female rewriting attempts to promote a reconstruction in language that is also productive of culture (Bourdieu: 2007, p. 27, 118; Kristeva: 1982, p. 45). In so doing, Carter draws attention as well to the deception that not rarely covertly pervades cultural discourses familiar to the reader and that inform, if not determine, the way s/he sees the world and himself/herself.

In order to perform this incorporation of the textualised past into the text of the present, Carter also has recourse to the subversive potential of parody along with several other cultural practices somehow associated with it which make up what this dissertation calls 'the parodic umbrella'. In effect, Carter utilises the politically doubly-coded discourse of parody so that she can problematise society's dominant values in such a manner and to such an extent as to question, disturb and, if possible, even subvert available forms of representation:

> For artists, the postmodern is said to involve a rummaging through the image reserves of the past in such a way as to show the history of the representations their parody calls to our attention. [...] But this parodic reprise of the past of art is not nostalgic; it is always critical. It is also not ahistorical or de-historicizing; it does not wrest past art from its original historical context and reassemble it into some sort of presentist spectacle. Instead, through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference (Hutcheon: 1995, p. 93).

Both inside and outside the hegemonic discourse, parody plays in language a role analogous to that of those who paradoxically belong and do not belong to society, those on the margins and borders, those who are endlessly ostracised by dominant ideologies. Therefore, there seems to be no better linguistic device to speak on their behalf. Actually, by giving new functions and implications to the source, "the method of parody is to disrealize the norms which the original tries to realize, that is to say, to reduce what is of normative status in the original to a convention or a mere device" (Shlonsky: 1966, p. 797). In this way, Carter helps raise the reader's awareness of the importance established forms of representation have in his/her life given that language does not only depict but is also part of that which it represents (Bourdieu: 2007, p. 34, 38, 51). However, it is important to notice, as Linda Hutcheon points out, that "[p]ostmodernism does not move the marginal to the center. It does not invert the valuing of centers into that of peripheries and borders, as much as *use* that paradoxical doubled positioning to critique the inside from both the outside and the inside" (Hutcheon: 1990, p. 69).

Finally, maybe one of the main aspects in Carter's two last novels which is the focus of this dissertation and which is only made possible by her constant use of the very postmodern parodic intertextuality is the blurring and why not even 'reinvention' of genres played out in *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*. First and foremost, regardless of the genre Carter appropriates, as far as the ones analysed in the following chapters are concerned, either it has natural postmodern suitability or, at the very least, it fits to a significant degree the postmodern aesthetics. Therefore, postmodernism is the backbone that justifies, for one thing, the assemblage of all these genres into one single work, to wit magical realism, Gothic, grotesque, autobiography, picaresque and *Bildungsroman*. For another, it is the way and extent to which Carter masterfully blends them into one another that it is virtually impossible to establish borders among them anymore. Of course it is just natural for the reader to rely on generic taxonomies to classify and label texts so that they may fit into specific categories such as genre, mode and theme. Nonetheless, that is not the case with postmodernism since it "has tended to dismiss genre as a more or less anachronistic and irrelevant concept" (Perloff: 1989, p. 3).

Effectively, postmodernism's stance on genre has nothing to do with the traditional attitude, which is very much analogous to the patriarchal commandment found in the biblical text: "You people should keep my statutes: You must not interbreed your domestic animals of two sorts. You must not sow your field with seeds of two sorts, and you must not put upon yourself a garment of two sorts of thread, mixed together" (Leviticus 19:19). In other words,

the traditional position on boundaries is very much one of domination that antagonises the merging of genres so that patriarchy can legitimise certain writings and not others, which is in line with what Jacques Derrida terms “The Law of Genre”:

> As soon as the word *genre* is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. ‘Do’, ‘Do not’, says ‘genre’, the word *genre*, the figure, the voice, or the law of genre. [...] Thus, as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity (Derrida: 1992, p. 224-25).

As opposed to this warning, though, Carter celebrates the disruption of boundaries and wallows in transgression and contamination. After all, for her postmodern female rewriting of genres, “*purity*, *autonomy*, and *objecthood* are the enemy” (Perloff: 1989, p. 8). Further to this, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe, “[...] literary genres are complicit in reproducing dominant ideologies” (Smith; Watson: 1998, p. 21-22), and that is exactly why Carter aims at debunking these norms and interdictions with respect to form and content for they run parallel with the sort of oppression the female subject goes through in the callous attempt to restrict her body and dictate her existence by means of a produced monolithic and symbolic woman which totally disregards the plurality and needs of the *real* women:

> The relationship between ‘Woman’ – a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse representational discourses (scientific, literary, juridical, linguistic, cinematic, etc) – and ‘women’ – real, material subjects of their collective histories – is one of the central questions the practice of feminist scholarship seeks to address (Mohanty: 2003, p. 19).

In summary, Carter writes from the vantage point of a twentieth-century female writer and makes good use of it in order to portray – through her parodic intertextuality, reworking and blurring of genres – the history of representations and their detrimental effect on the female subject over time as she also hints at possible avenues other than the ones offered by patriarchy. In what follows, the expectation is that the reader be teased into reconsidering notions of beginnings and endings both intertextually and in terms of genre boundaries and, more importantly, to brood over what might lie behind attempts to enforce such limits. This introduction, for example, is it *really* an introduction or just part of a textual continuum in which the appropriation and reworking of genres has been discussed? Similarly, that the reader be able to make as many connections as possible according to his/her views and the contributions s/he can make thanks to other readings so as to, besides perceiving the dialogical interactions taking place within the ‘reinvented’ genres, realise the numerous points of intersection among them which make it difficult to tell them apart at times. Thus, the reader

will have observed that, in a very postmodern manner, Carter's blurring does start from within, it is within the following genres that she starts playing havoc, and only then does she blur external boundaries.

Likewise, although every now and then it is specifically suggested which cultural practice of the 'parodic umbrella' is at work, which is only possible because sometimes Carter leaves nearly no room for doubts about to which range of the parodic spectrum her past references have been replaced – from eulogy to criticism, from pastiche to irony to satire –, it is for the most part up to the reader the construction of meaning as it depends on how his/her particular previous readings contribute to the parody work as well as on the context it is read. At any rate, this dissertation has been conceived in such a manner that it is possible to read its chapters forwards, backwards or even at random with no detriment at all of the comprehension of how the blurring process takes place. In fact, it can even be perceived within the individual chapters irrespective of the extent of Carter's 'reinvention' that some of the genres studied here are simply hybrid by nature. In the end, one thing is for sure: due to her effort to raise questions without trying to offer final answers but rather possibilities, reading Carter is unquestionably quite an intellectual experience to the reader.

THERE IS 'NOTHING' NEW UNDER CARTER'S SUN [5]

I am all for putting new wine in old bottles,
especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the
old bottles explode [6]
Angela Carter

As it is inferable from the title, this chapter aims at discussing intertextuality and its nature as an ongoing process which entails the participation of a text's author, its readers and the text itself, as well as its relation to previous texts in the construction of meanings. Of course, it is just impossible to refer to it and not to think of postmodernism since one of its main characteristics is this return to the past in order to appropriate textual material that is used to, concomitantly, install and challenge past representations known to the reader. Indeed, such a process is superbly illustrated by the epigraph above, which encapsulates the main feature of Angela Carter's *oeuvre* and explains why her last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, have been chosen to exemplify the main points. In brief, Carter epitomises how a writer can use the potentially destructive and at once creative power found in at least doubly-coded intertextual relations so as to endow her own work with autonomous artistry even though a plurality of other voices might inhabit it.

A lot has already been said about the intertextual adventure: Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Michael Riffaterre, Harold Bloom, all of them have already dwelt upon this topic and somewhat contributed to the propositions that pervade this chapter. It goes without saying that the moment the concept of intertextual relations is considered here, intertextuality itself takes place as the words and ideas, to a greater or lesser extent, echo other textual sources which have already been uttered and/or written some time in the past by the authors aforementioned and other people who also undertook the task of brooding over it. According to Robert Stam, in a Carter-like analogy, this is a textually transmitted 'dis-ease' in which "any text that has 'slept with' another text, as a postmodern wag once put it, has also slept with all the other texts that that other text has slept with" (Stam: 2005, p. 27). Nevertheless, the author's views and considerations, each reader's cultural and informational background, as well as how this process of moving among texts is played out in this chapter surely determine how this meeting of past textual material

[5] Ecclesiastes 1:9: "[...] there is nothing new under the sun".

[6] Carter: 1983, p. 69. See Matthew 9:17 in order to note Carter's intertextual subversiveness.

takes place, either clashing against one another or coalescing as they mingle with new elements furnished by the writer and the reader. In other words, how the production of meanings is enacted.

To begin with, this intrinsic connection between postmodern culture and intertextuality is crystal clear in the way some writers, such as Carter, dialogue with past texts to debunk the various forms in which patriarchal discourse is constructed and inscribed as 'natural'. Little wonder, then, that this constant presence of the past is suggested from the outset in *Wise Children* as the septuagenarian narrator, Dora, takes her readers on this time travel backwards: "Sometimes I think, if I look hard enough, I can see back into the past. [...] I am at present working on my memoirs and researching family history – see the word processor, the filing cabinet, the card indexes, right hand, left hand, right side, left side, all the dirt on everybody" (Carter: 1993b, p. 3). Nonetheless, the real point is that she is writing from "the wrong side of the tracks [...], the *bastard* side of Old Father Thames" (Ibid, p. 1). As Linda Hutcheon states about postmodernism:

> Wilfully contradictory, then, postmodern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. [...] There is no outside. All it can do is question from within. It can only problematize what Barthes (1973) has called the "given" or "what goes without saying" in our culture. History, the individual self, the relation of language to its referents and of texts to other texts – these are some of the notions which, at various moments, have appeared as "natural" or unproblematically common-sensical. And these are what get interrogated (Hutcheon: 1990, p. xiii).

By means of these strategies Carter can put at work her intent to undercut the naturalised monological discourse by at once denouncing the opaque mechanisms which portray the 'other' as victim, monster and freak, and releasing the fantastic 'demoniacal'[7] power of the dialogical text. For instance, the Victorian poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson depicts dichotomically in the poem "The Princess" what the ideal social roles of men and women would be[8]. In overt opposition to this 'Angel in the House'[9] picture and its gendered binary oppositions, Carter's protagonist Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*, whose story is set at the Victorian turn of the century (1899), also goes to the 'field', uses her 'sword' to fight and her 'head' to 'command' and make decisions until the moment her laughter, as a symbol of utmost subversion, takes up the entire globe. By doing so, Carter appropriates these images of

[7] Mark 5:9: "But he began to ask him: 'What is your name?' And he said to him: 'My name is Legion, because there are many of us.'"

[8] "Man for the field and woman for the hearth: / Man for the sword and for the needle she: / Man with the head and woman with the heart: / Man to command and woman to obey".

[9] This well-known expression stems from Coventry Patmore's famous poem.

womanhood available in nineteenth-century Western culture and subverts them through her *femme fatale aerialiste*. All in all, that is exactly how the network of textual relations is used by postmodernist writers to undermine dominant cultures which utilise established and received views which usually represent the 'dangerous other' to his/her detriment in terms of, for example, gender, race and class. Likewise, to provide a critique of how, among other things, 'high' art, popular culture, film, history, literature, myths and symbols also help legitimise the authoritativeness of hegemonic cultures.

Nonetheless, the way the intertextual process takes place, its outcome, as well as how and to what extent the elements involved inform it and one another is apparently far from a general consensus. In fact, some questions can be raised by now, such as: Which element prevails in the intertextual process: the author, the reader, the intertextual relations or the text itself? How far goes the issue of influence in the author-to-author relationship? How far and in which manner does intertextuality inform interpretation? How far can source texts be traced? Is the concept of intertextuality and its potential to produce meanings a threat to the author's existence? In an attempt to reach at least reasonable conclusions, it is a good idea to have a look at the most known assumptions written so far about this issue.

First, unlike Saussure who claims that "language itself is not a function of the speaker. It is the product passively registered by the individual. It never requires premeditation [...]" (Saussure: 1983, p. 14), positing, thereby, that every act of communication and its inherent choices derive from a system which came to be before the speaker, Bakhtin believes that "[l]anguage acquires life and historically evolves [...] in concrete verbal communication, and not in the abstract linguistic system of language, not in the individual psyche of speakers" (Bakhtin; Volosinov: 1986, p. 95). That is to say, different from Saussure who sees the subsequent meaning as something generalised which pre-exists and is beyond the reader's power as it depends upon the abstract system of language, Bakhtin endorses the idea that meaning is attained in concrete verbal communication. More importantly, it can be inferred from Saussure's concept that it is from this abstract system that "authors of literary works do not just select words from a language system, they select plots, generic features, aspects of character, images, ways of narrating, even phrases and sentences from previous literary texts and from the literary tradition" (Allen: 2000, p. 11). Therefore, however more plausible Bakhtin's theory might seem in comparison with Saussure's as the construction of meaning really varies according to the contexts and the participants involved, what matters thus far is that Saussure's proposition does recognise from the start that texts are interconnected

somehow, even if in the individual psyche of speakers, and that writers invariably draw upon this ever-flowing fountain.

Notwithstanding, perhaps one of the most germinal concepts immanent in the study of intertextuality is that of how texts relate to one another dialogically. In effect, since Bakhtin brought this reasoning to the fore, it has helped debunk the idea of the adamic word and, as a consequence, the concept of one single original meaning as though there had been nothing textual before:

> any utterance, in addition to its own theme, always responds (in the broad sense of the word) in one form or another to others' utterances that precede it. The speaker is not Adam, and therefore the subject of his speech itself inevitably becomes the arena where his opinions meet those of his partners (in a conversation or dispute about some everyday event) or other viewpoints, world views, trends, theories, and so forth (in the sphere of cultural communication) (Bakhtin: 1986c, p. 94).

Hence, regardless of the efforts to enforce the 'theological' word as being the unquestionable divine truth in order to perform every sort of repression and dominance, this polyphonic chain of utterances paves the way for the enactment of the potential 'evil' of the plurality of voices inherent in the intertextual world and the unstable nature of the word as for meaning. In other words, there is no such a thing as the unitary word stemming from a god-like author as it is highly susceptible to influences which might vary depending upon time, place, addresser, addressee and 'the already said'. In order to allow for dialogism in *Wise Children,* Carter establishes a conversational tone from the beginning as her first-person narrator openly invites the reader into the story and makes it clear that hers is an alternative view: "Good morning! Let me introduce myself. My name is Dora Chance. Welcome to the wrong side of the tracks. [...] we've always lived on the left-hand side, the side the tourist rarely sees" (Carter: 1993b, p. 1). In addition, another Bakhtinian term much used to refer to this aspect of intertextuality is *heteroglossia*, in which the Greek words *hetero* and *glot* mean 'other' and 'tongue' or 'voice', respectively (Allen: 2000, p. 29). Not surprisingly, this diversity of voices also pervades *Nights at the Circus*. Maybe the first moment it becomes evident is when it is clear that Jack Walser's male-produced journalistic speech is not to prevail once Fevvers and Lizzie usurp his hegemonic control of the narrative and start emasculating him little by little as soon as Lizzie "seizes the narrative between her teeth" (Carter: 1993a, p. 32).

After these initial considerations on the unavoidable interrelationality among texts, another noisy voice that undoubtedly stands out in the theoretical crowd is that of Kristeva who, by the way, also first used the term intertextuality. With regard to her proposition, it is

noticeable how it manages to mingle both Saussurrean and Bakhtinian stands: she is an exponent of Bakhtin's dialogism and she argues that it takes place in the abstract system of language and not in specific social situations. Nevertheless, Kristeva recognises the importance and intrinsic presence and influence of the social text through ideological structures and struggles. Moreover, she defends that the production of meaning is in part played out within and without the text, in the text itself and in the social text simultaneously, in a way that the past setting is always taken into account as meaning is constructed (Allen: 2000, p. 35-9). Similarly, Carter's works mirror the moment in which they were written and the corresponding aesthetics of postmodernism, but never stop echoing the past social text. This is so much so that she appropriates prevailing images of womanhood in the nineteenth century and, by inscribing them, aims also to deconstruct them as human constructs or, in other words, she "reappropriate[s] forms of the past to speak to a society from within the values and history of that society while still questioning it" (Hutcheon: 1995, p. 12). Therefore, it is by using the prevailing discourses from within the appropriated past text that the present-day without concomitantly subverts the erstwhile without and unveils the opaque mechanisms operating in society today. Thus, it is due to this on-going process that the Bakhtinian term 'polyphonic novel' is so appropriate and Kristeva adopts the same reasoning.

Nonetheless, by positing the author's demise in his famous article "The Death of the Author" (Barthes: 1977b, p. 142-148), the poststructuralist Roland Barthes is much probably the one who has provided the most controversial postulate. According to Lorna Sage's memories of the time it was released, "[i]f you renounced and denied the author's power over the text, the author's traditional authority, you were symbolically defying too the patriarchal power that decreed *your* place in the book of the world" (Sage: 2007, p. 3). Likewise, Carter also seems to have enjoyed greatly her share of the pleasure and "the euphoria of spitting in Almighty conformity's eye":

> Truly, it felt like Year One... all that was holy was in the process of being profaned... I can date to that time... and to that sense of heightened awareness of the society around me in the summer of 1968, my own questioning of the nature of my reality as a *woman*. How that social fiction of my 'femininity' was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing (Carter: 1983, p. 70).

To begin with, Barthes does not deny Kristeva's 'permutation of texts' (Allen: 2000, p. 35). Much on the contrary, he recognises the dependence the text has in relation to language and the latter's immemorial continuous histories of meaning. Besides, two images are of significant importance in his proposition, namely the text as a never-ending fabric

"woven out of numerous discourses and spun from already existent meaning" (Allen: 2000, p. 67) and the 'demoniacal'[7] power of the dialogical text.

As a matter of fact, by arguing that the concept of an author is first and foremost a modern and capitalist construct which does not give so much prominence to the abstract text and its content as it does to the concrete work and the name attached to it for the sake of profit, Barthes's chief goal, which thoroughly accords with Kristeva's line of thought, is to undercut the 'myth of filiation' which encompasses notions of paternity, traditional source text, origin and influence (Ibid, p. 69). That is to say, discourses which corroborate the existence of an individual and unified authorial consciousness which furnishes every and single text with a central and legitimate meaning. Interestingly, by means of a plot which resembles such an attitude towards the dominant stream of thought, Carter also relativises the borders between legitimacy and illegitimacy in *Wise Children* by calling into question the legitimacy and 'high' culture of the Hazard's descendants, which is made up of traditional Shakespearean actors who boast a hierarchical theatrical reputation which stems back from the nineteenth century in the forefather and patriarch Ranulph Hazard. Actually, it is from the outset, by raising doubts about Ranulph's paternity, as rumour has it that in fact Cassius Booth is Melchior's and Peregrine's real father, that metaphorically the 'myth of filiation' is challenged and refused by the exposition of several fake paternities that are brought to light throughout the novel. In the end, what takes place is a democratisation of classes, language and culture which ends up with Melchior recognising publicly his paternity, putting an end to the Chance sisters' bastard status and, in a way, debunking once and for all the 'myth of filiation'.

Nonetheless, in order to fulfil his principal objective as enunciated above, Barthes conspicuously questions the author's existence in what ostensibly is a complete denial of his/her voice in the text. Indeed, Barthes claims that it is language that speaks, 'performs', and not the author, which makes writing itself an impersonal act (Barthes: 1977b, p. 143). In addition, he makes a difference between two sorts of readers: those who look for a stable meaning in the text and those who enact a pluralist textual analysis that paves the way for the disruptive power of intertextuality, which is utterly opposed to the practice of criticism that not only aims at providing the text with a final meaning, but also endorses the idea of deciphering the authorial presence that supposedly underlies the text (Ibid: 1981, p. 43-44).

By doing that, Barthes apparently bestows on the reader by far the most important part in the construction of meaning and the production of the anti-monological text to the author's detriment, and reinforces it when he states that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its

destination" (Barthes: 1977b, p. 148). To a certain extent, such a statement would be indisputably accurate as there will surely be as many meanings as readers, which underpins the plurality of voices in opposition to the holy and unquestionable word stemming from a god-like author, as well as the idea that meaning fluctuates from reader to reader. All things considered, once he supports the idea of a plurality of meanings, his proposition seems somewhat comparable to that of Kristeva's, except for the fact that he places too much of an emphasis on the Author's inexistence. Further, despite the famous motto "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author", even the reader's importance is apparently underplayed when Barthes says that this destination cannot be personal anymore, that "the reader is without history, biography, psychology" (Barthes: 1977b, p. 148). In spite of these seeming controversies, for the sake of clinging only to the widely known Barthesian view that 'the Author is dead', perhaps it is better for the time being to agree with Allen that in Barthes's hands the text "foregrounds dramatically the productive role of the reader" (Allen: 2000, p. 68-9).

Furthermore, both Barthes and Kristeva understand that the author as a subject is 'lost' in the text, that the authorial 'I' stops being a 'subject of utterance' and becomes a mere 'subject of enunciation' (Ibid, p. 40-42). Nevertheless, the extent to which the author is 'lost' seems arguable as, for instance, several autobiographical elements can be spotted in Carter's work, which makes her neither thoroughly 'dead' nor 'untraceable'. Effectively, the giantess Fevvers reminds a lot of how Carter must have felt during her personal experience living in Japan, a foreign country which was like Jonathan Swift's land of Brobdingnag (*Gulliver's Travels*) for her, a place in which her size, skin and the colour of her hair made her feel like a real freak: "In the department store there was a rack of dresses labelled: 'For Young and Cute Girls Only'. When I looked at them, I felt as gross as [the giantess] Glumdalclitch[10]. I wore men's sandals... the largest size [...]" (Carter: 1981, p. 8). For this reason, Barthes's proposition that the author is dead sounds rather far-fetched. Eventually, he himself somewhat admits how utopian it is: "Even a radically avant-garde text [...] needs 'its shadow: this shadow is a *bit* of ideology, a *bit* of representation, a *bit* of subject'" (Barthes: 1975, p. 32). Perhaps a better way to put it is Carter's, who "went in for the proliferation, rather than the death, of the author" (Sage: 2007, p. 58) which is not far from Barthes's view for he himself claims that those readers who perform textual analysis are the real 'writers' of the text (Allen: 2000, p. 69-70).

[10] Glumdalclitch is the giantess who takes care of Gulliver and whom he grows fond of.

Two well-known theoreticians who have also contributed immensely to the comprehension of the intertextual journey are the structuralists Genette and Riffaterre. To begin with, Genette does not see in any way literary works as original pieces of text. Much on the contrary, he understands that every single element is obtained from a transcendent enclosed system and the manner in which it is done is somehow and in different degrees purposefully concealed by the author. As a result, the critic receives more prominence on account of his presumable task of unveiling and making known the way this borrowing of elements and articulations among texts are performed (Allen: 2000, p. 96-7). Furthermore, by drawing upon Bakhtin's dialogism and Kristeva's intertextuality, which for him take place in the abstract system of language, Genette provides what can be seen as a more minute view of the intertextual process. Thus, instead of Kristeva's 'intertextuality' he uses the term 'transtextuality' to refer to "all that which puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts" (Stam: 2005: p. 27; Genette: 1997a, p. 1), and divides it into five categories, to wit intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality and architextuality.

In very few words, the first category boils down to the connection between two or among several texts and even the presence of one within the other "in the form of quotation, plagiarism, and allusion" (Stam: 2005, p. 27; Genette: 1997a, p. 1-2).

Next, paratextuality has to do with the existence of extra textual material that might inform the reader's final understanding of the main text. Nonetheless, so as to comprehend better its enactment, it is necessary to know that 'para-' is an ambiguous prefix which refers both to 'within' and 'without'. Hence, in order to furnish a work with these 'external' elements, not only the author but also editors and publishers may resort to peritexts and epitexts: the former made up of "titles, chapter titles, prefaces and notes [...] dedications, inscriptions, epigraphs", and the latter of "interviews, publicity announcements, reviews by and addresses to critics, private letters and other authorial and editorial discussions – [literally] 'outside' of the text in question" (Allen: 2000, p. 103-6). In effect, a very good example of epitextual material is an article in which Carter talks about her maternal grandmother, who took her to the village of Wath-upon-Dearne no sooner had she been born in 1940 to spend the wartime safe and sound:

> [She] was a woman of such physical and spiritual heaviness she seemed to have been born with a greater degree of gravity than most people. She came from a community where women rule the roost... [...] and she overshadowed her own daughters, whom she did not understand – my mother, who liked things to be nice; my dotty aunt (Carter: 1977, p. 43-44).

After reading this excerpt, it comes as no surprise that unlike the absent motherly figure, grandma is a strong presence for the narrator in *Wise Children*, principally during the blitzes: "She [Grandma Chance] was our air-raid shelter; she was our entertainment; she was our breast" (Carter: 1993b, p. 29). Thereby, it is just impossible not to admit that the possession of this autobiographical experience bears a considerable influence on the subsequent reading of the novel, which shows also that paratextual components can be used to intentionally circumscribe meaning (Genette: 1997b, p. 407).

Third, metatextuality is the sort of transtextuality in which a text overtly or covertly refers back to another and establishes with it a relationship which may range from eulogy to criticism (Ibid, p. 102). Interestingly, as Stam points out:

> In the colonial and post-colonial eras, literature has often "written back" against empire, often in the form of critical rewriting of key texts from the European novelistic tradition. [...] Another recent trend within literature involves the rewriting of a novel from the perspective of secondary or even imaginary additional characters (Stam: 2005, p. 28-29) [11].

Carter endows *Wise Children* with this postcolonial aspect by rewriting the nineteenth-century social text through into the twentieth century and knocking Shakespeare off the pedestal he used to be put on during the Victorian spread of cultural Englishness through the colonies which had the bard as its main symbol: "Ranulph's evangelical zeal for spreading the Word of Shakespeare is so great that he 'crosses, crisscrosses' the globe, travelling 'to the ends of the empire' in his efforts to sell the religion of Shakespeare and the English values he represents" (Webb: 1995, p. 283; Sanders: 2008b, p. 52). Indeed, the whole novel is strewn with Shakespearean references in such a way as to portray the bard in his pre-canonised condition by travestying him in other media such as the cinema and the television. By doing so, Carter challenges the traditional borders between 'high' and 'low' cultures, represented by the Hazard dynasty and the Chance sisters, respectively, to prove her point that "Shakespeare just isn't an intellectual" (Sage: 1992, p. 186)[12]. In the end, what is left is a decaying empire in the picture of the beggar Gorgeous George tattooed with a map of the world featuring the

[11] This extract is superbly illustrated by Carter's short story "Black Venus" in which two discourses meet, clash and interweave from the beginning to the end, namely that of the French poet Baudelaire and of his black lover Jeanne Duval. By taking into account the poet's biographers, who were rather generous to him and less kind to Duval, Carter appropriates Baudelaire's "Black Venus" poems and undercuts the prevailing ideology by changing Duval from object to subject and giving her a voice which has been denied by history.

[12] Perhaps that is why one of *Wise Children*'s opening epigraphs is a direct allusion to one of the most famous songs in Cole Porter's late-1940s musical *Kiss Me Kate*, namely "Brush up Your Shakespeare", in whose lyrics it is said that guys who know Shakespeare can impress the ladies. This time, however, it is Carter who makes a HUGE impression on her readers by knowing and transgressing this 'universal' Shakespeare. It worth noting that "*Kiss Me Kate* has Shakespeare's misogynistic comedy *The Taming of the Shrew* quite literally at its core" (Sanders: 2008a, p. 29).

erstwhile British colonies in pink. Once ‘Clown Number One to the British Empire’, now the sight of him makes Dora exclaim “Lo, how the mighty are fallen” (Carter: 1993b, p. 150, 196; 2 Samuel 1:27). After all, “George shows us an empire falling: having once dominated the world, this Englishman can now be master of only one space: his own body” (Webb: 1995, p. 286). Different from that, as the novel closes, the septuagenarian old sisters dance and sing along Bard Road for, by now, they are impregnated with joy and self-assertiveness as a result of the eventual democratisation of language.

The fourth transtextuality explains the nature of the interdependence between a text and an anterior one, the ‘hypertext’ and ‘hypotext’, respectively, in which the former “transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends” the latter (Allen, p. 107-8; Stam, p. 31). With regard to this category, a point that is usually raised is to which extent the ignorance or even the inexistence of the earlier text can detract from the appreciation of a work, and influence the construction of meaning. According to Genette, that needs not be an issue as texts can be read either autonomously or in relation to the source text (Genette: 1997a, p. 397). In *Nights at the Circus*, for instance, there can be on the part of the reader lack of knowledge as to the intertextual reference to the legend of Leda and the Swan as well as Helen of Troy’s birth. Even though such a fact surely informs the reader’s understanding and makes his reading different from another’s who knows the hypotext, the text itself can still be read and appreciated on its own merits. Moreover, as Wisker states, “Carter’s particular talent is to make the complex accessible and amusing. The reader does not need to know the references, although this helps enrich reading, because she explains what each reference suggests” (Wisker: 2003, p. 10). Curiously, that is the reader once more acting on the production of meaning regardless of the author in a situation in which there takes place the clash between two dimensions: textual versus intertextual, namely a reading taking into account only the text itself being played off against another which considers the inter-texts (Allen: 2000, p. 115-16).

Finally, architextuality refers to “the generic taxonomies suggested or refused by the titles or subtitles of a text” (Stam: 2005, p. 30) and other textual references. That is, there are certain textual elements, architexts, which raise the reader’s expectations as for, among other things, genre, mode and theme owing to the fact that the whole literary system is based on these very same invariable, or at least gradually changing, components (Allen: 2000, p. 100-103). However, these self-same expectations are somewhat subverted in many ways by Carter. Actually, not to mention for now the real blurring of genres Carter performs, it is noteworthy the subversion she puts at work within one single genre as she does with the

Gothic, which was much influential in nineteenth-century writing and is mainly characterised by the critique of an apparent social security and stability that deep inside masks doubt and deception by disempowering its victims. In the end, though, order is usually restored at the expense of those who go on under the yoke of "dominant middle-class white masculinist beliefs and behaviours" (Wisker: 2003, p. 18). Nevertheless, despite appropriating this literary genre, Carter writes in tune with contemporary feminist Gothic writing and, thereby, does not reproduce it entirely as her point of view is rather complicitous with that of the victim-to-be. As a result, she does not reestablish the former *status quo* for it would imply in the perpetuation of the concealed cruelties perpetrated and imposed by patriarchy. Therefore, even though Fevvers could become the target of destructive adulation by turning into a golden bird in a golden cage for the Grand Duke in *Nights at the Circus*, "in [Carter's] hands, the seemingly adored but ultimately locked up, disempowered and sexually victimized 'living doll' escapes the domestic trap, celebrating her own identity and sexual power" (Wisker: 2003, p. 18-19, 28-30).

As for Michael Riffaterre's theory, it is mainly based on the presuppositions that texts signpost how they can be decoded without any need to look back for textual reference and that readers have enough knowledge of the literary tradition and of society's normative discourses to perform such a task (Allen: 2000, p. 125). That is, his thesis underpins the uniqueness of a literary text and its self-sufficiency. In effect, he provides an anti-referential semiotic approach in opposition to a referential mimetic one which chiefly characterises the poststructuralist concept of intertextuality. In this way, he favours the textual to the detriment of the intertextual by arguing that meaning construction is only possible owing to semiotic structures which connect and interrelate the innumerable elements which make up a literary text, which might range from a single word to a whole sentence. In other words, he somehow admits the existence of intertextual relations, but he does not see it as necessary to trace back the inter-texts to produce meaning. In addition, he claims that it is up to the reader to deal with the problem of an eventual need for a mimetic reading. Actually, he conceives that reading and text interpretation occur first on a mimetic level. However, once the reader stumbles across the text's indeterminacies or ungrammaticalities, which do not necessarily have to do with sentence construction, he resorts to a semiotic level on which he tries to identify the semiotic units underlying the text (Allen: 2000, p. 115-16).

For Riffaterre, there is no room for ambiguity or ungrammaticality on a semiotic level, only final decidability. According to him, what there can be are 'syllepses', or words whose meaning might vary from a context to another as it is not intrinsic to them. Moreover, so as to

solve any ungrammaticality to identify the relationship among semiotic units, the reader can also resort to an ‘interpretant’, a term borrowed from the linguist C. S. Pierce that refers to a word which makes clear the sort of common nature or connection these units share (Allen: 2000, p. 117-18). In fact, this ‘interpretant’ seems to be nothing but Riffaterre’s hypothetical ‘matrix’ which may be a word that does not appear in the text and epitomises what the reader understands as the text’s semiotic unity, that is the result of the transformation that the ‘idiolect’ or the author’s artistry enacts upon the ‘sociolect’ or the normative discourses which pervade and prevail in the social sphere (Ibid, p. 119). In short, in order to perform a semiotic interpretation, the reader has to presuppose the inter-text, or the text in its pretransformational state, also called hypogram, that all in all is what Barthes styles ‘the already read’ that “is not located in the text itself but is the product of past semiotic and literary practice” (Ibid, p. 121-22, 124).

In accordance with Riffaterre’s theory, the reader can enjoy Carter’s works regardless of his/her lack of knowledge of the inter-texts because she makes them accessible by furnishing pieces of information which make possible presuppositions, for example, in *Nights at the Circus*. Proof thereof are the several direct and indirect references to the legend of Leda and the Swan as well as Helen of Troy’s birth from the outset: Fevvers says she was hatched just like Helen and her shoulder parts are compared to those of her supposed father, the swan; baby Fevvers was found in a basket “sleeping among a litter of broken eggshells”; Walser raises the navel controversy as Fevvers claims to have been hatched just like the oviparous are; above Ma Nelson’s mantelpiece there is a picture portraying the legendary encounter between Leda and the Swan; in the game the Grand Duke plays with Fevvers the last egg “was white gold and topped with a lovely little swan, a tribute, perhaps, to her putative paternity” (Carter: 1993a, p. 7, 12, 17-18, 28, 192).

At long last, Bloom’s intertextuality is mainly characterised by a focus on the text’s relational nature in which the text itself represents a synecdoche for a larger whole (Allen: 2000, p. 136). Interestingly, he defines as the only exceptions in terms of ‘truly original writers’ the Jehovist writer, Shakespeare and Freud in the sense that they are endowed with the status of fact or ‘facticity’ for it is impossible to eschew their influence. What is more, he claims that Shakespeare is the most factitious writer as he is a constant source of inspiration even to his readers’ personal lives: “Shakespeare did not think one thought and one thought only; rather scandalously, he thought all thoughts, for all of us” (Bloom: 1997, p. xxvii-xxviii). Curiously, Shakespeare is exactly the emblem that used to symbolise the British

nineteenth-century imperialism that Carter adopts in *Wise Children* as the patriarchal backbone that is to be broken to pieces.

Nonetheless, perhaps what mostly calls attention to Bloom's theory is the assumption that the intertextual process stems from two concomitant motivations: a need to imitate precursor writers and a desire to be original, which gives way to his 'anxiety of influence' which, by the way, takes place differently to the female writer who suffers from what Gilbert and Gubar style 'anxiety of authorship': "The son of many fathers, today's male writer feels hopelessly belated; the daughter of too few mothers, today's female writer feels that she is helping to create a viable tradition which is at last definitively emerging" (Gilbert; Gubar: 1979, p. 50).

Furthermore, Bloom points out the 'reversal of power and authority' that is played out once women disregard the charge of unnaturalness and take up the phallic pen to give voice to their female experience and put in action an articulated resistance to dominant constructions of femininity. Effectively, that is exactly what takes place in *Wise Children* and *Nights at the Circus*, in which the female voice debunks the prevailing views of womanhood by undercutting in many ways the patriarchal discourse that is installed just to be eventually subverted.

Summing up, it is unavoidable to attend to doubts and conflicting positions once dealing with intertextuality as they are by definition immanent in the dialogical nature of every text (Allen: 2000, p. 59). However, some conclusions can be drawn from this overview of the principal theories which deal with the textual material. First, it seems that all the elements analysed, the author, the reader, the intertextual relations and the own text contribute somehow and in different degrees to the construction of a multitude of meanings. Moreover, as Bakhtin claims, the final outcome also varies according to the context, which entails time, place and culture. With regard to the influence of (an) author(s) over another, it is apparently as likely to happen as it is that the final interpretation of a text is informed by the anterior endless voices which make it up. As for the concern to trace back sources, it seems so unnecessary to the most important that is the text comprehension and appreciation as Genette and Riffaterre show. Besides, there will always be sources which will have been lost in time the closer it gets to the birth of language as it is known. Finally, the author's existence will never be threatened as his voice will ever be part of the numberless noisy ones which compose every single text. In the end, as Allen puts it, "there is never a single or correct way to read a text, since every reader brings with him or her different expectations, interests, viewpoints and prior reading experiences" (Allen: 2000, p. 7).

UNDER CARTER'S PARODIC UMBRELLA

She [Carter] had an instinctive feeling for the other side, which included also the underside [13]
Margaret Atwood

To avoid interpretation, art may become parody [14]
Susan Sontag

Among the postmodern narrative strategies used by Angela Carter in *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* in her constant going back to the past in order to rework appropriated linguistic or artistic material, perhaps parody is one of the most controversial ones. Indeed, parodic strategies are used to a wide range of purposes, from reverence to mockery, from a playful to a critical standpoint, which obtain the most of parody's inherently dual nature, namely deconstructive and conservative at once, and significantly contribute to the perpetuation of those very same texts they aim to assault and deconstruct (Hutcheon: 1990, p. 34; Dentith: 2000, p. 36-37).

In addition, parody is an umbrella term which encompasses several other devices such as satire and pastiche, which also bear upon the way parody is seen, either in a positive or negative manner, or even make its real comprehension on its own terms rather difficult. Moreover, the application of parody invariably raises issues related to the originality of the final work, as well as of its nature: parasite or host? In the end, regardless of its main target, be it the source text, its author and/or its reader, the fact is that parody is by nature the language of the margins, paradoxically both inside and outside (Hutcheon: 1990, p. 66), and very often establishes a quite dynamic and productive triple interplay among the parodist, the author of the parodied text, and the reader of the parody work.

To begin with, any attempt to cast any sort of doubt on the very close relationship between parody and postmodernism is bound for failure. In fact, one of latter's hallmarks is a patent dialogue with the textualised past so as to bring to light the history of representations known to the reader. By doing so and much in tune with parodic procedures, postmodernism provides the necessary means to reassess the past in the light of the present (Ibid, p. 19-20). Furthermore, the paradoxical and concomitant inscription and subversion of the incorporated

[13] Atwood: 1992, p. 61.

[14] Sontag: 1998, p. 694.

past is as much a postmodernist as a parodic feature in the use and abuse of the established forms of representations. Thus, there takes place at the same time the signalling of some connection and distance from anterior textual material which is in accordance with the ambivalent prefix 'para' present in the ancient Greek word 'parodia' which, in the context of parody study, can be understood as pointing out both nearness and opposition (Dentith: 2000, p. 164; Rose: 1993, p. 48). All in all, as Hutcheon puts it: "[t]o parody is not to destroy the past; in fact to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it. And this, once again, is the postmodern paradox" (Hutcheon: 1990, p. 126).

In this way, in *Nights at the Circus* Carter dialogues conspicuously with past historical contexts once she brings to the fore the suffrage movement, which surely was the focus of much debate during late nineteenth century, and apparently calls upon the reader to query the reasons for its denial until 1918. Actually, having been raised at Ma Nelson's brothel as "the pure child of the century that just now is waiting in the wings, the New Age in which no women will be bound down to the ground", a place in which all were suffragists (Carter: 1993a, p. 25, 38), Fevvers is inevitably associated with the movement for women's rights. Likewise, Mr Rosencreutz takes part in the whole affair as he strongly opposes the concession of the franchise to women:

> 'You must know this gentleman's name!' insisted Fevvers and, seizing his notebook, wrote it down. [...] On reading it:
> 'Good God,' said Walser.
> 'I saw in the paper only yesterday how he [Mr Rosencreutz] gives the most impressive speech in the House on the subject of Votes for Women. Which he is against. On account of how women are of a different soul-substance from men, cut from a different bolt of spirit cloth, and altogether too pure and rarefied to be bothering their pretty little heads with things of *this* world [...]' (Carter: 1993a, p. 78-9).

But it is this self-same man who unsuccessfully tries to kill Fevvers in a necromantic ritual so that he can obtain his *elixum vitae* at the expense of her life and live longer as many other patriarchs somehow have done before him, which brings to mind W. B. Yeats's poems "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium", in which a golden bird symbolises 'the artifice of eternity' (Sage: 2007, p. 47). Suffice to say, it comes as no surprise that Mr Rosencreutz antagonises the idea that "the caged bird should want to see the end of cages" for his attitude towards Fevvers as well as his political position with regard to women's emancipation accord perfectly well with the winged rampant phallus that he wears round his neck and certainly epitomises what lies behind his discourse (Carter: 1993a, p. 38, 70, 78-83).

Nevertheless, it is necessary to be careful in order not to label parody as an all-embracing term used to every single reference to past textual material. As a matter of fact, this

overarching concept is best applied to define intertextuality, to which parody is nothing but only a part of its spectrum of intertextual relations due to its particular sort of inflection in 'language imitation' (Dentith: 2000, p. 4, 37). In other words, there is always intertextuality in parody, but not necessarily parody in intertextuality. Besides, whereas intertextuality can revolve around the either/or and sometimes both deconstructive and conservative, parody *is* intrinsically dialogically both (Rose: 1993, p. 183-84).

However, the interchangeable application of these terms is far from being uncommon. It is so much so that even Linda Hutcheon in the index to *The Politics of Postmodernism* tells the reader to check 'parody' in the entry for 'intertextuality' (Hutcheon: 1995, p. 191). In short, the nature of the connection between these two terms, which is also in consonance with the way Carter deals with parody, seems best defined by Hutcheon below:

> Intertextual parody of canonical American and European classics is one mode of appropriating and reformulating – with significant change – the dominant white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, Euro-centric culture. It does not reject it, for it cannot. Postmodernism signals its dependence by its *use* of the canon, but reveals its rebellion through its ironic *abuse* of it (Ibid: 1990, p. 129-30).

That is precisely what Carter does, for instance, when she appropriates the myth of Leda and the Swan portrayed in W. B. Yeats's poem, "Leda and the Swan", in which Zeus rapes an unprotected and staggering Leda in the guise of a 'feathered glory', and reworks it in such a manner that she somewhat inverts roles at the end of *Nights at the Circus* and depicts the winged *aerialiste* Fevvers on top of Walser while they copulate as her winged body allows her no position other than that (Carter: 1993a, p. 292-95). However, Carter's intent here is not to establish a female supremacy, but only undercut the patriarchal stereotype of male dominance by furnishing an alternative his/herstory in that the relationship described is ultimately one between equals (Day: 1998, p. 192-94).

As the example above shows, parody invariably brings the source text to the spotlight and undermines it in tandem. In effect, this debunking of traditional patriarchal precepts and institutions or paradoxical laying bare of the devices simultaneous with their application, as the Russian Formalists would put it, is perhaps Carter's main goal and reason for using the parodic power in order to challenge and unveil the norms the parodied text tries to naturalise (Rose: 1993, p. 82-83). In this way, parodic discourse demonstrates how available forms of representations stem from anterior ones as well as it raises the reader's awareness to possibilities provided by both change and cultural continuity. Thereby, once at work, "postmodern parody is both deconstructively critical and constructively creative,

paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation – in any medium" (Hutcheon: 1995, p. 93, 98). Moreover, once the interpolation of the target text into the parodist's textual structure basically typifies parody, it is unavoidably politically double-coded. That is to say, parodic procedures realise themselves by means of two codes or texts which aim at conveying one message through the contrast between these codes (Rose: 1993, p. 82, 87).

Therefore, bringing to mind the visionary prophet-poet William Blake's anti-imperialist words that "The Foundation of Empire is Art and Science. Remove them or Degrade them and the Empire is No more. Empire follows Art and not vice versa" (Frye: 1953, p. 447), Carter depicts the religious zeal with which Ranulph Hazard disseminates Englishness via Shakespeare to foreigners in "those dark parts of the globe where civilization had yet to penetrate" at the end of the nineteenth century, which runs parallel to the grafted historical text which relates this cultural domination with the help of the Shakespearean emblem to the territorial expansion of the British Empire (Carter: 1993b, p. 19-20; Hulme: 1993, p. 28). As a result, British imperialism is called into question as it is implied that deep inside all boils down to money as the bard's culture is later on capitalised to the point that it becomes actual currency (Carter: 1993b, p. 191). In addition, so as to make blatant the real purpose lying behind all this piety that portrays the hegemonic discourse as a 'divine Word', Carter connects art and religion in Ranulph's 'mission' to perform Shakespeare "in order to persuade other people of the greatness of the Bard's words, just as missionaries took the Bible and tried to persuade 'natives' of the truth of God's Word". However, what goes unnoticed, and Carter points this out, is that the theatre, especially the very Shakespearean theatre used in the colonising process, is also immanently destabilising and subversive by virtue of its illegitimate nature as a profession (Webb: 1995, p. 284).

Nonetheless, parody is not infrequently applied as an umbrella term to lump together several other cultural practices to which it can be somewhat related. To begin with, one of the terms with which parody is very often connected is irony, a discourse Simon Dentith rates as being double-voiced for "it permits the reader to recognise that there are two distinct consciousnesses operating in a single utterance, and that their evaluative attitudes are not the same" (Dentith: 2000, p. 64). In other words, the ambiguous character of the ironic discourse is accomplished by means of a single code which conveys at least two messages: one that is usually immediately recognised, and another which is likely to be identified only by an 'initiated' public (Rose: 1993, p. 87).

Interestingly, this peculiar ironic dual meaning in parody is attained through two texts or codes in which the anterior masks the parodist's intention. However, irony *per se* usually manages to be more mysterious than parody as in the latter there will always be at least two distinct authors and codes, as well as their sets of messages, in opposition to irony's *mélange* of messages in one single code. Furthermore, unlike the ironist's meaning that is likely to be more promptly realised by the better prepared reader, the parodist's work is usually made manifest as it relies mostly on the comic effect provided by the contrast between the code of the target text and the context into which it is inserted (Rose: 1993, p. 87-88).

Ironic parody is enacted in *Wise Children*, for example, in relation to the deplorable street beggar Gorgeous George. Different from England's patron saint who fought the dragon with his phallic sword and won, "the [bygone] prime spectacle on offer" literally embodies the diminishing lights of an in decline post-war Britain in "a morbid raspberry colour that looked bad for his health" (Carter: 1993b, p. 66-67) found on the map tattooed on his own skin which portrays the past powerful British Empire in pink. As Linden Peach states, "perhaps suggesting how the Empire has eventually proved bad for the psychological and economic health of Britain" (Peach: 1998, p. 137). Besides, irony is also present in the fact that this "enormous statement" that George himself is might conceal something underneath. Indeed, his catch phrase "Nothing queer about our George" (Carter: 1993b, p. 64, 66) is quite compromising in the sense that it suggests a latent homosexuality on his part or, why not, a certain queerness embedded in the English culture? The fact is that somehow English masculinity is played with as not only George plays Bottom in *The Dream* but also always carries around his golf club, like his more famous saint namesake his sword, both representing anal fixation and sexual violence, respectively (Peach: 1998, p. 137).

Unlike irony, which makes use of subtlety to achieve its objective, a far straighter-to-the-point member of the parodic range is satire, mainly characterised by its critical vein. First of all, satire differs from parody by the fact that the source hardly ever contributes either to the satirist's textual structure or to its aesthetic needs, which means that satire's critical arrows usually aim at something external to it. Interestingly, the satirical discourse is also inherently double-edged as its attack may be directed not only against the norm but also its distortion. In addition, as opposed to irony which utilises one single code to communicate two distinct messages, satire needs only a single code to convey one crystal clear message. Nonetheless, of course parody may take on a satiric aim and direct its firing squad at a piece of text grafted into the parody work itself. However, when this happens to be the case, this association often

turns out to be negative as parody is criticised for becoming too destructive (Rose: 1993, p. 79, 82, 86, 88-89).

In *Nights at the Circus*, Lizzie advises Fevvers before she goes to her meeting with the Grand Duke: "Go for the ballocks, if needs must" (Carter: 1993a, p. 182). Maybe that is exactly Carter's purpose in her use of satirical parody in *Wise Children*: to throw her critical arrows right at patriarchy's Achilles' heel. Thereby, there seems to be no better target than a key cultural icon such as Shakespeare, directly related to the theatre, the Hazard family, the sense of Englishness, and to the British Empire. Effectively, if there exists a general 'truth', it is that there is no room in the postmodern world for an absolute Shakespeare. Neither for the Hazard dynasty nor British imperialism, both directly connected to the bard and satirised in *Wise Children*. Hence, "it is not surprising then that Carter seeks to demystify traditional and patriarchal authority through the Shakespearean figure of Melchior" (Meaney: 1993, p. 128). As a matter of fact, just like the latter-day disempowered and demoralised Windsor family that has been the object of public entertainment, once the patriarch Ranulph and his son Melchior take on the kingly mantle in Shakespearean parts, "the Hazards belonged to everyone. They were a national treasure" (Carter: 1993b: p. 14, 38, 57, 205; Webb: 1995, p. 283). However, much probably the climactic moment during which Carter finally attains her satirical goal is the public humiliation undergone by Melchior, "Mr British Theatre" of yesteryear, on his own son's live TV show "Lashings of Lolly" (Carter: 1993b: p. 41-42). In fact, a very good response for all those who have been cruelly victimised for only crossing the Hazards' way.

In much opposition to this critical distance from the source text seen so far, pastiche is another adjacent form in the parodic spectrum which performs quite differently. Actually, pastiche is mostly characterised by imitation of an idiosyncratic style or manner rather than transformation while keeping a playful feature (Dentith: 2000, p. 11, 155, 194):

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor (Rose: 1993, p. 222).

Thus, Carter's echo of Faustus's question "Is this the face that launched a thousand ships" as "this Helen [Fevvers] launched a thousand quips" (Marlowe: 2001, p. 74; Carter: 1993a, p. 8), as well as her reworking of *Moby Dick*'s narrator's opening lines "Call me Ishmael" as "Call him Ishmael; but Ishmael with an expense account" which shows Walser as

a latter-day Ishmael, in the sense that he is also a “man of action” who loves an adventurous life (Melville: 1993, p. 1; Carter: 1993a, p. 10; Peach: 1998, p. 133), are good examples of Carter’s use of this cultural practice (Stoddart: 2007, p. 12). As it is seen, there can even be laughter once pastiche is put at work, but it is not derisive, there is not an intent of critical distance. Actually, pastiche results from the realisation that the original itself is not important, just its style, as Stoddart attests: “pastiche may still provoke laughter, but it is laughter derived from relief at the inevitable emptiness or failure of the very idea of the ‘original’ rather than the mockery of it” (Ibid, p. 39).

Nonetheless, lack of proximity in terms of intent from the target text is peculiar to most of the elements which make up the parodic umbrella. For instance, another term with which parody is very often associated and contributes negatively to its image is burlesque, which works by establishing a close connection between ‘high’ and ‘low’ in the ‘decadence’ of a character in order to critique the former (Dentith: 2000, p. 147). It is worth noting that burlesque is usually linked to words like ridicule and mockery and that is why it attributes a certain connotation to parody that is often thought of as destructive (Rose: 1993, p. 9-10, 25-26). But that is not to be taken as a rule of thumb as for some, as Christopher Stone claims:

> ridicule is society’s most effective means of curing inelasticity. It explodes the pompous, corrects the well-meaning eccentric, cools the fanatical, and prevents the incompetent from achieving success. Truth will prevail over it, falsehood will cower under it (Stone: 1914, p. 8).

According to Marina Warner, transvestism and impersonation are recurrent elements in Carter’s *oeuvre* which are unquestionably intrinsic to the burlesque and its characteristic masquerade (Warner: 1995, p. 247-48). Proof thereof is Jack Walser who “experienced the freedom that lies behind the mask, within dissimulation, the freedom to juggle with being, and, indeed, with the language which is vital to our being, that lies at the heart of burlesque” (Carter: 1993a, p. 103). In effect, Walser starts relishing this sense of freedom once he departs with Colonel Kearney’s circus to become a clown and subsequently the Human Chicken. Later on, he also turns into an apprentice shaman, a moment during which he presumably reaches the salient stage on his journey in terms of latitude (Ibid, p. 152, 236-38, 252-70).

Furthermore, Fevvers diverges so much in every single way from the Victorian ideal of femininity that she can even be the Parisian *l’Ange Anglaise*, but definitely not the ‘Angel in the House’ whom, following Virginia Woolf’s advice, she kills by means of her very own existence whose image she herself writes and constructs (Woolf: 1961, p. 170). This is so much so that for a moment even Walser wonders whether she is not a man in drag as she is far

from fitting into the prevailing ideal of womanhood (Carter: 1993a, p. 8, 35). In this way, these experiences Walser and Fevvers undergo surely contribute to undermine the male-produced journalistic speech which constrains "Walser's very self" and tries to circumscribe the *aerialiste* into stereotypical interpretations of femininity which does not suit her fine at all, besides enabling Carter to critique patriarchal discourse and expose it to ridicule at once.

Finally, there also exist two other devices which proceed quite differently in the way they attend to the literary model, to wit travesty and mock-heroic. In a few words, travesty is for the most part characterised by the rendering of high-prestige textual material into a low style so as to provoke shock and possibly outrage by the debasement resultant from the interpolation of demotic or coarse tones into the source. In a different vein, mock-heroic translates trivial matters into a dignified mode. That is to say, unlike travesty that polemically reforms its models in a way that can be offensive, mock-heroic tends to produce a comic effect, bathos (Dentith: 2000, p. 104). Indeed, their concurrent use in *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* put into practice the precept that not only elitist and academic but also popular culture feature in postmodernism in such a way that both the so-called lowbrow and highbrow conventions of art are installed and subverted (Hutcheon: 1990, p. 44).

To this end, in *Wise Children* Carter inscribes from the beginning a dichotomic reasoning, "Welcome to the wrong side of the tracks [Bard Road]" (Carter: 1993a, p. 1), which resembles in large part the two roads described in the Bible: to destruction and salvation (Matthew: 7:13-14). However, as she goes on in the narrative, she destroys this patriarchal dualism and proves things can be otherwise, that there needs not be only a legitimate or an illegitimate side of the tracks, perhaps both at once and in harmony by way of a democratisation of 'high' and 'low' art distinctions:

> A characteristic procedure of Carter's is to seize upon some image, icon or bit of mythology and draw out its implications, making gorgeous what is denigrated or scorned, blaspheming against what is held sacred, and exposing what is usually kept covert. [...] Carter is interested in women larger than life, the giantesses of myth and history and fiction – Helen, Venus, Josephine Baker, Jeanne Duval and Sophia Fevvers, the birdwoman in *Nights at the Circus*, in whom the associations of gross size, deformity and sexual licentiousness, for example, are brought gloriously together (Matus: 1991, p. 470-71).

Hence, Shakespeare ends up overtly commodified as a mere seal of approval afforded by "The Royal Family of the theatre" in My Lady Margarine's participation in TV advertisements whose slogan is "To butter or not to butter…", which does embody the Hazard's travestying of their own theatrical reputation (Carter: 1993b, p. 37-38; Sage: 2007, p. 55-6). Conversely, marginalised, peripheral figures are bestowed with a greater

prominence. For instance, despite her gargantuan and grotesque body, her unceremonious bad manners, to sum up a freak according to patriarchal standards, Fevvers not only becomes the winged toast of Europe but also is the one who laughs last – and resonantly better (Carter: 1993a, p. 11, 294-95). Similarly, it is the erstwhile twice illegitimate – by birth and profession – septuagenarian Chance sisters who eventually rejoice in the very face of old age as they *still* dance and sing along Bard Road, but this time impregnated with joy and self-assertiveness (Carter: 1993b, p. 33-34, 165, 231-32).

There are still some other elements of minor importance which sometimes are included in the parodic spectrum of cultural practices which are not discussed here as they are not of great relevance to the study of Carter's novels above.

Regardless of its possible associations with other terms, parody can be played out in a general or specific manner. In fact, Carter's appropriation of nineteenth-century images of womanhood and its reworking can be referred to as general parody as her attack is "aimed at a whole body of texts or kind of discourse; [it is] a more generalised allusion to the constitutive codes of daily language" (Dentith: 2000, p. 7). Thus, in the act of interpolating the textualised past into her parody work, Carter also brings to the fore a whole range of female experience which has been suppressed by patriarchal hegemonic discourse. Thereby, however inappropriate that could have been in the Victorian era, to a greater or lesser degree, her protagonists take up the phallic pen and write their own *her*tories.

Nonetheless, at times Carter's parody is more specific as it is directed towards a particular precursor text (Ibid, p. 7), as it is the case with the dualism she legitimises from the outset in *Wise Children* in the portrayal of two possible tracks and also disrupts by the innumerable allusions to Shakespeare which favour plurality. Actually, this dualism much probably derives from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and from the poem's pervasive motif either for or against the patriarch, "a dualism resulting from the patriarchal and monistic vision of Christianity" (Webb: 1995, p. 286). In this way, Dora's recurrent Miltonic phrase "Lo, how the mighty are fallen" (Carter: 1993b, p. 10, 16, 75, 196; 2 Samuel 1:27) attests how much havoc has been wreaked to the detriment of established patriarchal hierarchies.

Moreover, in spite of being chalk and cheese, Dora attributes both Godlike and Satanic features to Melchior and Peregrine alike: as if he were the bearer of the Adamic word – "we didn't know him from Adam" – to the naked Eve-like children Dora and Nora, Peregrine is also the first man to seduce Dora when she is just thirteen in the very same manner the fallen angel Lucifer does in the guise of a serpent (Carter: 1993b, p. 22, 30, 220-21; Genesis 3:1-6). Similarly, "our father" Melchior Hazard who "did not live in heaven" but whose divine

existence is adored from afar by the illegitimate Chance Sisters also has his Satanic side: "tall, dark and handsome" with "those knicker-shifting [...] eyes", he surely takes part in not so legitimate practices to the point that Dora even wonders "if he lent his mouth here, his arsehole there, to see if that would do the trick" (Carter: 1993b, p. 24, 72, 87).

In addition, there are some arguable points which have to be raised in the study of parody: the questioning of its originality, the attribution of a parasitic nature to it and the disregard for its comic feature by some. First, as Shakespeare puts it: "every tongue brings in a several tale" (Shakespeare: 2005, p. 142), and that is not different in Carter's reworking of past textual material in which an unquestionable authorial intent to subvert invariably echoes the source and furnishes the reader with something new at once. Therefore, although Fevvers can be deemed as "far from original" iconographically speaking as she undoubtedly brings to mind W. B. Yeats's poem "Leda and the Swan", of symbols he uses in "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium", as well as of the Winged Victory of Samothrace[15], the recurrent image of the female winged creature who delivers the shout of victory (Sage: 2007, p. 47), Carter's final product certainly and indisputably opposes the prevailing *fin-de-siècle* idea of femininity witnessed by Yeats.

Furthermore, parody's depiction as "negative, parasitic, or trivial" (Rose: 1993, p. 180) does not prove pertinent as the existence of a parasite is usually synonymous with the demise of its host, which is surely not what parody performs. Much on the contrary, parody contributes to the perpetuation and sometimes even revives unknown target texts (Ibid, p. 41). Finally, since Julia Kristeva "several other late-modern commentators on parodic intertextuality have reduced parody to the intertextual by denying or overlooking the comic aspects of the parody" (Ibid, p. 180). That is to say, parody's comic aspect sometimes is a hindrance to its effective recognition as a legitimate and genuine literary resource, which circumscribes its apprehension to nothing but one more component of the intertextual spectrum. Nonetheless, however comic Carter's handling of the sources, it is always seriously committed in her parodic enterprise to deconstruct naturalised past representations. In effect, "[b]oth irony and parody are double-voicings, for they play one meaning off against another. To call such complexity 'unserious' may well mask a desire to void that doubleness in the name of the monolithic – of any political persuasion" (Hutcheon: 1990, p. 210-11). In short,

[15] The Winged Victory of Samothrace, also called the Nike of Samothrace, is a marble sculpture of the Greek goddess Nike (Victory) whose existence dates from the third century B.C. "She was represented as a winged maiden, often with a garland in one hand and a palm branch in the other, or a fillet in both hands". One of the most celebrated sculptures in the world, one of the peculiarities of this statue is the absence of arms, which have never been recovered (The American: 1968b, p. 488; Bridgwater; Kurtz: 1963a, p. 1505).

perhaps the response below is the best against all these attempts to diminish parody's pivotal role in literature:

> [...] the parodic paradox, by which parody creates new utterances out of the utterances that it seeks to mock, means that it preserves as much as it destroys – or rather, it preserves in the moment that it destroys – and thus the parasite becomes the occasion for itself to act as host. In this as in everything else, parody and its related forms serve to continue the conversation of the world, though its particular contribution is to ensure that the conversation will be usually carried on noisily, indecorously and accompanied by laughter (Dentith: 2000, p. 189).

Once the triangle is closed when the parody work is read, there takes place a simultaneous triple relationship among the parodist, the author of the source text, and the reader in which just the connection between the author of the parodied text and the reader cannot be taken for granted. Effectively, it inevitably raises the question of how important or decisive to the comprehension of the parodist's work or his real intention it is to know the target text. According to Margaret Rose, of course the reader will be on better grounds to understand the parody work if s/he has prior knowledge of the parodied target and its content. Otherwise, s/he will get to know the source through the contrast resulting of its interpolation into the parodist's work, as well as the nature of the discrepancy between the two texts (Rose: 1993, p. 39). Thereby, all the reader has to do is to recognise what Rose calls 'signals' given by the parodist by means of, for instance, discrepancies, incongruities, underlying criticism or humour, which help figure out what the nature of the relationship established between parody work and source text is (Rose: 1993, p. 41).

Curiously enough, sometimes the parodist's aim is not only pointed at the literary model itself, but also at its author and/or reader (Ibid, p. 42). Actually, that is what Carter does in *Wise Children* when she directs her onslaught at this constructed highbrow Shakespeare in the innumerable allusions to his *oeuvre*. By the way, *Wise Children* has *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as the chaotic centrepiece that allows Carter to "celebrate the subversive energies of women" in a "liberating and potentially creative" manner (Wisker: 2003, p. 16, 21, 23). In this way, she attacks this produced 'universal' author and the readers who appreciate this *status* endowed to him at once and brings the bard back to its original popular position by a crystal clear vehement statement that underlies her last novel: "Shakespeare just isn't an intellectual" (Sage: 2007, p. 56; Ibid: 1992, p. 186-7).[16]

[16] This attack to the author and/or his readers is also present in Carter's short story "Black Venus". Here she uses her doubly-coded discourse of complicity and challenge so that there can be a contrast between male fantasy and female experience concomitant with the ironising of the former. By doing so, Carter gives a voice to the disempowered Jeanne Duval, Baudelaire's black lover, who is portrayed in his "Black Venus" poems.

In sum, despite being ignored or treated as a sign of decadence and even lack of future for some and as a positive weapon for some others (Rose: 1993, p. 179-80, 189; Dentith: 2000, p. 186-87), parody and its related forms indisputably have to a greater or lesser degree what it takes to put at work controversial intertextual relationships which are at the same time deconstructively creative and productive and, thereby, play a major role in postmodern writing due to its protean possibilities in terms of usage. As a matter of fact, since its very first use by Aristotle (Dentith: 2000, p. 40), parody has been related to other terms and devices in such a way and extent that today it can be quite difficult to single it out in the different forms it may show up or to define to what degree it is parody and not something else, or even both. At any rate, the truth is that parody *is* for the most part intrinsically connected with several other devices in its present-day usage, something which both provides it with different modulations and facets and enriches the postmodern writer's dialogue with the textualised past. Therefore, it is no surprise that the use of parody is so recurrent in Carter's double-voiced discourse in which she "always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritage of both the muted and the dominant" (Showalter: 1985, p. 263) in order to install and debunk the patriarchal hegemony.

HOCUS-POCUS... *VOILÀ! C'EST* CARTER

The term 'magical realist' might well have been invented to describe Angela Carter [17]
John Haffenden

Fact or fiction? That is undeniably the prevailing mood of doubt and uncertainty once the reader embarks on the extraordinary journeys narrated in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*. From the outset, the first novel promises to be adventurous and permeated by an eerie atmosphere as it opens with the most uncanny incidents while Jack Walser, a sceptical journalist obsessed with defining and fixing reality by means of his male-produced journalistic discourse, interviews the *aerialiste* Fevvers, who is far from being a model of Victorian femininity. In the same vein, *Wise Children* turns out to be astonishing because of the unexpected exuberant stamina with which the septuagenarian twin sisters Dora and Nora Chance tackle a riotous and eventful day, April 23rd, on which paternities are put to question as several birthdays are celebrated – the Chance sisters', their father and uncle's and Shakespeare's –, in an astounding and fluid back and forth movement in time which spans three generations of the Hazard's theatrical troupe and its most peculiar multiple twining. As a matter of fact, both works are endowed with Carter's deft and particular way of interweaving magic and real in such a manner that there appears to be no sense in telling reality apart from fantasy anymore.

Invariably related to Latin American writers such as Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis Borges, who to a greater or lesser extent bear a considerable influence on Carter's later writing (Newman: 1986, p. 1), such a narrative strategy is usually referred to as magical realism, one of the literary genres with which Carter is usually associated to the point that, as Helen Carr claims: "Carter's novels became much more acceptable in Britain after the discovery of South American magic realism: her readers discovered that she was writing in a genre that could be named" (Carr: 1989, p. 7).

By calling into question the realm of the 'real' and its inherent assumptions of truth, thereby, fostering relativity, magical realism proves to be a useful cultural and political weapon which Carter wields so as to, through the co-existence of magic and the everyday

[17] Haffenden: 1985, p. 76.

reality at the same level, show "that representations create rather than reflect reality" (Bertens: 1995, p. 11).

Effectively, this genre is very postmodern in the way it works both "within and against the aesthetics of realism" (Chamberlain: 1986, p. 17), a quintessential postmodernist hallmark which utterly accords with magical realism's contentious nature. After all, magical realism is itself an oxymoronic term:

> One of the genre's principal traits is the disruption of dominant discourses from within. Carter's use of magical realism in *Nights at the Circus* is unquestionably tied to the novel's feminism, as an 'ex-centric' perspective on reality reveals that reality to be centred on patriarchal values and fixed models of gender identity (Johnson: 2007, p. 77).

That is precisely the ordeal Walser faces from the start: he is the bearer of a journalistic patriarchal discourse which purports to report the 'truth', what is 'real', and that is fertile ground for magical realism's relativisation of what is fact or fiction. Proof thereof is Walser's determination to maintain his scepticism despite the "stage magic which pervaded Fevvers' act": "[...] he temporarily lost his place, had to scramble to find it again, almost displaced his composure but managed to grab tight hold of his scepticism just as it was about to blow over the ledge of the press box" (Carter: 1993a, p. 16). So much so that what follows is Walser's thoroughgoing matter-of-fact evaluation of her number. Nevertheless, it is not long before Fevvers and Lizzie, in a very unsuitable attitude as far as Victorian female roles are concerned, take up the phallic pen and interpolate their speech into his version of the facts (Carter: 1993a, p. 32, 54). By doing so, "magical realist texts ask us to look beyond the limits of the knowable [...] magical realism is truly postmodern in its rejection of the binarisms, rationalisms, and reductive materialisms of Western modernity" (Zamora: 1995, p. 498).

Even though this narrative strategy is chiefly known nowadays as magical realism, it is sometimes mistakenly referred to as magic realism or marvellous realism by some authors, or else the three terms are used interchangeably. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that these two other terms for the most part make reference to distinct chronological periods and places which would ultimately lead up to what is today called magical realism. What is important to notice, though, is how Carter also dialogues with these different moments of the genre formation.

To begin with, magical realism does not stem from literature, but from another art, to wit painting. Also dubbed 'post-expressionism' at first, *magic realism* is a term coined in 1925 by the German art critic Franz Roh in order to introduce a new form of painting different from that of expressionism, for the latter "shows an exaggerated preference for fantastic,

extraterrestrial, remote objects" (Roh: 1995, p. 16). According to Roh, "with the word 'magic', as opposed to 'mystic', I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it" (Ibid). Of course, Roh was not oblivious that his post-expressionism diverges from the aesthetics of realism as well: "[...] this new world of objects is still alien to the current idea of Realism. How it stupefies the rearguard and seems to them almost as inappropriate as Expressionism itself!" (Ibid, p. 17). Furthermore, in spite of his consciousness that his art movement was somewhat connected with surrealism, he knew it was distinctive "due to magic realism's focus on the material object and the actual existence of things in the world, as opposed to the more cerebral and psychological reality explored by the surrealists" (Bowers: 2005, p. 12). In other words, surrealism differs from magic realism because unlike the palpable material reality magic realism presents, surrealism relies mainly on the unreal furnished by the imagination and the mind in an attempt to depict the psychological aspects of human beings.

All in all, the truth is that albeit the future held new avenues to magic realism, there were already plenty of crystal clear features of present-day magical realism in it. For instance, in what can be considered his manifesto for magic realism, Roh states that it "endow[s] all things with a deeper meaning and reveal mysteries that always threaten the secure tranquility of simple and ingenuous things: excessively large bodies, lying with the weight of blocks on a skimpy lawn" (Roh: 1995, p. 17-18). Is it not a perfect description of the bird-woman Fevvers and her gargantuan body and its exaggerated proportions?:

> Fevvers yawned with prodigious energy, opening up a crimson maw the size of that of a basking shark, taking in enough air to lift a Montgolfier [...]; God! She could easily crush him [Walser] to death in her huge arms, although he was a big man with the strength of Californian sunshine distilled in his limbs (Carter: 1993a, p. 52).

Needless to say, even though the word 'magic' pervades magic realism and its more developed form magical realism, and can also be taken as synonymous with 'mystery', it has nothing to do with illusion or tricks of prestidigitation such as the one that is played out by Peregrine in *Wise Children* to break the tension during the filming of Genghis Khan's Hollywoodian version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "Peregrine it was who broke the tension, and he broke it with a trick. [...] With one swift pass of his hand he removed, from the problematic portion of Melchior's costume, a scarlet macaw" (Carter: 1993b, p. 13). As Bowers states, "[c]onjuring 'magic' is brought about by tricks that give the illusion that something extraordinary has happened, whereas in magic(al) realism it is assumed that something extraordinary *really* has happened" (Bowers: 2005, p. 21).

As early as the 1940s, magic realism was imported to Latin American by the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier: “I saw the possibility of bringing to our own latitudes certain European truths”, after all, “I found the marvelous real at every turn” (Carpentier: 1995a, p. 84, 87). Whereas aesthetic expression was Roh’s main concern, Carpentier’s were cultural and geographical aspects (Zamora; Faris: 1995, p. 7). Although his ‘marvellous realism’ results from the mixture of two different cultural systems, Carpentier insists that the interaction of fantasy and reality to articulate non-material aspects of life that he upholds “is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace” (Carpentier: 1995b, p. 104). At any rate, perhaps the most important aspect is that by relying significantly on religiousness, miracles and superstitions, in short, on faith (Ibid: 1995a, p. 85-86), marvellous realism does not install paradox, and since the contradictions and antagonisms which lie at the heart of its European predecessor does not haunt it, marvellous realism is ready for the “radical poetic gesture of giving verisimilitude to what lacks it”[18] (Chiampi: 1980, p. 63, 89, 168, our translation). Hence, marvellous realism “brings together the seemingly opposed perspectives of a pragmatic, practical and tangible approach to reality and an acceptance of magic and superstition into the context of the same novel” (Bowers: 2005, p. 3).

Again, this time overtly alluding to a Latin American country’s nature and culture, magically as she sees it, Carter echoes in *Wise Children* Carpentier’s statement that “[e]verything strange, everything amazing, everything that eludes established norms is marvelous” (Carpentier: 1995b, p. 101) the moment Dora depicts Peregrine’s arrival from Brazil with wonderment for he is wreathed in butterflies, “some most mysteriously violet and black”. In fact, Peregrine provides such a weird and wonderful vision that even Melchior seems to think Peregrine is a ghost as everybody thought he was dead. However, “such a material ghost” he is that “the cameras held their fire, for once, as if Peregrine had not only upstaged his brother but also plausibility” (Carter: 1993b, p. 19, 207). Actually, at this moment Peregrine does embody the blend of two civilisations and their respective cultures in an interplay of European rationality and *lo real maravilloso americano*, neither one thing nor the other, but something else, in much the same manner Carter’s magical realism, informed by Latin American marvellous realism, has eventually its own particularities all the same (Haffenden: 1985, p. 81).

[18] The text in Portuguese is: “gesto poético radical de tornar verossímil o inverossímil”.

More importantly, though, it is virtually impossible to read the excerpt below and still have any sort of doubt that Carter has certainly drunk from marvellous realism's literary fountain:

> we can see that whereas in Western Europe folk dancing, for example, has lost all of its magical evocative power, it is hard to find a collective dance in America that does not embody a deep ritual sense and thus create around it a whole process of initiation: such are the dances of Cuban *santería* or the prodigious African version of the Corpus festival (Carpentier: 1995a, p. 87).

No sooner the reader goes through this passage than what comes to mind immediately is the episode in *Nights at the Circus* in which the clowns and outlaws 'will' themselves to be "blown off the face of the earth" by means of "the dance of death" which invokes a storm that sweeps them away. Indeed, at this point it is conspicuous that Carter has brought this 'lost magic element' back to European literature to such a degree that there occurs an effective suspension of disbelief that typifies the act of faith (Johnson: 2007, p. 71). Once magical evocative power is culturally restored and endowed with the status of real, it comes as no surprise Fevvers's and Lizzie's eventual conclusion that "the clowns made an invocation to chaos and chaos, always immanent in human affairs, came in on cue" (Carter: 1993a, p. 242-44).

Although it is widely known and accepted that magical realism in the English language only appears in the early 1970s (Bowers: 2005, p. 47), it is worth observing that far before that Latin American writers had already been in touch with translations from the Anglo-American canon, namely Poe, Hawthorne, Faulkner and Hemingway and their portrayal of the supernatural in realist terms (Chamberlain: 1986, p. 9). Thus, it would be somehow erroneous to affirm that magical realism was imported into the US, for instance. At best, what has to be recognised is that Latin American narrative undoubtedly informs considerably today's Anglo-American magical realism.

Later on, in the 1950s, as marvellous realism becomes internationally appropriated and reworked, it also starts acquiring new features. As a consequence, there takes place the adoption of the name magical realism "as the main term used to refer to all narrative fiction that includes magical happenings in a realist matter-of-fact narrative" (Bowers: 2005, p. 2). According to Zamora and Faris, these texts are furnished with a subversive in-betweenness, all-at-onceness that makes room for the enactment of forces which antagonise monological political and cultural views of life, something particularly useful to women writers (Zamora; Faris: 1995, p. 6).

Therefore, it is no wonder Carter uses the genre to turn the spotlight on the Chance sisters for, besides illegitimate and living on the wrong side of the tracks, they are also victimised on the basis of their gender and age: "we decided to tolerate the invisibility of old ladies – [...] our age and gender still rendered us invisible" (Carter: 1993b, p. 199). In this way, Carter celebrates the transgressive female potential through the larger than life sex performed by the septuagenarian Dora and her centenarian uncle Peregrine which almost brings down the house which, so to speak, stands for the Hazards' patriarchal structure:

> There was just one ecstatic moment, she [Nora] opined, when she thought the grand bouncing on the bed upstairs – remember, Perry was a *big* man – would bring down that chandelier and all its candles, smash, clatter, and the swagged ceiling, too; bring the house down, fuck the house down, [...] scatter little candle-flames like an epiphany on every head[19], cover over all the family, the friends, the camera crews, with plaster dust and come and fire (Carter: 1993b, p. 220).

Sometimes it might appear that only magic is given importance to, but that is surely not the case in Carter's prose. The reader has to be attentive to the very real implications which underlie her use of magical realism. Actually, it is "the representational code of realism locked in a continuous dialectic with that of fantasy" (Peach: 1998, p. 8) which allows Carter to expose and critique social and political evils outside the text. Funnily enough, it is done to such an extent that at times even her characters get confused with regard to what is real or not: "I could have sworn that then the curtain came down, the lights went up and there was a standing ovation but, as Nora pointed out later, there was no curtain, the lights were on already, and it would have been discourteous of that audience to applaud" (Carter: 1993b, p. 217). For this reason, every now and then Carter provides some points of contact with reality so as to remind her characters, and why not her readers, of the '*real* reality' quality of her fantasy, as it happens to Fevvers in Rosencreutz's mansion: "Only the current copy of the London *Times* laying on an oak chest was proof I had not been somehow magically transported into an earlier age" (Carter: 1993a, p. 74, 253). Conversely, at times Carter gets so realistic that even a realist writer would be proud of her (Wisker: 2003, p. 53-54):

> Once upon a time, you could make a crude distinction, thus: the rich lived amidst pleasant verdure in the North speedily whisked to exclusive shopping by abundant public transport while the poor eked out miserable existences in the South in circumstances of urban deprivation condemned to wait for hours at windswept bus-stops while sounds of marital violence, breaking glass and drunken song echoed around and it was cold and dark and smelled of fish and chips (Carter: 1993b, p.1).

[19] At this moment Carter much probably parodies the celebration of the festival of Pentecost, as depicted in Acts 2:1-4, as it seems that everyone in the house has been filled with the 'postmodern spirit' and its pervading democratisation of languages. Moreover, it is noteworthy that even though the term epiphany stems from religious lore, in literary terms the epiphanic moment is one of revelation.

In this manner, in spite of the propinquity between “what is real and what is not” (Carter: 1993a, p. 244), the reader is able to recognise reality in social, historical, geographical and political references (Johnson: 2007, p. 76-77). Nevertheless, this effort to intertwine reality with fantasy all the while intends to show that everything is artificial, constructed: “is not this whole world an illusion? And yet it fools everybody” (Carter: 1993a, p. 16). Proof thereof is the film set for the 1940s version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream,* in *Wise Children,* in which the comparison of every exceptional element to something real aims at underpinning its credibility (Wisker: 2003, p. 56): “[...] all was twice as large as life. Daisies big as your head and white as spooks, foxgloves as tall as the tower of Pisa that chimed like bells if shook” (Carter: 1993b, p. 124). As a matter of fact, such an artifice can be so successful that Dora claims: “I no longer remember that set *as* a set but as a real wood” (Ibid, p. 157). By making use of this procedure, Carter presents “a feminist perspective on cultural, political and representational traditions. Through this mode in particular, she is able to expose the idealistic as ‘unrealistic’ by investigating the reality that lurks behind idealized forms” (Johnson: 2007, p. 70).

In much tune with many magical realist writers who speak from the margins either geographically or politically, Carter herself is a borderless writer “able to move between popular pleasures and academic challenges: popular challenges and academic pleasures” (Stoddart: 2007, p. 4-5), a feature clearly bestowed on some of her most transgressive characters. For instance, constructed in such a way as to defy social norms, the winged trapeze artist Fevvers is the sheer embodiment of the disruption of boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures, magic and real as well as male and female roles in that not only is she a *woman* ‘Cockney Venus’ to the core, but also a *bird,* putatively the offspring of the myth of Leda and the Swan. What is more, “she is defiantly masculine *and* erotically feminine” (Sceats: 2007, p. 88). As Fevvers herself claims: “I only know my body was the abode of limitless freedom” (Carter: 1993a, p. 7, 41).

Complying with Faris’s statement that “[m]agical realism reorients [...] our habits of time and space” (Faris: 1995, p. 174), Carter also puts at work the transgression of time and spatial boundaries by distorting them in such a manner that it gives way to the relativisation of these categories as she puts into question their status of fixed or eternal truths (Stoddart: 2007, p. 11). Indeed, it is interesting to see how Carter installs patriarchal time just to ultimately undermine it along with its narrative, as she does during Walser’s interview with Fevvers, in which the clock Father Time – “the signifier of Ma Nelson’s little private realm”, a “wholly female world” –, whose hands are “stuck at twelve for all eternity”, the aghast “hour of vision

and revelation", seems to empower Fevvers to play with time as Big Ben strikes midnight three times, which makes Walser feel "seriously discomposed" (Carter: 1993a, p. 29, 37-39, 42-43, 48): "But odder still – Big Ben had once again struck midnight. The time outside still corresponded to that registered by the stopped gilt clock, inside. Inside and outside matched exactly, but both were badly wrong" (Carter: 1993a, p. 53).

Moreover, Carter's manipulation of time is also patent when Fevvers and Lizzie realise that the pace of time for the tribespeople is not in synchrony with theirs as Walser goes native and grows a long beard in what appears to be only one week: "Something's going on. [...] remember Father Time has many children [...], by the length of Mr Walser's beard and the skill with which he rode his reindeer, time has passed – or else is passing – marvellous swiftly for these woodland folk" (Carter: 1993a, p. 272). Likewise, besides the fact that *Wise Children* most extraordinarily depicts the whole action of one hundred and fifty years or so of family history in one single day, it is impressive the way time seems to bear no effect whatsoever on Melchior and Peregrine: "I don't know what infernal deal the Hazard brothers made with time, but he [Peregrine]'d not aged so you'd notice" (Carter: 1993b, p. 114, 170, 207). It goes without saying that somehow the same holds true for the spry Chance sisters and their vivacity at such an old age. In the end, perhaps the only plausible conclusion is Lizzie's observation that "Father Time has many children", in which "she underlines the fact that even time, which seems so tied up with natural laws, is not universally *understood* in the same way and is therefore seen as being subject to ideological variations of conception and use" (Ibid: 1993a, p. 272; Stoddart: 2007, p. 36-37).

With respect to the matter of space, Dora is right to ask the reader "Hard to swallow, huh?" as it calls for the very Coleridgean suspension of disbelief the passage in which Peregrine produces Gareth's twins from both his pockets. In fact, as Dora herself admits: "I'll never know how he got it [the first twin] in his pocket" (Carter: 1993b, p. 226-27).

At other times, time and place are relativised concomitantly and the reader might have a vertiginous sensation as that of Walser's: "As if the room that had, in some way, without his knowledge, been plucked out of its everyday, temporal continuum, had been held for a while above the spinning world and was now – dropped back into place" (Carter: 1993a, p. 87). Similarly, when in a few seconds, as the Grand Duke ejaculates, Fevvers drops a toy train on its wheels, runs down the platform, opens the door of the compartment, and there she is with Lizzie (Carter: 1993a, p. 192), conveying the impression that "time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality" (Flores: 1955, p. 191).

In addition, another pivotal point in this revision of Carter's use of magical realism is how writer, reader and narrator(s) bear on the construction of meaning as well as on the understanding of this intermingling of magic and reality. First, it is noteworthy that Carter's narrators, sometimes explicitly, do share their experiences or the way they see things with the reader, maybe to the point that at times it is necessary for the reader to "recover his [or her] sense of proportion", or not[20]: "Surprised by his own confusion, he [Walser] gave his mind a quick shake to refresh its pragmatism", "Do not run away with the idea, from all this, that the Shaman was a humbug [...]. The Shaman most certainly was *not* a humbug", "Hard to swallow, huh?" (Carter: 1993a, p. 30, 52, 263; Ibid: 1993b, p. 227). Thus, the narrator openly recognises the part the reader plays in constructing the novel, which is fundamental as:

> One of the unique features of magical realism is its reliance upon the reader to follow the example of the narrator in accepting both realistic and magical perspectives of reality on the same level. It relies upon the full acceptance of the veracity of the fiction during the reading experience, no matter how different this perspective may be to the reader's non-reading opinions and judgements (Bowers: 2005, p. 4).

Of course, this construction also depends considerably on the reader's cultural and informational background. Given that "*word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*" (Bakhtin; Volosinov: 1986, p. 86), not only the writer's context, but also the reader's in terms of cultural, social and generational aspects, to name but a few, has to be taken into consideration in the construction of meaning that results from this dialogical interface. Not surprisingly, Carter is well aware of that as for her "[r]eading is just as creative an activity as writing" (Carter: 1983, p. 69). Thereby, since what might seem strange and unfamiliar to Western eyes might not be so to someone else's culture, how appropriate it is to adopt a magical realist perspective is eventually dependent upon the nature of the interaction between writer and reader (Bowers: 2005, p. 126). In *Nights at the Circus*, for instance, the "mythic resonances" in Mignon's song bear no effect whatsoever on the tribespeople in that "these awoke no echoes in their own mythology": "The magic of her song was alien magic and did not enchant them" (Carter: 1993a, p. 268).

Finally, in order to avoid misconceptions, perhaps it is important to trace very objectively the main differences between magical realism and some other modes of writing

[20] That is, s/he might be as pragmatic as Walser or just delight himself/herself with the magical elements as he apprehends any possible *real* reality underlying it.

with which it can be wrongly associated in Carter's writing, namely surrealism, fantastic, allegory, science fiction and carnivalesque. To begin with, as that was the case back there with magic realism, and even though Carter for some time flirted with surrealism (Roe: 1995, p. 60-61), she does not use it in her last two novels as it would surely detract from her intent to deconstruct the legitimised male-produced reality by means of her critique through fantasy. Effectively, "[t]he extraordinary in magical realism is rarely presented in the form of a dream or a psychological experience because to do so takes the magic out of recognizable material reality and places it into the little understood world of the imagination" (Bowers: 2005, p. 24).

In like manner, taking into account that boundary-breaking events and extraordinariness are accepted as part of everyday reality in magical realism and, hence, do not disconcert the reader, it cannot be confused with the fantastic, which has as one of its features the hesitation between believing and not-believing the supernatural. As for Walser's initial uncertainties, "Why isn't the whole of London asking: does Fevvers have a belly-button?", "Is she really a man?" (Carter: 1993a, p. 18, 35), they do not last long, so much so that he ends up with the bird-woman. As Chanady puts it, "[t]he same phenomena that are portrayed as problematical by the author of a fantastic narrative are presented in a matter-of-fact manner by the magical realist" (Chanady: 1985, p. 24). To this end, in Carter's narrative "there exist[s] no difference between fact and fiction; instead, a sort of magic realism" (Carter: 1993a, p. 260).

However, of course the extent to which a novel or parts of it fits into one genre or mode of writing or another also depends on the reader's interpretative role and, once more, this does not escape Carter. Inasmuch as allegory is a sort of narrative in which there are at least two levels of meaning, one plausible in terms of plot, and an alternative one usually more profound in terms of importance, it cannot be related to magical realism due to the diminishing effect the optional meaning has on the plot, which unavoidably affect the reader's acceptance of the status of real of the magical elements (Bowers: 2005, p. 27). Despite that, not rarely Carter's writing is referred to as allegorical as well: "Fevvers clearly evokes the 'Iron Lady' of British politics, Margaret Thatcher, whose power and influence reached into (and shook up) political domains normally reserved for male leaders" (Baxter: 2007, p. 104-105). Again, Carter knows that and she herself endorses such a stance:

> Certainly I was using straightforward allegorical ideas in parts of *Nights at the Circus*. Mignon, for example, is supposed to be Europe, the unfortunate, bedraggled orphan – Europe after the War – which is why she carries such a weight of literary and musical references on her frail shoulders. But it does seem a bit of an imposition to say to readers that if you read this book you have got to be thinking all the time; so it's there if you want it (Haffenden: 1985, p. 87).

With regard to science fiction, the discrepancy lies in the fact that everything is to a greater or lesser degree justifiable within the realms of known science in this genre. Actually, there exists no room for suspension of disbelief here, there has to be an explanation for any strange or extraordinary happenings. Moreover, even though it portrays reality in terms usually unfamiliar to the reader, it relies on actual future possibilities that it might become real (Bowers: 2005, p. 30). Suffice to say that only Carter's boundary-breaking play with time and space evades any attempt to subsume her last two works into this genre.

Last, different from magical realism, the carnivalesque has a deadline. Carnival cannot last forever: "[t]here are limits to the power of laughter and though I may hint at them from time to time, I do not propose to step over them" (Carter: 1993b, p. 220). Actually, the relationship between magical realism and Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque is principally centred on a number of the latter's inherent traits, for example: "inversions of social and conceptual hierarchies", "the breakdown of borders of all kinds", "democratization of language", and laughter, whose "main purpose is to disturb serious reality (any official and normative view of reality)" (Dias: 2003, p. 14, 22, 28, 29). Therefore, taking into account that Carter's magical realism works against rational closure and unity in that it either reverses or intermingles the categories of magic and real, it acts in cooperation with the carnivalesque in the undercutting of patriarchal structures as both theories pave the way for multiple perspectives as the ones Walser envisages in Fevvers's eyes: "as if these eyes of the *aerialiste* were a pair of sets of Chinese boxes, as if each one opened into a world into a world into a world, an infinite plurality of worlds and these unguessable depths exercised the strongest possible attraction" (Carter: 1993a, p. 30). Indeed, this reasoning is intrinsically related to Bakhtin's polyphony or *heteroglossia* which explains the possibility of both realist and magical standpoints to interpenetrate one another in magical realism: "it [a heteroglot language] represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions" (Bakhtin: 1981, p. 291). In the same manner, that the carnivalesque and magical realism work in such a consonance that, as Bowers suggests, "in her novel *Wise Children* Carter proposes that it is the elements of transgression and excess in carnival that allow illusion to work and the improbable to become possible" (Bowers: 2005, p. 71).

In conclusion, magical realist writers stretch the borders of realism in their analysis of what is deemed as ‘normal’ or ‘real’ so that these very same borders can encompass magical or extraordinary events and, as a result, provide a realistic context to their fiction. In this way, they manage to empower and give voice to those who are politically or culturally relegated to society’s outskirts, those who are on the margins, the outsiders, the illegitimates, the ones on the wrong side of the tracks. By allowing for alternative truths, magical realism renegotiates the concept of marginality to such an extent that boundaries are “erased, transgressed, blurred, brought together, or otherwise fundamentally refashioned in magical realist texts” (Zamora; Faris: 1995, p. 6).

In all respects Carter seems to have been fortunate in her use of magical realism owing to her successful task of providing her magical elements, from beginning to the end, with the necessary means to pass for ordinary, everyday occurrences in such a way as to be “admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism” (Zamora; Faris: 1995, p. 3). Furthermore, in a very postmodern manner, all the while she manages to “have us plunge, romantically, into the maelstrom without making it our goal to emerge on *terra firma*” (Lovibond: 1993, p. 397). Interestingly, that is exactly how she finishes *Nights at the Circus*: the spiralling tornado of Fevvers’s laughter magically embraces the entire globe and makes everything laugh (Carter: 1993a, p. 294-95). Likewise, in *Wise Children*, her swansong, not even the adversities of old age prevent the Chance sisters from ‘closing’ the book showing off their irrepressible vitality by dancing and singing and totally willing to go on doing so until they drop on the wrong tracks (Carter: 1993b, p. 231-32).

THE AMUSINGLY TERRIFYING DISRUPTIVE INGREDIENTS OF CARTER'S LIBERATING NETHER WORLD

We live in Gothic times [21]
Angela Carter

Famous for dialoguing with past texts and in the course of her narrative appropriating different genres in order to throw a critical eye on the construction of gender roles as well as to nourish reflection on the power of perpetuated modes of representation, Angela Carter does not let her readers down once she decides to legitimise historical female Gothic in *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* only to eventually undermine it by means of her contemporary female Gothic writing. Different from the conventional close which reaffirms an apparent domestic harmony in which the female character ends up ensnared by the disempowering 'Angel in the House' myth or else punished and/or destroyed, Carter makes no room for such neat *denouements* which only reinforce the *status quo* and confirms the stereotyped symbols invariably related to the female subject. In short, "Carter uses Gothic settings, language and its paradoxes to expose social contradictions and the oppressions of socially constructed myths about gender and power relations which affect the ways we see ourselves in something" (Wisker: 2003, p. 5).

Despite undergoing several transformations from its inception in late eighteenth century to date, the Gothic tradition has always been permeated by a strong preoccupation with the powerful effects of representation on its readers (Botting: 1996, p. 14). In point of fact, it can be seen as a cultural phenomenon which dwells upon the uncertainties and fears of quickly changing times by supplying the necessary imaginary space for the supernatural in such a manner that there takes place a concomitantly antithetical and imitative relationship with realism. It goes without saying that this intrinsic ambivalence, which gives way to discontinuity within continuity, along with a constant presence of the past, only reinforces its undeniable postmodern suitability.

In addition, Gothic literature's labyrinthine and transgressive narrative, together with its excessive nature both in moral and formal terms, has always been seen as a 'feminine' form *vis-à-vis* the dominant discourse (Fleenor: 1983, p. 8). Of course, Carter is well aware of that, as Mr Christian Rosencreutz's analogy between terror and the female genital organ in

[21] Carter: 1987, p. 133.

Nights at the Circus clearly shows: “the female part, or absence, or atrocious hole, or dreadful chasm, the Abyss, Down Below, the vortex that sucks everything dreadfully down, down, down where Terror rules...” (Carter: 1993a, p. 77).

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Carter has chosen to take part in the contemporary Gothic revival, which follows in the wake of postmodernism and feminism, and uses this genre to furnish a reading experience which opens the way for liberation from the patriarchal symbolic order through a social critique of its values and mores. Perhaps the best manner to analyse Carter’s appropriation and use of traditional Gothic fiction in her aforementioned last two novels is put Becker’s statement below to the test:

> It is my argument that gothicism [sic] – or rather *neo-gothicism* [sic] [1970s-1990s] – will signal the emancipatory possibilities of postmodern culture: we live again in times that are sensible to gothic [sic] forms of emotion and representation. And it is my conviction that one of the secrets of the gothic’s [sic] persistent success is gender-related: it is so powerful because it is so feminine (Becker: 1999, p. 2).

To begin with, the term ‘Gothic’ stems from the Goths, who partook in the destruction of the Roman Empire. Thereby, there could not be a better word to name the aesthetic movement which antagonises classic realism. Indeed, many of the staple components of the Gothic novel as it is known today had their starting point in Horace Walpole’s attempt to find the middle way between fantasy and reality in the mixing of medieval romance and realistic novel[22] (Botting: 1996, p. 48), which was the very beginning of the tortuous ambivalence which typifies the genre and puts at work the inscription and subversion of boundaries between natural and supernatural, present and past, reason and emotion, unity and alternatives, to name but a few.

Needless to say, this ambivalence and the attack contemporary Gothic narrative promotes against the forms of representation patriarchy reproduces and its underpinning structures is one of the main points of contact with postmodernism. Likewise, this running parallel and counter to the dominant discourse which reflects the prevailing anxieties attendant on the vicissitudes of life in distressing times. With regard to this point, the uncertainties at the turn of the century in *Nights at the Circus* are much in tune with the turbulent 1960s which would prepare the ground for the Gothic revival: among other things, suffragettes fight for the franchise in a male-dominated culture and the brothel in which half-

[22] *The Castle of Otranto* (1765).

a-dozen mothers raise Fevvers hums with feminist activity in favour of the 'New Woman'[23] who fights against conventional sexual divisions between domestic and social spheres (Botting: 1996, p. 138): "Yet we were all suffragists in that house; oh, Nelson was a one for "Votes for Women", I can tell you!'" (Carter: 1993a, p. 38).

Funnily enough, the Gothic style's capacity to provoke both emotions of terror or horror and laughter also testifies to this ambivalence. Since "power, repression and authority never speak in the language of laughter" (Bakhtin: 1984, p. 308), the use of this device can only signal the Gothic's rebellious refusal to submit to any sort of law or authority (Botting: 1996, p. 168, 172). In this respect, there appears to be no better example as the moment in which a terrified Fevvers wields her sword in order to defend herself and right after that cannot avoid laughing at Mr Rosencreutz's astonishment to find out that she is not so vulnerable after all: "even in the midst of my consternation, I was tickled pink to see the poor old booby struck all of a heap to see his plans awry and he was as much put out when I laughed in his face as he was to see old Nelson's plaything" (Carter: 1993a, p. 83). Similarly, not even the terror of old age and its devastating effects, which once somehow defeats Ma Chance as the erstwhile young Chance sisters mock her "vast, sagging, wrinkled, quivering" hag body (Carter: 1993b, p. 94), prevents the stereotypical crone twins from attending Melchior's birthday party thanks to empowering laughter:

> I suffered the customary nasty shock when I spotted us both in the big gilt mirror at the top – two funny old girls, paint an inch thick, clothes sixty years too young, stars on their stockings and little wee skirts skimming theirs buttocks. Parodies. [...] we had to laugh at the spectacle we'd made of ourselves and, fortified by sisterly affection, strutted our stuff boldly into the ballroom (Ibid, p. 197-98).

Thus, postmodernism and Gothicism thwart master narratives' attempts to circumscribe meaning and pave the way for indeterminacy, a postmodern intellectual inevitability that produces alternative truths and a Gothic "narrative necessity, providing the essential possibilities of mystery and suspense" (Smith: 1996, p. 7, 12).

Furthermore, Gothic aesthetics is also akin to that of postmodernism in what Hutcheon calls 'the presence of the past': an insistence to look back in time in a paradoxical interface between attraction and contempt, desire and suspicion (Hutcheon: 1993, p. 244; Smith: 1996, p. 10). Actually, flashbacks are recurrent in both novels and sometimes they are interpolated in quite an unusual manner as when, in *Wise Children*, Dora stops her narrative with a

[23] The term 'New Woman' was coined by the novelist Sarah Grand in 1894 "to describe the new generation of women who sought independence and refused the traditional confines of marriage" (Sanders: 2004, p. 26).

conspicuously abrupt "Freeze-frame" so as to provide the reader with some background information on the Chance sisters' personal history as well as give an overview of how patriarchally-structured Hazard family has been callous to some of the female characters and even cripples some others who have crossed their way, which explains Tiffany's plight, the first black in the Chance family who seems bound to end up in an Ophelia-like drowning. Only after that does Dora "Press the button for 'Play'" again (Carter: 1993b, p. 11, 40, 50).

Interestingly, this chronological narrative return sometimes is not only indicated in temporal terms, but spatial as well, as Mulvey points out: "The Gothic is, quite obviously, a genre of uncanny *mise-en-scènes*: ruins, tombs, labyrinthine underground passages give material visibility to the presence of the past, doubling up the way that the stories are actually set in past historical time" (Mulvey: 1996, p. 53). So much so that the very first impression Fevvers has as she arrives at Rosencreutz's mansion is that she has gone back in history due to its appearance and surroundings: "I saw before me a mansion in the Gothic style, all ivied over, and, above the turrets, floated a fingernail moon with a star in its arms. Somewhere, a dog, howling. Around us, a secrecy of wooded hills" (Carter: 1993a, p. 74).

In this way, simultaneously in accordance with the Foucauldian principle that "resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" and the postmodern contradictory practice "that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges" (Foucault: 1993, p. 336; Hutcheon: 1993, p. 243), Carter's postmodern female Gothic fiction does inscribe historical female Gothic, but only to undercut it in the end (Becker: 1999, p. 11). Proof thereof is that Tiffany does not end up as the conventional victimised female character. Much on the contrary, she is the one eventually empowered to such an extent that not only does she upstage the whole Hazard family while she is at Melchior's birthday party, but also turns down Tristam's possibly entrapping marriage proposal in spite of his begging for her hand on his knees (Carter: 1993b, 210-11). Neither is Fevvers the typical victim for she manages to evade Rosencreutz's "bizarre transaction" which boils down to an attempt to sacrifice her in order to fulfil his intent of prolonging his life as other patriarchs like Artephius[24], King David and Signor Guardi had somehow done before him[25] (Ibid: 1993a, p. 79, 82-83).

[24] "A Renaissance tradition held that Artephius had been born in the first or second century and died in the twelfth, thanks to having discovered the alchemical elixir that made it possible to prolong life. In his *Secret Book*, Artephius indeed claims to be more than a thousand years old" (Wikipedia: 2009).

[25] Mr Christian Rosencreutz's intent makes him fit perfectly into the category of the seeker after forbidden knowledge of eternal life who, along with the wanderer and the vampire, make up the three main symbolic figures of the Gothic work of the romantic poets. In addition, it is noteworthy that *Christian Rosenkreuz* is Rosicrucianism's alleged founder (Punter: 1996, p. 87, 118; Sarraut: 1962, p. 558).

Effectively, one of traditional Gothic's idiosyncratic features which Carter does not allow for in her fiction is the restoration of patriarchal order which only reasserts the maintenance of the current state of affairs and also confirms the veracity and efficacy of the cautionary strategies issued by every sort of patriarchal institution (Botting: 1996, p. 7), as Wisker succinctly observes:

> But the genre is also conventional in that, once it has exposed and dramatized our worst fears, it returns us to safety and order, reinforcing the status quo. [...] but only if we can spot what is threatening because it is different, or other. As such, the genre can also reinforce a kind of social xenophobia: anyone or anything out of the ordinary is suspect. But horror in the hands of more racial writers, such as Angela Carter, can question such simplistic responses, such essentially conservative, indeed blinkered, possibly tyrannical, repressive world views. In Carter's hands, horror refuses to restore a limiting status quo (Wisker: 2003, p. 30).

Hence, Carter does make use of Gothic genre's inherent subversive nature. However, her "novels are frequently subversions of the genre; themes and ideas first explored [...] in Gothic writing are re-examined, challenged and expanded" (Peach: 1998, p. 28). Thereby, once Carter puts her social critique at work, she usually re-empowers her female characters in the aftermath of their ordeal. For this reason, after spending almost thirty years living as the invalid Wheelchair in the Chance sisters' basement as a victim of the Hazard blood, Lady Atalanta Hazard, née Lynde, is finally back to the spotlights to turn the tables on the Hazards by making a spectacular entrance at Melchior's birthday party and finishing him off before millions who watch the event on TV and learn that Melchior has been cheated on for Saskia and Imogen are not his children but Peregrine's (Carter: 1993b, p. 7, 209, 214-16).

Moreover, Carter calls into question the way the construction of the 'other' as a monster usually occurs, as she ironically does in a reverse manner in *Nights at the Circus* in order to show the arbitrary and unreliable basis of this process: "Since they [the tribespeople] did not have a word for 'foreigner', they used the word for 'devil' [...] as the generic term for those round-eyed ones who soon began to pop up everywhere" (Carter: 1993a, p. 253-54). In a similar vein, in the way Peregrine unmasks the "darling buds of May", Saskia and Imogen Hazard: "They're mine, Melchior, little monsters that they are" (Ibid: 1993b, p. 216), and Wiltshire Wonder's perspective on the so-called 'normal' humankind: "I had known all these things from birth and grown accustomed to the monstrous ugliness of mankind" (Ibid: 1993a, p. 67). At last, Carter keeps up to her word that she is in the demythologising business and does not let Fevvers be constructed as the traditional Gothic monstrous-feminine by Walser's patriarchal journalistic narrative: "Fevvers lassooed him with her narrative and dragged him along with her" (Carter: 1983, p. 71; Ibid: 1993a, p. 60; Becker: 1999, p. 44). Even though

she is half bird, half woman, and belongs to the ancient realm of myths which to a greater or lesser extent inform every single individual's everyday life, Fevvers 'reinvents' herself as she knows that "[a]s a symbolic woman, she has a meaning, as an anomaly, none" (Carter: 1993a, p. 161).

All this need for mobility in cultural and formal terms brings immediately to mind two key words intrinsically related to the Gothic genre: 'excess' and 'escape'. In fact, postmodern feminist Gothic writing sets out to confront patriarchal attempts to enclose both genre and gender through excess that releases from cultural and ideological containment that not only reduces the female subject to powerlessness but also imposes boundaries which aim at crippling Gothic's political power (Becker: 1999, p. 18-19, 25, 34-36). By the same token, it is no coincidence that Fevvers is a giantess whose measures are far beyond the Victorian model of femininity in every way and whose "exceedingly long and abundant" "half hundredweight of hair" enables her to embody the contemporary feminist Gothic boundlessness, not to mention her empowering postmodern ambivalence as the "neither naked nor clothed" "Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states, being on the borderline of species" (Carter: 1993a, p. 76, 81). In like manner, the Chance sisters are endowed with such an extravagant vivacity that excessive is *the* word to define the demolishing sex the sprightly septuagenarian Dora and her centenarian uncle Peregrine have at Melchior's birthday party (Carter: 1993b, p. 220).

Thus far, it is already unquestionable that as opposed to realism's sense of order, propriety and reason, fantasy, imagination, emotion and havoc pervades Gothic fiction from beginning to the end in the undertaking of a somewhat antirealist process whose outcome is invariably the blurring of boundaries between the categories of the naturalised 'real' and the supernatural so that an erstwhile opaque reality can come to light. To put it simply, "[t]he Gothic is a distorting lens, a magnifying lens; but the shapes which we see through it have nonetheless a reality which cannot be apprehended in any other way" (Punter: 1996, p. 98).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that although Gothic writing undergoes its greatest change during the romantic period, which has to do with a greater concern towards aspects of interiority and individuality (Botting: 1996, p. 91-92), that is not the sort of Gothic style that typifies Carter's narrative since a greater focus on aspects of the 'inner self' would much probably decrease the effectiveness of her efforts to debunk traditional patriarchal concepts and institutions which can be more easily grasped in palpable material reality somewhat common to all and on which her use of the supernatural relies. According to Armstrong:

> Angela Carter [...] does not write from subjectivities and their centre of self. Hers is not the expressive mode, the inwardness of the feeling self. Instead she writes in a stylised, objectifying, external manner, as if all experience, whether observed or suffered, is self-consciously conceived of as *display*, a kind of rigorous, analytical, public self-projection which, by its nature, excludes private expression (Armstrong: 1995, p. 269).

Carter states in the "Afterword" to *Fireworks* that "The Gothic tradition in which Poe writes grandly ignores the value systems of our institutions; [...] It retains a singular moral function – that of provoking unease" (Carter: 1987, p. 133). As it is clear, there is something missing in Carter's view and that is precisely the putting into doubt the 'truths' the symbolic order establishes as real, mainly concerning the female subject, and not only denouncing them, which she enacts by means of a three-fold strategy. First, she appropriates and enforces the familiar, the everyday experience, together with naturalised images of femininity. However, she does so to an excess so that familiarisation and defamiliarisation occur at once, which is exactly the moment in which Freud's *unheimlich* or uncanny takes place.

As Freud notes, the uncanny is related to that which frightens, arouses dread and has to do with feelings of repulsion and distress. Besides, it is also characterised, among other things, by the involuntary repetition or recurrence of the same situation (Freud: 1997, p. 212-14). Therefore, what at first appears a down-to-earth interview for Walser turns out to be the starting point of the deconstruction of everything he might deem certain. For one thing, Big Ben strikes midnight three times in the course of the interview. For another, there is a moment in which he has the tortuous impression that for a while the room is taken out of its temporal continuum and held above the world (Carter: 1993a, p. 37, 42-43, 53, 87), which is very much in line with Becker's standpoint that "narrative excesses – hyperbole, reversal, displacement in time and in space – defamiliarise the common power structures and open up a critical perspective" (Becker: 1999, p. 30). What is more, given that Mary Russo claims that "[t]wins, after all, can be hilariously funny as well as disturbingly uncanny" (Russo: 1995, p. 120), what to make then of the proliferation of twins in *Wise Children*?

Further to this, Carter leaves no room for doubting the supernatural. As a result, the imaginary enables her to furnish alternative worlds which do not conform to patriarchal symbolic order and provide liberation at the same time. Fevvers herself, for instance, is the embodiment of the uncanny in the sense that she is a subversive symbol to which has been given life:

> This is that an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on (Freud: 1997, p. 221).

This is nothing but the refamiliarisation of the supernatural that makes the uncanny possible and liberating in tandem. In addition, once Carter introduces this personification of an excessively antagonising symbol that Fevvers is, she also draws attention to how the iconographic supersedes the ontological in society in a gender-construction process reverse to that of the Dracula, for example, who stands for the materialisation of ideas as much as Fevvers. In other words, Fevvers's construction occurs in a process opposed to the symbolic women patriarchy produces (Neumeier: 1996, p. 149).

Moreover, by quoting Schelling, Freud finds that "*'Unheimlich'* [or uncanny] *is the name for everything that ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light*" (Freud: 1997, p. 199). As a matter of fact, this is exactly the sort of uncanniness that Carter brings to the fore and refamiliarises, for instance, in the museum of woman monsters whose very owner, Madame Schreck, "had some quality of the uncanny about her" in the first place (Carter: 1993a, p. 58). Indeed, "Our Lady of Terror", alias the "Living Skeleton", is just the first on a list of "prodigies of nature" which subsumes: Fanny Four-Eyes, the Sleeping Beauty, Wiltshire Wonder, Albert/Albertina, Cobwebs and the mouthless black man Toussaint. All of them, except for Madame Schreck and Toussaint, cater to the most sordid and bizarre desires of those who would rather keep this "lumber room of femininity" and its dispossessed creatures unnoticed (Carter: 1993a, p. 59-60, 69).

Back to temporal and spatial separation from the present as a strategy for social critique, it is also important to point out that these distancing strategies to which Carter so often has recourse in her defamiliarisation process endow her writing with a better and necessary critical distance, with the "exposure to the unfamiliar, whose symptoms were questions" (Ibid, p. 254). That is why time is not linear in the novels, it develops in a maze of dizzying back and forths which time and again relocate contemporary flow of time to the past in such a way as to destabilise patriarchal social order (Botting: 1996, p. 83).

As for space as a defamiliarising device, Carter uses the spatial ambivalence in *Wise Children* as a means of topographical metaphor from the outset by installing London's right and wrong sides of the tracks, and makes it also clear through the existence of the underworld and overworld Londons in *Nights at the Circus*: "I was known to all the netherside of London as the Virgin Whore" (Carter: 1993b, p. 1; Ibid: 1993a, p. 55)[26]. Notwithstanding, Carter's interest seems to be to a considerable extent in the appropriation of the sanctified home, the paradoxical place of protection which turns out to be a prison. After all this is a recurrent

[26] The same occurs in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838) (Punter: 1996, p. 192).

motif in Gothic literature since late eighteenth century, "[b]ut it is the failed home that appears on its pages, the place from which some (usually 'fallen' men) are locked out, and others (usually 'innocent' women) are locked in" (Ellis: 1989, p. ix). In fact, as Gothic literature has always portrayed, the boundaries between inside and outside are quite blurred, which explains the contradiction that is the depiction of the enclosed space as a place of danger and imprisonment.

Of course, Carter takes hold of this convention and shows that being within does not necessarily mean safety as terror can be brought from without as Fevvers well attests once she goes through the experience of living as a prisoner and performing in Madame Schreck's chamber of imaginary horrors, also known as "Down Below" or "The Abyss": "there was no terror in the house our customers did not bring with them" (Carter: 1993a, p. 62). Furthermore, despite turning "a blind eye to the horrors of the outside" and being a place in which a harmonious sisterhood prevails, not even Ma Nelson's brothel survives patriarchal terror, and as soon as its owner dies, Lizzie has to let in Nelson's brother who promises to put an end to the "security and companionship of the Academy" (Ibid, p. 26, 43-46). Likewise, Lady Atalanta Lynde's home proves to be not enough to protect her from her own daughters Saskia and Imogen, cast in the very same patriarchal mould Melchior was, who not only rob her home and money, but are also much probably the ones responsible for her transformation into the crippled Wheelchair (Carter: 1993b, p. 178-82, 214-15). In this way, Carter parodies the myth of domesticity by showing that there is no such a thing as an absolute safe inside, but a disguised ideological purpose of circumscribing female space and agency (Ellis: 1989, p. x, xvi).

Finally, remoteness is also the order of the day as it both defamiliarises and introduces another sort of dread, to wit the terrifyingly ominous wilderness which makes Fevvers's courage fail in Siberia: "Outside the window, there slides past that unimaginable and deserted vastness [...]. Horrors! And, as on a cyclorama, this unnatural spectacle rolls past" (Carter: 1993a, p. 197). Once isolated, *outside* the influence of the 'civilised world' and its mores, or as Fevvers puts it "where the hand of Man has badly wrought" (Ibid), the protagonist finds herself in a desolate place which proves to be not only alienating but also full of menace. Effectively, after the train wreck caused by the blown up railway track, Lizzie loses Father Time and, to make matters worse, Fevvers and the survivors of the circus crew are kidnapped by outlaws, which ends up being doubly more frightening: "Forward, we went, deeper and deeper into an unknown terrain that was, at the same time, claustrophobic, due to the trees shutting us in, and agoraphobic, because of the enormous space which the trees filled"

(Carter: 1993a, p. 221, 226). Besides defamiliarising, maybe the purpose of this strategy is to show that the outside for the most part turns out to be as hazardous as the inside from which the heroine escapes. Hence, her safety cannot depend only on running away or waiting for some rescuing hero, but first and foremost on struggling with the gender roles, the myth of fragility, imposed upon her.

Up to this point, it is crystal clear that reiteration with excess and an inevitable critical difference plays an important role in the use Carter makes of her appropriation of the Gothic genre. Indeed, in one of the epigraphs to *Heroes and Villains* (1969) Carter quotes Fiedler's concept that "[t]he Gothic mode is essentially a form of parody, a way of assailing clichés by exaggerating them to the limit of grotesqueness" (Fiedler: 1960, p. 406). However, perhaps double-talking ironies are the most recurrent among the parodic methods Carter utilises in her postmodern female Gothic, which is not at all surprising once the good-humoured gendered critique it enables and the questions it raises are taken into account:

> What is it about the situation of women that makes irony such a powerful rhetorical tool? Many feminist critics argue that the condition of marginality (with its attendant qualities of muteness and invisibility) has created in women a 'divided self, rooted in the authorised dualities' of culture. If so, then the 'splitting images' they create through their double-talking ironies are a means of problematising the humanist ideal (or illusion) of wholeness, as well as hierarchy and power. Contradiction, division, doubleness – these are the contesting elements that irony lets in by the front door (Hutcheon: 1991, p. 97).

In addition, Carter's readers can in this manner experience the pleasures of terror vicariously as they apprehend by means of the imaginary what most often goes on intransparent in the 'real' space and time: "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful" (Burke: 1834, p. 48). Actually, the Gothic's ambivalence is also perceived in the influence it has over its readers who, in spite of the repulsion terror provokes, usually feel attracted to it (Botting: 1996, p. 9). But this time Carter undermines the intent which underlies the warning strategies of the traditional Gothic and does not provide readers with the feeling that if they follow the rules and do not transgress social and aesthetic limits, there will be no problem in the end, which only reasserts the values of society. That is to say, she does not supply her readers with neat endings, which is an efficient manner of casting doubt on the sort of security and stability the conventional Gothic offers.

To this end, Carter's heroines are also afflicted by every sort of fear and at times have to flee so that the show can go on. Nonetheless, *their* show go on: they are endowed with such

strength, self-assertiveness and self-possession that the myth of domesticity does not succeed in entrapping them. In brief, Carter's heroines are in overt opposition to the virtuous and sensitive, shy and retiring early Gothic heroines who, in spite of their deftness to evade the worst of predicaments, sometimes faced outside while experiencing exciting and adventurous freedom, invariably end up 'saved' and sent back to the prison-like domestic sphere and possibly marriage, or else receive punishment for their deviation in consonance with the stock traditional Gothic plot (Punter: 1996, p. 9; Monteiro: 2004, p. 12). No wonder then Lizzie's repulsion for the institution of marriage (Carter: 1993a, p. 21, 46, 282). Also, the Grand Duke's unsuccessful attempt to, to the sound of "uncanny harmonies", turn Fevvers into "[o]nly a bird in a gilded cage" (Ibid, p. 184-93). In the same way, although sometimes life proves to be overly hard, "I sometimes wonder why we go on living", the septuagenarian and unmarried Chance sisters 'close' the novel exultantly singing and dancing on the very same wrong side of the tracks despite being far from the patriarchal role model of family structure, but this time along with Gareth's little cherubs (Carter: 1993b, p. 112, 232).

With reference to the cruel and terrible Gothic villains, always endlessly resourceful so as to achieve their usually opaque evil ends, it is interesting to see how Carter plays with the conventions. For instance, this time the Gothic villain to usurp 'rightful heirs' is Ma Nelson's elder brother who expelled her from home when she was a girl and now sets out to "cleanse the temple of the ungodly" as he legally inherits his sister's brothel when she dies, and the orphaned daughters are a bunch of whores who used to be the intestate Ma Nelson's family in her "wholly female world". Nevertheless, neither the "demented Minister" nor his patriarchal God have the last laugh: "What say we give the good old girl [Ma Nelson] a funeral pyre like the pagan kings of old, and cheat the Reverend out of his inheritance, to boot!" (Carter: 1993a, p. 49).

Similarly, Carter empowers Dora and Nora by associating them with Dracula, a powerful symbol which represents nothing less than the vampiric ambivalence and its relentless crossing of boundaries: past/present, animal/man, East/West, death/life. Thus, the twins travel to the New World on a "sacred mission": to take there earth from Stratford-upon-Avon within a bizarre vessel in the shape of a bust of William Shakespeare (just as Dracula carries earth from Transylvania) "so that Melchior could sprinkle it on the set of *The Dream* on the first day of the shoot" (Carter: 1993b, p. 113). Here again, Carter has a good time in the demythologising business and desecrates the earth with Daisy's cat's urine, which is replaced

with earth from a motel named after the legendary Forest of Arden[27]. Thereby, the Chance sisters' interference in the consecration of the grounds is consistent with the epidemic contagions from the past usually connected with vampires. So much so that Dora foresees: "This film is going to lose a fortune" (Carter: 1993b, p. 129).

In short, as Neumeier concisely puts it: "Angela Carter's fictional exercises in Gothicism are very effective renditions of her theoretical statements on the nature of the genre which deals in exaggeration, distortion, in cliché images and symbols" (Neumeier: 1996, p. 148). By using exaggeration and shocking their readers, early Gothic writers wanted to draw attention to the invisible forces operating in society, convey the terrors underlying their everyday world, and portray the actual barbarity reproduced by the so-called 'civilised'. With respect to the female subject, though, home became and went on being a contradictory fortress since it presented a site for "resistance to an ideology that imprisons them even as it posits a sphere of safety for them" (Ellis: 1989, p. x). Today, contemporary female Gothic writing has a greater focus on the dreadful effects of powerlessness to which women are reduced by the perpetuation of homogenising and stereotypical images of femininity, as well as the high price paid by the female subject for the 'happy ending' usually associated with imprisonment in the chains of marriage. In other words, the physical reality which lies behind these constructed and reproduced mythic images which aim at labelling those who do not conform as *unfeminine* and *unnatural* (Moi: 1985, p. 65).

Accordingly, Carter provides her Gothic fiction with escape and liberation from the fetters of gender and genre by, respectively, deconstructing traditional representations of womanhood and extending the limits of realism in order to fit those of the supernatural together with the blurring of genres so characteristic of her writing. By doing so, she manages to envisage the day on which all the women, New Women, will have wings just like Fevvers: "The dolls' house doors will open, the brothels will spill forth their prisoners, the cages, gilded or otherwise, all over the world, in every land, will let forth their inmates singing together the dawn chorus of the new, the transformed" (Carter: 1993a, p. 285). However, in a very postmodern and *neo-Gothic* manner, as Becker calls it, Carter's provocative politics does not at any moment offer new role models but only plays the part of a vehicle for social critique once it defamiliarises the 'natural' existence of established relations of power that for the most part have detrimental impact on women (Becker: 1999, p. 3-4). Eventually, the truth is that Carter's heroines are strengthened to such an extent that "the seemingly adored but

[27] "[A] former forested area in central England, Warwickshire, the scene of Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*. The forest, as such, no longer exists, although the district is still well wooded" (The American: 1968a, p. 102).

ultimately locked up, disempowered and sexually victimized ‘living doll’ escapes the domestic trap, celebrating her own identity and sexual power” (Wisker: 2003, p. 30), which not only signals postmodern deliverance, but also contemporary Gothicism’s intrinsic female nature.

CARTER'S IDIOSYNCRATIC ÃND DÊBASÏNGLY ~~GRÒTESQÚE~~ BODY

That in the beginning when the world was young
there were a great many thoughts but no such thing
as a truth. Man made the truths himself [...]. It was
the truths that made the people grotesques [28]
Sherwood Anderson

The grotesque is caricature without ingenuity [29]
Wolfgang Kayser

Could there be a better way of posing a threat to the so-depicted 'clean and proper' monolithic body of the patriarchal canon and its narrative than putting it face-to-face with the grotesqueness invariably attributed to the transgressive nature of a non-conformist female body? Instead of a straightforward and blatant no, Angela Carter makes her point in *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* by means of a hall of female characters who, to a greater or lesser degree, offer resistance and eventually undermine any attempt to ascribe freakish and unnatural qualities to their bodies and rate them as not only imperfect but also impure. In so doing, Carter brings to the fore the frailty of the male-produced narrative as well as paves the way for the liberation of the female body irrespective of its form, content and experience.

In order to do so, Carter elaborates on Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism found in *Rabelais and His World* by appropriating his assumptions and reinscribing them with parodic dissonance. Moreover, she unquestionably dialogues with Kristeva's theory of the abject as described in *Powers of Horror* so as to empower her female grotesque body with some other attributes considered threatening to the masculine domain and that, not rarely, entitle her characters to bear the epithet 'monstrous-feminine' adopted by Barbara Creed.

Ultimately, the nauseated reader is surely left with the impression that there are moments in which Carter's writing does seem to stink like excreta, to be written in ink crimson like menstrual blood, and all that as a means of "grotesquely de-form[ing] the female body as a cultural construction" and present it as a site/sight of resistance (Almansi: 1994, p. 217; Russo: 1994, p. 179).

First of all, it is important to bear in mind that the term grotesque stems from barbarian ornamentations found in archaeological underground excavations in Rome in late fifteenth

[28] Anderson: 1958, p. 24-25.

[29] Kayser: 1957, p. 57, our translation. The text in Portuguese is: "O grotesco é a caricatura sem ingenuidade".

century, in which the word *grotto* means ‘cave’ (Kayser: 1957, p. 17-18). Thereby, that is a fortunate choice of name to the sort of art and mode of representation that antagonises the ‘perfection’ of the classical aesthetics from the outset.

According to Bakhtin, the patriarchal body and its narrative, which aesthetically opposes the grotesque ‘boundless ocean’ and in comparison with the latter is a ‘tiny island’, can be described as follows:

> The new bodily canon, in all its historic variations and different genres, presents an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual. [...] The basis of the image is the individual, strictly limited mass, the impenetrable façade. The opaque surface and the body’s ‘valleys’ acquire an essential meaning as the border of a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world (Bakhtin: 1994, p. 228).

Having this notion in mind, Bakhtin introduces the mouth as one of the most important features in the grotesque body as far as the human face is concerned. In effect, he refers to the mouth as “this wide open bodily abyss” (Ibid, p. 226). That is to say, the mouth is one of the greatest menaces to the unity and smoothness of the patriarchal body as not only does it lead to the inner features of the body such as blood and bowels, but it is also the mouth that devours so that something is digested and defecated into something else. Perhaps that is the reason why Toussaint is rendered “a black man with this mournful peculiarity, he had been born without a mouth” (Carter: 1993a, p. 55), as if to shut the historical Toussaint L’Ouverture who was the leader of the Haitian Revolution. It is worth observing that in this instance Carter parallels her concern with gendered with that of racial restrictive constructions, but she does not combine these two categories (Sceats: 2007, p. 88). Nevertheless, that does not last long as later on Carter gives him back his “lovely way with [spoken] words” and his eloquence by means of a cosmetic surgery that puts an end to his speechlessness (Carter: 1993a, p. 60, 85). By the same token, how uncomfortable, if not frightening, might be then to be in the gaze of the “hungry eyes” of someone like Fevvers who has got these white teeth “big and carnivorous as those of Red Riding Hood’s grandmother” (Carter: 1993a, p. 18, 204).

Soon, it becomes clear that Bakhtin relies greatly on topographical metaphors in order to convey the grotesque’s ambivalence since it “leads beyond the body’s limited space or into the body’s depths” by way of, *inter alia*, mountains, abysses, subterranean passages or the *grotto* (Bakhtin: 1994, p. 227). And so does Carter once she places the spectacle of horrors in the crypt known as “Down Below” or “The Abyss”, located under the museum of woman monsters, or then isolates the crippled Wheelchair for nearly thirty years in the Chance sisters’

basement. Or else, when she portrays the patriarchal-like smoothness of “white with snow” Siberian wilderness as terrifying on account of the sensation of apparent meaningless “progressing through the vastness of nothing to the extremities of nowhere” for those who do not belong to it (Carter: 1993a, p. 61-62, 197-98; Ibid: 1993b: p. 7).

On the one hand, whenever associated with the depths of a cave or the underground, the grotesque is likely to evoke visceral claustrophobic sensations usually attributed to the female genital organ as a cavernous bodily metaphor, not to mention the corporeal waste found down there in the bodily underworld that usually provokes feelings of abjection (Russo: 1994, p. 1-2). On the other, every sort of protuberance typifies an attempt against the unity and uniformity of the surface of the patriarchal bodily canon whose hallmarks are its individuality and strictly limited borders attendant on an enforced normalisation so as to achieve homogeneity through conformity, obedience and self-control (Bakhtin: 1994, p. 228). In other words:

> The classical body is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek; it is identified with the “high” or official culture of the Renaissance and later, with the rationalism, individualism, and normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie. The grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with non-official “low” culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation (Russo: 1994, p. 8).

In this way, the grotesque, not infrequently connected with the female subject, is deemed as a deviation and a device used against the male norm. Hence, it does not take long until the reader realises that Carter uses this narrative strategy plentifully. Not surprisingly, Mr Christian Rosencreutz refers to “the female part” as “atrocious hole, or dreadful chasm” (Carter: 1993a, p. 77). Likewise, Fevvers’s body, “the abode of limitless freedom”, promises to challenge the standards of Victorian femininity through literal excrescences since a very early age: “Looks like the little thing’s going to sprout Fevvers [feathers]!” (Ibid, p. 12, 41), which is very much in line with Bakhtin’s view that the grotesque “is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body’s confines” (Bakhtin: 1994, p. 226).

Nevertheless, maybe the moment in which Bakhtin’s gendering of the grotesque becomes clearer is when he states that the grotesque body is always in the act of becoming so that it can even transgress itself in order to conceive another one (Ibid, p. 226-27). In fact, Carter wreaks further havoc in this issue for it invariably relates conception, pregnancy and birth to the feminine. In this manner, even though numerous aspects subsume Fevvers and the Chance sisters under the category of the grotesque, among other things, Fevvers’s gargantuan

body, weight and appetite, improper manners and odorous body, and the nasty shock Dora's and Nora's hag bodies provide (Carter: 1993a, p. 7, 8, 11, 22; Ibid: 1993b, p. 197), fertility and conception are not necessarily features intrinsic to them.

First, despite having been brought up in a brothel, Fevvers is "known to all the netherside of London as the Virgin Whore" (Carter: 1993a, p. 55). Albeit by the end Fevvers herself puts to question her position as the "only fully feathered intacta in the entire history of the world", it still has to be considered that her own origin is doubtful: "Hatched; by whom, I do not know. Who *laid* me is as much a mystery to me, sir, as the nature of my conception, my father and my mother both utterly unknown to me, and, some would say, unknown to nature, what's more" (Ibid, p. 21, 71, 82, 294). Therefore, as Stoddart puts it, Fevvers's fecundity as a grotesque body is symbolic rather than actual. In as much as she has not docked via "the *normal channels*" and is outside the 'normal' or patriarchal patterns of origin, if she is to give birth to something, it is to "the histories of those woman [sic] who would otherwise go down nameless and forgotten, erased from history as if they had never been" (Ibid, p. 7, 285; Stoddart: 2007, p. 30).

Similarly, the same applies to the Chance sisters and the persistent history of absent fathers and questionable paternities which does not allow origin, at least as patriarchy sees it, to inhere as a fact in their lives: "a mother is a biological fact, whilst a father is a movable feast" (Carter: 1993b, p. 35, 216). That is possibly why Nora, in spite of grotesquely getting pregnant in dirty corners, loses the baby in the end (Ibid, p. 81). Thus, the Chance sisters do not reproduce, do not transgress their own bodies in 'the act of becoming'. Indeed, it is the own Hazard family that, as a subverted and renewed body, produces the first twin wise children in the family, a baby boy and a baby girl who are going to be raised precisely by the "two batty old hags" Dora and Nora. Much probably to perpetuate this "never finished, never completed" disruptive nature of the grotesque body, also suggested by the novel's open-ended close, which will "go on singing and dancing until we drop in our tracks, won't we, kids" (Ibid, p. 5, 226-27, 232; Bakhtin: 1994, p. 226).

Furthermore, another theory that is significantly in synchrony with Bakhtin's grotesque realism in terms of transgression and also features in Carter's works is Kristeva's concept of abjection. To begin with, the abject does not show reverence for liminal lines in any way. Much on the contrary, it promotes the breakdown of borders as well as meaning, which inevitably disturbs the established patriarchal symbolic order. All that is the result of the ambiguity, the in-between position the abject occupies and that provokes "discomfort, unease, dizziness" given that the abject straddles desire and repulsion at once (Kristeva: 1982,

p. 1-2, 4, 9-10): “It follows that jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on en jouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion. [...] We may call it a border; *abjection is above all ambiguity*” (Kristeva: 1982, p. 9-10, our emphasis). Actually, that explains Walser’s “seismic erotic disturbance” despite his disgust at the feminine squalor of Fevvers’s room which, by the way, is not far from the Chance sisters’ house in terms of smell (Carter: 1993b, p. 2): “if he could fill his lungs just the one time with air that was not choking with ‘essence of Fevvers’, then he might recover his sense of proportion” (Ibid: 1993a, p. 52). In addition, as Barbara Creed notes, as paradoxical as it might seem, “[a]lthough the subject must exclude the abject, the abject must, nevertheless, be tolerated for that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life”, which has to do with strategically defining one’s position in relation to the symbolic (Creed: 1993, p. 9).

It is noteworthy that it is this characteristic ambiguity which makes Kristeva’s theory of the abject postmodern by nature and helps explain why abjection fits so well, strategically speaking, into Carter’s subversive narrative. As Kristeva herself makes it clear the abject “neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them” (Kristeva: 1982, p. 15), in much the same manner postmodernism simultaneously (de)constructs, (de)legitimises, (de)naturalises patriarchal norms (Hutcheon: 1995, p. 98). Needless to say, this postmodern ambiguity is also noticeable in the way Bakhtin’s grotesque realism assaults the surface of the individual body both inwards and outwards and, more importantly, it appears to metaphorically welcome the blurring of genres, which is very peculiar of Carter’s prose in *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, since “[t]he outward and inward features are often merged into one” (Bakthin: 1994, p. 227).

Bakhtin’s depiction of the boundless grotesque body finds another point of intersection with Kristeva’s description of the abject physical defect in that both suffer rejection for being deemed as abominable non-conformist bodies which are not in tune with the patriarchal God’s deliberation concerning those fit to serve Him (Kristeva: 1982, p. 102). In effect, Bakhtin’s and Kristeva’s theories are supported by the notions about abjection expressed in the biggest of the ‘Big Books’:

> In case there is any man in whom there is a defect, he may not come near: a man blind or lame or with his nose slit or with one member too long, [...], or hunchback or thin or diseased in his eyes [...]. Any man of the seed of Aaron the priest in whom there is a defect may not approach to present Jehovah’s offerings made by fire. There is a defect in him. He may not approach to present the read of his God (Leviticus 21:18-21).

Under this light, all the members of the museum of horrors, including its very owner, the gruesome Madame Schreck, can be subsumed under the category of the defective bodies which are not proper to the service of the patriarchal God. Thereby, they should be suppressed into the only metaphorical relief, as it were, left for the grotesque body in abysses or subterranean passages such as the cavernous underground stage on which Madame Schreck's spectacle of "prodigies of nature" takes place by the exhibition of anatomical performers standing in niches carved in the wall. As the "so diminutive in stature" Wiltshire Wonder confirms: "here, I'm well protected from the dark, foul throng of the world, in which I suffered so much. Amongst the monsters, I am well hidden; who looks for a leaf in a forest?" (Bakhtin: 1994, p. 227; Carter: 1993a, p 61-62, 64-65). In like manner, the very same misfortune befalls the crippled Wheelchair who has to spend almost three decades 'stored' in the Chance sisters' basement once she stops being Lady Atalanta Hazard, "[t]he most beautiful woman of her time", and becomes a defective body which is rechristened with a name proper to her less than human position and which "nobody else would have [...]. Least of all her own two daughters", whom she only sees nearly forty years later, after her 'accident', in Melchior's hundredth birthday party (Carter: 1993b, p. 7, 184, 209).

As a matter of fact, Creed's reasoning underlying the use of the term 'monstrous-feminine' instead of 'female monster' proves relevant at this point because it shows how the female is more than often constructed as a monster rather than just as an opposition to the 'male monster'. Actually, the fact that "the function of the monstrous remains the same – to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability" (Creed: 1993, p. 3, 11) accounts for Carter's association of the Chance sisters with Dracula: the female vampire is twice abject on account of her capacity to cross boundaries of all sorts such as East/West, death/life, animal/ human, as well as her lust for impure bodily fluid (Ibid, p. 61). Thus, it is no coincidence that Melchior's filmic adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* turns out a real failure due to the presence of these destabilising characters who defile the 'holy soil' from Stratford-upon-Avon used to consecrate the film setting in the very same manner Dracula was very often connected with diseases and plagues in the past (Carter: 1993b, p. 113, 128-29).

Moreover, the ambivalence of the grotesque/abject is also perceptible in the powerful emancipatory symbol of the flying female body and its immanent virility, historically depicted as 'boyish', which unavoidably liberates from old models of womanhood in that it unloads from the female body the weightness usually associated with it (Russo: 1994, p. 24-25). Effectively, Carter seems to nourish a 'philobatic imagination' on the part of the reader,

which means that she tries to foster a certain willingness to lean out "into dangerous and 'friendly' expanses away from the zone of security", into the alien, the unknown that "produce[s] in the viewer a certain state of ambivalent *dis*traction" (Russo: 1994, p. 34, 40). So much so that despite Fevvers's gigantic and heavy body for a female acrobat, which should endow her with a discouraging languor, she jumps off the classical pedestal usually associated with the 'Angel in the House' myth, rids herself of the heaviness attributed to the female body and dares both in the trapeze and life. In this manner, Fevvers flies and falls, incessantly takes off and lands. Never stable, she overtly defies the rationality of the scientific law of gravity, does not fear to take risks, and ends up empowered by any attempts to construct her as masculine: "Is she really a man?" (Carter: 1993a, p. 16-17, 30, 35, 48).

In a similar vein, the Chance sisters and Wheelchair also show this manly urge and determination to 'soar up into the *hazards*' of the unknown regardless of their heavy old age once they decide to attend Melchior *Hazard*'s birthday party, which means to be *tête-à-tête* with the members of "the House of Hazard", "the Royal Family of the theatre", who have one way or another victimised them, the dwellers of the wrong side of the tracks, the illegitimate side, for three generations. On top of it, Dora and Nora make this decision not only on *their own birthday*, but also shortly after they learn their goddaughter Tiffany, who is pregnant, has probably killed herself for her lover Tristam Hazard has broken her heart (Carter: 1993b, p. 50, 52). Therefore, as Russo states: "[t]he representation of femininity as an effortless mobility implies enormous control, changeability, and strength. [...] a femininity which defies the limits of the body, especially the female body" (Russo: 1994, p. 44).

With regard to the female trapeze artist, it is also important to notice her ambivalent provocative exposure owing to her body's concomitant accessibility and unattainability (Ibid, p. 43). In fact, Fevvers's room boasts a wall-size poster by an anonymous artist which portrays exactly this feeling: "[he] had chosen to depict her ascent from behind – bums aloft, you might say; up she goes, in steatopygous perspective". Incidentally, a "look, don't touch" perspective also shared by the journalist Jack Walser in one of Fevvers's performances: "My, how her bodice strains! You'd think her tits were going to pop right out. What a sensation *that* would cause" (Carter: 1993a, p. 7, 17, 62). Of course, the "Lucky Chances" are also conversant with ambivalent teasing exhibition since they spend almost fifty years at the fag end of vaudeville performing in nude shows:

> the Lucky Chances faced the music and they danced for well-nigh half a century, although we would always be on the left-hand line, hoofers, thrushes, the light relief, as you might say; bring on the bears! Or, bares. [...] The showgirls would stand there, topless, living statues, and we would do our number in and out the nipples in our tasselled bras (Carter: 1993b, p. 59).

Although this exposure or making a spectacle of oneself has always been a danger for women as it is invariably related to a loss of boundaries (Russo: 1994, p. 53), such loss has its bright side in that it can play the part of a symbolic model of transgression which somewhat does promote some social change by redefining current social frameworks. After all, even though these female circus and music hall performers are for the most part "seen but not heard" and have their presentation mainly devised in such a manner as to please the male gaze, they also "provoked wonder and ambivalence in the female viewer, as such latitude of movement and attitude was not permitted most women without negative consequences" (Ibid, p. 68).

Further still on grounds of religion, Kristeva claims that abjection is menacingly present within all the religious frameworks: "Abjection appears as a rite of defilement and pollution in the paganism that accompanies societies with a dominant or surviving matrilinear character" (Kristeva: 1982, p. 17). As far as the Christian Word is concerned, the only sort of dialectic interplay left for the abject is that of with a 'threatening otherness', the other sex that stands for a radical evil that has to be obliterated. Thereby, religious rites of purification can be played out in order to jettison from the symbolic order that which defiles and puts at stake the rational and social order of certain social segments (Ibid, 17, 65). Such a performative interaction is crystal clear in *Nights at the Circus* when Ma Nelson's brother, who is a dissenting cleric, inherits the whorehouse and promises to bring the good Lord's work into play by "cleansing the temple of the ungodly". What he does not know, however, is that the remaining harlots of the Mistress of the Revels' sisterhood are bound to burn down his inheritance in a pagan-like ritual (Carter: 1993b, p. 44, 49-50). That is, the so-labelled female abject eventually undercuts religious patriarchal intent and prevails over it.

It is also worth noting the connection Kristeva makes among abjection, language and the symbolic order as her reasoning gives way to the envisaging of cultural change. By joining Saussurean and Bakhtinian concepts of language, to wit its pre-existence and beyondness in relation to the subject as well as its dialogical nature, respectively (Saussure: 1983, p. 14; Bakhtin: 1986c, p. 93-94), Kristeva undergirds the idea that the revolt abjection promotes occurs within language. What is more, it is productive of culture at a subjective level in a way that at a macro and intertextual level the abject promotes reconstruction in the very same language (Kristeva: 1982, p. 45):

> Consequently, when I speak of *symbolic order*, I shall imply the dependence and articulation of the speaking subject in the order of language, such as they appear diachronically in the advent of each speaking being, and as analytic listening discovers them synchronically in the speech of analysands. I shall consider as an established fact the analytic finding that different subjective structures are possible within that symbolic order, even if the different types presently recorded seem subject to discussion and refinement, if not reevaluation (Kristeva: 1982, p. 67).

The use of language as a stylistic strategy in order to point out an ideological position by means of the disruption or even the emptiness of meaning can also signal the sort of strangeness the abject possesses when it articulates emotion and sometimes violence and hatred through colloquial speech or slang which, not surprisingly, not only shocks the reader but sometimes overpowers him/her for his/her incapability to cope with its powerful nature as a "radical instrument of separation, of rejection and, at the limit, of hatred" (Ibid, 191), as it is easily apprehended in Fevvers's and the Chance sisters' grating working-class Cockney accent which resonates throughout the novels: "'Lor' love you, sir", "Oooo-er", "Gawd!" (Carter: 1993a, p. 7, 190; Ibid: 1993b, p. 110, 119).

In addition to the "warped, homely, Cockney vowels and random aspirates", another hallmark of both Carter's novels is the unconstrained, bawdy and kinky unofficial speech of those who are on "the left-hand line", another characteristic of the grotesque mockery and abuse (Bakhtin: 1994, p. 228): "Have you heard the one about how Fevvers *got it up* for the travelling salesman...", "I wonder if he [Melchior] lent his mouth here, his arsehole there, to see if that would do the trick", "Tony, Tony, macaroni,/Show us all your big baloney" (Carter: 1993a, 8, 43; Ibid: 1993b, p. 24, 117). On account of the destabilising nature of this harsh contrast between crude use of language in opposition to Melchior's and Jack Walser's "precision, perfect elocution and sophisticated vocabulary", the former clear-cut meaning is undermined due to the abject's tendency to draw "toward the place where meaning collapses" (Bowers: 2005, p. 69; Kristeva: 1982, p. 2). As a result, distinctions and boundaries which tell apart 'low' and 'high' culture become indisputably blurred.

At last, another instance in which the dialogical relationship between the grotesque and the abject is fundamental in Carter's novels is when the lower stratum of the body, which is pivotal among the inner features of the grotesque body (Bakhtin: 1994, p. 227), emerges from the depths of the bodily underworld and brings to light the fragility of the patriarchal smoothness before corporeal waste such as menstrual blood and excrement. According to the patriarchal Word: "[t]here is nothing from outside a man that passes into him that can defile him; but the things that issue forth out of a man are the things that defile a man" (Mark 7:15). Curiously enough, the list of polluting objects does not include the seed that perpetuates

patriarchy, the semen, which underscores the fact that the rituals of defilement are very often only associated with the feminine (Kristeva: 1982, p. 10, 71). So as to display the virulent power of these internal fluids, Carter portrays them as part of the female prisoners' weaponry against the "private asylum for female criminals" run by the Countess P. and whose construction accords with the panopticon prison, "where all was visible to the eye of God" (Carter: 1993a, p. 212), designed by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). As Creed observes:

> In order to enter the symbolic order, the subject must reject or repress all forms of behaviour, speech and modes of being regarded as unacceptable, improper and unclean. [...] All signs of bodily excretions – bile, urine, shit, mucus, spittle, blood – must be treated as abject, cleaned up and removed from sight (Creed: 1993, p. 37-38).

Hardly unexpectedly, Carter does exactly the opposite and endows the female inmates with bloody love words to the wardresses which "are [doubly] outside of the male tradition of 'love words' because they are written to another woman and because they are written, literally and metaphorically, in the womb's blood" (Peach: 1998, p. 135). Interestingly, these very same female convicts were chosen for the "wheel-shaped House of Correction" because they had killed their husbands and their "bumps indicated the possibility of salvation" (Carter: 1993a, p. 210). In this way, Carter highlights the weaknesses of the patriarchal symbolic order which fails to perceive the abject plot going on despite the Countess P.'s attentive and continual gaze and the "perfect silence within this place" for the army of lovers effect contact in "all manner of substances, [...], in blood, both menstrual and veinous, even in excrement, for none of the juices of the bodies that had been so long denied were alien to them" (Ibid, p. 213, 217). In similar fashion, the strong symbolic value of the imagery of a bloody trail in the wake of half-naked Tiffany entering the TV set in which Tristam Hazard pays homage to his father and its aftermath just cannot pass unnoticed: the defiling power of the abject triumphs once more: "Tristam's career in pieces! His old man's birthday tribute ruined! The flower-like child he'd violated turning up to shame him, mad as a hatter in front of an audience of millions! (Carter: 1993b, p. 45).

In brief, Carter's narrative swallows up, digests and defecates Bakhtin's grotesque realism into a playful repetition by appropriating, installing and then challenging his assumptions concerning the grotesque body. It goes without saying that all the while Kristeva's theory of the abject pervades and underpins Carter's attempt to empower the female grotesque body as abjection affords her the necessary means to play on the vulnerabilities of the patriarchal symbolic order. In this manner, Carter does not allow for her

female characters' passive resignation to the marginalising places of relief destined to them. Much on the contrary, even though at the beginning the Chance sisters are spiritless and down in the dumps, "I sometimes wonder why we go on living", and limited to the feminine stench of their house, they are eventually on top of the world for they have found a reason in the twin babies to literally go out and continue singing, dancing and living "for at least another twenty years" "if needs must" (Carter: 1993b, p. 2, 112, 230). Moreover, Wheelchair is also taken out of the *grotto* and back to the spotlight empowered to such an extent that she upstages the Hazards at Melchior's own birthday party: not only does she look "her old self again", but this time she is the one to humiliate Mr British Theatre by making public that she had cheated on him first with the in reality illegitimate Saskia and Imogen Hazard's actual father, namely Peregrine (Ibid, p. 209, 214).

Likewise, neither Fevvers nor the other female monsters are kept shut forever in the miserable conditions of the "chamber of imaginary horrors". No sooner do they run away, than they devise a manner of making a decent living (Carter: 1993a, p. 85-86). As for Fevvers, such a denial to submit and have her grotesque body circumscribed by patriarchy is still seen in several other instances such as Mr Rosencreutz's and the Duke's episodes. Finally, after escaping the panopticon prison, the army of lovers set off with the intention of founding a female Utopia in the taiga "on which they could inscribe whatever future they wished" (Ibid, p. 74-83, 184-92, 218). Therefore, by no means does Carter make room for the perpetuation of the female grotesque body's suffering, discrimination and social ostracism. In order to antagonise Bakhtin's tendentious gendering of the grotesque and traditional constructions of femininity, Carter shows a disrespectful attitude towards boundaries and performs a real onslaught on the smooth surface of the patriarchal canon so that alternative voices can be heard and different points of view can be taken into account by means of the defiling power of the boundless grotesque bodily imagery and its material bodily lower stratum.

...CARTER*LY*-CONSTRUCTED
(AUTO)-BIO-GRAPH-ICAL FEMALE NARRATIVE*S*...

I being addicted from my childhood [...]
to write with the pen [rather] than to work with a needle [30]
Margaret Cavendish

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue /
Who says my hand a needle better fits [31]
Anne Bradstreet

There is no one woman, no one truth
in itself about woman in itself [32]
Jacques Derrida

[T]he truth is that when we write of a woman,
everything is out of place [...];
the accent never falls where it does with a man [33]
Virginia Woolf

Among all the genres the English writer Angela Carter appropriates and installs in *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* just to critically undermine and subvert them in the end, perhaps the one from which she derives more pleasure and enjoys playing with is the traditional autobiography. For one thing, owing to her personal dislike of it attendant on its form and matter-of-fact way of portraying reality, as well as its unsuitability and even unwillingness to convey the plurality and variety of female experiences (Sage: 2007, p. 52). For another, due to the fact that if autobiography has one landmark with regard to gender, it is that the female subject is noticeable for its absence as writer and bearer of meaningful existences (Stanton: 1998, p. 131-32). Notwithstanding, it does not mean that women were not writing relevant autobiographies, it is just that their production was simply relegated to the margins by the canon. Effectively, the autobiographical canon has very often historically regarded several other modes of life writing and experiences other than that of 'the great men' unworthy of any sort of consideration.

[30] Cavendish: 2000, p. 57.

[31] Bradstreet: 1967, p. 16.

[32] Kamuf: 1991, p. 372.

[33] Woolf: 2005, p. 549.

Nonetheless, in Carter's deft hands that sort of literary and critic evaluation does not take place for she devises a manner to go against the grain and empowers her female characters by endowing her narrators/protagonists Fevvers and Dora with the phallic pen. In this way, Carter's fictional (auto)biographers can contest the genre's monolithic nature and the borderlines patriarchy imposes to it. To this end, Fevvers, the winged *aerialiste*, and Dora Chance, the illegitimate septuagenarian, gregariously assemble the experiences of the marginalised and dispossessed as well as their diverse practices of life writing so as to give them a chance to collectively write themselves into the very history that has always ignored them. Hence, they furnish the reader with a polyphonic narrative whose shape and content thoroughly opposes that invariably provided by the white, Western and male-centred perspective. In other words, as Swindells describes below:

> Autobiography now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual. People in a position of powerlessness – women, black people, working-class people – have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a 'personal' voice, which speaks beyond itself. [...] In this context, autobiography can appear the most direct and accessible way of countering silence and misrepresentation (Swindells 1995: 7).

In order to point out how outrageous this historical scenario is, maybe it is a good idea to have a bird's eye view of the origin of modern Western autobiography. To begin with, even though the English working-class writer Ann Yearsley is the first person to use the word autobiography in the eighteenth century, Robert Southey is for the most part considered the one responsible for the coinage of the term by anglicising the Greek words *autos*, *bios* and *graphe* – self, life and writing, respectively – in 1809. Earlier on, the illiterate medieval mystic Margery Kempe had an amanuensis write the very first autobiography in English circa 1432. In 1656, Margaret Cavendish wrote the first important secular life narrative by a woman (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 1, 2, 93-94; Mason: 1980, p. 209, 211-212). However, what are all these female remarkable feats in comparison with those of 'the great men' which have been legitimised as role models for the writing of autobiographies?

In what can possibly be one of the most gendered genres Carter incorporates, different from today's disposition towards the writing of autobiographies by women and other minority groups, in the past women's life narratives were usually deemed as of neither cultural nor historical relevance. As a result, these marginal texts were rarely investigated (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 118, 128), and that is hardly the case that the female writers were unaware of it, as Cavendish well attests: "Why hath this lady writ her own life? since none cares to know whose daughter she was or whose wife she is, or how she was bred, or what fortunes she had,

or how she lived, or what humour or disposition she was of" (Cavendish: 2000, p. 63). Indeed, such a mood in which unexpected recognition is taken for granted is not dissimilar to Dora's concerning her (auto)biographical narrative:

> I, Dora Chance, in the course of assembling notes towards my own autobiography, have inadvertently become the chronicler of all the Hazards, although I should think that my career as such will go as publicly unacknowledged by the rest of the dynasty as my biological career has done for not only are Nora and I, as I have already told you, by-blows, but our father was a pillar of the legit. theatre and we girls are illegitimate in every way – not only born out of wedlock, but we went on the halls, didn't we! (Carter: 1993b, p. 11).

Neither to Fevvers's who at a certain moment refers to her contributions to Walser's interview as "scarcely credible narrative" and even doubts they will be published: "Come on, sir, now, will they let you print *that* in your newspapers? For these were women of the *worst class* and *defiled*" (Ibid: 1993a, p. 21, 84). Actually, the point is that patriarchy has always legitimised certain autobiographical writings and not others on the basis of gender. Thereby, women's self-referential discourse is historically fragmented, ambivalent, it is typified by this double-voiced structure in which they concomitantly crave for public appreciation and fear to taint their image of feminine propriety by excessive self-exposure. Cavendish, for instance, allows her husband to overshadow her as she only prepares her autobiography after doing him the honour of writing his biography (Smith; Watson: 1998, p. 12; Ibid: 2001, p. 93-94). Despite all that, just like the Chance sisters who at first hesitate to go to Melchior's party, soon female writers would perceive that "Memory Lane is a dead end" and would throw "cautions to the wind" and face the hazards of their writing as the only means to envisage better future possibilities: "Expect the worst, hope for the best!" (Carter: 1993b, p. 190).

According to the canon, life narratives should follow in Saint Augustine's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's footsteps if they are to be successful (Anderson: 2004, p. 86). First, Augustine wrote *Confessions*, widely accepted as the first autobiography in the modern Western world, around 397 AD (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 85). Lest one loses himself in the eyes of God, Augustine fosters the inward-turning gaze in opposition to that turned to the outside world, which is a peculiar feature of canonical texts. Further, he believes that one is likelier to have pointless irreverence towards the law when in company of friends than alone (Anderson: 2004, p. 18-22). In short, he was certainly someone who would only do things by 'The Book': "Do not be misled [from the path of 'Truth']. Bad associations spoil useful habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Nevertheless, that is not the way Carter's carefree contributors to Dora's narrative see things since they always make room for others and the diverse experiences they bring along –

even the ones who *might* fall: Ma Chance gives shelter to the penniless orphan Kitty and does not throw her out even when she gets pregnant of Melchior Hazard: "Perhaps Mrs Chance's house was even a haven to her". Later on, it is Our Cyn's turn: "'I wasn't planning on running a hostel for fallen women,' said Grandma in a huff". Yet again, 49 Bard Road receives homeless Wheelchair. But this time it is the Chance sisters who reach out a helping hand. With reference to *Nights at the Circus*, things are not different. Proof thereof is the episode in which Lizzie's sister Isotta receives the refugees from Madame Schreck's museum with open arms (Carter: 1993b, p. 25, 34, 178-80; Ibid: 1993a, p. 84). Therefore, Carter is clearly in favour of the proliferation of experiences in her (auto)biographical narrative rather than the radical individuality Augustine upholds. In fact, regardless of minor or major characters, Carter examines every single one of them to a greater or lesser degree and brings to the spotlight dimensions of human life which the canon would rather leave consigned to oblivion.

In the eighteenth century, Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782) is posthumously published, and it becomes another important landmark in the history of traditional autobiography, reinforcing yet more these exclusionary practices on account of its characteristic selfishness and egotism (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 96):

> I am resolved on an undertaking that has no model and will have no imitator. I want to show my fellow-men a man in all *the truth* of nature; and this man is to be myself. *Myself alone*. I feel my heart and I know men. I am not made like any of that I have seen; I venture to believe that I was not made like any that exist. If I am not more deserving, at least I am different. As to whether nature did well or ill to break the mould in which I was cast, that is something no one can judge until after they have read me (Rousseau: 2000, p. 5, our emphasis).

As a matter of fact, Rousseau's claim illustrates well the typical all-male monolithic speech and standpoint Carter strives to undercut in *Nights at the Circus* the moment Fevvers and Lizzie graft their plural voices and more fluid sense of self into the journalist Jack Walser's narrative: "the girl [Fevvers] never missed a beat of her narrative but went smoothly on a different tack" (Carter: 1993a, p. 56). Similarly, in the way Fevvers relativises with authorial dexterity the concept of (auto)biographical 'truth' by tacitly joking with her reminiscences: "'Oh, Lizzie, the gentleman must know the truth!' And she fixed Walser with a piercing, judging regard, as if to ascertain just how far she could go with him" (Ibid, 35). Curiously, it is exactly this tendency of Carter's narrators to 'stretch' the truth that is traditionally seen as making women's autobiographies "too windy and unreliable" in terms of autobiographical writing (Smith; Watson: 1998, p. 4-5).

In order that Fevvers's and Dora's life writings can fit into the boundaries of patriarchy's 'truthful real' and have greater credibility, one of Carter's strategies is to set her

narrators' (auto)biographical components against a historical backdrop and make reference to historical figures. That is why "not just Lautrec but *all* the post-impressionists vied to paint her [Fevvers]", and "during his [Ranulph Hazard's] Macbeth, Queen Victoria gripped the curtains of the royal box until her knuckles whitened. Regicide, no fun for a reigning monarch". In similar fashion, that women, as Mr Rosencreutz states, ought not to "be bothering their pretty little heads with things of *this* world, such as the Irish question and the Boer War". Also, the importance World War I and II have as landmarks in the Chance sisters' life on account of the recurrent references to them in the novel: "In the war, in the mornings after air raids, you saw people look like Brenda looked, just then" (Carter: 1993a, p. 11, 79; Ibid: 1993b, p. 14, 29, 50, 163; Johnson: 2007, p. 76).

It is also noteworthy in Rousseau's excerpt above the conversational tone which makes implicit the presence of an interlocutor in accordance with the convention which dictates that "the 'I' is confirmed in the function of permanent subject by the presence of its correlative 'you', giving clear motivation to the discourse" (Starobinski: 1980, p. 77). Not surprisingly, Carter installs this 'I/you-reader' convention in *Wise Children* in order to give credibility to Dora's (auto)biographical narrative. In this way, every now and then there is this conspicuous interruption in the narrative flow so that there can be an interaction between narrator and reader: "But, truthfully, these glorious pauses do, sometimes, occur in the discordant but complementary narratives of our lives and if you choose to stop the story there, at such a pause, and refuse to take it any further, then you can call it a happy ending" (Carter: 1993b, p. 227). In *Nights at the Circus*, though, Carter seems to save this interplay to the ambiguous 'you' when Walser queries Fevvers about her efforts to convince him she was the "only fully-feathered intacta in the history of the world" and Fevvers bursts into laughter: "'I fooled you, then!' she said. 'Gawd, I fooled you!'". Does it not appear that this 'you' applies to Walser and the reader at once? (Ibid: 1993a, p. 294; Johnson: 2007, p. 81).

Effectively, Carter is very postmodern in the manner she challenges the sovereignty and universality of this unified self Rousseau's *Confessions* helps perpetuate. First and foremost, Fevvers and Dora straddle 'high' and 'low' cultures from the outset in the way they (help) develop their (auto)biographical narratives with both working-class and middle-class autobiographical structuring features. That is, the narrators or those who contribute to the narrative make clear the protagonists' working-class ordinariness, but they also furnish a (putative) family lineage along with a date of birth – or at least the day of arrival in Fevvers's case –, which is typical of middle-class narrative. Moreover, in opposition to what is taken as a general rule in terms of parent-child relations, the sort of protection, love and tenderness

Fevvers receives at the brothel does not seem to differ much from that of the conventional bourgeois family towards their offspring. Neither does the amount of attention and dedication the Chance sisters receive from Ma Chance and uncle Peregrine, even if they are not that lucky with respect to their biological father: "Our father might have reneged on the job but we *did* have a right old sugar daddy in our Uncle Perry and well you know it. We never knew our mother but Grandma filled the gap and you can say that again" (Smith; Watson: 1998, p. 267; Carter: 1993a, p. 1, 12-14, 22; Ibid: 1993b, p. 1, 11-40, 189, 193).

Last, unlike the peculiar linearity which typifies most middle-class autobiographies, the novels begin *in media res* and, thereby, rely considerably on flashbacks to relate past events and to introduce characters, settings and conflicts. Indeed, it comes as no surprise as soon as Dora herself admits that: "There I go again! Can't keep a story going in a straight line, can I? Drunk in charge of a narrative" (Carter: 1993b, p. 158).

Furthermore, Carter is well aware that there is politics both in remembering and forgetting, at personal and collective levels. That is why she fights traditional collective forms of cultural remembering by means of the postmodern strategy of 'presentification' of the past and tries to provide her readers with alternative memories and meanings by filling in the gaps left for forgetfulness and silence in the attempt to manipulate collective memory (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 17-18; Le Goff: 1986, p. 12; Hutcheon: 1990, p. 19-20). In a way, such a procedure is in tune with bell hook's opinion that "[...] autobiography is a personal story telling – a unique recounting of events not so much as they have happened but as we remember and invent them" (hooks: 1998, p. 430). In the same way, Carter retrospectively invests with the status of worthiness the multiple and discontinuous experiences which were not heretofore considered as such by the patriarchal hegemonic discourse. In fact, that is what allows her to speculate on the historical difficulty the suffragettes have to obtain the right to vote: besides showing what lies behind Mr Rosencreutz's intolerance of women's emancipation since it is of his particular interest that the caged birds be not set free, she gives utterance to Fevvers's predicament in his hands (Carter: 1993a, p. 74-83).

Actually, it is impressive the extent to which Carter deconstructs from within a number of the major assumptions which define and circumscribe the genre. As a contemporary postmodern writer, she blurs boundaries twice as much because not only does she mix biographical and autobiographical narratives, making the divide between them more permeable or mobile, but also further confuses the distinction between life narrative and fictional novel narrated in the first person. For instance, despite *Wise Children*'s narration in the first person and its aspect of life narrative, Carter is not *really* writing about her own life,

she is just a novelist who does not necessarily have to cling to her personal memories, as opposed to the (auto)biographical narrator Dora. By doing so, Carter rids herself of the burden of Philippe Lejeune's 'Autobiographical Pact' which besides dictating that authorial signature, names of narrator and character have to match, would surely prevent her from subverting 'the truth' as patriarchy sees it for she herself would have to make claims to 'the truth' (Rak: 2009, p. 17). In like manner, she is freer to write in several other different practices of life writing not recognised by conventional autobiography (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 7-9).

Given that Carter's main purpose is to disclose the 'other' side of the coin, she incorporates, for example, the mode known as prison narrative to report the incidents at the panopticon prison for female criminals run by Countess P. Although enforced silence prevails at this authoritarian institution which dehumanises the inmates and turns them into invisible and powerless beings, the convict Olga Alexandrovna and her wardress and to-be lover Vera Andreyevna contrive a manner to deceive the tyranny of a place in which "all was visible to the eye of God" (Carter: 1993a, p. 212). Hence, by using menstrual blood and all sorts of body fluids there takes place the exchange of love words between them. Shortly after, it becomes a collective enterprise that ends up in an insurrection that opens all the cages and leaves the prisoners free to write their narratives without any sort of state coercion: "The white world around them looked newly made, a blank sheet of fresh paper on which they could inscribe whatever future they wished" as fully human beings (Ibid, p. 218). Nonetheless, maybe the most important element about this episode is that only by fighting for deliverance from the imposed speechlessness to their life narratives that Alexandrovna's history of domestic violence, rape and impossibility of relishing motherhood can come to the fore (Carter: 1993a, p. 211, 214-15; Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 201).

Likewise, Carter also appropriates the (auto)pathography, a practice of life writing whose focus is on the disabled body or "those who have been assigned the cultural status of the unwhole, the grotesque, the uncanny" (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 108). Needless to say, that is Wheelchair's case in that her life writing portrays chiefly her disability and its limitations since this "dreadful quarrel over funds that transformed the whilom Lady A. into our Wheelchair and left her homeless, penniless, reliant on the left-hand line" (Carter: 1993b, p. 182). Obviously, another category this mode subsumes is that of the diseased or abnormal bodies such as those in Madame Schreck's "lumber room of femininity": "Dear old Fanny Four-Eyes; and the Sleeping Beauty; and the Wiltshire Wonder, who was not three foot high; and Albert/Albertina, who was bipartite, that is to say, half and half and neither of either; and

the girl we called Cobwebs" (Carter: 1993a, p. 59-60) whose formerly hidden life stories Fevvers narrates. First of all, what is notable about this mode is the visibility it endows these characters with. Moreover, the pivotal role it plays in the empowerment it promotes by undermining their stigmatisation as aberrant bodies or social burdens in the very same manner Carter does once she brings Wheelchair back to life and gives a chance in society to the ex-members of the "chamber of imaginary horrors" (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 187-88; Carter: 1993b, p. 209; Ibid: 1993a, p. 85-86).

Still with regard to the 'Autobiographical Pact', it does not necessarily follow that Dora adheres strictly to it owing to the narrative artifices she clearly utilises to liberate her from such a commitment. First, she fills in the gaps by making up memories in the way she prefers to believe she was conceived: "I'd like to think it went like this [...]" (Carter: 1993b, p. 24). Next, she admits her reminiscences might not be trustworthy: "It was a strange night, that night, and stranger still because I always misremember. It never seems the same, twice, each time that I remember it. I distort" (Ibid, p. 68, 157, 196). At last, she gives in that she might choose to withhold information: "At my age, memory becomes exquisitively selective" (Ibid, p. 195). In fact, a good example is her refusal to talk in details about the war time: "Yes, indeed; I have my memories, but I prefer to keep them to myself, thank you very much. Though there are some things I never can forget" (Ibid, p. 163). In a similar vein, how can Fevvers claim the *absolute* status of an authoritative source of truth to her narrative if all the while she paves the way for the reiteration: "Is she fact or is she fiction?" (Carter: 1993a, p. 7).

In addition, once the writer is somewhat implicated in the work, which is Carter's situation in several respects, it is barely the case that the work is not going to resonate to a greater or lesser extent with the writer's personal historical records (Anderson: 2004, p.1). Thus, as soon as the reader obtains external information about the historical author Carter, s/he is unavoidably going to see some of her personal experiences underlying both novels. To begin with, Ma Chance's protective posture during the war echoes significantly Carter's grandmother's evacuation with her grandchildren during the war from South London to the village of Wath-upon-Dearne (Peach: 1998, p. 16-17):

> When the bombardments began, Grandma would go outside and shake her fist at the old men in the sky. She knew they hated women and children worst of all. She'd come back in and cuddle us. She lullabyed us, she fed us. She was our air-raid shelter; she was our entertainment; she was our breast (Carter: 1993b, p. 29).

That would also somehow help explain the absence of mothers in Carter's novels for not only was she separated from her mother during the war, but just like the twin sisters' biological mother Kitty, despite being younger than her father, Carter's mother died first (Sage: 2007, p. 5-6). By the way, another relative of Carter's whose life resounds in *Wise Children* is her Aunt Kit who was expected to 'go on the Halls', that is, to act in slightly lewd musical performances. In spite of that, she ended up as a clerkess and "had a miserable life and a bleak death". For this reason, the Chance sisters are, in a way, a recreation of Carter's Aunt Kit but this time with a far more thrilling life (Clapp: 1991, p. 26).

Similarly, Carter much probably obtained inspiration to create the giantess Fevvers during her two years in Japan, a place in which her physical features such as height, hair and complexion made her stand out in the crowd and increased dramatically her sense of being the 'other'. According to Lorna Sage, "Japan confirmed her in her sense of strangeness" (Sage: 1994, p. 29). But Japan also endowed Carter with her fascination for *irezumi* (tattooing) on which she wrote a journalistic article and whose influence is crystal clear in some of her works (Ibid: 2007, p. 27-8). In *Wise Children*, the one who comes immediately to mind is Gorgeous George and this "enormous statement" he embodies that is the British Empire tattooed in brilliant pink across his torso (Carter: 1993b, p. 66-67). Incidentally, Carter's experience as a journalist who made attempts at writing from a male viewpoint certainly bears a considerable influence on the way she produces Walser (Sage: 2007, p. 25):

> I was, as a girl, suffering a degree of colonialisation of the mind. Especially in the journalism I was writing then, I'd – quite unconsciously – posit a male point of view as the general one. So there was an element of the male impersonator about this young person as she was finding herself (Carter: 1983, p. 71).

Finally, as "the pure product of an advanced, industrialised, post-imperialist country in decline" (Ibid, p. 73), Carter's perceptions of post-war Britain emerge in *Wise Children* by means of the inevitable association between the decadence of the British Empire and that of the formerly "Clown Number One to the British Empire", Gorgeous George, who begs in the streets while displaying on his now aged and wrinkled body the grim fact that "the yellow streetlamps took all the pink out of his continents" (Ibid: 1993b, p. 196). However, Carter is certainly more interested in the bright side of Britain's decreasing importance in the world scenario: "The sense of limitless freedom that I, as a woman, sometimes feel *is* that of a new kind of being. Because I simply could not have existed, as I am, in any other preceding time or place" (Ibid). Actually, is it not precisely how the Chance sisters feel once they recurrently realise the waning power of erstwhile legitimate symbols of the empire? "Lo, how the mighty

have fallen" in clear allusion as well to the ruined "Royal Family of the theatre", to wit the Hazards. In short, it appears that for analogous reasons Carter, Dora and Nora eventually conclude: "What a joy it is to dance and sing!" (Carter: 1993b, p. 10, 16, 37, 196, 232; 2 Samuel 1:27; Peach: 1998, p. 14).

Therefore, even though both novels cannot be labelled self-referential writing, strictly speaking, but just in terms of structure, there certainly takes place an intersubjective interplay between Carter and her readers by means of "processes of communicative exchange and understanding" which typify the reading of life narratives depending on how one reads it (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 13). Effectively, as Mitchell puts it: "memory is an intersubjective phenomenon, a practice not only of recollection of a past *by* a subject, but of recollection *for* another subject" (Mitchell: 1994, p. 193). In this way, in a sort of transpersonal identification with those who have been victimised and denied by patriarchy for "[s]he had an instinctive feeling for the other side, which included also the underside" (Atwood: 1992, p. 61), Carter gives voice to disregarded memories in an intersubjective act of sharing the social past in order to, if not reshape the future, at least offer projections of alternative future avenues (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 20-21). To put it simply, as Carter gives voice to the speechless women of yore, her own personal experience is also woven into the (auto)biographical narratives of her last two novels. Nevertheless:

> In literature the autobiographical is transformed. It is no longer the writer's own experience: it becomes everyone's. He is no longer writing about himself: he is writing about life. He creates it, not as an object that is already familiar and observed, as he is observed by others, but as a new and revealing object, growing out of and beyond observation. Thus characters in a novel are based on the novelist's observation of real people and of himself. Yet they would not be "living" if they were just reported. They are also invented – that is new – characters, living in the scene of life that is his novel, independent of the material of real observation from which they came (Spender: 1980, p. 117).

In summary, although in *Nights at the Circus* Walser writes out of duty, for communicative ends, there clearly pervades his narrative a certain intentionality to construct the *aerialiste* Fevvers textually as fake and/or a freak. Indeed, that is exactly what propels both the trapeze artist and her minder Lizzie into taking part in the narrating/writing process. Besides the good time they have at the cost of the journalist's uneasiness, of course. With regard to Dora, in *Wise Children*, in spite of being not very clear about her motives to write and even showing a certain lack of enthusiasm in the process at first, the fact is that, historically speaking, some music hall performers did write their autobiographies to make money by catering to the readers' avid desire to vicariously relish the stage performers' alternative lives, something Dora even jokes about: "Romantic illegitimacy, always a seller. It

ought to copper-bottom the sales of my memoirs" (Carter: 1993b, p. 11; Smith; Watson: 1998, p. 266-67). However, one thing is unquestionable about both novels: once the female protagonists/narrators take up the phallic pen, they *do not* follow the canon's stylistic propriety. Much on the contrary, they aesthetically profane the male canonical autobiographical shrine in many ways.

Likewise, these narrating and narrated subjects take up the phallic pen so as to give voice to a multitude of experiences to which has been denied historical utterance in order to unveil the opaque mechanisms patriarchal society utilises so that it can 'naturally' perpetrate all sorts of atrocities against women. Thus, perhaps Carter's incorporation of the past can be apprehended in terms of a deformation of the totalising patriarchal autobiographical narrative so as to re-form, rework it. Nevertheless, this time making room for multiple other voices previously turned down by the canon. Little wonder that the contradiction immanent in female discourse is not so much a threat to its characteristic "we-ness" as a sign of regard and respect for the diversity and variety of experiences which compose it (Smith; Watson: 1998, p. 192). Of course, Carter's life narrative is also part of this interweaving of disparate voices. Albeit Carter's narrative in *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* is not precisely that of self-disclosure, once the reader gets in touch with some epitextual materials, such as interviews, it is unquestionable that there is a certain degree of self-representation on her part underlying the (auto)biographically-structured plots of both novels.

Furthermore, Carter's novels show from the start that any sort of attempt to find any correspondence between patriarchal ideology and its attempt to produce a monological autobiographical narrative and the plurality of female fragmented experiences is bound to failure, as Mason points out:

> Nowhere in women's autobiographies do we find the patterns established by the two prototypical male autobiographers, Augustine and Rousseau; and conversely male writers never take up the archetypal models of Julian[34], Margery Kempe, Margaret Cavendish, and Anne Bradstreet[35] (Mason: 1998, p. 321).

Ultimately, no matter how much canonical autobiography may try to establish firmly delineated boundaries and enforce its 'truths', the fact is that this utopian obsession to attain an unbreakable unity only makes patent its unstable nature as a genre and its postmodern

[34] Dame Julian of Norwich was "the first English woman to protest that she *would* speak out about herself" so as to make known the spiritual revelations she had on 13 May, 1373 (Mason: 1980, p. 207, 213).

[35] "Anne Bradstreet, born in Cavalier England [...], ended her life in the far-off American colonies, [...] what she saw as God's providence and accepted the complex fate of being an American and a member of the Puritan community as her destiny". Bradstreet wrote a very brief spiritual autobiography (Mason: 1980, p. 211, 227).

suitability, as Olney attests: “I fear that it is all too typical – indeed it seems inevitable – that the subject of autobiography produces more questions than answers, more doubts by far (even of its existence) than certainties” (Olney: 1980, p. 5). In addition, once the writing of an autobiography depends on the self-observation of its writer, it is by nature open-ended, always in process. Maybe that is why Carter chooses the (auto)biographical narrative for her last two novels: besides being indisputably open-ended, it mirrors this never-ending construction of the postmodern subject (Ibid, p. 25).

PICARESQUE & *BILDUNGSROMAN À LA CARTER*

The habit of applying warpaint outlasts the battle [36]
Angela Carter

We are no more, no less,
than the language we speak and write [37]
Harry Sieber

Once it is taken into account the "enthusiastic and curious internationalist" Angela Carter is (Stoddart: 2007, p. 6), it comes as no surprise that among the literary genres she incorporates into her last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, are the picaresque and the *Bildungsroman*. It goes without saying that Carter also chooses these genres on account of their postmodern suitability and the degree to which patriarchal modes are intrinsic to them, features which she most pleasurably eventually undercuts.

For one thing, the picaresque is a genre whose hallmark is an open-ended autobiographical narrative of an errant outcast who has writing as the most effective defence mechanism in a life of provisional but intense encounters (Sieber: 1977, p. 12). Indeed, just like the traditional picaresque narrator, Carter's narrators/protagonists Fevvers and the septuagenarian Dora become (co-)authors and undertake the mission of unveiling the oppressive mechanisms of the patriarchal social order that have always victimised them. Nevertheless, Carter subverts the genre in a number of ways such as, unlike the traditional rogue, the manner in which her narrators treasure their memories and low or questionable origins, as well as make room for other points of view in their narrative.

For another, when Carter depicts the phenomenon of growing up female as she does in the novels, she locates her female heroes in the *Bildungsroman*, "a narrative whose central focus is on the personal development of its main character" (Gamble: 2001, p. 58). However, as a contemporary writer, Carter's narrative process has nothing to do with the 'growing down' experience female characters have gone through in the first attempts at the genre before the twentieth century (Ellis: 1999, p. 7, 16). Much less with the male-centred narrative so characteristic of the *Bildungsroman*. On the contrary, Carter offers a wider range of options to her characters, no matter whether male or female, besides punishment or the enclosure of domestic life usually reserved to the latter.

[36] Carter: 1993b, p. 6.

[37] Sieber: 1977, p. 17.

In brief, Carter appropriates these genres so as to enact a historical and literary review from a distinct standpoint and to rewrite the roles assigned to women by patriarchy in order to set new and alternative models to typify the female experience.

To begin with, 'picaresque' is an adjectival form of the word *pícaro*, the same as 'rogue', and the name of a genre whose inception dates back to sixteenth-century Spanish literature and whose prime features Miguel de Cervantes delineates in *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605), usually seen as the chief ancestor of the genre: autobiographical narrative of a criminal's life in the style of *Lazarillo de Tormes* (anonymous author, 1554) and works alike such as Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599, 1604), open-endedness and thieves' cant (Lewis: 1961, p. 32; Sieber: 1977, p. 10). In effect, it is mostly characterised by social satire in the form of an autobiography which aims at criticising the recurrent circumstances under which the roguish nature of the *pícaro* comes into existence, namely those of poverty, hunger, humiliation, delinquency and expedients of the sort which underlie Fevvers's words:

> And so our journeyings commenced again, as if they were second nature. Young as I am, it's been a picaresque life; will there be no end to it? Is my fate to be a female Quixote, with Liz my Sancho Panza? If so, what of the young American [Walser]? Will he turn out to be the beautiful illusion, the Dulcinea of that sentimentality for which Liz upbraids me, telling me it's but the obverse to my enthusiasm for hard cash? (Carter: 1993a, p. 245).

With reference to the *Bildungsroman*, its prototype is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticepship*) published in Germany in 1794-1796 (Pinto: 1990, p. 9-10). From the start, its thematical material is concerned with the pedagogical needs of the time of its conception with the purpose of achieving the reader's advancement (*Bildung*) by portraying the growth of a hero from childhood to the threshold of adulthood (Swales: 1978, p. 12). Thus, as a writer in tune with her time, Carter uses the genre's didactic function as a catalyst for possible future social transformations concerning women by supplying her masculine and feminine reading public with alternative views which they might choose to follow. For example, in *Nights at the Circus*, after realising how much of a coward he has been to have thought himself superior to women due to his strength, which in reality has always been a disguise to his fear of a woman's love, Samson, also known as the Strong Man, perceives that a marriage-like connection is not the only one left for a man and a woman in the end: "I am not vain enough to think that, one day, either Mignon or the Princess might learn to love me as a man; perhaps, some day, they will cherish me as a brother" (Carter: 1993a, p. 276).

In terms of similarities and postmodern traits, both genres rely on the autobiographical narrative, which means to retrace the past usually accompanied by final indeterminacy since the story-telling is supposedly not over until its narrator dies. First, complying with one of the strategies available to the picaresque narrative, Carter's two novels begin *in media res* as the protagonists recount episodic reminiscences with the intention of exciting the reader's curiosity as they once in a while interpolate digressions and personal remarks (Vaíllo: 1983, p. 519; Sieber: 1977, p. 18): "Let us pause awhile in the unfolding story of Tristam and Tiffany so that I can fill you [reader] in on the background. High time! you must be saying" (Carter: 1993b, p. 11). Similarly, the *Bildungsroman* for the most part has to do with recollections of days gone by which work as a warning to the reader in order not to reproduce that past but, conversely, to search for new avenues after reappraising former assumptions. Perhaps that is why Fevvers decides to throw her diamonds to Little Ivan after reevaluating the danger under which she has already been several times by playing patriarchy's reifying game and, this once with the Grand Duke, owing to sheer greed: "'I've learned my lesson' said Fevvers and, sitting up, ripped off her bracelet and earrings" (Ibid: 1993a, p. 192-93). Thereby, the novels fulfil in a very postmodern manner the didactic purpose usually performed by the traditional *Bildungsroman* (Pinto: 1990, p. 60).

Nonetheless, it is important to notice that although Carter's picaresque protagonists depict the past so that they can also somehow justify some dishonourable practices and the *status quo* (Vaíllo: 1983, p. 450), their behaviour has nothing to do with the traditional *pícaro*'s insistence to obliterate any telling traces which can connect him with his 'tainted' ancestry in "his concern with honour and his desire for respectability, to become an 'hombre de bien' [sic]" (Sieber: 1977, p. 12, 43, 50). Needless to say, the *pícaro*'s attitude differs greatly from Carter's narrators' who not only keep their habits and manners to the end, but are also proud of their ordinary origins and willing to make them known: "as to the question of origins and past history, let me plunge deep into the archaeology of my desk" (Carter: 1993b, p. 11). Actually, Fevvers and the Chance sisters' behaviour bears a considerable resemblance to that of the *Bildungsroman* hero's in that they also see life itself as a school of hard knocks and try to learn from previous experiences in order to ultimately achieve an integration of self.

In addition, in accordance with the picaresque wandering serial formula in which travelling occurs for the sake of travelling on "a journey that is neither flight nor quest, and of an ending without real closure" (Sage: 2007, p. 35), the hero in the *Bildungsroman* has also an inconclusive *denouement* (Montenegro: 2004, p. 45; Pinto: 1990, p. 59, 87). Therefore, it is up to the reader to envisage how at least another quarter of century is going to unfold while

the Chance sisters raise the new generation of Hazards, a baby boy and a baby girl who categorically stand for a symbolic disruptive landmark in the either twin boys or twin girls in the Hazards' genealogy (Carter: 1993b, p. 227, 230-32). Likewise, the aftermath of Fevvers's contagious subversive laughter: "The spiralling tornado of Fevvers' laughter began to twist and shudder across the entire globe [...] until everything that lived and breathed, everywhere, was laughing" (Ibid: 1993a, p. 295).

Nevertheless, despite the welcome postmodern features, the picaresque and the *Bildungsroman* also present some peculiarities which do not please at all postmodern feminist writers like Carter. In fact, in the *Bildungsroman*'s incipient phase the narrative focus lies in "the formation of a young life as gendered [male], classed [usually bourgeois], and raced [white Anglo-Saxon] within a social network larger than the family or the religious community" (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 102; Montenegro: 2004, p. 41). Thus, the female hero's refusal to the restrictions of home and family life were seen as a threat to the patriarchal social order, which invariably resulted in marginalisation, if not physical or spiritual death, as punishment for ignoring the social limits imposed on her (Pinto: 1990, p. 13-14; Guedes: 1997, p. 18):

> The novel of development portrays a world in which the young woman hero is destined for disappointment. The vitality and hopefulness characterizing the adolescent hero's attitude toward her future here meet and conflict with the expectations and dictates of the surrounding society. Every element of her desired world – freedom to come and go, allegiance to nature, meaningful work, exercise of the intellect, and use of her own erotic capabilities – inevitably clashes with patriarchal norms" (Pratt: 1981, p. 29).

As a consequence, different from the male character who attains personal and social integration in the end, the female hero neither achieves social acceptance nor a sense of selfhood in her search for identity (Pinto: 1990, p. 149). Proof thereof is this widespread disillusion at the beginning of *Wise Children* before the Chance sisters decide to resume their quest: "What would have become of *us*, if Grandma hadn't left us this house? [...] Nora and I would be on the streets by now, hauling our worldlies up and down in plastic bags, [...] to gasp and freeze and finally snuff it disregarded on the street and blow away like rags" (Carter: 1993b, p. 1-2). It is all too easy to infer that Carter does not let that happen and that is the moment she begins subverting the genre from within.

Although the *Bildungsroman* is usually related to "the development of character from early adolescence to young adulthood" (Labovitz: 1986, p. 2), Carter unconventionally enlarges this age range for the elderly Dora and Nora make a fresh start and go on with their search: "But the urge has come upon me before I drop to seek out an answer to the question

that always teased me, as if the answer were hidden, somewhere, behind a curtain: whence came we? Whither goeth we?" (Carter: 1993b, p. 11). Actually, it totally accords with the postmodern concept that the construction of identity is never over, it is "constantly in the process of change and transformation" (Hall: 2002, p. 4), as well as corroborates the open-ended nature of the autobiographical narrative. Interestingly, this time the Chance sisters are not so concerned with social integration anymore: they dress up as eccentrically as they can and disregard the invisibility with which they are initially treated as they attend Melchior's party. After all, "[a]t our age, you feel you've seen it all before" (Carter: 1993b, p. 8, 197-99). Effectively, such behaviour is consistent with Pratt's opinion:

> If the purpose of the novel of development is to integrate the individual into her society, its generic function is frequently aborted by society's unwillingness to assimilate her. The older woman hero, in contrast, has "been through all that"; her goal is to integrate her self with herself and not with a society she has found inimical to her desires (Pratt: 1981, p. 136).

Furthermore, even though the male hero is alienated from the safety of his family shelter as a result of the vicissitudes of life which usually call for action, his contact with 'the larger society' is always bound for an eventual integration into the bourgeois social order. Not surprisingly, the same does not occur in the female development narrative once she decides to face the hardships of a journey into the wide world: some sort of punishment is right there on the horizon for those who do not conform and submit to marriage, maternity and children's upbringing. Thus, that is the reason for so much fear and impasse on the Chance sisters' part about going or not to Melchior's birthday party and start the quest for identity anew (Carter: 1993b, p. 190). In like manner, Fevvers's conflict over remaining on the security the brothel's roof symbolises or jumping off it into the unknown and unsettling moment of indefinition: "I suffered the greatest conceivable terror of the irreparable *difference* with which success in the attempt would mark me. I feared a wound not of the body but the soul, sir, an irreconcilable division between myself and the rest of humankind" (Ibid: 1993a, p. 34; Pinto: 1990, p. 53, 56; Guedes: 1997, p. 18). Of course, Carter's narrators take risks and set out to face the hard realities of life.

Finally, Carter does not respect the linearity so typical of the genre (Guedes: 1997, p. 10; Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 70). In opposition to traditional standards, her retrospective narrative is every now and then punctuated with a lot of to-ing and fro-ing in time so as to hint at the sort of emotional, psychological and character transformations external events promote on the female heroes. With regard to that, the episode in which young Dora and Nora mock Ma Chance's "old and ugly" body is certainly a haunting memory of a deeply

regrettable mistake: “I see it, now, as a defeat that we, her beloved grandchildren, inflicted upon her out of heedlessness and vanity and youth” (Carter: 1993b, p. 94, 164).

Neither does Carter revere the individuality so peculiar to the male *Bildungsroman* in which the male protagonist is the only character in the spotlight. Unlike that, the female lead shares it with other characters in the contemporary female *Bildungsroman*. In *Nights at the Circus*, for instance, Fevvers’s *Bildung* and that of other characters such as Mignon and Olga Alexandrovna take place concomitantly, not to mention that of Walser’s. Albeit the first-person narrator’s viewpoint one way or another certainly stands out in the female autobiographical narrative, her voice is invariably and clearly part of a real textual plait with several others: “Women characters, more psychologically embedded in relationships, sometimes share the formative voyage with friends, sisters or mothers, who assume equal status as protagonists” (Abel *et al*: 1983, p. 12). Hence, in spite of the marginality they undergo for being female, Carter’s protagonists know they can count on the fluidity and multiplicity of a certain impulse towards companionship typical of women’s experience in order to have a successful journey and find alternatives not only in society but also in themselves. As a matter of fact, this view of female relationality is very much in line with Chodorow’s reasoning:

> growing girls come to define themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate (Chodorow: 1999, p. 169).

As far as isolate selfhood is concerned, the picaresque’s single narrator and his first-person narration whose stance always prevails is also undermined by Carter’s preference for the confluence of several perspectives (Vaíllo: 1983, p. 450; Sieber: 1977, p. 2, 12). Moreover, it is true that the narrators do not give birth in Carter’s novels. However, that does not mean that they end up childless like the conventional tricksters who are “unable to reproduce themselves” (Sieber: 1977, p. 44). Indeed, Peregrine bestows on the Chance sisters the honour of raising the first wise children in the family, namely Gareth’s cherubs. As for Fevvers, although she does not literally have a child to rear, she is the precursor and symbolically mother to all those New Women[23] yet to come, those transformed ones of “the New Age in which no women will be bound down to the ground” (Carter: 1993a, p. 25, 285).

Except for the deconstructions Carter performs in the picaresque genre shown so far, all the other features of the genre seem to underpin her intent to wreak havoc with patriarchy.

Actually, there seems to be nothing better than the lawless nature of a swindler to do it. In this way, by means of a "plot [that] is episodic and consists of a succession of [meaningful] encounters between the harried protagonist and a number of unrelated persons" (Lewis: 1961, p. 251), she puts at work her simultaneously humorous and satiric way of portraying changing life circumstances and events that produces stories out of stories and at the same time criticises corruption in society.

From the outset, Fevvers's and the Chance sisters' questionable and disreputable births echo the sharper's who "is born of poor and dishonest parents, who are not often troubled with gracing their union by a ceremony, nor particularly pleased at his advent" (Chandler: 1899, p. 45). In this respect, a putative deity's daughter, Fevvers is abandoned as a baby "on the steps at Wapping[38], me in the laundry basket in which *persons unknown* left me [...] packed up in new straw sweetly sleeping among a litter of broken eggshells" (Carter: 1993a, p. 12). Yet again resembling the characteristic starting point of a rogue's life, Dora and Nora's penniless mother is left by their father Melchior the moment she gets pregnant. To make matters worse, no sooner she bears the twins, than she dies: "We don't even know what she looked like, there isn't a picture. She was called Kitty, like a little stray cat. Fatherless, motherless" (Ibid: 1993b, p. 25). It is illuminating to consider that however happy Carter's little orphans are with their foster families, their very beginnings here work as an effective "social satire of a system unresponsive to the needs and desires of a growing active community of 'have-nots'" (Sieber: 1977, p. 9).

At any rate, as the protagonists grow up, a combination of the idea that travel and the self-improvement it affords is the only way out of an ordinary life and to ascend the social ladder with principally the 'needs-must factor', "so it was just as well we [Chance] girls could earn our living because after that [Peregrine's bankruptcy] we had to" (Carter: 1993b, p. 75), propels them into the hazards of an alien world as the opportunities come up. Fevvers, for example, fearfully leaves the protection of Isotta's house, her second home in life, to join Madame Schreck's "spectacle of the freakish and unnatural": "oh! If our household had not been overwhelmed by an accumulation of those unpredictable catastrophes that precipitate poor folk such as we into the abyss of poverty through no fault of their own" (Ibid: 1993a, p. 56).

In effect, this is the moment in which the most peculiar picaresque serial structure starts taking place and the female hero literally "flits from one master to another", always

[38] Wapping (pronounced 'Wopping') is a "riverside district of Stepney metropolitan borough, London, England", and forms part of the Docklands to the East of the city of London (Bridgwater; Kurtz: 1963b, p. 2281).

trying to outwit their oppressive power (Chandler: 1899, p. 45). Madame Schreck, Mr Christian Rosencreutz, Colonel Kearney, for a short interim period The Grand Duke, then back to Colonel Kearney again, and the leader of the outlaws are, respectively, the ones whom Fevvers somehow plays servant to. Curiously, with regard to how the episodic structure is distributed throughout the first novel, Carter herself admits that "[t]he last half of *Nights at the Circus* gets very picaresque indeed; the middle section is very elaborately plotted, like a huge circus with the ring in the middle, and it took me ages tinkering with it to get it right. A circus is always a microcosm" (Haffenden: 1985, p. 89).

It is noteworthy that as the *pícaro* relates his adventures in an inexorable onward movement, the hypocrisy of society is brought to light for time after time the rogue points out its errors (Sieber: 1977, p. 12). For instance, that is how the reader learns the real circumstances which lead the outlaws to blow up the railway track and make a wounded Fevvers admit that "although he's kidnapped us [...] I'm more for him than against him (Carter: 1993a, p. 230):

> Each man of us, even including the first fire-boy, is here in flight from a law which would extract punishment from us for the vengeance we took upon those minor officials, army officers, landlords and such like petty tyrants, who forcibly dishonoured the sisters, wives and sweethearts of flesh and blood we all once had, who are now left far behind us (Ibid).

In the same manner, there cannot be any doubts about Melchior's nature anymore, which resembles that of "whitewashed graves", beautiful outside but "full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" inside, as soon as the reader gets to know about his sordid and disgusting offer of money to keep Ma Chance and the bastard twin girls shut about his paternity: "Yes! Melchior was engaged to be married and wanted to pay us all off in case we made trouble at some future date" (Matthew 23:27-28; Carter: 1993b, p. 32).

Funnily enough, it is precisely by indicating society's faults that the rogue ends up somewhat blameless. That is to say, he diverts attention from him even though he himself feels like augmenting his gains by means of roguery (Sieber: 1977, p. 31). In fact, that is this sort of greed that makes Fevvers get into trouble with The Grand Duke, an episode in which she almost turns into "Only a bird in a gilded cage". Nonetheless, she eventually manages to manipulate the Duke to evade his claws, and influence the reader in the sense that the impression left is that she is nothing but a guiltless victim nearly objectified by patriarchy: "'Look what a mess he's made of your dress, the pig,' said Lizzie" (Carter: 1993a, p. 190, 192).

Of course, linguistic devices peculiar to the genre are also a pivotal element in the *pícaro*'s manoeuvres to achieve his goals. So as to attain success the knavish narrator has to reveal what lies behind 'the truth' endorsed by the social structure and, concomitantly, has to manipulate language in such a manner as to convince the reader to overlook his own flaws: "While disclosing but simultaneously 'blinding' the reader into accepting his dishonourable situation, he is able to sell himself and thus to survive" (Sieber: 1977, p. 12, 16-17). Hence, that is why Dora does not mind at all giving bawdy details of her intercourse with a waiter who has mistaken her for her sister Nora: "even in the midst of all this turmoil I felt the stirring of, ahem, his manhood and couldn't resist" (Carter: 1993b, p. 101). According to Starobinski, "[t]his narrative tone often requires the imaginary presence of an addressee, a confidante who is made an indulgent and amused accomplice by the playfulness with which the most outrageous behaviour is recounted" (Starobinski: 1980, p. 83).

Last but not least, in consonance with conventional standards of the *Bildungsroman*, Carter's journeying female heroes also have love affairs during their perilous or not so pleasant travels (Guedes: 1997, p. 17). However, the real point about one of these romantic involvements, which not rarely go down to sexual encounters in the novels, is that Jack Walser has to become "the New Man, in fact, fitting mate for the New Woman". Thereby, he also undergoes the experience of letting go of his former self as soon as he joins the circus: "When Walser first put on his make-up [...] he felt the beginnings of a vertiginous sense of freedom [...], and Walser's very self, as he had known it, departed from him, he experienced the freedom that lies behind the mask" (Carter: 1993a, p. 103, 281). In other words, Carter extends the process of search for identity to a male character as a means of showing alternative roles not only to women but to men as well. In this way, the phenomenon of growing up and developing through socio-historical external factors Bakhtin describes below applies equally to both female and male in Carter's hands, Fevvers and Walser alike:

> [...] human emergence is of a different nature. It is no longer man's own private affair. He emerges *along with the world* and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being. What is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man. [...] It is as though the very *foundations* of the world are changing, and man must change along with them (Bakhtin: 1986b, p 23-24).

Therefore, it is not out of the blue that in *Nights at the Circus* "the nineteenth century would transform itself into the twentieth" and, as part of Walser's process of education, he meets the Shaman who becomes his mentor and even likens him to a "little bird hatched from

an egg whose shell had disappeared". That is, Walser goes through the very same process as Fevvers (Carter: 1993a, p. 264-65). Further to this, Walser himself has also had his share of a picaresque life and its intrinsic roguishness in the repressive world. Now, as the traditional *pícaro* should do, he leaves his past behind and as a professional journalist tries to define Fevvers in patriarchy's terms: "he hailed from California, from the other side of a world all of whose four corners he had knocked about for most of his five-and-twenty summers – a picaresque career which rubbed off his own rough edges; now he boasts the smoothest of manners" (Carter: 1993a, p. 9).

Furthermore, what to make of Melchior and Peregrine Hazard? "Melchior was all for art and Peregrine was out for fun. [...] Chalk and cheese" (Ibid: 1993b, p. 22). Effectively, the Hazard brothers somehow seem to embody the male hero in his *Bildung* and the rogue in his wandering, respectively. For one, Melchior is an orphan who fights against the surrounding environment until he is finally integrated into the bourgeois society. In the meanwhile, he has several love affairs, marries three times, and just at the close of the novel does his milieu spur him into reassessing his former assumptions and recognising the Chance sisters as being his offspring, which is part of the didactic function of the novel. For another, "pilgrim by name, pilgrim by nature", Peregrine is a man of questionable origin – Ranulph Hazard's or Cassius Booth's son? – who is again and again seized by a certain wanderlust that impels him into an errant life since childhood when he flees his Presbyterian aunt Miss Euphemia Hazard and vanishes into America. In short, "[f]or him, life had to be a continuous succession of small treats or else he couldn't see the point" (Ibid, p. 21, 22, 34, 61). Again, Carter interweaves the genres and extends them to male characters so that she can both depict Melchior's *Bildung*, which helps him learn from his past and cope with it, and describe Peregrine's suggested knavish life which, *inter alia*, makes him a sort of sugar-daddy accomplice to those on the wrong side of the tracks.

In sum, Carter's artistry proves to be one more time, borrowing Linda Hutcheon's terms, "deconstructively critical and constructively creative" (Hutcheon: 1995, p. 98) in the incorporation of the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque as a means to enact an effective social satire and at the same time break the backbone of patriarchy concerning its imposition of form and content to the genres on the basis of gender. As a matter of fact, Carter's particular way of dealing with the appropriation of these genres also entails the insertion of elements which are in tune with the particularities of the female experience and its relational way of development as well as the use of the devices these genres supply her with in order to debunk patriarchy and its gender restrictions. The *Bildungsroman*, for instance:

> has been taken up more recently by women and other disenfranchised persons to consolidate a sense of emerging identity and an increased place in public life. [...] In much women's writing, its plot of development culminates not in integration but in an awakening to gender-based limitations (Smith; Watson: 2001, p. 189-90).

In this manner, so that the protagonist's quest for a more authentic self be successful, there has to be a refusal of the pre-established social roles patriarchy enforces (Pinto: 1990, p. 124, 126). Despite that, after succeeding in their search, Fevvers and the Chance sisters resume their everyday lives with no problems whatsoever. The only difference is that this time they live on quite different terms. Moreover, the genres' intrinsic open-endedness along with Carter's imagination and creativity signal possibilities both to men and women and, more importantly, portray the diversity of women's experience and a number of possible outcomes in the roles of, among others, Wheelchair, the harlots of Ma Nelson's brothel, the female monsters, the female convicts, Mignon and the Princess of Abyssinia. To put it simply, "[t]he *Bildungsroman* contributes today to the confirmation of women's individuality and to the accomplishment of their yearnings, as well as the formation of a society in which it can come true"[39] (Ibid, p. 32, our translation).

As for "the autobiography of a 'nobody' and his adventures in a 'repressive' society" (Sieber: 1977, p. 74), the picaresque element and its episodic plot endow Fevvers and the Chance sisters with the necessary streetwise cleverness to survive not only the vagaries of patriarchal society, but also the seamier side of life outside their homes. Taking into consideration that it is will and fortune which first and foremost determine the traditional *pícaro*'s existence (Ibid, p. 25), the latter is unavoidably unstable. And it is exactly this comical unpredictability, this ever-changing nature, that makes the genre fit so well the typically postmodern open-endedness of Carter's narrative and the inconstancy that characterises the never-ending process of identification through which her protagonists go on their educational journeys: "The picaro [sic] is a protean figure who can not only serve many masters but play different roles, and his essential characteristic is his inconstancy – of life roles, of self-identity – his own personality flux in the face of an inconstant world" (Wicks: 1974, p. 245). In this way, besides the entertainment and instruction Carter purposely furnishes her reader with in using these genres, she also "open[s] up singular notions of narrative, reality and identity to heterogeneous possibilities" by means of "[e]ncounters with strange peoples, with different customs, assumptions and attributes" (Botting: 1996, p. 170).

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[39] The text in Portuguese is: "[O] *Bildungsroman* contribui hoje para a afirmação da individualidade da mulher e para a realização dos seus anseios, assim como para a formação de uma sociedade onde isso possa concretizar-se".

Conclusion...

Hail to the Edges! [40]
Linda Hutcheon

[T]he categories of genre are regularly challenged these days [41]
Linda Hutcheon

[T]here can be neither a first nor a last meaning [42]
Mikhail Bakhtin

As this dizzying journey through several boundless and sometimes even labyrinthine incorporated and reworked genres shows, the boundary liberation Carter performs in terms of genre undoubtedly parallels the deliverance of her female characters and their bodies from the fetters of patriarchy. Thus, in the very same manner Carter strives to undermine the myth of domesticity and the enclosure to which it submits women, so does she fight the ideological and formal containment to which genres have been traditionally circumscribed by patriarchy (Becker: 1999, p. 18-19). More importantly, the eventual political power consequent on the blurring of these several genres mirrors undoubtedly whatsoever strength women find in their more fluid sense of self, which does not amount to homogeneity at all: "[...] while some women share some common interests and face some common enemies, such commonalities are by no means universal; rather, they are interlaced with differences, even with conflicts" (Fraser: 1993, p. 429). Hence, it appears just impossible not to infer that there is a very close relationship among genre, gender and social change once Carter puts an end to the immobility patriarchal order tries to enforce and perpetuate by providing escape on the level of the narrative both in terms of gender and genre.

As a matter of fact, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* pave the way for revamped cultural, social and, why not, historical changes. Needless to say, this renovation relies first and foremost on the female emancipation from male-dominated institutions and conventions such as marriage, gender roles and genre. In order to achieve such a goal, Carter overtly establishes intertextual links with the historical and literary past which, by means of an interface with the text of the present, endow her with the necessary tools to put at work her postmodern artistry. What is more, Carter makes room for the most unusual and fruitful

[40] Hutcheon: 1990, p. 73.

[41] Hutcheon: 1990, p. 60.

[42] Bakhtin: 1986a, p. 146.

dialogical interactions as the ones between Mikhail Bakhtin's grotesque realism and Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject, Freud's *unheimlich* or uncanny and her own contemporary female Gothic writing, autobiography and marginalised practices of life writing such as prison narratives and (auto)pathography as well as with the canonical autobiographical genres picaresque and *Bildungsroman*, magical realism and its Latin-American predecessors, but never losing sight of the fact that somehow she is 'reinventing' something new. As Carter claims: "[Gabriel García] Márquez is a very great writer, but the kinds of social forces which produce a writer like Márquez are in fact very different from those that produced, say, me. [...] In Britain one has to invent much more" (Haffenden: 1985, p. 81).

At any rate, the point is that Carter's "Helen of the High Wire", Fevvers, prepares the ground from the outset for the real Trojan-horse role that Carter's interpolations play within the walls of patriarchal discourse. Likewise, the manner in which Dora wields the empowering phallic pen as she writes her memoirs that almost brings the House of the Hazards, an icon of official culture, down. Actually, it is precisely the contrast between these past and present textual codes which enables Carter to elaborate her parodic message. However, it is important to point out that even if to make a mockery of it, Carter's parodic allusions do not at any moment aim at obliterating or negating the past, in reality they sometimes even seem to pay homage to it, but all the while questioning its ulterior reasons to normalise a monolithic idea of woman to the detriment of the difference that typify those voices left in the dark. In this manner, as Carter gives utterance to the "ex-centric", as Linda Hutcheon would have it, there is also cultural continuity and change in tandem (Hutcheon: 1990, p. 26, 35, 67, 126).

Furthermore, once Carter sets out to appropriate and rework genres, she 'reinvents' them from within, which is nothing else but the first step of her playful repetition as she "trips lightly through many styles and genres" (Webb: 1995, p. 297) and brings into action some of the cultural practices which make up the 'parodic umbrella'. Next, Carter engages in a conspicuous merging of genre boundaries which heightens to such a degree the reader's perception that a text may subsume more than one genre that it is inevitable to think of Jacques Derrida's reasoning that: "Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging" (Derrida: 1992, p. 230). In other words, no matter how much patriarchy may try to enforce taxonomies and limits, it is to no avail since there can always be traces of some other genre in one text regardless of its patriarchal classification, which prevents this or that attempt of definitive labelling. In addition, as Marjorie Perloff observes, "[...] genre, far from being a

normative category, is always culture-specific and, to a high degree, historically determined" (Perloff: 1989, p. 7). Proof thereof is that what might be a magical realist text in one specific society and culture might indeed be realist in another depending on cultural and religious matters. In short, as Carter's art and her committed use of parodic intertextuality are a living proof of it, "[...] postmodern writing blurs genres, transgresses them, or unfixes boundaries that conceal domination or authority" (Cohen: 1989, p. 11).

Therefore, it is no surprise that it is this self-same unsettling fluidity of boundaries Carter puts at work, which surely reminds us of women's intrinsic relational nature, their "invisible bonds of affection", and their more fluid sense of self (Chodorow: 1999, p. 169; Carter: 1993a, p. 45), that allows her to extend the limits of realism so as to give greater credibility to the magical and supernatural elements in her use of magical realism and Gothicism, respectively. In fact, even autobiography is 'reinvented' the moment Carter refuses to make claims to 'the truth' and utilises these stretched boundaries of the real to fit the imaginative elements of her narrators' (auto)biographical *plural narratives* as well.

In like manner, given that Carter attaches a lot of importance to the deconstruction of palpable material reality common to all, neither her magic nor Gothic components are present in the 'inner self' or the world of imagination, which is another patent point of contact between her particular use of Gothic writing and magical realism. Moreover, her intent to undercut male-produced material reality certainly also poses a threat to Walser's journalistic patriarchal discourse's attempt to write Fevvers's 'truthful' biography.

Parallels can also be drawn between Carter's reflection on the possible security an outside Gothic space may or not offer and the patriarchal-like flatness, as far as the grotesque body is concerned, Fevvers finds in the Siberian wilderness. In the end, as the marginalised prison narrative of the female convicts shows, women's safety lies neither within nor without a particular space, but in fighting against the myth of fragility so that they can both enjoy security and give utterance to their plight wherever they are. Interestingly, Carter's views on Gothic writing in which reiteration with excess in consonance with the transgressive protuberance of the grotesque body is the order of the day can be exemplified by one of the epigraphs in her novel *Heroes and Villains*: "[t]he Gothic mode is essentially a form of parody, a way of assailing clichés by exaggerating them to the limit of grotesqueness" (Fiedler: 1960, p. 406).

Likewise, Carter's dialogical interaction between Bakhtin's grotesque realism and Kristeva's concept of the abject endows the former with the latter's ambiguous effect of attraction and repulsion at once on the reader analogous to that Gothic terror provokes.

Furthermore, it is also abjection that makes Carter's play with Gothic conventions more of a threat to patriarchal social order the moment she decides to empower the Chance sisters with vampiric ambivalence and lust for impure bodily fluid. Notwithstanding, one of the moments Carter's skill impresses her readers the most is when she blurs the boundaries among (auto)pathography, a marginalised practice of life writing, her contemporary female Gothic writing, which uses Freud's uncanny to enact (de)familiarisation and refamiliarisation, and the grotesque as depicted by Bakthin's grotesque realism and dialogues with Kristeva's abjection as she describes Wheelchair's, Schreck's female monsters', and Fevvers's lives. Incidentally, with respect to Fevvers's refamiliarisation process, Carter's warning that her readers can have "an intelligent awareness of society" is well worth considering. As she claims, "[...] if dreams are real as dreams, then there is a materiality to symbols; there's a materiality to imaginative life and imaginative experience which should be taken quite seriously" (Haffenden: 1985, p. 85). That is to say, in the very same manner life can be given to an abstract idea such as Fevvers, so can symbolic constructions as femininity be made 'real' to the imprudent reader.

Last but not least, open-endedness is a point of intersection which connects the never finished nature of the grotesque body with a particularity of the autobiographical genre and that is the fact that autobiography cannot be over while its narrator is still alive. By extension, given that the picaresque and the *Bildungsroman* are genres intrinsically autobiographical, the narrative which looks back to the past and usually ends up in final indeterminacy is also a feature of these genres. In addition, it is important to notice that Carter's appropriation of autobiography and other sorts of life writing has the purpose of tracing alternative future avenues regardless of gender, class, culture or any other taxonomy to which patriarchy gives prominence. Of course, it is just impossible not to relate this to the didactic function Carter's female rewriting of the *Bildungsroman* plays in terms of pointing out possible future transformations to both women and men as she herself admits: "[t]he idea behind *Nights at the Circus* was very much to entertain and instruct" (Haffenden: 1985, p. 87).

It goes without saying that the parallels drawn here are just a few if compared to the innumerable possibilities Carter's novels offer depending on the eyes of the beholder. In effect, the reader's reception and interpretation of her novels as s/he also reworks and recombines it with his/her previous readings and socio-cultural background surely produces as many meanings as readers. Thereby, it is no coincidence that Mandel queries: "But is it not true that 'completeness' rests not in the work of literature but in the reader?" (Mandel: 1980, p. 54). After all that has been seen and discussed so far, it is seems more of a rhetorical question, does it not? Further, it is fundamental to take into account gender issues with regard

to authorship and readership for the female experience is certainly a key element in the way the female subject sees and apprehends the world as well as constructs it: "[...] for gynocritical theorists writing and reading are experienced and produced very differently depending on the gender of the subject who writes or reads" (Allen: 2000, p. 155-56).

Effectively, it is exactly the realisation that the 'canonical family of genres' does not include either her female experience or of numberless other women before her that makes Carter 'reinvent' her own 'literary family' relationally in the very same manner *Wise Children* suggests: "It is a characteristic of human beings [...] that if they don't have a family of their own, they will invent one" (Carter: 1993b, p. 165). Not surprisingly, this attitude is analogous to the 'reinvention' of the concept of family and genre which occurs in both novels and, obviously, is totally opposed to patriarchal role models. Thus, the relational ties of femininity, which re-form the idea of family, are a recurrent motif in the two novels discussed in this dissertation and also completely in tune with the disruption of genre boundaries Carter perpetrates in her *oeuvre*.

All in all, what becomes crystal clear as soon as there takes place the investigation of Carter's incorporation, rewriting or 'reinvention' and blurring of genres in *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children* is that even though she relies heavily on the existing literary tradition in order to produce her art, these novels are unarguable proof that she does create something new out of the textual past material she absorbs into her parodic work. In a similar vein, there are more than enough grounds to infer that the genre that epitomises Carter best is the far more encompassing "postmodern genre" on account of the both/and position it favours instead of the either/or (Perloff: 1989, p. 8). Finally, despite all the different alternatives and future avenues Carter provides in her novels, she does not at any moment and in any way proposes to tell 'the truth' or furnish 'final answers'. Much on the contrary, she is always willing to partake in a real onslaught against those who insistently try to supply 'absolute certainties' based on 'Big Books' and 'universal truths' by examining, putting to question and challenging their ulterior motives to do so. Similarly, in a Carter-like attitude, this dissertation aims at offering no 'final conclusion' about Angela Carter's appropriation, rewriting or 'reinvention' and blurring of genres, but to contribute as much as possible to the understanding of this particularity of Carter's artistry and with great satisfaction become part of the textual continuum dedicated to this fabulous writer.

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