

Incest as Form and the Identity Taboo according to Angela Carter

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Abstract This paper analyses Angela Carter's desecrating tendency to taboo-breaking in thematic and formal terms. By referring to her short-fiction production and focusing on "John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*", I intend to show how gender/patriarchal and genre/authorial taboos are similarly broken and transmuted into daringly subversive outcomes. In line with her feminist agenda and postmodern transformism, Carter superbly challenges, sabotages, violates, de- and re-constructs traditionally codified sexual and gender taboos by mimicking such reversals through new narrative solutions. If diversity, multiplicity and change guarantee the continuity of life, incest can easily metaphorise a taboo relationship based on repetition of the identical, sameness, and immobility, to be finally transformed, if not avoided. Consistent with many of her female characters' incestuous relationships with parents or siblings, Carter also establishes incest-like relationships with previous authors and narrative discourses, which she predatorily appropriates. Carter's resulting narrative testifies to the fact that taboos must be first experienced to be eventually broken. It is in the dialectic between rule and infraction, taboo and its violation that Carter's writing is rooted, constantly looking for borders to be crossed.

Keywords Angela Carter. John Ford. Incest. The Identical. Postmodern I-identity. Code/Genre/Gender-Rewriting. Transformism.

Summary 1 Literary Incests: Introducing the Topic. – 2 Coupling with John Ford. – 3 Recodifying the Identical.



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Tell me, ye learned, [...] Shall we for ever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another? Are we for ever to be twisting, and untwisting the same rope? for ever in the same track - for ever at the same pace?

(Laurence Sterne,
The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy)

1 Literary Incests: Introducing the Topic

The universality of the incest taboo in human societies has been widely considered¹ and there is a wealth of scientific evidence that taboos are “successful ecological practices that enhance biodiversity and sustainable development” (Osei 2006, 42). Differentiation is centrally important to preserving life, and respecting the incest taboo is intended to ensure (bio)diversity. In socio-anthropological terms, this taboo marks a boundary between parents and descendants, partly in order to accept the troubling extraneousness of the Other, or what lies outside familial space. But one can also read the incest taboo in literary terms, since literature’s ability to voice marginalized and aberrant discourses, implicitly and explicitly, makes it an “extraordinarily privileged medium for the depiction and analysis of phenomena such as taboo and transgression” (Horlacher 2010, 16).²

In her “Introduction” to *Shaking a Leg*, Cooke speaks of Angela Carter’s narratives as “taboo-breaking” (Cooke 2013, XVI), and in her “Afterword” to *Fireworks* Carter herself (1996e, 549-50) considers incest and cannibalism³ as the great themes of the Gothic tradition of Poe, which is also her own. Yet in her writings, while cannibalism is always condemned, incest may play different roles that variously concern the concept of the identical.⁴ This focus on sameness is also voiced through the looking-glass motif (which frequently functions as a kind of ‘looking-gloss’), but incest is a constantly recurring trope. The short stories dealing with the incest taboo include: “The Execu-

¹ Seminal early studies on the subject are: *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) and *Totem and Taboo* (1913) by Sigmund Freud; *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949).

² Also cf. Miller, Leeson 2018. As concerns the relationship between taboo themes and the fantastic, cf. Todorov 1973.

³ On incest and cannibalism as one of the principal Gothic features in Carter’s short fiction, cf. Mulvey-Roberts 2019, 1-16.

⁴ According to Snaith, when dealing with incest, Carter mainly adopts and exploits a Western/Christian perspective, which differs from an Oriental and less depreciative one (2019, 204-22). Nevertheless, maybe due to Carter’s two-and-a-half years in Japan and her consequent contact with this Eastern perspective, in her writings she also refers to the incest taboo in less tragic terms than we might expect as Christian Westerner readers, thus spurring us to cross Occidental cultural and ideological boundaries.

tioner's Beautiful Daughter" (featuring a double brother-sister and father-daughter relationship: an executioner beheads his own son for his incestuous relationship with his sister, but he himself commits the same crime against her and enjoys what the law prohibits: "only the executioner himself, because there is nobody to cut off his head, dare [...] upon his blood-bespattered block make love to his beautiful daughter"; Carter 1996a, 46);⁵ "Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest" (two twins, brother and sister, discover individual differences through incestuous likeness: "this new awareness of one another's shapes [...] had made them less twinned, less indistinguishable from one another"; 1996b, 76);⁶ "The Snow Child" (telling of a count's rape of his dead though fictive daughter: "Weeping, the Count got off his horse, unfastened his breeches and thrust his virile member into the dead girl"; 1996c, 230-1);⁷ "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" (in which Carter hints at Poe's incestuous feelings for both his mother and his 13-year-old cousin-wife Virginia: "Imagine the sinless children lying in bed together! The pity of it! For did she not come to him stiffly armoured in taboos [...] ?"; 1996d, 322).⁸ Among her novels, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) features an incestuous sister-brother relationship that also signifies a rebellious act against patriarchal law, represented by Uncle Philip.⁹ The radio play "Vampirella" (1976) similarly touches on this taboo ("our sons turned to our daughters and knew them and cast new coins from the old moulds"; 1997, 13), as does an essay entitled "Through a Text Backwards: The Resurrection of the House of Usher" (1988), in which Carter inverts Poe's story and hints at the twins' probable and deadly incestuous relationship, made worse by the fact that they are also identical ("A man and a woman are clasped together on the floor, [...] locked in what seems to be either the fatal embrace of a love suicide or else a post-coital slumber so profound it is as good as death [...] they are twins, each the fatal double of the other"; 2013b, 593-4).

5 The short story belongs to the collection *Fireworks* (1974). Bijon reads this story by relating the concepts of the incest taboo and anamorphosis, and focuses on the paradoxical function of the mask worn by the executioner (2022, 173-86).

6 The short story is contained in *Fireworks*.

7 The short story is included in the collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and recalls the version of *Snow White* as presented in the Grimm brothers' 1810 manuscript: the girl's mother is an evil queen who makes her pick up roses and abandons her in the forest, where she is rescued by her father instead of a prince, with no apparent suggestion of incest (cf. Grimm, Grimm 2015).

8 The short story comes from the collection *Black Venus* (1985).

9 Wiskers interprets this incestuous attitude as a way of fighting back against male patriarchal power (2019, 183-203). Regarding the relation between the incest taboo and the Gothic framework of *The Magic Toyshop*, cf. Butter, Eitelmann 2010.

In short, in her macrotext, Carter deals with incest in two ways:

1. as an abhorrent replication of what is alike that is to be avoided, recalling the belief of anthropologists that this taboo pursues the “avoidance of the identical’ [...], that is ‘the proscription of associating [...] two terms that are in some crucial respect considered the same’”; (Héritier quoted in Horlacher 2010, 9)
2. as a potentially powerful tool to be wielded against patriarchal conventions, which also implies “yoking together opposites”. (Wiskers 2006, 193)

Focusing on the former aspect and the short story “John Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*” (1988),¹⁰ I intend to show how gender(patriarchal) and genre(authorial) taboos are similarly first broken, then respected and transmuted into subversive outcomes, both thematically and formally. By revisiting and rewriting the Jacobean play, Carter superbly challenges and sabotages traditionally codified sexual and gender taboos in part by adopting new narrative solutions that formally mimic these fertile reversals. If diversity and change guarantee the continuity of biological life, then incest can function as an appropriate literary metaphor for a taboo relationship based on the repetition and reproduction of the identical. But sameness is deadly (as in Freud’s concept of repetition as an inertial death-drive) and must ultimately be contaminated and transformed by otherness.¹¹ Mirroring many of her female characters’ incestuous relationships, Carter herself establishes figuratively incestuous relationships with her literary fathers and their narrative discourses, with which her prose openly couples and which she cannibalizes and ultimately alchemizes. On the levels of both narrated content and narrating form, Carter’s narrative often testifies to the fact that this taboo must first be violated so that it can ultimately be respected. Nonetheless, this short story peculiarly shows that her writing is rooted in a dialectic between rule and infraction, taboo and violation, constantly seeking borders to be crossed. Carter thus presents a postmodern concept of formation of both individual and aesthetic identity which reuses Western cultural and literary models in highly critical and parodic terms, situating herself, as Acosta states, at a “feminist/postmodern crossroad” (1999, 16), where criticism of patriarchy joins with that of representation, confronting issues of both gender and genre according to a transformative and deconstructive agenda.

10 This short story was first published in the magazine *Granta* and then in the posthumous anthology *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* (1993).

11 Concerning the role of art in opposing sameness, cf. Connor’s considerations on Deleuze’s criticism of Freud’s idea of repetition as the sheer replicability of the alike, and the claim that the French thinker “sees the lifting of servitude to the Same as a revolutionary liberation. Art has an important part to play in this liberation. Art depends upon repetitions of various kinds, but can never itself be reduced to mere repetition” (Connor 2006, 9).

2 Coupling with John Ford

My aim here is to narrow the focus, illustrating the strong bond between the thematized incest taboo and the parallel likeness taboo on the formal level, with its implied authorial and ideological issues. The short story “John Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*”¹² permits of such a reading for its peculiarly exemplary nature. This text both thematizes the incest taboo and the connected issue of sameness related to the development of self-identity, or “I-identity” (Neumeier 1996, 142), and simultaneously mimics that very issue in formal terms as it is itself grounded in the repetition of the alike in its replication of Ford’s Jacobean theatrical brother-sister incest.¹³ At the same time, it also entails diversification, which produces newness and transforms it into an intertextual mould as, through the very act of re-writing Ford’s theatrical incest taboo, Carter attempts to free text and authorship from the yoke of similarity in terms of both genre and gender. She does so by using this specific sexual motif, for which Ford’s play provides a highly appropriate source.

Carter’s short story is a hybrid hypertext created through a complex intertextual and intermedial dynamics. It is based on a stratified hypotext consisting of the original 1633 tragedy by the playwright John Ford and an imagined film script attributed to the modern US director John Ford (henceforth F1 and F2 respectively). The result is a syncopated¹⁴ “narrativized account” (Ryan-Sautour 2011 [online])¹⁵ that also implies a shift from a seventeenth-century male authorship to a twentieth-century female one, and that can be defined, repeating Falzon’s use of Pasolini’s formula, as a “*sceno-testo*”: a literary work that is autonomous despite its cinematic features (Falzon 2002, 112; italics in the original). Though brief, the short story forms a composite space in which, through contamination, variation and demythologizing practices,¹⁶ Carter stresses the postmodern concept of iden-

¹² All quotations from this story are from Carter 1993, henceforth JFPW followed by the page number(s) after the quotations in the text.

¹³ For an analysis focusing on the tragedy’s forbidden love and clandestine marriage in relation to contemporary political social and religious discourses, and considered in light of Ford’s debt to, and revision of, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, cf. Cleland 2021, 134-42. On Carter’s rewriting, cf. also Papetti 2000.

¹⁴ Cf. Houlahan 2007.

¹⁵ Also cf. Ryan-Sautour (2019) on applying the “screen idea”, as conceived by Macdonald (2013), to JFPW’s “stage idea”, reading it as a deliberate experimentation by Carter.

¹⁶ Gass grounds Carter’s demythologizing attitude and rejection of critical attempts to read her work as related to myth on the fact that the writer identified “myth with the rhetoric of oppression” (1994, 7). As concerns Carter’s idea of myth, cf. also her own “Notes from the Front Line” (2013a, 45-53), Katsavos’s interview (1994) and Ryan-Sautour’s consideration on Carter’s dismantling of the Hollywood myth by adopting “the ironic position of the film writer” from within a narrative structure (2011, 3).

tity as an open and changeable space contrasting with the notion of sameness as a *reductio ad unum*, effectively represented by incest. Carter's use of the incest taboo as a marker of likeness is compelling because she develops it simultaneously on the levels of plot and form. She juxtaposes the incestuous act with the generative act of literary creation which, by contrast, counters the incest taboo by introducing diversity, thus avoiding the replication of the identical. Within the story, identity-sameness and difference-otherness are interwoven as features of both theme and text. Just as the development of the female protagonist's identity depends on abandoning incestuous similarity in favour of diversity, so Carter's narrative and authorship are grounded in exposure to difference and multiplicity. The character and the author recognize and detach themselves from the codified mystifications of patriarchal ideologies, so that the protagonist's metamorphosis parallels that of its author, albeit only partially. If, as Munford states, Carter's "textual investment [is] in male-centred frameworks" (2006, 12), one can also accept Davison's interpretation, namely that "she does not necessarily care for respectful, legitimate transmission or indeed acquiring the legitimating literary authority achieved by precise copying" (2016, 213).

To understand how likeness explodes into a "differential plurality" (Falzon 2002, 154; Author's transl.) implicating content, code and author, I will consider the levels of content and form separately.

2.1 Plotting with John Ford

The plot deals with likeness under various guises: 1. the repetition of the same in the form of incest between siblings, leading to a maternity that epitomizes the reproduction of the identical; 2. the double and homonymous male authorship of the two John Fords; 3. the replication of a patriarchal perspective in that F1's play represents the woman as a passive object of male desire and action, while F2's movie script represents the Wild West colonial myth of conquering the land and the woman alike, implying a two-way colonization: Western historical colonialism (from Europe to America), Hollywood cultural-and-media colonialism (from America to Europe). The original incestuous plot of the play remains largely unchanged in the story, but Carter grafts some innovations onto it.

The spatio-temporal setting changes from seventeenth-century Old World Parma to the nineteenth-century New World American prairie. The number of protagonists is drastically reduced to two families: one consisting of father, brother and sister; the other of father, mother and son. Except when the short story faithfully reproduces the tragedy, the protagonists' names also change: Giovanni becomes Johnny and An-

nabella Annie-Belle.¹⁷ Carter introduces other characters such as the dying mother, the male personification of Death and the female personification of America, whose original linguistic plurality is reduced to English alone: “the language that silences the babble of this continent’s multitude of tongues” (JFPW, 21), thus showing how the colonisers’ tongue replicates itself and further confirming the yoke of the identical on another level, both linguistic and ideological.

The story’s characters present slight differences with respect to their dramatic counterparts. Johnny lacks Giovanni’s boldness and rhetorical ability but he, similarly, never repents for breaking the incest taboo. His firm belief in sameness leads him to identify with his sister: not to possess her is to not exist, so that he will ultimately decide to kill both her and himself. The Minister is the only representative of religion, in contrast to the two in the play of F1. His wife is Carter’s invention and combines Soranzo’s verbal and physical violence with the Cardinal’s verbal aggressiveness. Although in the story (with the exception of the title) Carter never replicates the Cardinal’s pronouncement that concludes the play (“’tis pity she’s a whore”, Ford 1997, 5.6.160), the concept is taken up through variations put into the mouth of the Minister’s wife: “’Bitch! Whore!’ said the Minister’s wife and struck Annie-Belle a blow across the mouth that started her nose bleeding” (JFPW, 33); “his mother wanted to murder her and refused to get the breakfast for this prostitute” (36); “The repentant harlot” (40). The Minister’s wife allows one to see Carter’s different treatment of the male sphere, to which she ascribes gentleness. Conversely, in the hypotext, Annabella’s authentic feelings reveal the extreme degradation of her social context and its patriarchal and religious authority; she submits to it, thus also remaining entangled in sameness, be it expressed by incest and the resulting pregnancy or by the repetition of a male, patriarchal ideology.

Maintaining only the incestuous storyline and isolating it in the space of the wide prairie allows Carter to justify the unavoidability of the siblings’ centripetal and claustrophobic bond¹⁸ while simultaneously stressing the possibility of an alternative and sincere relation-

¹⁷ “In the old play, one John Ford called them Giovanni and Annabella; the other John Ford, in the movie, might call them Johnny and Annie-Belle” (JFPW, 21). The names of other characters, such as Annie-Belle’s husband, are not given; he is generally called “young husband”.

¹⁸ In both the play and the story, the condemnation of the incestuous act is somehow justified, albeit minimally: in the tragedy, the authenticity of the siblings’ love compensates for the corruption of society; in the narrative it is the spatial, relational and emotional solitude that justifies the breaking of the taboo, which is the only possible form of love and tool for identity formation. Where no otherness can be known, the relationship with the identical is the only viable way: “we were alone together under the vast sky that made us scared and so we clung together and what happened, happened [...] the most natural love of all” (JFPW, 35-6).

ship with a different man, contrasting with the self-interest motivating Annabella's marriage to Soranzo. Unlike Annabella, and despite being similarly impregnated by her brother, Carter's Annie-Belle wants to interrupt the replication of similarity, and thus incest too, by behaving differently. This diversity and duplicity are inscribed in her very name, composed of two parts as if to represent two different forms of femininity. She starts as a traditional woman who cares for her menfolk, even to the point of sexually feeding Johnny. But then she begins to develop a new individual and social identity, rejecting incest by opening herself up to differentiation, namely to another man. Finally, Annie-Belle differs from Annabella because she develops an awareness of the dangers involved in replicating likeness and, indeed, admits that she has never really known a man because her brother was identical, not other. She tells her husband: "I never properly knowed no young man before", and thinks: "she did not consider her brother in this new category of 'young men', he was herself" (JFPW, 35). Through the taboo act and her repentance, she realizes that the development of self-identity can only begin from the encounter with otherness. Only in the distance implied by alterity are (self-)knowledge and renewal possible: "when she looked at her husband, she saw, not herself, but someone who might, in time, grow even more precious" (JFPW, 36); "she found out she had sinned only when he offered his forgiveness, and, from her repentance, a new Annie-Belle sprang up" (35). This awareness questions all previous issues of self-identity development related to the incest taboo, which is effectively signalled by the mirror motif: the siblings' first transgression is marked by the breaking of a mirror in whose fragments they do not see the possibility of differentiation but only the similarity of their faces, as if they were one: "their round, blond, innocent faces that, superimposed upon one another, would fit at every feature, their faces, all at once the same face" (JFPW, 24). Incest as replication of likeness is also strongly underlined by some textual symmetries, such as the lexical repetition of "log cabin", informing the reader of the siblings' sexual intercourse that takes place in a log cabin, under a quilt made with the very same log cabin technique by their own mother, further delimiting the action within an exclusively familial perimeter: "they [...] slept together in the log cabin under the patchwork quilt made in the 'log cabin' pattern by their mother" (JFPW, 27). At last, Annie-Belle deliberately decides to escape from this "entirely self-contained heaven of repetition, identity, [...] seen as perverse by society and potentially dangerous for the self" (Wiskers 2006, 192) and, unlike Annabella, she will be able to oppose her brother's love explicitly: "'Never! It's wrong. It's a sin'. But, worse than that, she said: 'I don't want to', and she meant it, she knew she must not or else her new life [...] would be utterly destroyed" (JFPW, 40). Annie-Belle's husband also develops an awareness that differentiates him from both Soranzo and

the story's male figures inscribed by Carter in a negative paradigm (such as Johnny, his father, Death).

Annie-Belle and her husband realize that the only escape from sameness lies in differential distance, and therefore leave for California. But this new and positive distance, symbolized by the rails intended to take them away from alikeness, is nullified by the old and familiar distance that Johnny is simultaneously travelling by horse to reach them and shoot them and himself. Therefore, despite the variations with respect to the hypotext, the story ends with the victory of identity, condemning Annie-Belle to remain imprisoned in the original incest taboo plot.

2.2 Reformulating John Ford

While Carter largely duplicates F1's plot, she definitively changes the form, opening up theatre to the narrative and cinematic codes. The story begins by replicating in its own title that of the play and by providing an extradiegetic explanatory note:

John Ford (1586 c.-1639). English dramatist of the Jacobean period. His tragedy, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, was published in 1633. [...].
John Ford (1895-1973). American film-maker. Filmography includes: *Stagecoach* (1938); *My Darling Clementine* (1946); *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949). (JFPW, 20)¹⁹

Hence, the beginning implies both similarity and difference since the title and the note establish a link with the dramatic hypotext while simultaneously modifying it: the identity of 'John Ford' provided by the title is split, by the note, into two – the dramatist and the director. This homonymy epitomizes the incest taboo interpreted as a reproduction of the alike. The siblings' perception of themselves as a single identity compares to that experienced by the reader in regard to the story's John Ford as a fusion of F1 and F2. Nevertheless, against the background of the seemingly parasitical sameness suggested by the title, diversity emerges and likeness is confronted by otherness. The dynamics between similarity and alterity is guaranteed as Carter develops the plot by interweaving the short story's narrative prose with F1's dramatic verse and F2's film script prose. The result is a palimpsest structure that combines: the F1 historical

¹⁹ Carter also provides a final metamedial note, matching the initial one and focusing explicitly on the different medial requirements of the two Ford(s): "The Old World John Ford made Giovanni cut out Annabella's heart and carry it on stage; [...] The New World John Ford would have no means of representing this scene on celluloid" (JFPW, 44).

model, the F2 fictitious adaptation, and the re-write by Carter who ultimately defines her own authorship by re-inscribing it upon F1's and F2's authorships.

The inception of the story connects to the past as it recalls a conventional fairy-tale beginning, while also immediately presenting American otherness: "There was a rancher" (JFPW, 20). The reader soon faces an increasing heterogeneity of codes and genres, mixed in a way that is both explicit, when graphically signalled by portions of text signifying different codes and genres, and implicit, when such clues are lacking. The following quote exemplifies the mixture of narrative, theatrical and cinematic passages in a fourfold sequence related to a triple authorship (film script/F2, narrative/Carter, play/F1, narrative/Carter):

Wisconsin, Ohio, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska [...] Oh, those enormous territories! That green vastness, in which anything is possible.

EXTERIOR. PRAIRIE. DAY
(Close up) Johnny and Annie-Belle kiss.
"Love theme" up.
Dissolve.

No. It wasn't like that! Not in the least like that. He put out his hand and touch her wet hair. He was giddy.

ANNABELLA Methinks you are not well.
GIOVANNI Here's none but you and I. I think you love me, sister.
ANNABELLA Yes, you know I do.

And they thought, then, that they should kill themselves, together now, before they did it; they remember tumbling together in infancy, how their mother laughed to see their kisses, their embraces, when they were too young to know they should not do it. (JFPW, 24-5)

In its brevity, the story counters likeness through its plurality of genres and codes, which similarly implies an enunciative multiplicity that breaks the canon by being simultaneously narrative, dramatic and cinematic. These three modalities alternate randomly, forcing readers to follow the plot by adapting their reading and interpretation to this unpredictability with respect to textual typologies and to the linguistic characteristics of the three levels. Besides, the protagonists' voices and thoughts interrelate and interrupt one another, often through an unexpected shift between the names given to them by F1 and F2. What contributes to uniting voices, events and codes

is the story's narrating voice which is omniscient, peculiar and intrusive.²⁰ This voice, readily comparable to the cinematographic voiceover, leads the reader through a metamedial isotopy and reflection²¹ often by using cinematic terminology within the narrative portions to cement the connection between them: "in the movies" (JFPW, 26); "the second lead", "prairie scenario", "celluloid" (28-9); "played out", (43); "She wore a yellow ribbon" (40, which is the title of one of F2's movies cited in the initial note). Sometimes this narrative voice also opposes what is stated by one of the other codes, as when, after the incestuous kiss has been described in the film script mode, the voice affirms in its own narrative terms: "No. It wasn't like that! Not in the least like that" (24). This voice makes its presence, its generative and despotic role clear, raising the reader's (meta)textual and ideological awareness. It is Carter's use of intermedial potentialities and ability to cross medial borders, by also negotiating between them, which allows for "ventriloquial" exchanges between its "intertextual counterpart[s]" (Ryan-Sautour 2011, 5, 7), namely between the different cinematic, theatrical and narrative voices of the characters and the authors.²²

3 Recodifying the Identical

Through a "schizoid text" (Acosta 1999, 16) which gives material expression to its own intertextual and composite identity, Carter's story ultimately counters its hypotext's reaffirmation of the dominant ideology and the persistence of likeness which seems to be formally

²⁰ The occasional but authoritative use that the narrative voice makes of the first person stresses its presence and central position, thus equating it with the theatrical Giovanni, whose presence is expressed by performative devices such as pronouns and deictics. The story's first person also allows the narrative voice to create an ambiguous proximity to readers: it sometimes merges with the reader into 'we', sharing its doubts and ruminations, or gives the reader space for his/her questions but immediately answers them: "Did she [mother] die of the loneliness of the prairies? Or was it anguish that killed her [...] when she came to this emptiness? Neither. She did die of the pressure of that vast sky" (JFPW, 20); "I do not know what else she thought [...] I think she did not think so far" (23); "It is the boy [...] who is the most mysterious to me [...] I imagine him mute" (25). On this voice as a mark of Carter's stylistic "evolution" towards a "female narrator, presenting the world of the text from a female subject position" cf. Acosta 1999, 15.

²¹ Cf. Ryan-Sautour 2019.

²² Besides the dialogic and visual aspects associated with cinema and theatre respectively, Ryan-Sautour also considers the short story's commitment to radio in that "it points to potential images, and draws upon the reader to create the scene", thus testifying to the "three-dimensionality" (2011, 4) Carter herself associated with her radio plays. In her "Preface" to the collection of four radio plays, *Come Unto These Yellow Sands*, the writer states that "[i]t is this necessary open-endedness of the medium [...] that gives radio story-telling its real third dimension" (1985, 7).

attested by the fact that the very beginning and very end of the play echo each other through sonic repetition, as if they were two rhyming half-lines forming a single, regular iambic verse, despite the textual distance separating them: “Dispute no more” (Ford 1997, 1.1.1); “’tis pity she’s a whore” (5.6.160). In JFPW, by contrast, on the formal and authorial levels, the development of self-identity is successful because form succeeds in disempowering sameness more palpably than content. This hybrid re-write counters and invalidates the plot’s incestuous act of repetition of sameness through an “intersemiotic bricolage” (Falzon 2002, 114; Author’s transl.)²³ that involves both genre and gender and entails a multiple metamorphosis: from theatre to a narrative that combines both theatre and cinema; from the hypotextual male authorship of both the dramatist and the film-maker John Fords to the hypertextual female authorship of Carter who simultaneously appropriates both by intertextually alchemising a traditionally male authorship. By assembling different codes, this short story posits the self-identity process as stretching between replication and difference in that, as Rushdie observes, Carter “opens an old story for us, like an egg, and finds the new story, the now-story”²⁴ (1996, XV). This is how she defamiliarizes at the expense of incestuous form: she couples with the alike (the patriarchal canon)²⁵ to subvert it in light of her “idea of embracing and performing – never-ending – change” (Pasolini 2016, 15), thus leading to the re-signification of genre, authorial and gender issues in postmodern and voraciously intertextual terms. Carter demolishes the replicability of sameness, as she herself has said, by “putting new wine in old bottles and, in some cases, old wine in new bottles” (2013a, 53). This is what this short story exemplifies through the incest taboo and this is how, in Atwood’s words, Carter “opened imaginative doors and said, ‘this is possible’” (2018).

If one considers that both Rushdie and Atwood stress openness when discussing Carter, and that for Carter herself whoredom is a metaphor for openness to vital diversity and renewal, then we could claim, in conclusion, “’Tis [not] Pity She’s a Whore” (‘she’ being both character and author). This “vitality of otherness” (Webb 2016) will be greatly celebrated in *Wise Children* (1991), in keeping with the fact

23 Carter herself uses this term when talking about her own writing: “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*” (quoted in Haffenden 1985, 92; ellipsis and italics in the original).

24 This reference to “egg” curiously and markedly contrasts with what the incestuous executioner of Carter’s aforementioned story does (“The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter”): he opposes the renewal of life not only by violating his own daughter, but also by perversely eating “only [...] those eggs precisely on the point of blossoming into chicks” (1996a, 43).

25 Also cf. Davison 2016.

that in her last novel the incest taboo borders on a playful ambiguity because most legitimate familial ties are muddled. The result is a joyful celebration of pluralism closely related to the disappearance of fatherly responsibility, and to a strong presence of womanly creativity that further testifies to Carter's female²⁶ alchemic transformation of gender and genre by both violating and respecting the incest taboo.

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26 Carter's idea that language is (male)gendered implies, as she states in an interview, that "there is a bias of discourse which usually does presuppose the interest of the organizing gender" (Katsavos 1994, 17).

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