

There is ‘nothing’ new under Carter’s sun ¹

Fabio Jarbeson da Silva Trajano²

ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to investigate and analyse Angela Carter’s last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, in the light of the main theories regarding intertextuality. In order to do so, there takes place the examination of several streams of thought concomitant with a comparative analysis to see to what extent Carter’s novels dialogue with such theories. The main contribution of this article lies in its attempt to relate Carter’s postmodern writing to the intertextual journey.

Keywords: Intertextuality; Postmodernism; Plurality.

*I am all for putting new wine in old bottles,
especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the
old bottles explode ³*
Angela Carter

As it is inferable from the title, this article 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* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991), 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 article. 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

¹ Ecclesiastes 1:9: “[...] there is nothing new under the sun”.

² Mestre em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa pela Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro/UERJ.

³ Carter: 1983, p. 69. See Matthew 9:17 in order to note Carter’s intertextual subversiveness.

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 article surely determine how this meeting of past textual material 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’⁴ 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

⁴ Mark 5:9: “But he [Jesus] began to ask him [a man under the power of an unclean spirit]: ‘What is your name?’ And he said to him: ‘My name is Legion, because there are many of us.’”

would be⁵. In overt opposition to this ‘Angel in the House’⁶ 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 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 received and established 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

⁵ “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”.

⁶ This well-known expression stems from Coventry Patmore’s famous poem.

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, 1986, 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] Glumdalclitch⁷. I wore

⁷ Glumdalclitch is the giantess who takes care of Gulliver and whom he grows fond of.

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: "[e]ven 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).

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-Deerne 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: “[s]he [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)⁸.

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.

⁸ 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.

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)⁹. 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 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: 2000, p. 107-8; Stam: 2005, 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).

⁹ 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).

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. Peirce 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 *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, 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" (Ibid, p. 7).

RESUMO: O objetivo deste artigo é investigar e analisar os dois últimos romances de Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus* e *Wise Children*, à luz das principais teorias que tratam da intertextualidade. Para tal fim, realiza-se um exame de várias linhas de pensamento em paralelo a uma análise comparativa a fim de se verificar até que ponto os romances de Carter dialogam com tais teorias. A principal contribuição deste artigo está em sua tentativa de relacionar a escritura pós-moderna de Carter à jornada intertextual.

Palavras-chave: Intertextualidade; Pós-modernismo; Pluralidade.

Bibliographical references:

- ALLEN, Graham. *Intertextuality*. New York: Routledge, 2000. 238p.
- BAKHTIN, Mikhail M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: EMERSON, Caryl; HOLQUIST, Michael (Eds.). *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. p. 60-102.
- _____; VOLOSINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. London: Harvard University Press, 1986. 205p.
- BARTHES, Roland. The Death of the Author. In: _____. *Image – Music – Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. p. 142-148.
- _____. *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975. 80p.
- _____. Theory of the Text. In: YOUNG, Robert (Ed.). *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*. London: Routledge, 1981. p. 31-47.
- BIBLE. English. *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1984. 1278p.
- BLOOM, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. 157p.
- CARTER, Angela. 'Family Life' – 6, Time to Tell the Time. *New Review*, 4/42, p. 41-6, Sept. 1977.
- _____. *Fireworks: Nine Stories in Various Disguises*. California: Harper & Row, 1981. 133p.
- _____. *Nights at the Circus*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993a. 295p.
- _____. Notes from the Front Line. In: WANDOR, Michelene, (Ed.). *On Gender and Writing*. London: Pandora Press, 1983. p. 69-77.
- _____. *Wise Children*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993b. 234p.
- GENETTE, Gérard. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997a. 490p.
- _____. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997b. 427p.

GILBERT, Sandra M.; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. London: Yale University Press, 1979. p. 733.

HUTCHEON, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990. 268p.

_____. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 195p.

SAGE, Lorna. Angela Carter Interviewed by Lorna Sage. In: BRADBURY, Malcolm; COOKE, Judith (Eds.). *New Writing*. London: Minerva Press, 1992. p. 185-93.

_____. *Angela Carter*. Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2007. 84p.

SANDERS, Julie. What is Appropriation? In: _____. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. New York: Routledge, 2008a. p. 26-41.

_____. 'Here's a Strange Alteration': Shakespearean Appropriations. In: _____. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. New York: Routledge, 2008b. p. 45-62.

SAUSSURE, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. BALLY, Charles; SECHEHAYE, Albert (Eds.). Michigan: Duckworth, 1983. 236p.

STAM, Robert. Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation. In: _____; RAENGO, Alessandra, (Eds.). *Literature and Film: A Guide to Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. p. 1-52.

WEBB, Kate. Seriously Funny: *Wise Children*. In: SAGE, Lorna, (Ed.). *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*. London: Virago Press, 1995. p. 279-307.

WISKER, Gina. *Angela Carter: A Beginner's Guide*. London: Hodder & Stoughton Educational, 2003. 88p.