

UNDER CARTER'S PARODIC UMBRELLA

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to investigate and analyse several cultural practices to which parody is usually associated, how and to what extent other narrative strategies can relate to parody, in which different ways parody can take place, and some controversies connected with parodic references. All the while the points made are illustrated and underpinned by Angela Carter's last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*.

Keywords: parody; postmodernism; paradox.

She [Carter] had an instinctive feeling for the other side, which included also the underside
(ATWOOD, 1992, p. 61)

To avoid interpretation, art may become parody
(SONTAG, 1998, p. 694)

■ **A**mong the postmodern narrative strategies used by Angela Carter in *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991) in her constant going back to the past in order to rework appropriated linguistic or artistic material, perhaps parody is one of the most controversial ones. Indeed, parodic strategies are used to a wide range of purposes, from reverence to mockery, from a playful to a critical standpoint, which obtain the most of parody's

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inherently dual nature, namely deconstructive and conservative at once, and significantly contribute to the perpetuation of those very same texts they aim to assault and deconstruct (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 34; DENTITH, 2000, p. 36-37).

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

To begin with, any attempt to cast doubts on the very close relationship between parody and postmodernism is bound for failure. In fact, one of postmodernism's hallmarks is a patent dialogue with the textualised past so as to bring to light the history of representations known to the reader. By doing so and much in tune with parodic procedures, postmodernism provides the necessary means to reassess the past in the light of the present (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 19-20). Furthermore, the paradoxical and concomitant inscription and subversion of the incorporated past is as much a postmodernist as a parodic feature in the use and abuse of the established forms of representations. Thus, the use of parody signals both connection and distance from anterior textual material, which is in accordance with the ambivalent prefix "para" present in the ancient Greek word "parodia" which, in the context of parody study, can be understood as pointing out both nearness and opposition (DENTITH, 2000, p. 164; ROSE, 1993, p. 48). All in all, as Hutcheon (1990, p. 126) puts it: "[t]o parody is not to destroy the past; in fact to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it. And this, once again, is the postmodern paradox".

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

"You must know this gentleman's name!" insisted Fevvers and, seizing his notebook, wrote it down. [...] On reading it:

"Good God," said Walser.

"I saw in the paper only yesterday how he [Mr Rosencreutz] gives the most impressive speech in the House on the subject of Votes for Women. Which he is against. On account of how women are of a different soul-substance from men, cut from a different bolt of spirit cloth, and altogether too pure and rarefied to be bothering their pretty little heads with things of this world [...]" (CARTER, 1993a, p. 78-79).

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

Nevertheless, it is necessary to be careful in order not to label parody as an all-embracing term used to every single reference to past textual material. As a matter of fact, this overarching concept is best applied to define intertextuality, to which parody is nothing but only a part of its spectrum of intertextual relations due to its particular sort of inflection in "language imitation" (DENTITH, 2000, p. 4, 37). In other words, there is always intertextuality in parody, but not necessarily parody in intertextuality. Besides, whereas intertextuality can revolve around the either/or and sometimes both deconstructive and conservative, parody is intrinsically dialogically both (ROSE, 1993, p. 183-84).

However, the interchangeable application of these terms is far from being uncommon. It is so much so that even Linda Hutcheon (1995, p. 191) in the index to *The Politics of Postmodernism* tells the reader to check "parody" in the entry for "intertextuality". In short, the nature of the connection between these two terms, which is also in consonance with the way Carter deals with parody, seems best defined by Hutcheon (1990, p. 129-130) below:

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

That is precisely what Carter does, for instance, when she appropriates the myth of Leda and the Swan portrayed in W. B. Yeats's poem, "Leda and the Swan", in which Zeus rapes an unprotected and staggering Leda in the guise of a "feathered glory", and reworks it in such a manner that she somewhat inverts roles at the end of *Nights at the Circus* and depicts the winged *aerialiste* Fevvers on top of Jack Walser while they copulate as her winged body allows her no position other than that (CARTER, 1993a, p. 292-295). However, Carter's intent here is not to establish a female supremacy, but only undercut the patriarchal stereotype of male dominance by furnishing an alternative his/herstory in that the relationship described is ultimately one between equals (DAY, 1998, p. 192-194).

As the example above shows, parody invariably brings the source text to the spotlight and undermines it in tandem. In effect, this debunking of traditional patriarchal precepts and institutions or paradoxical laying bare of the devices simultaneous with their application, as the Russian Formalists would put it, is perhaps Carter's main goal and reason for using parody in order to challenge and unveil the norms the parodied text tries to naturalise (ROSE, 1993, p. 82-83). In this way, parodic discourse demonstrates how available forms of representa-

tions stem from anterior ones as well as it raises the reader's awareness to possibilities provided by both change and cultural continuity. Thereby, once at work, "postmodern parody is both deconstructively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation – in any medium" (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 93, 98). Moreover, once the interpolation of the target text into the parodist's textual structure basically typifies parody, we might say it is unavoidably politically double-coded. That is to say, parodic procedures realise themselves by means of two codes or texts which aim at conveying one message through the contrast between these codes (ROSE, 1993, p. 82, 87).

Therefore, bringing to mind the visionary prophet-poet William Blake's anti-imperialist words that "[t]he Foundation of Empire is Art and Science. Remove them or Degrade them and the Empire is No more. Empire follows Art and not vice versa" (FRYE, 1953, p. 447), Carter depicts the religious zeal with which Ranulph Hazard, in *Wise Children*, disseminates Englishness via Shakespeare to foreigners in "those dark parts of the globe where civilization had yet to penetrate" at the end of the nineteenth century, which runs parallel to the grafted historical text which relates this cultural domination with the help of the Shakespearean emblem to the territorial expansion of the British Empire (CARTER, 1993b, p. 19-20; HULME, 1993, p. 28). As a result, British imperialism is called into question as it is implied that deep inside all boils down to money as the bard's culture is later on capitalised to the point that it becomes actual currency (CARTER, 1993b, p. 191). In addition, so as to make blatant the real purpose lying behind all this piety that portrays the hegemonic discourse as a "divine Word", Carter connects art and religion in Ranulph's "mission" to perform Shakespeare "in order to persuade other people of the greatness of the Bard's words, just as missionaries took the Bible and tried to persuade 'natives' of the truth of God's Word" (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 169). However, what goes unnoticed, and Carter points this out, is that the theatre, especially the very Shakespearean theatre used in the colonising process, is also immanently destabilising and subversive by virtue of its illegitimate nature as a profession (WEBB, 1995, p. 284).

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

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

Ironic parody is enacted in *Wise Children*, for example, in relation to the deplorable street beggar Gorgeous George. Different from England's patron saint who fought the dragon with his phallic sword and won, "the [bygone] prime spectacle on offer" literally embodies the diminishing lights of an in decline post-war Britain in "a morbid raspberry colour that looked bad for his health" (CARTER, 1993b, p. 66-67) found on the map tattooed on Gorgeous George's own skin, a map which portrays the past powerful British Empire in pink. As Linden Peach (1998, p. 137) states, "perhaps suggesting how the Empire has eventually proved bad for the psychological and economic health of Britain". Besides, irony is also present in the fact that this "enormous statement" that George himself is might conceal something underneath. Indeed, his catch phrase "[n]othing queer about our George" (CARTER, 1993b, p. 64, 66) is quite compromising in the sense that it suggests a latent homosexuality on his part or, why not, a certain queerness embedded in the English culture? The fact is that somehow English masculinity is played with as not only George plays Bottom in *The Dream* but also always carries around his golf club, like his more famous saint namesake his sword, both representing anal fixation and sexual violence, respectively (PEACH, 1998, p. 137).

Unlike irony, which makes use of subtlety to achieve its objective, a far straighter-to-the-point member of the parodic range is satire, mainly characterised by its critical vein. First of all, satire differs from parody by the fact that the source hardly ever contributes either to the satirist's textual structure or to its aesthetic needs, which means that satire's critical arrows usually aim at something external to it. Interestingly, the satirical discourse is also inherently double-edged as its attack may be directed not only against the norm but also its distortion. In addition, as opposed to irony which utilises one single code to communicate two distinct messages, satire needs only a single code to convey one crystal clear message. Nonetheless, of course parody may take on a satiric aim and direct its firing squad at a piece of text grafted into the parody work itself. However, when this happens to be the case, this association often turns out to be negative as parody is criticised for becoming too destructive (ROSE, 1993, p. 79, 82, 86, 88-89).

In *Nights at the Circus*, Lizzie advises Fevvers before she goes to her meeting with the Grand Duke: "[g]o for the ballocks, if needs must" (CARTER, 1993a, p. 182). Maybe that is exactly Carter's purpose in her use of satirical parody in *Wise Children*: to throw her critical arrows right at patriarchy's Achilles' heel. Thereby, there seems to be no better target than a key cultural icon such as Shakespeare, directly related to the theatre, the Hazard family, the sense of Englishness, and to the British Empire. Effectively, if there exists a general "truth", it is that there is no room in the postmodern world for an absolute Shakespeare. Neither for the Hazard dynasty nor for British imperialism, both directly connected to the bard and satirised in *Wise Children*. Hence, "it is not surprising then that Carter seeks to demystify traditional and patriarchal authority through the Shakespearean figure of Melchior" (MEANEY, 1993, p. 128). As a matter of fact, just like the latter-day disempowered and demoralised Windsor family that has been the object of public entertainment, once the patriarch Ranulph and his son Melchior take on the kingly mantle in Shakespearean parts, "the Hazards belonged to everyone. They were a national treasure" (CARTER, 1993b, p. 14, 38, 57, 205; WEBB, 1995, p. 283). However, much probably the climactic moment during

which Carter finally attains her satirical goal is the public humiliation undergone by Melchior, “Mr British Theatre” of yesteryear, on his own son’s live TV show “Lashings of Lolly” (CARTER, 1993b, p. 41-42). In fact, a very good response for all those who have been cruelly victimised for only crossing the Hazards’ way.

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

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

Thus, Carter’s echo of Faustus’s question “[i]s this the face that launched a thousand ships” as “this Helen [Fevvers] launched a thousand quips” (MARLOWE, 2001, p. 74; CARTER, 1993a, p. 8), as well as her reworking of *Moby Dick*’s narrator’s opening lines “[c]all me Ishmael” as “[c]all him Ishmael; but Ishmael with an expense account” which shows Walser as a latter-day Ishmael, in the sense that he is also a “man of action” who loves an adventurous life (MELVILLE, 1993, p. 1; CARTER, 1993a, p. 10; PEACH, 1998, p. 133), are good examples of Carter’s use of this cultural practice (STODDART, 2007, p. 12). As it is seen, there can even be laughter once pastiche is put at work, but it is not derisive, there is not an intent of critical distance. Actually, pastiche results from the realisation that the original itself is not important, just its style, as Stoddart (2007, p. 39) attests: “pastiche may still provoke laughter, but it is laughter derived from relief at the inevitable emptiness or failure of the very idea of the ‘original’ rather than the mockery of it”.

Nonetheless, lack of proximity in terms of intent from the target text is peculiar to most of the elements which make up the parodic umbrella. For instance, another term with which parody is very often associated and contributes negatively to its image is burlesque, which works by establishing a close connection between “high” and “low” in the “decadence” of a character in order to critique the former (DENTITH, 2000, p. 147). It is worth noting that burlesque is usually linked to words like ridicule and mockery and that is why it attributes a certain connotation to parody that is often thought of as destructive (ROSE, 1993, p. 9-10, 25-26). But that is not to be taken as a rule of thumb as for some, as Christopher Stone (1914, p. 8) claims:

[...] ridicule is society’s most effective means of curing inelasticity. It explodes the pompous, corrects the well-meaning eccentric, cools the fanatical, and prevents the incompetent from achieving success. Truth will prevail over it, falsehood will cover under it.

According to Marina Warner (1995, p. 247-248), transvestism and impersonation are recurrent elements in Carter’s *oeuvre* which are unquestionably intrinsic to the burlesque and its characteristic masquerade. Proof thereof is Jack Walser, who “experienced the freedom that lies behind the mask, within dissi-

mulation, the freedom to juggle with being, and, indeed, with the language which is vital to our being, that lies at the heart of burlesque” (CARTER, 1993a, p. 103). In effect, Walser starts relishing this sense of freedom once he departs with Colonel Kearney’s circus to become a clown and subsequently the Human Chicken. Later on, he also turns into an apprentice shaman, a moment during which he presumably reaches the salient stage on his journey in terms of latitude (CARTER, 1993a, p. 152, 236-238, 252-270).

Furthermore, Fevvers diverges so much in every single way from the Victorian ideal of femininity that she can even be the Parisian *l’Ange Anglaise*, but definitely not the “Angel in the House” whom, following Virginia Woolf’s advice, she kills by means of her very own existence whose image she herself writes and constructs (WOOLF, 1961, p. 170). This is so much so that for a moment even Walser wonders whether Fevvers is not a man in drag as she is far from fitting into the prevailing ideal of womanhood (CARTER, 1993a, p. 8, 35). In this way, these experiences Walser and Fevvers undergo surely contribute to undermine the male-produced journalistic speech which constrains “Walser’s very self” and tries to circumscribe the *aerialiste* into stereotypical interpretations of femininity which does not suit her fine at all, besides enabling Carter to critique patriarchal discourse and expose it to ridicule at once.

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

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

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

Hence, Shakespeare ends up overtly commodified as a mere seal of approval afforded by “The Royal Family of the theatre” in My Lady Margarine’s participation in TV advertisements whose slogan is “[t]o butter or not to butter...”, which does embody the Hazard’s travesty of their own theatrical reputation (CARTER, 1993b, p. 37-38; SAGE, 2007, p. 55-56). Conversely, marginalised, peripheral figures are bestowed with a greater prominence. For instance, despite her gargantuan and grotesque body, her unceremonious bad manners, to sum up a freak according to patriarchal standards, Fevvers not only becomes the winged toast of Europe but also is the one who laughs last – and resonantly better (CARTER, 1993a, p. 11, 294-295). Similarly, it is the erstwhile twice illegitimate – by birth and profession – septuagenarian Chance sisters who eventually rejoice in the very face of old age as they *still* dance and sing along Bard Road, but this time impregnated with joy and self-assertiveness (CARTER, 1993b, p. 33-34, 165, 231-232).

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

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

Nonetheless, at times Carter’s parody is more specific as it is directed towards a particular precursor text (DENTITH, 2000, p. 7), as it is the case with the dualism she legitimises from the outset in *Wise Children* in the portrayal of two possible tracks and also disrupts by the innumerable allusions to Shakespeare which favour plurality. Actually, this dualism much probably derives from John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) and from the poem’s pervasive motif either for or against the patriarch, “a dualism resulting from the patriarchal and monistic vision of Christianity” (WEBB, 1995, p. 286). In this way, Dora’s recurrent Miltonic phrase “[l]o, how the mighty are fallen” (CARTER, 1993b, p. 10, 16, 75, 196; 2 Samuel 1:27) attests how much havoc has been wreaked to the detriment of established patriarchal hierarchies.

Moreover, in spite of being chalk and cheese, Dora attributes both Godlike and Satanic features to Melchior and Peregrine alike. As a matter of fact, not only does Peregrine play the part of the bearer of the Adamic word – “we didn’t know him from Adam” – to the naked Eve-like children Dora and Nora, but he is also the first man to seduce Dora when she is just thirteen in the very same manner the fallen angel Lucifer does in the guise of a serpent (CARTER, 1993b, p. 22, 30, 220-221; Genesis 3:1-6). Similarly, “our father” Melchior Hazard who “did not live in heaven” but whose divine existence is adored from afar by the illegitimate Chance sisters also has his Satanic side: “tall, dark and handsome” with “those knicker-shifting [...] eyes”, he surely takes part in not so legitimate practices to the point that Dora even wonders “if he lent his mouth here, his arsehole there, to see if that would do the trick” (CARTER, 1993b, p. 24, 72, 87).

In addition, there are some arguable points which have to be raised in the study of parody: the questioning of its originality, the attribution of a parasitic nature to it and the disregard for its comic feature by some. First, as Shakespeare puts it: “every tongue brings in a several tale” (SHAKESPEARE, 2005, p. 142), and that is not different in Carter’s reworking of past textual material in which an unquestionable authorial intent to subvert invariably echoes the source and furnishes the reader with something new at once. Therefore, although Fevvers can be deemed as “far from original” iconographically speaking as she undoubtedly brings to mind W. B. Yeats’s poem “Leda and the Swan”, of symbols he uses in “Sailing to Byzantium” and “Byzantium”, as well as of the Winged Victory of Samothrace¹, the recurrent image of the female winged creature who delivers the shout of victory (SAGE, 2007, p. 47), Carter’s final product certainly and indisputably opposes the prevailing *fin-de-siècle* idea of femininity witnessed by Yeats.

Furthermore, parody’s depiction as “negative, parasitic, or trivial” (ROSE, 1993, p. 180) does not prove pertinent as the existence of a parasite is usually synonymous with the demise of its host, which is surely not what parody performs. Much on the contrary, parody contributes to the perpetuation and sometimes even revives unknown target texts (ROSE, 1993, p. 41). Finally, since Julia Kristeva “several other late-modern commentators on parodic intertextuality have reduced parody to the intertextual by denying or overlooking the comic aspects of the parody” (ROSE, 1993, p. 180). That is to say, parody’s comic aspect sometimes is a hindrance to its effective recognition as a legitimate and genuine literary resource, which circumscribes its apprehension to nothing but one more component of the intertextual spectrum. Nonetheless, however comic Carter’s handling of the sources, it is always seriously committed in her parodic enterprise to deconstruct naturalised past representations. In effect, “[b]oth irony and parody are double-voicings, for they play one meaning off against another. To call such complexity ‘unserious’ may well mask a desire to void that doubleness in the name of the monolithic – of any political persuasion” (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 210-211). In short, perhaps the response below is the best against all these attempts to diminish parody’s pivotal role in literature:

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

Once the triangle is closed when the parody work is read, there takes place a simultaneous triple relationship among the parodist, the author of the source

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

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

Curiously enough, sometimes the parodist's aim is not only pointed at the literary model itself, but also at its author and/or reader (ROSE, 1993, p. 42). Actually, that is what Carter does in *Wise Children* when she directs her onslaught at this constructed highbrow Shakespeare in the innumerable allusions to his *oeuvre*. By the way, *Wise Children* has *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as the chaotic centrepiece that allows Carter to "celebrate the subversive energies of women" in a "liberating and potentially creative" manner (WISKER, 2003, p. 16, 21, 23). In this way, Carter attacks this produced "universal" author and the readers who appreciate this *status* endowed to him at once and brings the bard back to his original popular position by a crystal clear vehement statement that underlies her last novel: "Shakespeare just isn't an intellectual" (SAGE, 2007, p. 56; 1992, p. 186-187)².

In sum, despite being ignored or treated as a sign of decadence and even lack of future for some and as a positive weapon for some others (ROSE, 1993, p. 179-180, 189; DENTITH, 2000, p. 186-187), parody and its related forms indisputably have to a greater or lesser degree what it takes to put at work controversial intertextual relationships which are at the same time deconstructively creative and productive and, thereby, play a major role in postmodern writing due to its protean possibilities in terms of usage. As a matter of fact, since its very first use by Aristotle (DENTITH, 2000, p. 40), parody has been related to other terms and narrative strategies in such a way and extent that today it can be quite difficult to single it out in the different forms it may show up or to define to what degree it is parody and not something else, or even both. At any rate, the truth is that parody *is* for the most part intrinsically connected with several other devices in its present-day usage, something which both provides it with different modulations and facets and enriches the postmodern writer's dialogue with the textualised past. Therefore, it is no surprise that the use of parody is so recurrent in Carter's double-voiced discourse in which she "always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritage of both the muted and the dominant" (SHOWALTER, 1985, p. 263) in order to install and debunk the patriarchal hegemony.

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

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*Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é investigar e analisar várias práticas culturais às quais a paródia é quase sempre associada, como e até que ponto outras estratégias narrativas se relacionam à paródia, de que diferentes formas a paródia pode ocorrer, e algumas controvérsias que dizem respeito às referências paródicas. Os pontos destacados são todo o tempo ilustrados e embasados pelos dois últimos romances de Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus* e *Wise Children*.*

Palavras-chave: paródia; pós-modernismo; parádoxo.