



Review Article

**On Angela Carter’s Subversive Panorama: The Carteresque
and Intertextuality¹²**

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Abstract

Angela Carter uses subversive narrative techniques and qualities in producing her groundbreaking works and establishing her demythologising and (de)philosophising panorama, which is named ‘The Carteresque’. While establishing her narration, Carter uses major narrative qualities such as magic realism, intertextuality, fetishism, and grotesque respectively. On the basis of her viewpoint on feminism, Carter paves the way for her subversive politics and her autonomous narrative qualities are shaped accordingly. This study explores ‘Intertextuality’ as one of the major literary ways of Carterian expression and clarifies Carter’s politics of intertextuality with its theoretical background.

Keywords: Angela Carter, Subversive Language, The Carteresque, Intertextuality.

Introduction to The Carteresque

Angela Carter’s narrative strategies and style and, especially, her politics of intertextuality in her works function as a way to build her authentic narration in which different texts are absorbed and transformed into one another. However, according to Linden Peach, Carter’s intertextual narration is not merely based on the exploitation of her work, but also on its hybridity which is “actually part of a wider intertextuality in which traditions, mythologies and conventions are subjected to scrutiny and inverted” (1998, p. 18). In other words, Carter’s novels “explicitly and implicitly, refer to mythology, the Bible, European and English literary works, Renaissance drama, fairy

¹I hereby declare that this paper has been extracted from the dissertation of mine entitled “Body Politics in Angela Carter’s Works” and it includes the literary and theoretical analyses scrutinised within the scope of my doctoral study.

² This study is an expanded version of an oral presentation in the “8th International Conference on Narrative and Language Studies” organised and held in Karadeniz Technical University, May 2-3, 2019, Trabzon - Turkey.

stories, European art, film, especially Godard and Bunuel, opera, ballet, music and psychoanalytic and linguistic theory” (Peach, 1998, p. 18). In addition, Carter is considered such a seminal novelist that she skillfully covers intertextuality in her works. As Peach further indicates: “[i]ndeed, Carter’s voice as a novelist is located, even though it is difficult to uncover, in the intertextuality of her work” (1998, p. 18).

Carter was influenced greatly by Anglo-American and world literary sources as Rebecca Munford puts it: “[f]rom fairy tale to French decadence, from medieval literature to Victoriana, and from cookery books to high theory, Carter’s narratives are littered with allusions and references drawn from a wide range of cultural spheres” (2006, p. 1). Hence, the influences of a variety of literary sources on Carter’s writings are expressed as follows:

At Bristol University, Carter became familiar with European art- the French Symbolists and Dadaists are an obvious influence on her writings; and with Shakespeare and the medieval literature in particular. Later, she became more conversant with European critical theorists especially the poststructuralists and the feminist psychoanalysts. The literary influences on her work include Chaucer, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Jonathan Swift, William Blake, Mary Shelley, the Marquise de Sade, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Dostoevsky, Lewis Carroll and Bram Stoker. [...] (Peach, 1998, p. 18)

Thus, it can be said that, for Carter, “intertextuality becomes not so much a characteristic of her writing but a boldly thematised part of it” (Peach, 1998, p. 19), because it is through intertextuality that the Carterian sense of authentic narrative quality is produced. As Carter asserts:

My fiction is very often a kind of literary criticism, which is something I’ve started to worry about quite a lot. I had spent a long time acquiescing very happily with the Borges idea that books were about books, and then I began to think: if all books are about books, what are other books about? Where does it all stop? [...] Books about books is fun but frivolous. (Angela Carter in interview with John Haffenden) (Carter qtd. in Munford, 2006, p. 1)

Carter internalises many literary and cultural references from a variety of literary canons and their creators including writers and critics while producing her narratives. Therefore, Carter, in her writing processes, uses intertextuality in composing the thematic part of her works purposefully. With her ‘with purpose’ attitude, it is said that Carter deconstructs and demythologises established norms of patriarchy, especially on women’s place in a man’s world. To give an example from Carter’s intertextual references in her *Nights at the Circus* (1984), the same thematic point can be seen in her intermingling reality and fantasy as a literary reference. In her narration, Carter uses the name of ‘Charles Baudelaire’, the seminal French poet, and refers to his fondness for prostitutes in the given dialogue while identifying the image of the ‘Carterian sense of women’: “[...] The influence of Baudelaire, sir. [...] The French poet, sir; a poor fellow who loved whores not for the pleasure of it but, as he perceived it, the horror of it, as if we was, not working women not doing it for money but *damned souls* who did it solely to lure men to their dooms, as if we’d got nothing better to do ...” (Carter, 2006, p. 41). Carter’s construction of her narration from a diverse range of available things builds a unifying gesture in which readers, as Carter states in her interview with John Haffenden, can experience their reality:

I have always used a very wide number of references because of tending to regard all of western Europe as a great scrap-yard from which you can assemble all sorts of new vehicles... bricolage. Basically, all the elements which are available are to

do with the margin of the imaginative life, which is in fact what gives reality to our own experience, and in which we measure our own reality. (92) (Haffenden qtd. in Munford, 2006, p. 1)

It can also be said that Carter's elaborate and excessive use of intertextual citations in her narratives is the evidence for her adopting postmodern qualities, especially when grotesque body images and fetishisation of women in the demythologising process are considered. As Munford writes: "Carter's stylistic heresy is cast as an affront to the 'reality', or 'authenticity', of women's experience" (2006, p. 3). Therefore, Carter's works show and prove that "words and images are divorced from their context" (Munford, 2006, p. 2), because it is said for Carter's narratives that "dispersal of social and cultural realities occurs from the stylization of her fantasy" (Munford, 2006, p. 2). In other words, it is through the Carterian sense of intertextuality that her characters free themselves from the real world and they create their fantastic, alternative reality in which their authentic experiences take place.

Theoretic Development of Intertextuality

Intertextuality and its textual meaning are hereby expressed depending upon Carter's explanations of intertextuality in her fiction. Following that, the related critics, who are considered among the pioneers of intertextuality, are mentioned within literary context along with their references to intertextuality. As Munford explains the theory of intertextuality and how the term appeared first as a contemporary vocabulary:

'Intertextuality' is an incredibly voluminous term – one that has been subject to various definitions, uses and, according to Graham Allen, misinterpretations (2). Coined by Julia Kristeva in her discussion of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and carnival in the late 1960s, the term intertextuality has since become a commonplace of contemporary critical vocabulary. In its most contracted appropriation, intertextuality posits an understanding of text as wanting in independent meaning; that is, to cite Kristeva's reading of Bakhtin, 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (66). Rather than representing a field of intentional influence, allusion and quotation, or of generic equivalence, this theory of intertextuality maintains that a text does not function as a closed system of meaning. (2006, p. 5)

According to Julia Kristeva, Bakhtinian carnivalesque forms the core of intertextuality. Intertextuality is shaped according to the independency of different meanings in text so that it forms an open system in which every meaning is included. Thereby, in clarifications of intertextuality and its function in the text, Bakhtinian term, 'the carnivalesque', can be shown as a seminal point. Based on that, Bakhtinian terms, namely, 'carnavalesque', 'orchestration', 'polyphony' and 'heteroglossia' are all explicated hereafter. It is also noteworthy to mention that these terms are all taken from Mikhail Bakhtin's 'Dialogism'³ (Dialogic Criticism) so that carnival relations in intertextuality are able to be discussed.

To begin with, in carnivalism, as Ihab Hassan states in his *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (1987), there is "[t]rue feast of time' the feast of becoming, change and renewal, "human beings, then as now, discover" the peculiar logic of the 'inside out', out of the 'turnabout', ... of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, coming crownings and uncrownings" (1987, p. 171). This

³ For further information about Bakhtin's 'Dialogic Criticism', see Abrams & Harpham's *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 2009, pp.77-78.

ideological meaning of carnivalism⁴ describes the fact that it contains and welcomes everything regardless of limitations in the text. It is called 'orchestration'. This might be considered one of the core arguments of intertextuality. Bakhtin uses the term 'orchestration' in order to define 'polyphony' within the context of a carnivalesque narration. The basic point is asserted in Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975) as follows: "Bakhtin's most famous borrowing from musical terminology is the 'polyphonic' novel, but orchestration is the means for achieving it. Music is the metaphor from seeing to hearing [...]. The possibilities of orchestration make any segment of text almost infinitely variable" (1981, pp. 430-431). Furthermore, Hassan explains Bakhtinian carnivalesque in detail, pointing out its close relation to 'polyphony' as follows: "[c]arnivalization further means 'polyphony,' the centrifugal power of language, the 'gay relativity' of things, perspectivism and performance, participation in the wild disorder of life, [...]" (1987, p. 171). Therefore, it can be explicitly deduced that there are many voices in carnivalism which are intermingled with one another and although each seems separate in form, these differences form a unity. Bakhtin calls these voices 'heteroglossia'⁵.

[a]uthorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships [...]. These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization - this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel. (1981, p. 263)

Intertextuality is, therefore, shaped based on Bakhtinian dialogism, and Kristeva carries this word a step further into practice by positing "the double-voiced nature" (Munford, 2006, p. 5) of Bakhtinian dialogism into literature. Thus, the conceptualization of literary structure "as generated in relation to [...] another structure [...] disrupts notions of monologic⁶ meaning and truth – opening up a space for new understandings of the relationship between language, politics and subjectivity" (Munford, 2006, p. 5). As it is expressed above, Bakhtin's dialogism is literarily developed and put into practice through intertextuality in which one-voiced notions and expressions are converted into dialogic ones. By this way, new type of discourse containing multiple-voices is welcomed in literary arena.

The Carterian Sense of Intertextuality and Overall Conclusion

⁴ For further information about Bakhtin's carnivalism in his *Rabelais and His World*, (trans. 1984), see Abrams & Harpham's *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 2009, pp. 77-78. And for further details see, Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, (1984), trans. Helene Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

⁵ Heteroglossia: many voices. According to Bakhtin: "heteroglossia is considered as central to the tradition of the English comic novel" (Munford, 2006, p.16). Heteroglossia is also related to "polyphonic (orchestration) novel and dialogism" (Ekmekçi, 2012, p. 37).

⁶ Monologic: One-voiced expression. According to Bakhtin, monologic novels: "undertake to subordinate the voices off all characters to the authoritative discourse and controlling purposes of the author [...]" (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, p. 77).

Intertextuality is well suited for Carter's⁷ works and Carter uses the term frequently for her "textual practices" (Munford, 2006, p. 6), and through intertextuality, Carter describes the intended meaning in her works thoroughly. As Munford puts it: "Carter engaged with specific theories of textuality, representation and authorship – in particular, certain strands of French structuralist and poststructuralist thinking – in both her fiction and non-fiction" (2006, p. 6). As it is stated previously, Kristeva's theory of intertextuality is supported by Bakhtinian carnivalesque. Moreover, Roland Barthes' groundbreaking work entitled "The Death of the Author" (1967), also helps intertextuality develop influentially. As Barthes writes: "[d]eath has another significance: it renders unreal the author's signature and transforms the work into myth [...] by erasing the author's signature, death founds the truth of the work, which is enigma [...]" (2004, p. 30). Thereby, it can be explicitly asserted that Barthes' "The Death of the Author"⁸ is a text, simply based challenging and refusing the authority. Barthes' related remarks are as such:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of the original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture. [...] the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His 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) (Barthes qtd. in Munford, 2006, p. 6)

It is important to know that the quotation above in Barthes' seminal work has been considered an inspiration for feminist power to resist against the authority of patriarchy, which can thoroughly be observed throughout Carter's works. It is therefore stated that "this frequently quoted passage from Barthes' essay, with its implicit renunciation of paternal power and ownership, is in many respects consonant with the feminist (and atheistic) challenge to patriarchal authority central to Carter's writing" (Munford, 2006, p. 6). Similarly, Munford explicates that *The Madwoman in the Attic*⁹ (1979) written by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, can also be shown as a sample of intertextuality among women writings in terms of changing the literary traditions. Her related remarks are as such: "The Madwoman in the Attic, published in 1979, offers an alternative model of intertextuality – one concerned with the issues of influence and source eschewed by Barthes and, centrally, with mapping relations between women writers" (2006, p. 11). Both groundbreaking works mentioned above have the same thematic point through which women writers challenge the authoritative discourse in accustomed literary traditions of the past. Thus, they create their authentic discourse in which the female power is represented by refusing authoritative norms. And based on that feminist writings come to the forefront literary arena and women writers like Carter re-create the writings by challenging and questioning the materials and the motifs of the past. As it is added: "Carter's textual practice might be focused on the recovery and recuperation of 'alternative stories' and 'hidden or secret scripts'" (Munford, 2006, p. 11).

⁷As Maggie Ann Bowers writes in her *Magic(al) Realism*: "Angela Carter's novels are widely recognized as being indebted to the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895–1975) theories of the carnivalesque and heteroglossia [...]" (2004, p. 66).

⁸For electronic version of Barthes' "The Death of the Author," see http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf

⁹For further details, see S. M. Gilbert and S. Gubar's *The Madwoman in The Attic*, (1979), United States of America, West Hannover, Mass.: Yale University Press.

Furthermore, it is also stated that "Carter's intertextual narratives enact an unremitting assault on traditional images of the mother and maternal lineage" (Munford, 2006, p. 11), because, as Christina Britzolakis writes in her article titled "Angela Carter's Fetishism": "Carter's abiding fascination with femininity as spectacle has hitherto been understood predominantly in terms of a feminist critical project which identifies and rejects male-constructed images of women as a form of false consciousness" (1997, p. 44). This is the clear statement which totally rejects male perspective of women depiction since, in the early works of Carter, women are represented either as victims or "puppet-like objects by a male master – what Carter calls the mad scientist/shaman/toymaker figure" (Britzolakis, 1997, p. 44). Therefore, they are represented as sufferers and become victims¹⁰ at the end, because of male cruelty. On the contrary, in the later works of Carter, 'wicked' type of intertextual women characterisations are observed since women immolation is totally rejected and subversive and perverse women characterisations are depicted. Those heroines¹¹ are the ones "who take control of their own performances and manipulate their self-stagings for their own advantage" (Britzolakis, 1997, p. 45).

It is clear to see that the Carterian sense of intertextuality mostly focuses on literature written by men due to Carter's writing's "intertextual engagement with 'the rhetoric and iconography of a prominent, largely male-authored strand of European literary history' (Britzolakis 49)" (Britzolakis qtd. in Munford, 2006, p. 11). Depending on the Carterian perspective, Carter explains her unique writing strategy with her well-known, groundbreaking metaphor in her *Notes from the Front Line* as follows:

I try when I write fiction, to think on my feet – to present a number of propositions in a variety of different ways, and to leave the reader to construct her own fiction for herself from the elements of my fictions. (Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottle explode.) (1998, p. 26)

Carter explicates her writing strategies and narrative techniques in such a way that her writings resemble newly produced wine that is put in old bottles. In other words, through intertextuality, Carter uses traditional materials as well as materials of the past, and converts them into modern and authentic narratives through which she produces and constructs her writings. According to Carter: "[t]his past [...] has important decorative, ornamental functions; further, it is a vast repository of outmoded lies" (1998, p. 29). Hence, Carter's work can best be comprehended "in relation to the intersection between the models of intertextuality" (Munford, 2006, p. 12). So, what is crucial to know about the Carterian sense of the myths produced in Western culture is the fact that they should not be created again as new grand narratives, because Carter's personal attitude is wholly against producing new myths which have the same origins of old patriarchal myths of Western culture. Thereby, as Jacqueline Pearson writes: "Carter's intertextuality

¹⁰ 'Ghislaine' in *Shadow Dance* (1966), 'Leilah' in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), and 'Justin' in *The Sadeian Woman* (1978), can all be referenced as the earliest famous victims in Carter's narratives. For further details, see Carter's *Shadow Dance* (1995), London, Virago; *The Passion of New Eve* (1982), London, Virago; *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (1978), London, Virago.

¹¹ 'Juliette' in *The Sadeian Woman* (1978), 'Lilith' in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), 'The Little Girl' in "The Werewolf" (1979), 'The Little Girl' in "The Company of Wolves" (1979), and 'The Wife of Marquis de Bluebeard' in "The Bloody Chamber" (1979) are all able to be considered the most notable and famous intertextual 'Carterian Heroines' among all Carter's narratives. For further details, see Carter's "The Werewolf", *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1995), London, Vintage, pp. 108-110; "The Company of Wolves", *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1995), London, Vintage, pp. 110-118; "The Bloody Chamber", *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1995), London, Vintage, pp. 7-41.

challenges both our confidence in our social, cultural and psychic structures and the nature of ‘reality’ itself” (Pearson qtd. in Munford, 2006, p. 13).

Consequently, as her narrative strategy, Carter makes use of intertextuality as a political expression of thematisation through which Carter demystifies and destabilises the authority in her narratives. Carter shapes her narrative techniques in such a way that “her writing is both highly stylized and politically engaged. And it often involves negotiating the precarious border between duplication and duplicity, between complicity and critique” (Munford, 2006, pp. 16-17). As it is expressed hitherto, Carter’s intertextuality comes from the demythologisation and deconstruction of old texts to create authentic and new ones. Therefore, for Carter, nothing is new; rather, every product is a re-working or re-writing of canons. It is also said that “nothing is sacred for her” (Munford, 2006, p. 16). From this perspective, intertextuality has a vital importance for Carter in the creation of her works.

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