

## **Intertextual Relations: James Joyce and William Shakespeare in Angela Carter's *Wise Children***

*Angela Carter's feminist appropriation of Shakespeare's plots in Wise Children (1991) is well-recognized. This article proposes that the novel also makes sustained references to the life and work of James Joyce that provide a crucial but overlooked counterpoint to Carter's use of Shakespeare. It sets her simultaneous play with these two literary forefathers in the light of her thoughts on intertextuality, Bardolatry, and biological and cultural legitimacy, and her observations in "Envoi: Bloomsday". In doing so, it argues that Carter invokes Joyce's liberating example as an adaptive writer in the burlesque tradition in order to support her own feminist critique of patrilineal models of artistic inheritance and literary transmission and reject the institutionalization of Shakespeare's plays as high art rather than popular entertainment.*

### **Introduction**

*Wise Children* takes the form of the fantastical family memoir of Dora Chance, an illegitimate member of the famous Hazard acting dynasty. The Hazard family's immersion in Shakespeare's theatre is so complete that events from their lives are presented through parodies of scenes from his plays. These exuberant set-pieces provide Carter with the opportunity to interrogate Shakespeare's familial plots as informing cultural myths that reveal the damaging consequences of patriarchy for mothers, daughters and illegitimate children. The parodies are also a means to challenge the canonical valuation of Shakespeare as the epitome of "legitimate" culture and high art by reconnecting him to his roots in popular theatre. This article proposes that Carter's

suspicion of “legitimacy” as a construct that is passed down by successive generations in service of patriarchal values is played out on a literary level through intertextual play, in particular her contrasting use of Shakespeare and another author whose presence in the novel is less well-recognized—James Joyce. It observes that the patriarchs of the “legitimate” Hazard family line who venerate Shakespeare as the Bard are cast as representatives of “official” culture, whereas the maternal line (which is not held together by biological ties) is insistently linked to Joyce’s life and works and, by that token, “illegitimate” social and cultural practices, including the alternative tradition of burlesque Shakespeares in nineteenth- and twentieth-century popular theatre. It interprets *Wise Children* in the light of Carter’s essay “Envoi: Bloomsday” to argue that Joyce’s liberating example as a postcolonial writer whose burlesque sensibility brooks no hierarchies provides Carter with an antidote to the ideology that promotes Shakespeare as the national English Bard and then exports his plays as a commodity to assert cultural dominance and patriarchal law. In doing so, it examines how Carter invokes Joyce as an ally for the female writer who inherits the androcentric canon, but writes against patriarchal values and cultural hierarchies by appropriating celebrated texts in ways that value what is “illegitimate”, “feminine” and entertaining.

### **Carter and Intertextuality**

Christina Britzolakis is among many critics to note that Carter’s writing is distinctive for its “voracious and often dizzying intertextuality” (50). For instance, Jacqueline Pearson observes

that Carter's first novel *Shadow Dance* (1966) reverberates with echoes from multiple literary texts:

Cut adrift from any aesthetic, political or moral context, fragments of Dante, Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), *King Lear* (ca. 1605), *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), 'Goblin Market' (1862), *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne emphasize the fundamental incoherence and moral bankruptcy, but also the widely imaginative fertility, of the novel's world. (vii)

Consequently, Carter has often been accused of fetishizing stylization and superficial literariness by dissociating fragmentary quotations and allusions from their original context, and thereby divesting them of critical significance or any capacity to comment on contemporary matters. The most notorious of these criticisms came from Tom Paulin who remarked that "The easy fluency and soft stylishness of Angela Carter's fictions is won at the expense of form and mimesis" (19) in his review of *Nothing Sacred* (1982).

Carter may be a cultural magpie who is attracted to the glint of a glancing allusion and the sheen of empty simulacra, but beyond the apparently superficial pleasures of intertextuality, she does posit that the practice has its uses, as she explains in "Notes from the Front Line" (1983):

I feel free to loot and rummage in an official past, specifically a literary past ....

This past, for me, has important decorative, ornamental functions; further, it is a vast repository of outmoded lies, where you can check out what lies used to be a la mode [sic] and find the old lies on which new lies are based. (74)

Carter draws a firmer distinction between the literary looting that is simply “ornamental” and the kind of appropriation that seeks to challenge pernicious “lies” when she says of Edgar Allan Poe: “I’ve used him a lot decoratively, but never structurally” (Munford 180)). In practice, however, this distinction between eye-catching but empty ornamentation and meaningful allusion is unconvincing. Appropriated literary material has to be recognized as borrowed before it can function decoratively. Even if that material has not been used in a targeted way to develop a particular theme, it does nonetheless align Carter with specific writers and traditions and the political messages they carry. Elsewhere Carter is very much alive to the cultural values that cling to particular authors and bear on the public estimation of their life and works. In an interview with Lorna Sage, published in *New Writing* (1992), Carter explains that she appropriated Shakespeare’s plots in *Wise Children* in order to explore “the idea of Shakespeare as a cultural ideology” (185): that is, to examine the social, political, colonial and economic purposes that his works have been made to serve. Her desire to make a full and rounded assessment of Shakespeare’s consequence in *Wise Children* is indicated by her original intention to make a game of referencing all of his plays (Gamble 165). It goes without saying that to interrogate the ideological uses to which Shakespeare has been put demands purposeful allusion and a solid system of signification.

Carter professes to be ambivalent as to whether or not the reader penetrates the decorative surface of her fictions to appreciate the ways in which the cultural ideologies of the various stolen elements might signify within the larger structural scheme of her novels:

From *The Magic Toyshop* onwards I've tried to keep an entertaining surface to the novels, so that you don't have to read them as a system of signification if you don't want to. ("Novelists in Interview" 87)

In "Notes from the Front Line", Carter is equally keen to divest herself of authorial responsibility for interpretation, declaring that it is her policy "to leave the reader to construct her own fiction for herself from the elements of my fictions" (69). The emphasis that Carter places on the agency of her readers accords with post-structuralist theories of text. By the late 1970s, Carter was conversant with French theory and was conceptualizing her writing in those terms: "I was beginning to regard the work that I was doing as external to myself .... I was beginning to perceive text as text, as Barthes would say" (Munford 6). The allusion is to "The Death of the Author" (1968), in which Roland Barthes proposes that the author disappears into the ceaseless play of signifiers on the page. The argument of that essay is worth rehearsing to appreciate the subtle but easily overlooked distinction that Barthes makes between different strains of intertextuality. Because a text is constituted by language (which refers to the things of the world, rather than previous usage) it does not release the author's singular message, but instead exists as "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146), which the reader is left to interpret. In this definition,

intertextuality is the linguistic condition of textuality. It is pervasive and, ultimately, untraceable. However, when Barthes explains that the writer's "only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others in such a way as never to rest on any one of them" (146), a degree of authorial control is quietly reinstated. By mixing writings so as to orchestrate points of comparison and thereby initiate networks of meaning and signification, the self-conscious author can hope to condition the reader's response. This second kind of deliberate intertextuality has specifically literary impulses and includes strategies of quotation and allusion. While Carter perceives her works "as text", and leaves the reader to construct her own reading for herself, she nonetheless creates systems of signification through the self-conscious accumulation of references to literature, music, film and folklore.

More recent theorists of intertextuality have explored the full ramifications of its literary rather than purely linguistic aspects for understanding the dynamics of the relationships between the author, the text and its readers. For instance, Patrick O'Donnell and Robert Con Davis make the case that "Intertextuality .... signals an *anxiety* and an indeterminacy regarding authorial, readerly or textual identity, the relation of the present culture to the past, or the function of writing within certain historical or political frameworks" (xiii). Mary Orr further suggests that it is this very anxiety that returns the reader to the issues surrounding authorial intent that post-structuralist theory—with its investment in non-hierarchical notions of textuality—sought to sidestep:

Intertextuality's most blatant shadowland, its arch enemy, the term it reacted to most violently, and desired to replace and displace, was influence, with all its baggage of critical source-hunting and authorial intention. (15)

The point where intertextual resemblance solidifies into a direct, intentional allusion with a precise referent can be extremely hard to determine, especially in the absence of any firm evidence, such as extant preparatory notes or authorial commentary. Readers are left to exercise their own judgment, separating as best they can specifically literary ornamentation from the pervasive kind of intertextuality that is the condition of all language, and then contemplating probable sources in relation to the wider systems of signification at work in the text. In Carter's case, this interpretative work requires taking account of what is already known of her flamboyant allusive practices, her political ideologies, the fame of the looted material in question, the probable range and depth of her understanding, and then weighing up how suggestive potential connections might be in terms of her wider arguments.

### **Shakespeare in *Wise Children***

Carter self-consciously foregrounds the many direct allusions she makes to Shakespeare's plays in *Wise Children* so as to leave critics in no doubt that they form a solid system of signification, whereby Shakespearean familial models—and the notions of biological and cultural legitimacy that proceed from them—are scrutinized and challenged (Chedgzoy 49-93; Gamble 169-84; Sanders, *Novel Shakespeares* 37-65). Indeed, Carter announces her intention to interrogate

Shakespeare as “cultural ideology” from the outset. The first of the novel’s three epigraphs is the proverb “It’s a wise child that knows its own father” (designated as an “OLD SAW” (unnumbered page)). This adage inverts the logic of Launcelot’s witticism “It is a wise father that knows his own child” (Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice* 2.2.72-3), asserting the primacy of the child over the parent in determining true lineage. The second, “Brush up your Shakespeare”, is the title of a song from Cole Porter’s musical *Kiss Me Kate* (1948), inspired by *The Taming of the Shrew*. It signals that readers should look out for allusions to Shakespeare’s plays as well as their afterlives in other popular genres. The final rueful observation “How many times Shakespeare draws fathers and daughters, never mothers and daughters” (unnumbered page) is attributed to Ellen Terry, the leading late nineteenth-century Shakespearean actress. It encourages readers to be mindful of Shakespeare’s obsession with the father to the exclusion of the mother and the detriment of the daughter, and to reflect on histories of performance. The Terry epigraph also provides cautionary evidence of Carter’s free-handed approach to quotation. In her *Memoirs*, Terry actually wrote “How many times Shakespeare draws father and daughters, and how little stock he seems to take of *mothers!*” (162). The ground is thus prepared for a feminist interrogation of Shakespeare’s familial plots that resists the idea that the father has the sole authority to confer biological legitimacy and further calls into question the concept of legitimacy as cultural construct by framing public appreciation of the Shakespearean canon in terms of popular adaptation rather than high art.

Carter intervenes in the longstanding battles over Shakespeare’s status fought between the Bardolators who unquestioningly revered Shakespeare for his timeless insights into human nature and the irreverent practitioners whose burlesque Shakespeares were a staple of the



repertoire of mid to late nineteenth- and twentieth-century theatre. The rise of Bardolatry can be traced back to the eighteenth century, when Shakespeare was elevated to the status of “England’s supreme cultural hero” (Bate 174). Carter picks up the story as it was unfolding in Terry’s time, when patriotic Bardolatry reached its peak and Shakespeare was promoted nationally (and exported globally) as a source of moral instruction. Terry herself played an important role in this project, hence her qualms about Shakespeare’s representation of daughters and mothers. From 1878-1902, Terry was the leading lady of the celebrated actor-manager Henry Irving, who mounted spectacular productions of Shakespeare’s plays. Irving was vocal in his belief that the poetic drama that Shakespeare perfected was without parallel and regularly lectured on its value to British society:

It is above all things as the poet of the people that Shakespeare is supreme ....  
Books were for a limited class, but the theatre was open to all. How many  
Englishmen, to whom reading was a labour or an impossibility, must have drawn  
from the stage which Shakespeare has enriched some of the most priceless  
jewels! (Richards 104)

The philosophy that exposure to Shakespeare is universally improving inspired Irving to mount eight major tours of North America in order to extend Shakespeare’s global reach. This credo is undercut in *Wise Children* by the actions of Ranulph Hazard, whom Dora introduces as “one of the great, roaring actor-managers” (14) of the kind embodied by Irving. Ranulph is “all agog to give to America the tongue that Shakespeare spake” (16). He takes Irving’s mission to satiric

extremes, dragging his company's touring productions of Shakespeare "to the ends of the Empire" (17), trekking across Australia, India, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Canada and America. Ranulph's productions are not commercially successful and he fails in his megalomaniacal bid to colonize America's cultural life. Never pausing to question the wisdom of Shakespeare's representations of human relations, Ranulph falls prey to the intensity of Shakespeare's father-daughter relationships and becomes romantically involved with Estella, the actress who plays Cordelia to his Lear. No longer able to "tell the difference between Shakespeare and living" (21), Ranulph murders Estella in a jealous rage, killing her lover, Cassius Booth, and then himself in a parodic re-enactment of the final scene of *Othello* (Shakespeare, *Othello* 5.2). Their volatile relationship signals the dangerous repercussions of Shakespeare's tragic plots for the female characters who are at the mercy of the men in their lives, whether they occupy the position of wife or daughter.

Over and above Shakespeare's plays, Carter draws inspiration from the burlesque tradition of exuberant performances on the "unofficial" British stage in order to criticize the value systems endorsed by Bardolatry. In *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century* Richard Schoch examines numerous examples of these exuberant performances, such as Hugo Vamp's "Comic Dramatic Shakespearean Scenas" (c. 1850s), which features parodies of *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Richard III*, set to popular songs (132). Schoch argues that burlesques mounted a powerful critique of "official Bardolatrous culture" (7) by imperiling Shakespeare's iconic status, foregrounding his writing's remarkable ability to be invented for succeeding ages, and therefore creating "an alternative space about just what performing Shakespeare means" in any given time (102). This is exactly

the kind of cultural work Carter performs in *Wise Children*, where she invokes existing adaptations and writes her own parodies to open up those alternative spaces where his plays—and the values systems that they support—can be interrogated and remodelled.

A case in point is *What You Will!*, a West End revue in camp homage to the Bard. The production is a joint venture between Melchior and Peregrine Hazard, the orphaned non-identical twins that Ranulph and Estella leave behind. The fact that they may have been sired by Cassius brings the notion of biological legitimacy into play, which for Melchior is intimately bound up with cultural legitimacy, as he spends his whole life locked in the quest to prove his lawfulness in all senses by becoming the man he takes for his father and emulating Ranulph's professional success as the nation's leading Shakespearean actor. The script for *What You Will!* is written by Peregrine, who suffers none of his higher-minded twin's pretensions, but obliges Melchior by casting him as William Shakespeare himself. The production also features the vaudeville actresses Dora and Nora Chance (Melchior's identical twin daughters, born out of wedlock, whom he refuses to acknowledge as his own flesh and blood). The biologically and culturally illegitimate Chance twins don bellhop costumes to perform a "Hamlet skit" where they travesty Shakespeare's greatest tragedy by pondering in song whether a package should be delivered to "2b or not 2b" (90). Then they dance a highland fling in frivolous homage to *Macbeth* and sing "Oh Mistress Mine" from *Twelfth Night* in "fifteenth-century drag" (90), hinting at the potential for genuinely transgressive re-imaginings of gendered relationships via cross-dressing on the Early Modern stage (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* 2.3.38-43, 46-51). Finally, they perform an *Antony and Cleopatra* inspired Egyptian sand-dance in front of "a mural copied from the British Museum" (90), satirizing "official" theatre's solemn propensity to stage

Shakespeare's plays in their "authentic" historical context. *What You Will!* is a commercial and popular success because it celebrates Shakespeare's plays as universal cultural reference points without taking them seriously. The implication is that Shakespeare the cultural icon is not timeless and fixed, but the sum of what his successive *adapteurs* will him to be.

Carter asserts that productions of Shakespeare that appeal to standards of authenticity in their attempt to do justice to high-minded notions of the Bard are doomed to obscurity because they forget that his plays are entertainment first and foremost. When Melchior attempts to fulfil his putative father's dream of cracking America, he does so with a big-budget Hollywood film adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a production loosely based on Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle's lavishly staged 1935 motion picture in which the forest of Arden was recreated inside a studio, using real trees and wind machines, and populated with live animals (Sanders, "Bubblegum and Revolution" 51-2). The set is symbolically consecrated using authentic English soil taken from the Forest of Arden. Unbeknown to Melchior, the casket supposedly holding the sacred soil in fact contains cat faeces, a colourful metaphor for Carter's opinion of his cultural mission. In her account of Melchior's film, Carter parodies Reinhardt and Dieterle's production values mercilessly, because, as Dora says of Melchior's equally ostentatious film, "it left nothing to the imagination" (125). The movie is box-office flop and Melchior's hopes of asserting dominance over "the major public dreaming facility in the whole world" and thereby enacting "Shakespeare's revenge for the War of Independence" (148) are dashed.

Carter's decision to present Melchior's 1930s celluloid dream as a failure reflects the fact that English culture no longer holds sway over a former colony now in the ascendant,

rather than denying Shakespeare's global relevance. In an interview Carter declares that Shakespeare is "the intellectual equivalent of bubble-gum, but can make 12 year-old girls cry, can foment in Africa, can be translated into Japanese and leave not a dry eye in the house" (Sage 187), praising the tradition of intercultural performance where Shakespeare is freely appropriated by other nations rather than in the English imperial gift. Like Fevvers, the aerialist from *Nights at the Circus* (1984) who speaks for her fellow variety performers when she professes "We dearly love the Bard, Sir" (57), Carter's gusto for the plays as dramatic spectacle is obvious from her penchant for parody, which affirms even as it criticizes, enabling her to remonstrate with the patriarchal values that Shakespeare's plays encode while simultaneously restoring him to what Sage calls his "pre-canonical self" by asserting his brilliance as a popular entertainer who captivates audiences by holding their emotions to ransom (*Angela Carter* 53). What Carter values most in this respect is the fact that Shakespeare's plays are enduringly relevant because they can be readily adapted to speak to the concerns of successive ages. She once declared that "Shakespeare, like Picasso, is one of the great Janus-figures that sum up the past as well as opening all the doors towards the future" (Sage 186-7).

Whenever Carter appropriates Shakespeare, she does so through burlesque, reaching back through previous incarnations of his works as she inflects them anew to embody alternative "cultural ideologies". For instance, Carter once stated that she loved Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* "almost beyond reason, because it's beautiful and funny and camp—and glamorous and cynical" (Sage 186-7). These are the qualities that Carter chose to exaggerate in her transgressively sexualized, feminist and postcolonial reinterpretation "Overture and Incidental Music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (1985), in which Titania is

buxom, Puck is polymorphously perverse and the silent Indian boy (once a token of exoticism) is recast as a hermaphrodite called Herm (273-83). As Susanne Gruss notes, Carter's "Overture" is written "against the [sanitized] Victorian version of Shakespeare and his fairies" in order to reject nineteenth-century moral probity and re-animate "her Shakespeare with the burlesque elements that the [official] Victorian theatre stage tried to excise or control" (47).

*Wise Children* continues the cultural work of "Overture", but tackles the entire Shakespeare Industry, offering a capsule history of Shakespeare's plays in performance, from the nineteenth-century touring companies promoting Shakespeare as England's highest art, to his presence in burlesque and music hall, to the years when film and then television superseded live performance as popular entertainment. While the five part structure of *Wise Children* nods to the format of Shakespeare's five act plays, the novel can also be considered as a burlesque performance, because it stages successive skits on Shakespeare's canon, interspersed with evocations of popular dances, songs, literatures and films, in the manner of the multiple billings of music hall shows. In the spirit of burlesque theatre, individual characters in *Wise Children* can play many parts and tragedy is subverted. For instance, when Dora's pregnant god-daughter Tiffany confronts Tristram (the father of her unborn child) about his incestuous relationship with his aunt Saskia on live television, Tiffany is recast as a modern-day, mixed-race Ophelia, who, distracted in her despair, strews the set with flowers, sings lines from vulgar songs, reveals her bare breasts, bids the audience goodnight and is later thought to have drowned herself in the Thames (43-7). However, Carter refuses to permit her Ophelia to die in response to the cruel treatment of an irresponsible, anguished young man. Instead, Tiffany is brought back from the dead at Melchior's one-hundredth birthday party at the end of the novel, in a

parody of the final scene of *A Winter's Tale* (Shakespeare, *A Winter's Tale* 5.3.98-104). Whereas Shakespeare's Hermione is miraculously returned to her penitent menfolk, having been presumed dead following the false accusation that she bore an illegitimate child, pregnant Tiffany is magically reincarnated as a self-confident woman, who turns down Tristram's guilty offer of support and insists on her independence. Afterwards, the assembled guests dance, Nora and Dora continue to sing songs on the way home, and Dora signs off with the exclamation "What a joy it is to dance and sing!" (232), providing a conclusion that conforms to the rules of the burlesque genre. As Schoch explains, "By 1870 audiences full expected a burlesque tragedy to close with a rousing song-and-dance number performed by the entire company" (51). From start to finish, Carter appeals to the burlesque tradition in *Wise Children* to assert the right of the female and therefore illegitimate artist to make free with Shakespeare and his legacy to model a future beyond patriarchy and empire.

### **Twining the Shakespearean with the Joycean**

Many of the motifs and themes in *Wise Children* that have been assumed to be Shakespearean can also be considered to be Joycean. But whereas Carter deliberately foregrounds her intertextual play with Shakespeare as means to debate the "cultural ideologies" that he has been made to embody, her relations with Joyce, though systematic and structural, are not explicitly announced. Carter leaves it to "the reader to construct her own fiction for herself from" the traces of Joyce's works that enter what Barthes refers to as the "multi-dimensional space" of the novel "in which a variety of writings .... blend and clash".

At first, the scattered references to Joyce appear incidental and “ornamental”, in the sense that they arise in connection to locally specific issues only and therefore seem to form “part of the entertaining surface” of the novel for those readers who recognize them, rather than belonging to a considered “system of signification” whereby the values that Joyce represents as a cultural icon are brought into play. However, once the evidence is assessed in the aggregate, it becomes clear that a Joycean strata of allusion has been carefully worked out in a sustained, meaningful way. Joyce is repeatedly invoked in relation to the illegitimate, maternal Chance family as a crucial intertextual counterpoint to the Shakespeare of “official” culture promoted by the paternal Hazard line, and so Joyce’s presence in the novel is integral to the debates Carter conducts concerning literary and cultural legitimacy.

Joyce’s influence quietly pervades *Wise Children* and is present from the very outset. The epigraph “It’s a wise child that knows its own father” does not just evoke *The Merchant of Venice*, but more closely echoes *Ulysses*, in which the phrase “wise child that knows her own father” appears twice (6.53; 11.644-5). *Wise Children* is set on the anniversary of Shakespeare’s birthday (also St George’s day), but takes in the full history of Dora’s extended family as she moves between present tense commentary and past recollection. Sanders suggests that this detail can be read as a gesture to the “experimentation of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce in texts such as *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *Ulysses* (1922) which unfold within the controlling parameters and timeframe of a single day” (Sanders, “Bubblegum and Revolution” 117). An additional consideration is that *Wise Children* also shares with *Ulysses* the conceit of being set on a symbolically significant date, 16 June 1904, commemorating Joyce’s first date with Nora.



The formal melding of the Shakespearean and the Joycean is also present at the level of characterization. While the patriarchs Ranulph and Melchior are identified with Shakespeare's tragic heroes for the damage they wreak on their families, the maternal line is unobtrusively but systematically associated with subversive performances of Shakespeare's plays (particularly his comedies), the burlesque tradition and—in that irreverent spirit—Joyce. Estella receives wide critical acclaim as a transvestite Hamlet until her pregnancy begins to show. "A female Hamlet is one thing", Dora quips, "but a pregnant prince is quite another" (16). As Kate Chezdgoy suggests, Estella is the "inheritor of the alternative female tradition of theatrical succession embodied by Sarah Siddons, Charlotte Cushman *et al*" (8). The actress Millicent Bandmann Palmer might also be added to Chedgzoy's list as her star turn as Hamlet is mentioned in *Ulysses* when Leopold Bloom considers her performance at Dublin's Gaiety Theatre, pondering "*Leah* tonight. Mrs Bandmann Palmer. Like to see her again in that. Hamlet she played last night. Male impersonator. Perhaps he was a woman. Why Ophelia committed suicide" (5.194-6). Dora informs readers that Estella "could do it all – make you laugh, make you cry, dance for you, sing you a song" (14), but she didn't take Shakespeare seriously:

She used to get the giggles, sometimes, in the middle of some big night scene, the casket scene, the sleep-walking scene, she'd double up, everybody else would have to cover for her. Her hair was always coming undone, too, tumbling down her back, spraying our hairpins in all directions. (12)

Convulsing with laughter, her hair undone, Estella resembles Molly Bloom, wife of Leopold, also a performer (an opera singer), who recalls a time when “I was in fits of laughing with the giggles I couldn’t stop about all my hairpins falling out one after another with the mass of hair I had” in the “Penelope” episode of *Ulysses* (18.211-13).

Further affinities between the female characters in *Wise Children* and Joycean women surface on close inspection to consolidate the link between the maternal line and Joyce. In a novel full of coincidental birthdays, it is perhaps no accident that Estella was born “Sometime in or around the year 1870” (13), the same year as Molly (17.2275-6). Both women have extra-marital affairs. In *Ulysses*, Molly spends the afternoon in bed with Blazes Boylan, but the critical consensus is that despite her infidelity she remains emotionally committed to her husband, Bloom, in so far as her final “Yes” affirms their marriage (18.609). Estella is likewise unchastely faithful to Ranulph. Dora tells us “she was always true to him in her fashion”, adding “I don’t have anything of her in me, not at all. I am the sentimental one. But Nora, sometimes” (15). Whereas Dora shares her name with Sigmund Freud’s most famous patient, Nora bears a name which, as Sanders suggests, “may well be a direct nod to Joyce’s own wife, Nora Barnacle” (*Novel Shakespeares* 59). The likelihood that this echo is intended is strengthened by further Joycean dimensions to Nora’s character. Not only does Nora say “‘Yes’ to life” (5), echoing the climax of Molly’s interior monologue in the “Penelope” chapter of *Ulysses* (18.1609), but she is also “fluxy ... her menstrual flow ... copious to a fault” (5), a detail that accords with Molly’s fluvial stream of conscious in “Penelope” and the onset of her menstrual period (18.1122-3). Notably, Nora Barnacle worked as a chambermaid, the same profession as Nora and Dora’s biological mother, Kitty.

The latent association between Joyce and illegitimacy in Carter's characterization of the novel's maternal line is reinforced by the way that Carter repeatedly evokes his fiction in relation to illicit sexual acts. The boyfriend of Nora's who is bed-tricked into sleeping with Dora is described "a wee scrap of a lad pale as a lily, blond as a chick", whose "heart is as pure as Epps' Cocoa" (82-3), the brand of drinking chocolate that Bloom famously serves to the youthful, blue-eyed, blonde-haired Stephen in the "Ithaca" episode of *Ulysses* (17.355-6). This assignation, brought about by Shakespearean subterfuge, is deliberately tinted with Joycean allusion, indicating Carter's desire to indulge her love of Joyce and Shakespeare simultaneously on a narrative level. The seduction of a Stephen Dedalus substitute prefigures the moment when Dora slips upstairs with her Joycean uncle Peregrine to have incestuous sex on Melchior's bed during the centenary celebration of his life and career. Wayward incestuous desire is a major theme in Joyce's work (for instance Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker's interest in his daughter Issy in *Finnegans Wake*), but what clinches the association with Joyce is Peregrine's habit of singing the chorus of "Finnegan's Wake" (the ballad that inspired the title of Joyce's final book) at the top of his voice. The first rendition comes when Peregrine re-enacts Timothy Finnegan's whisky-fuelled resurrection with his Hollywood co-writer, Ross "Irish" O'Flaherty (122). The ballad is then reprised when Peregrine, presumed deceased, re-appears unexpectedly at his twin brother Melchior's one hundredth birthday and belts out the lines "Thunder and lightning! ... Did yez think I was dead?" (206). Nicole Ward Jouve's brisk comment on the incestuous sex at the climax of the novel is memorable and astute:

If at the last, by means of Dora, Carter wanted to consummate her lifelong passion for Nuncle Joyce on Daddy Shakespeare's bed, she would have been a fool to deny herself. (155)

Jouve perceptively identifies Peregrine to be a proxy for Joyce, but without explanation. The resemblances between Peregrine and Joyce are worth dwelling on because they help to clarify the qualities that Carter admired in Joyce as a writer. Of course, there is the ballad and the fact that Peregrine, like Joyce, spends the largest part of his adult life as a self-willed exile, but the crucial factor is that as the script-writer for *What You Will!* and the Hollywood *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Peregrine specializes in comic adaptive writing, a genre Joyce made his own. Not only did Joyce transpose Homer's *Odyssey* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by the light of modern times in *Ulysses*, but he even parodied the succession of esteemed English prose stylists through history from Anglo-Saxon to the then present day. His adventures in burlesque culminated in the comic deformation of the structures of the English language itself in *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce's spirited adaptations are the antidote to the solemn notion that there is an "authentic" Shakespeare, literary canon or version of the English language that must be safeguarded for the good of culture.

By casting the Shakespeare-revering Melchior's non-identical twin Peregrine as the personality and artist who is most patently representative of Joyce's fiction, Carter symbolically pairs the two celebrated writers as foils for one another's cultural legacy. In an unrelated discussion, Sanders suggests that "The choice of twins [in *Wise Children*] is itself Shakespearean in association", citing *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Winter's Tale* (Novel

*Shakespeares* 39). However, the twinning motif can also be seen to be Joycean given the prominence of warring brothers Shaun and Shem in *Finnegans Wake*. The notion that Shakespeare and Joyce are literary counterparts, whose place in literary culture is best understood by reference to one another, is also present in "Envoi: Bloomsday" (1992), Carter's highly personal appraisal of Joyce's cultural and ideological value on the occasion of the annual celebrations in honour of *Ulysses* (1922), which was published in an earlier form as "A Happy Bloomsday" (1982) and then revised to serve as the final essay in *Expletives Deleted: Selected Writings* (1992), prepared when she was terminally ill. The new title makes it clear that the essay constitutes Carter's parting words on literary culture, and it is surprising therefore that it has been entirely overlooked in discussions of her last novel, *Wise Children*, which was published only months before.

"Envoi: Bloomsday" indicates the scope of Carter's knowledge of Joyce and her attitudes to his work. It confirms that Carter did not possess an annotator's knowledge of Joyce's works and that her engagement with his writing was as an enthusiast, rather than as a scholar. She makes only fleeting mention of the "massed scholarship arriving in Dublin for Bloomsday Week and the VIII International James Joyce Symposium in order to get their heads down over a susurrating mass of learned papers" (210) and instead focuses on the public celebrations and the party atmosphere pervading the inner city. She certainly knew her Joyce well enough to play on one of Stephen's best-known aperçus from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* ("Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow" (220)), quipping, with regard to Ireland's large youth population, "One doubts both the old sow's appetite for *this* farrow and her ability to digest it" ("Envoi Bloomsday" 171). She also quotes "hemiplegia of the will", Joyce's diagnosis

of the malaise afflicting Dublin in a letter to his brother Stanislaus (“Envoi: Bloomsday” 211; *My Brother’s Keeper* 247), and the words of the old milkwoman who visits the Martello tower where Stephen lives in *Ulysses* (“I’m ashamed I don’t speak the language myself” (“Envoi Bloomsday” 209; *Ulysses* 1.433-4)). However, she renders the famous line “History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to wake” (*Ulysses* 2.377) ““History is a trap from which I am trying to escape,’ said Stephen Daedalus [sic]” (“Envoi: Bloomsday” 211), misspelling Stephen’s surname as it appears in that text. Of course, expectations of literariness differ considerably for journalism and fiction, but the fact that Carter let the errors in “Envoi: Bloomsday” stand in *Expletives Deleted* inspires little confidence that she had an especially close textual knowledge of Joyce’s works, though she read his works with enthusiasm and was acquainted with his most celebrated lines and tropes.

In “Envoi: Bloomsday” Carter is chiefly interested in Joyce as an inclusive writer with wide popular appeal—a view which diverges from his more common reputation as the high priest of elite modernism—and bears similarities to her cultural construction of Shakespeare as an author who should be regarded as a brilliant popular entertainer. In the case of both authors, she scotches the idea that high art proffers its secrets to an elite audience only. Instead, for Carter, great art is readily accessible by definition. “*Finnegans Wake* is postgraduate stuff still”, she concedes in “Envoi: Bloomsday”, but “as it turns out, *Ulysses* is for everybody” (207).

The omission of “Envoi: Bloomsday” from critical accounts of *Wise Children* is all the more striking because in that essay Carter makes the case for Joyce’s importance in relation to the “cultural ideology” that “official” culture attaches to Shakespeare, and explains the

rationale for Joyce's presence in her last novel. She reflects that the cultural construction of the Bard's pre-eminence "is inseparable from the history of the British Empire" (209). The decline of that empire and the rise of a new order in which "English, in the great world, has become synonymous with the language spoken in America" (209) is mapped in *Wise Children* when Melchior fails to replicate the success of Ranulph's late nineteenth-century campaign "to take Shakespeare where Shakespeare had never been before" (17). Melchior's attempt to "take North America back for England, Shakespeare and St George" (133) fails because he does not understand that distinctively English modes of expression, such as Gorgeous George's bawdy pier-side act, no longer travel once the empire is in decline. In "Envoi: Bloomsday", Carter argues that in a world where "American" threatens to displace "English", so that it risks becoming "like Castilian Spanish, stiff outmoded, unapposite", writers "will be thrust back on Joyce, who never took English seriously" ("Envoi: Bloomsday" 209). When Joyce "Irished", "Europeanised" and "decolonialised" English, Carter explains, he "carved out a once-and-future language" for "post-imperialist Britain" from a tongue that had been "systematically deformed by a couple of centuries of use as the rhetorical top-dressing of crude power" (210). For Carter, then, the ideas of Shakespeare and Joyce as "cultural ideology" are inextricably linked. "Envoi: Bloomsday" posits Joyce as the necessary antidote to the English language that belonged to a declining empire and the imperial ideology that venerated Shakespeare as *the* Bard and then exported that commodity as a means to assert cultural dominance. *Wise Children* encodes this argument intertextually, where Joyce is positioned as a literary forebear whose mocking laughter can serve as a corrective to Bardolatry and the nationalistic ideologies and cultural hierarchies that Shakespeare has been made to serve.

In *Wise Children*, Carter responds to the complex ways in which Joyce mediates debates concerning Bardolatry, burlesque, cultural legitimacy and lines of literary succession through biological metaphors in *Ulysses*. The high-cultural construction of Shakespeare as the national English Bard is affirmed in *Ulysses* when Stephen presents his biographically-inflected interpretation of *Hamlet* to the scholars assembled in the National Library of Ireland in the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode. Stephen argues that *Hamlet* is modelled on Shakespeare’s own family circumstances, claiming that Shakespeare identifies with the cuckolded Hamlet *père*, with the result that Ann Hathaway is Queen Gertrude and Hamnet is Hamlet *fils*. Stephen interprets Shakespeare’s decision to cast himself in the role of the father in *Hamlet* as symbolic of his artistic maturation: “being no more a son, he was and felt himself the father of all his race” (9.868-9). In the course of his exposition, Stephen proposes that fatherhood (in the artistic sense) is “a mystical estate, an apostolic succession” (9.837-8) and this proposition is facilitated by the knowledge that “paternity may be a legal fiction” (9.844), an insight that frees the (male) artist to select the fathers in art who correspond to his particular ambitions. While attaining the status of Shakespeare as the ultimate father in art—the author of us all— is a laughably unfeasible ambition for young Stephen, who has yet to write anything of note, if any Irish Bard has created “a figure which the world will set beside Saxon Shakespeare’ Hamlet” it is Joyce (9.43-4). The quality that makes Shakespeare “Himself his own father” (9.875), in the literary sense, is his ability to adapt the work of his fathers in art (Shakespeare, Homer) in a way that is so originally creative that he is a son no longer.

However, a different version of Shakespeare emerges when readers of *Ulysses* attend to the rich interior monologue of Bloom, a thoughtful but unintellectual advertising canvasser,



one who is closer to Carter's desired model of Shakespeare as the universal playwright whose works speak to everyone. Bloom's interior monologue swirls with half-remembered quotations from Shakespeare and other authors besides. He even expresses awareness of the way that Shakespeare's plays structure his thoughts is registered in "Sirens", when he composes a reply to a letter while listening to a pianist:

Too poetical that about the sad. Music did that. Music hath charms. Shakespeare said. Quotations every day in the year. To be or not to be. Wisdom while you wait. (11.904-6)

When Bloom returns home and realizes he has lost his key, he ponders "To enter or not to enter. To knock or not to knock" (17.82), travestyng the opening line from Hamlet's famous soliloquy in the same camp spirit as Carter's bellhops. In *Ulysses*, Shakespeare is figured both as a talent of monumental standing and a poet of the popular imagination whose works are not just meaningful to the cultural elite but so much a part of the common heritage that stock phrases can be readily adapted for comic purposes.

Joyce's cultural construction of Shakespeare as the Bard who is ripe for burlesque informs Carter's exploration of the ideologies that the great playwright has been made to embody. Like Joyce she admires Shakespeare's plays and endorses their position in the canon, but parodies them to remodel their political import and restore his works to their original status as entertainment. Carter also responds to Joyce's handling of the long-established trope whereby fatherhood is figured as a metaphor for the processes of artistic creation. Chedgzoy

notes that “Carter’s revisions of Shakespeare frequently flirt with or are refracted through the work of other writers and artists who happen to be engaged in the same enterprise including Brecht, Mendelssohn, Joyce, Marx and Freud” (8). With respect to Joyce, Chedgzoy suggests that Carter’s “flirtation with the hypothesis of paternity evokes James Joyce’s exploration of the same issue in the ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ episode of *Ulysses*, where Stephen mediates his own encounter with Shakespeare via multiple literary fathers” (8). She cites Melchior’s thwarted obsession with emulating Ranulph’s achievements, which reaches its apotheosis at his one hundredth birthday party when he attends “in the costume of his father”, having waited “his whole long life [...] to become the father of himself” (*Wise Children* 224).

Stephen’s investment in fatherhood as a metaphor for artistic creation would not seem obviously compatible with Carter’s explicit concern in *Wise Children* with the rights of the illegitimate daughter. Chedgzoy argues that in Stephen’s theory “it is the mother who is eliminated from the family which is reconstructed as an exclusively masculine space where the capacity for procreation and literary creation are co-extensive” (8). However, Joyce presents Stephen with tender but cutting irony. There is plenty of evidence that Joyce does not subscribe to Stephen’s theory of *Hamlet*, which is mocked by Buck Mulligan and then later discredited by Stephen himself. The very notion of literary forefathers is mocked in the “Oxen of the Sun” chapter of *Ulysses*, which is written in a continuous pastiche of the historical styles of English prose, miming the “apostolic succession” of literary talents by ambivalently evoking the styles of seminal male writers. While the role of the woman in creation is overlooked by Stephen, it is insistently reasserted by Joyce, who sets the episode in a maternity hospital where a woman is giving birth. The extent to which Carter viewed Stephen as an ironic figure is uncertain. While

*Wise Children* certainly strikes up a dialogue with the model of authorship that Stephen proposes (which excludes women by passing the mantle directly from father to son), in the absence of authorial commentary, and in the knowledge that she was unlikely to have kept abreast of scholarly debates on the matter, it is unclear whether she saw herself as simply refuting Stephen's theory or adding to Joyce's mockery. Certainly, Carter values writing that is explicitly concerned with female experience and the positioning of women within the symbolic order, but at no point does she undertake to promote and establish a female canon or fulfil the cultural work of gynocriticism. While she acknowledges that the stories in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) "could not have existed the way they are without Isak Dinesen, Djuna Barnes and Jane Bowles" ("Novelists in Interview" 84), her intertextual play has always been primarily concerned with "the rhetoric and iconography of a prominent, largely male-authored strand of European literary history" (Britzolakis 49). As Munford points out, though, Carter's "textual investment in male-centred frameworks is not synonymous with a political investment in them" (12). Setting Carter's disdain for Stephen's patriarchal theories to one side, the fact that she insistently associates Joyce with the maternal, illegitimate line in *Wise Children* strongly indicates that Carter viewed Joyce as an ally and enabling forebear whose irreverent example could be co-opted for the purposes of opening up lines of literary succession to the female writer.

Carter's strategies of citation and intertextual enrichment seek to undermine notions of ordained literary lineage and the metaphorical formulations they rest upon. There is a long history linking biological legitimacy to modes of textual reproduction, a trope that is manifest in Shakespeare's plays. For instance, in *The Winter's Tale*, the legitimate child is begat by direct copying ("Your mother was most true to wedlock, Prince, / For she did print your royal father

off, /Conceiving you" (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* 5.1.123-5)), whereas in *Cymbeline*, Posthumus is a bastard because his mother allowed "Some coiner with his tools" to make him "a counterfeit" (Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* 2.5.5-6). To pursue the metaphor, direct copying in the manner of sincere, precise quotation is potentially a legitimate and legitimating strategy, because it respects the rights of the (creative) father, whereas adaptation, be it in the guise of burlesque travesty, parodic inversion, ironic quotation, misquotation, distant echo or even diffuse intertextuality, disrespects origins, and is positioned metaphorically against the father and aligned instead with the illegitimate and unauthorized maternal creativity.

It is the unauthorized and illegitimate strain of creativity in which Carter is invested, both in terms of her use of burlesque to open up alternative spaces where the value systems that texts support can be interrogated and remodelled and in terms of her contention that her abundant references are primarily "decorative" and only optionally "structural". Carter works on the principle that precise and deferential citation is not required provided that allusions are detectable. The gist or a gesture will do, as seen in Carter's misquotation of Terry, where it is the thought, not the expression, that matters, or the deployment of the conspicuously resonant Joycean word "epiphany" in the scene where Peregrine and Dora have sex, where the term is used in the commonplace sense of "revelation", rather than in Stephen's famous technical definition as "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself" (216). What emerges from Carter's critical comments on intertextuality and her often casual attitude to borrowed material, even when allusions are intended to signify in a wider network of structural relation, is that she does not necessarily care for respectful, legitimate transmission or indeed acquiring the legitimating literary

authority achieved by precise copying. In this light, what Britzolakis called “imaginative fertility” of Carter’s intertextual excess is not mere “soft stylishness”, as Paulin would have it, but can be positively framed as a “feminine” and feminist strategy whereby (predominantly male-authored) literature is diffusely repurposed for illegitimate ends.

## **Conclusion**

Carter favours intertextual relations of the illegitimate kind, a circumstance that she figures in the most graphic and exuberant symbolic terms in *Wise Children*, when, by way of Dora and Peregrine’s incestuous tryst, she consummates her love for Joyce on Shakespeare’s bed. For Carter, burlesque, allusive excess and intertextual diffusion serve as narrative strategies through which the patriarchal order can be contested by opening up alternative spaces where the values endorsed by “official” literary culture can be questioned and countered, or even ignored. Drawing on the rich tradition of Shakespearean burlesque enables Carter to challenge the damaging scenarios played out in his patriarchal plots, while celebrating the possibilities they offer for genuinely transgressive performance or adaptation. Joyce is figured as her ally in this endeavour, not only for his propensity for burlesque and his contribution to debates concerning Shakespeare as a “cultural icon”, but also as a rambunctiously intertextual writer himself, whose irreverent attitude and embrace of the illegitimate in all its forms have preserved his status as a popular (albeit difficult) author. By linking Joyce and Shakespeare as intertextual counterparts, Carter is able to present Joyce’s pervasive mockery as a tonic to the construction of Shakespeare as the national English Bard and to the imperial ideologies he is

made to exemplify. Furthermore, the model of literary succession that Stephen articulates in relation to Shakespeare as the ultimate literary father in *Ulysses* furnishes Carter with a framework for debating cultural legitimacy in terms of biological parentage. Carter expands the father-son model for artistic succession laterally to accommodate female writers. Because Joyce is alternately associated with the roles of the mother (Estella), sister (Nora), uncle (Peregrine) and lover in *Wise Children*, but never the father as Shakespeare is, Dora's love for her Joycean uncle is not burdened by the debilitating anxiety of paternity that afflicts the many familial relationships mediated through Shakespeare's plays. Instead, Dora's joyful, uninhibited sexual union with her Joycean uncle Peregrine is a calculated rebuttal of the father-centric theories of female hysteria that Freud articulated in his famous study of her namesake and the ultimate compliment to Joyce's liberating example as a novelist whose burlesque sensibility pointed the way for Carter as a female writer who also held nothing sacred.

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