



## Journal of the Short Story in English

Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

51 | Autumn 2008

Theatricality in the Short Story in English

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#### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/918>

ISSN: 1969-6108

#### Publisher

Presses universitaires d'Angers

#### Printed version

Date of publication: 1 December 2008

ISSN: 0294-04442

#### Electronic reference

Julie Sauvage, « “This *Tableau Vivant*... Might be Better Termed a *Nature Morte*”: Theatricality in Angela Carter’s *Fireworks* », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 51 | Autumn 2008, Online since 01 December 2011, connection on 05 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/918>

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# "This Tableau Vivant... Might be Better Termed a Nature Morte": Theatricality in Angela Carter's Fireworks

Julie Sauvage

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- 1 Although she confessed to an early, thwarted vocation for acting and wrote successful radio plays and film scripts,<sup>1</sup> Angela Carter authored only two works for the stage proper, an opera libretto she adapted from Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and a translation of Frank Wedekind's *Lulu*, neither of which have ever been performed.<sup>2</sup> Yet the dramatic quality of her fiction has not escaped detection: "If there is a single theme that appears central to criticism of Carter's writing, that theme must be theatricality," Christina Britzolakis rightly asserts.<sup>3</sup>
- 2 Interestingly enough, when she published her first collection of short stories, entitled *Fireworks*, Angela Carter added an after word specifying that those "short pieces" were not short stories, but "tales." To her, she explained, "formally, the tale differ[ed] from the short story in that it [made] few pretences at the imitation of life":<sup>4</sup>

The tale does not log into everyday experience through a system of imagery derived from subterranean areas behind everyday experience, and therefore the tale cannot betray its readers into a false knowledge of everyday experience (...) Its style will tend to be ornate, unnatural – and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the word as fact. (BYB, 459)
- 3 Such artificiality relates to the sometimes derogatory connotations of 'theatricality,' which can refer to exaggerated, melodramatic and ultimately unbelievable performances. In Carter's writing, though, it is derived from a dramatization of the narrative that parallels Brecht's epic theatre and its well-known alienation effects. As Linden Peach has pointed out,<sup>5</sup> the German playwright obviously exerted great influence on the British authoress: he even makes a cameo appearance in her last novel, in the guise of a "runty little German chap" exiled in Hollywood.<sup>6</sup> Besides, during her two-year stay in Japan,

Carter had ample opportunity to discover the Japanese stage, which was certainly predominant in her aesthetic views, just as the traditional Chinese theatre had been influential in Brecht's theorization.

- 4 I shall start from Carter's definition of the tale as contrasted with the short story to determine the part played by theatricality in her transformation of the genre. Focussing first on the unreality effects she creates by referring to painting and *tableaus*, I shall then examine her theatrical handling of the body, which will lead me to tackle the dramatization of narrative voices in *Fireworks* and its consequences in terms of reading.
- 5 "It was midnight - I chose my times and set my scenes with the precision of the born artist" (BYB 68), declares the narrator of "Flesh and the Mirror." Throughout the collection, similar metafictional comments repeatedly point to the artificiality of the scenery, which tends to be described as a stage set. Such remarks only bear out what the reader had already gathered from the many allusions to paintings and sculptures peppering the whole collection. One only needs to find mountains "sprouting jags as sharp and unnatural as those a child outlines with his crayons" in "The Loves of Lady Purple" (BYB 41), or the waves "mould[ing] the foreshore into (...) curvilinear tumuli like the sculptures of Arp" in "The Smile of Winter" (BYB 55) to realize such pictorial terms present even the most natural landscapes as artefacts. Consequently, as one turns the pages, various settings seem to pop up like the pictures in the child's book mentioned by the narrator of "A Souvenir of Japan": "a book with pictures which are cunningly made out of paper cut-outs so that, when you turn the page, the picture springs up in the three stylized dimensions of a backdrop in Kabuki" (BYB 30). In "Flesh and the Mirror," though, the device fails in spite of the narrator's efforts and she is left to lament the gap that separates her scenery from reality: "So I attempted to rebuild the city according to the blueprint of my imagination as a backdrop to the plays in my puppet theatre, but it sternly refused to be rebuilt. I was only imagining it had been rebuilt" (69).
- 6 Yet, even in this instance, the parallel remains clear: the setting of the tale is supposed to retain the artificial aspect of a paper cut-out and the stylised quality of the painted sets on the traditional Japanese stage. No "reality effects" are to be found in *Fireworks*, at least not in the sense Barthes defined them in his famous article,<sup>7</sup> that is, as an attempt to do away with the signified in order to conflate signifier and referent. On the contrary, Carter will often try to foreground the signifier and cast a doubt on the very existence of a referent, thus resorting to a type of theatricality that can be equated with artificiality and prevent any suspension of disbelief.
- 7 In the last paragraph of "The Smile of Winter," the narrator explicitly evokes the backdrop she has been depicting:
 

Do not think I do not realize what I am doing. I am making a composition using the following elements: the winter beach; the winter moon; the ocean; the women; the pine trees; the riders; the driftwood; the shells; the shapes of darkness and the shapes of water; and the refuse. These are all inimical to my loneliness because of their indifference to it. Out of these pieces of indifference, I intend to represent the desolate smile of winter which, as you must have gathered, is the smile I wear. (BYB 57)
- 8 The landscape finally turns out to be either an inscape or a portrait, and the short story itself is summed up through an enumeration of significant images. Carter seems to draw the tale towards the descriptive, developing its pictorial aspect first and foremost,

sometimes at the expense of the narrative itself. With its inexistent plot, "The Smile of Winter" consists of a series of stills or, as the narrator puts it, of "still lives."

But sometimes, the fragile habitations of unpainted wood; and the still lives, or *natures mortes*, of rusting water pumps and withered chrysanthemums in backyards; and the discarded fishing boats pulled on the sand and left to rot away – sometimes, the whole village looks forsaken. (...) Everything has put on the desolate smile of winter. (BYB 54)

- 9 The *nature morte* verges on the vanitas subgenre as rust and chrysanthemums, especially when fading, are redolent of death. That Carter relates her theatrical sets to still lives, which appears as a locus of tension in Western painting, entails a twofold consequence. As regards realism and representation, first, it may be quite strange to foreground its artificiality, since it is considered to be one of the most mimetic pictorial genres. Yet, in still lives and Carterian descriptions alike, the symbolical value of objects counterbalances the "reality effect" they may otherwise produce. As a matter of fact, symbolical details proliferate in the collection. In his book about objects in fiction, Laurent Lepaludier notes that objects are often "overdetermined" in narrative.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, as Susan Hunter Brown has cogently shown through an experiment carried out with two groups of subjects,<sup>9</sup> short story readers tend to interpret details, including objects, symbolically – unlike novel readers who are content to consider them as "useless," like the "seemingly useless" descriptions which create reality effects according to Barthes. That Carter explicitly chooses traditional Japanese backdrops as a model only reinforces the tendency to envisage objects as symbols, which short story readers share with theatre audiences. This is exemplified by the value of mirrors in *Fireworks*, as analysed by Laurent Lepaludier and Liliane Louvel:<sup>10</sup> they can be used by characters, but they also fulfil an intertextual function, evoking the myth of Narcissus or Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*. Besides, they constitute metatextual clues reflecting the structures of stories based on repetitions and doubles, such as "Flesh and the Mirror" or "Reflections," thus raising the question of mimesis and representation. In this respect, they call mostly on the reader's interpretive skills and reinforce alienation effects.
- 10 Secondly, as the oxymoron suggests, *still life* combines life and death, movement and stillness. In this respect, enhancing the pictorial qualities of the tale or short story allows Carter to break off its narrative flow. "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter," for instance, opens on a capital execution scene:
- (...) the *tableau vivant* before us is suffused with the sepia tints of an old photograph and nothing within it moves. The intent immobility of the spectators, wholly absorbed as they are in the performance of their hieratic ritual, is scarcely that of living things and this *tableau vivant* might be better termed a *nature morte* for the mirthless carnival before us is a celebration of death (...). (BYB 35)
- 11 Playfully setting into relief their opposition by resorting to their French appellations, the author also refers to the common origin of *nature morte* and *tableau vivant*, a theatrical genre in which actors would stand motionless on stage, imitating a famous painting. Its contradictions recall those of the still life genre since it was developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an era when both audiences and theorists advocated a more realistic theatre, while it substituted stillness to life and the imitation of paintings to the imitation of reality. Its paradoxical theatricality thus combined artificiality and a sense of suspended time. Angela Carter shows comparable intentions in "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter," as she obviously tries to play "tricks with time,"<sup>11</sup> adding one paragraph later: "Time, suspended like the rain, begins again, slowly" (BYB 35). Narrative time is slow indeed, as

the condemned man's death occurs only one page later in a dramatic slow motion: "The axe falls. The flesh severs. The head rolls" (BYB 36). Full stops break up the scene into three Grand Guignol stills, a theatrical genre also alluded to in the short story (BYB 39).

- 12 By treating settings as painted theatre sets, scenes as tableaux, Angela Carter produces unreality effects in the narrative that parallel the alienation effect Brecht aimed to create on stage. She thus calls on the readers' intellectual abilities rather than on the psychic agency prompting them to believe the stories and identify with the characters. There is more, however, to Carter's tales than brilliant, superficial intellectual games. Her choice of still life as an aesthetic model points to the significance of death in the theatrical effects she draws from the reference to painting, thus revealing deeper concerns. Her extensive use of tableaux, implying that bodies should be *stilled*, also targets the readers' unconscious death drive, thereby appealing to the passive component of their minds.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, she could also be said to adapt Brechtian principles to the narrative, as the German theorist insisted that alienation effects should not suppress the spectators' feelings.
- 13 Painting, to Carter, always exemplifies the interpersonal or social violence that turns people into masterpieces, therefore objects. It points to the dark theatricality of social life which urges human beings to consider others as things while they themselves strike poses as paintings or behave as puppets, thus symbolically sacrificing others as they sacrifice themselves.
- 14 Metaphorically, the executioner is a painter: "He brings one booted foot to rest on the sacrificial altar which is, to him, the canvas on which he exercises his art" (BYB 35). So is the famous Lady Purple who "used her lovers as the canvas on which she executed boudoir masterpieces of destruction. Skins melted with the electricity she generated" (BYB 46). Bodies and skins become the canvases on which the painter *executes* his works, in both senses of the word. Consequently, in "A Souvenir of Japan," tattooing, the art of painting on the surface of the flesh, illustrates the social violence that turns people into objects or signs: "They paint amazing pictures on their skins with awl and gouge, sponging away the blood as they go; a tattooed man is a walking masterpiece of remembered pain" (BYB 33). The tattooed man's body is no longer a mere body, just as the performing actor's body is always a set of signs the audience has to decipher, a substitute for a meaning or even for a picture, in tableaux.<sup>13</sup> According to Georges Banu, the connection between the Japanese theatre aesthetics and painting enhances the dehumanization of its actors. Costumes, he writes, end up "turning into essences," "making the body unreal by submitting it to the topos of painting." In Noh plays especially, they "set the actor up as a statue."<sup>14</sup>
- 15 This form of social violence actually lies at the historical roots of the theatre, which originates in the ritual sacrifice of an animal which, Michel Serres argues, was substituted for a human. After mentioning the etymology of the word "victim" – literally a substitute, he notes the theatre retains its original ambiguity:
- Here is the origin of tragedy, of any kind of theatre or representation generally speaking – the Greek word *tragos* means the goat that is sacrificed as a substitute. On the marble of the altar, who is to die as a substitute for whom? In a theatre, nobody has ever seen anything else than characters mixed with actors, that is, substitutes.<sup>15</sup>
- 16 In *Fireworks*, the executioner also undergoes a similar ordeal as his own face is transformed beyond recognition by the mask he wears:

The close-fitting substance of the mask has become so entirely assimilated to the actual structure of his face that the face itself now seems to possess a party-coloured appearance, as if by nature dual and his face no longer pertains to that which is human as if, when he first put on the hood, he blotted out his own, original face and so defaced himself for ever. Because the hood of office renders the executioner an object. He has become an object who punishes. He is an object of fear. He is the image of retribution. (BYB 36)

- 17 The description of his face – “by nature dual” – is indeed reminiscent of Michel Serre’s analysis of the actor’s ambiguous status as a substitute. Angela Carter even stresses the fact that the executioner is actually a victim in the etymological sense, since the mask obliterates his original face to such an extent that what is left visible is no longer human flesh, but meat:

(...) his blunt-lipped, dark-red mouth and the greyish flesh which surrounds it. Laid out in such an unnerving fashion, these portions of his meat in no way fulfil the expectations we derive from our common knowledge of faces. They have a quality of obscene rawness (...). He, the butcher, might be displaying himself as if he were his own meat. (BYB 36)

- 18 She insistently reminds her readers that human flesh cannot be conceived of as unpainted, unclothed. Bare, unadorned flesh usually verges on still, dead matter, be it animal or mineral. In this perspective, human faces lie half-way between meat and artefacts, and the “Loves of Lady Purple” plays on the essential ambivalence of the costume that turns meat into flesh but might as well turn flesh into inert matter. The puppet called Lady Purple is said to have once been a woman, a famous heartless courtesan, who finally turned into her own marionette. The tale relates how she comes (or comes back) to life after sucking her puppeteer’s blood. Had he not wished to see his creation with her costume on before kissing her goodnight, however, this unfortunate accident could not have occurred – as suggested in the passage where the magnificent dress imparts a new life on the dead wood: “Now she was dressed and decorated, it was as if her dry wood had all at once put out an entire springtime of blossoms for the old man alone to enjoy” (BYB 49). Yet, ironically, her new existence turns out to be a parody of her previous past lives for, in her predicament, she can imagine no other option than heading to the nearest brothel to act out the same scenario all over again. Hence the narrator’s questioning:

(...) had the marionette all the time parodied the living or was she, now living, to parody her own performance as a marionette? Although she was now manifestly a woman, young and beautiful, the leprous whiteness of her face gave her the appearance of a corpse, animated solely by demonic will. (BYB 51)

- 19 The woman may thus be a victim of the puppet’s white mask, all the more so as prostitutes sell “the nameless essence of the idea of woman, a metaphysical abstraction of the female” (BYB 46), which implies they should negate their own bodies, like so many actresses.
- 20 One might even argue that, in Angela Carter's view, any human society consists of a mass of depersonalized puppets. Indeed, her characters are always the objects of the others’ gazes and desires which turn them into images or types, so much so that the narrator of “Flesh and the Mirror” is surprised to see she can still “[act] out of character” (BYB 71). Similarly, through names or situations, readers are encouraged to project literary or mythical types on the short story characters, a process which calls their identity into question. In “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest,” we follow twins, Emile and Madeline, whose relationship undergoes serious transformations while they are walking

to the centre of a tropical forest. They finally find a fabulous tree and, as the young woman tastes one of its fruits before handing it to her brother, the short story ends on a sentence that is pregnant with meaning: "He took the apple; ate; and after that, they kissed" (BYB 67). Obviously, Emile and Madeline are strongly identified to Adam and Eve and readers are encouraged to consider them as the biblical figures' doubles. Yet, their father is a scholar and a botanist, which, combined to the boy's name, certainly recalls Rousseau and his treatise on education, *L'Emile*. Carter's character could then be a double of the French philosopher's ideal pupil. Similarly, Madeline's name may refer to Magdalene the repentant harlot, Eve's counterpart in the New Testament, and to Edgar Allan Poe's Lady Madeline in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Through onomastics, readers are urged to envisage the characters as types and intertextual doubles. In this respect, their experience parallels that of the narrator in "Flesh and the Mirror," when she notices that her lover's features are "blurring, like the underwriting on a palimpsest" (BYB 74).

- 21 As to nameless first person narrators, they constantly enhance the disruption of self inherent in autobiography, a genre that splits the narrative agency into voice and character. They can thus watch themselves performing various roles and sometimes even comment on their own lack of authenticity. In "Flesh and the Mirror," for instance, the narrator watches herself acting, but she also watches herself watching her performing self:

It was as if there were a glass between myself and the world. But I could see myself perfectly well on the other side of the glass (...). But all the time, I was pulling the strings of my own puppet; it was this puppet who was moving about on the other side of the glass. And I eyed the most marvellous adventures with the bored eye of the agent with the cigar watching another audition. I tapped out the ash and asked of events 'What else can you do?' (BYB 69)

- 22 Almost stammering, replete with alliterations, the phrase "I eyed ... with a bored eye" renders a schizoid turn of mind that bears a striking resemblance to Brecht's description of the Chinese actors' performance:

The Chinese show not only the behaviour of people, but also that of actors. They show how, in their own way, actors present people's gestures. For actors translate the language of everyday life into their own language. So that, when watching a Chinese actor, you can see three characters at the same time: one of them is showing, two are shown.<sup>16</sup>

- 23 A single carterian narrator can thus equal a whole Bunraku performance, complete with puppet and puppeteer. Indeed, as the Bunraku genre implies the presence of a chanter who remains off stage yet visible, so Carter's short stories endow the narrative voice with a theatrical function. The Bunraku chanter's powerful voice reaches the audience, drawing their attention to the puppets as he sings the story they are performing. Similarly, Angela Carter's tales purport to retain a dramatic, oral quality and elicit the sense they are *told*.

- 24 In narrative fiction, of course, voices cannot be heard and readers must be content with voice effects. One of the easiest ways to produce them in writing consists in mimicking a conversation by addressing a mysterious "you." The second person pronoun standing for an unknown narratee appears in six tales out of the nine that make up *Fireworks*. Its use occasionally counterbalances alienation effects that readers might otherwise find off-putting, as in "A Souvenir of Japan" when the narrator explains she is too honest to abide by the rules of realism:

At times, I thought I was inventing him as I went along, however, so you will have to take my word for it that we existed. But I do not want to paint our circumstantial portraits (...) so that you are forced to believe in us. I do not want to practice such sleight of hand. (BYB 32)

- 25 The very same argument is put forward by Angela Carter to explain why she conceives of literary realism as inherently deceitful, and why she herself refuses to put such wily devices into practice. When the narrative voices seem to doubt their own existence, though, the second person pronoun remains the readers' only point of reference. This leads them to adopt some very uncomfortable postures, for instance in "Elegy for a Freelance," the last tale in the volume – but definitely not the least since a collection entitled *Fireworks* should be expected to end with an impressive finishing piece.
- 26 Like the two short stories preceding it, "Master" and "Reflections," it is centred on the lethal doubles of fireworks – firearms – and relates the story of several unnamed characters referred to by capital letters. A, B and C are all friends with X, as well as the narrator who never reveals her name, but recounts her story in the first person singular, "I." Juxtaposed to A, B, C and X, "I" seems to lose its pronominal value to become yet another capital letter. At least, it does not look any more remarkable than X which suggests a name crossed off or even X-rated material, so that readers experience the flicker of a doubt when the characters decide to use a Chinese book, the "I Ching" for divination purposes (BYB 101). In this context, "I" is not necessarily a pronoun and when it is, it hardly refers to a person, since the narrator underlines her own emptiness: "(... ) when I met X. That was like finding myself on the edge of an abyss but the vertigo I felt then came from a sense of recognition. This abyss was that of my own emptiness" (BYB 98).
- 27 Besides, if readers have grown accustomed to taking the narratee's stance, the opening sentence of "Elegy for a Freelance" may come as a shock to them: "I remember you as clearly as if you'd died yesterday, though I don't remember you often – usually, I'm far too busy" (BYB 96). They have to realize that the narratee is a dead man, who was killed by the woman now addressing him so impertinently, and that he was a murderer as well.
- 28 Creating voice effects, imitating a dialogue is tantamount to conjuring up a body with its attitudes and movements for a voice evokes the body it originates from, hence its sensuous qualities which Carter systematically enhances through synaesthesia: Lady Purple's is like "fur soaked in honey" (BYB 44). In "Reflections" Anna's voice has a "richly crimson sinuosity," it "pierce[s] the senses of the listener like an arrow in a dream" (BYB 81) whereas the narrator's cries appear as "gobs of light" (BYB 93) in the anti-world of the mirror. As Henri Meschonnic puts it: "You can say a voice is moving, penetrating or caressing. There is gesture in a voice."<sup>17</sup> So much so that Carterian voice effects do create what Brecht called a *gest* or *gestus* – they suggest the narrator's gait or bearing, attitudes and gestures, they conjure up a performance.<sup>18</sup>
- 29 Some of the short stories in *Fireworks* thus bear a double resemblance to dramatic monologues. Indeed, their narrators behave like ventriloquists; discourses and voices are not easily distinguished since they often seem to quote and imitate one another. It becomes difficult to tell who is speaking, whose opinions are voiced, as in the following excerpt from "Elegy for a Freelance": "But I told the commissar about you, once (...). But he said if I wanted absolution, that he was the last person to ask for it and, besides, everything is changed now, and we are not the same" (BYB 96). It is unclear whether the narrator herself considers she has changed, whether she speaks on her own or imitates



the commissar's rather clichéd use of revolutionary rhetoric expressing his problematic view on personal identity.

- 30 Their discourses tend to merge, overlap and sometimes jar. The narrator's description of a love scene with X is thus given a comical counterpoint:

Your flesh defines me. I become your creation. I am your fleshy reflection.  
 ('Libido and false consciousness characterized sexual relations during the last crisis of Capital', says the commissar). (BYB 99)

- 31 Punctuation and typography, with new paragraphs, parentheses and inverted commas, are used almost as musical notations to mark shifts in voices. But their interpretation ultimately depends on the readers and it is difficult to say how they individually handle sentences in capital letters or italics, be they Latin phrases, foreign words or quotations from various discourses or even documents. In "The Loves of Lady Purple," for example, they are faced with a transcription of the handbills the puppeteer has printed off to advertise his show:

*Come and see all that remains of Lady Purple, the famous prostitute and wonder of the East!*  
 A Unique sensation. See how the unappeasable appetites of Lady Purple turned her into the very puppet you see before you, pulled only by the strings of *lust*. Come and see the very doll, the only surviving relic of the shameless Oriental Venus. (BYB 44)

- 32 Italicization suggests emphasis, whereas the exclamation mark, the nominal sentence and the repetition of the imperative "come and see" draw the readers' attention to a rhythm and intonation that evoke a barker's booming voice and dramatic diction. So does the typographical blank, which seems to mark a pause, if not a musical rest, allowing the entertainer to get his breath back. Confusion settles as the text is supposed to be the reproduction of a written flier. However, the voice that resonates off the page seems both to imitate a barker calling out to passers-by and to address readers. The latter are then provided with an extensive account of Lady Purple's performance – a play based on her "*pyrotechnical career* which ended as if it had indeed been a *firework display*, in ashes, desolation and silence" (BYB 47).<sup>19</sup> The parallel between their experience and that of the puppet show audience suggests that *Fireworks* is to end in silence as well.

- 33 All the short stories in the collection exemplify what Henri Meschonnic calls a "dramatization of the printed page"<sup>20</sup> which draws readers into the text and potentially prompts them to experience various sensations. In this perspective, typographical blanks play an important role and the critic remarks that they are not silences, or rather that the silences they visually render have a meaning, that they refer to a context and belong to the realm of speech.<sup>21</sup> As such, they evoke postures and movements, even under the strangest circumstances. The passage where the narrator tries to come back through the mirror in "Reflections" is thus framed by typographical blanks that give it the appearance of free verse. The visual, typographical disruption reflects the schizophrenic situation the narrator's mind and body are trapped in as he tries to escape through a looking-glass, fleeing from a world ruled by a knitting hermaphrodite figure:

She dropped her knitting as I crashed through the glass  
 through the glass, glass splintered around me driving  
 unmercifully into my face  
 through the glass, glass splintered  
 through the glass –  
 half through (BYB 94)

- 34 Growing indentations both reflect the narrator's movement through the mirror and suggest a gasping for breath, a syncopated diction further emphasized by a dash that also

materializes the surface of the looking-glass on the written page. The theatrical dimension of Angela Carter's tales clearly appears in the way she uses the printed page to create and combine visual and aural effects, to conjure up stances, voices and intonations that ultimately define meaning.

- 35 Angela Carter's virtuoso handling of narrative voices and her general conception of theatricality certainly owe much to her experience of the Japanese stage, combined to her reading of Brecht. Yet, for all the emphasis she lays on refusing realism, she is not concerned only with alienation effects and she uses theatricality to make her readers walk a tight rope between intellectual games and unconscious drives. The aural and even oral quality her tales possess mostly appeal to conflicting psychological agencies in the readers' minds, pointing to a dialectics of identification and alienation. Typography draws the readers' attention to the printed page, to the book they are holding, but it also dramatizes the narrative voice, thus promoting reader identification – which finally proves uncomfortable and thus creates alienation effects. If Angela Carter definitely ignores, indeed rebuffs the reader who would believe in the story and existence of the characters, such frustration is fully compensated for both by unconscious and hyper-conscious games and by the pleasure of directing one's own performances of the text. She turns her readers' minds into so many small stages with sets, actors and music. In such inner theatres, they can both direct and perform her polyphonic tales with the diction, rhythm and tessitura they may select according to their tastes and fantasies.

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## NOTES

1. Angela Carter, "Notes from the Frontline" in J. Uglow (ed.) *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings* (London: Vintage, 1998) 41.
2. See Susannah Clapp's introduction to *The Curious Room: Collected Dramatic Works* (London: Vintage, 1997) vii-x.
3. Christina Britzolakis, "Angela Carter's Fetishism" in T. Broughton and J. Brystow (eds.) *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter* (London: Longman, 1997) 43.
4. Angela Carter, *Burning Your Boats: The Collected Angela Carter, Stories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995) 459. Further references will appear parenthetically in the text.
5. Linden Peach, *Angela Carter* (London: Macmillan, 1998) 140, 168.
6. Angela Carter, *Wise Children* (London: Vintage, 1991) 130.
7. Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect" in Richard Howard (trans.) *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1989) 141-48.
8. Laurent Lepage, *L'Objet et le récit de fiction* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes 2004) 39.
9. Susan Hunter Brown, "Tess and 'Tess': An Experiment in Genre", *Modern Fiction Studies* 28 (1982): 25-44.
10. See Laurent Lepage, "Passages du miroir et miroir du passage dans 'Reflections' d'Angela Carter", *idem*, 188-206, and Liliane Louvel, "Le miroir érotique: 'Flesh and the Mirror' in *Texte/Image: Images à lire, textes à voir* (Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes 2002) 78-85.

11. See Carter's "Preface to *Come Unto These Yellow Sands*," in *The Curious Room* (London: Vintage, 1997) 497.
12. I am referring to Vincent Jouve's theory of reading as expounded in *L'effet-personnage dans le roman* (Paris: P.U.F, 1998) and I am indebted to Michelle Ryan-Sautour who first used this fruitful approach to define the type of reading Angela Carter's works require in her PhD thesis, *Le Jeu didactique et l'effet sur le lecteur dans The Passion of New Eve (1977) et Nights at the Circus (1984) d'Angela Carter* (Université d' Angers, 2000).
13. Such dehumanization it to be found at the core of Japanese social relationships according to the narrator of "A Souvenir of Japan" who remarks: "This country has elevated hypocrisy to the highest style. To look at a samurai, you would not know him for a murderer, or a geisha for a whore. The magnificence of such objects hardly pertains to the human. They live in a world of icons (...)" (BYB 33).
14. Georges Banu, *L'Acteur qui ne revient pas* (1986, Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 58-59, my translation.
15. My translation of the following excerpt: "Voici l'origine de la tragédie, de tout théâtre en général, de toute représentation : le mot grec *tragos* signifie le bouc ou la bête que l'on sacrifie de façon substitutive. Sur le marbre de l'autel ou les planches de la scène, qui va mourir en remplacement de qui ? Nul n'a jamais vu au théâtre que des personnages mélangés à des acteurs, autrement dit, des substituts." Michel Serres, *Statues* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987) 280.
16. "Die Chinesen zeigen nicht nur das Verhalten der Menschen, sondern auch das Verhalten der Schauspieler. Sie zeigen, wie die Schauspieler die Gesten der Menschen in ihre Art vorführen. Denn die Schauspieler übersetzen die Sprache des Alltags in ihre eigene Sprache. Sieht man also einem chinesischen Schauspieler zu, dann sieht man nicht weniger als drei Personen gleichzeitig, einen Zeigenden und zwei Gezeigte" in Bertolt Brecht, "Über das Theater der Chinesen" (1935), *Schriften 2* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag 1993) 126. Translation mine.
17. My translation of Henri Meschonnic's assertion: "On dit bien qu'une voix est touchante, ou pénétrante, ou caressante. Il y a du geste en elle, sous une forme sonore." See Henri Meschonnic, "Le théâtre dans la voix", Gérard Dessons (ed.), *La Licorne 41* (1997): 88.
18. Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation effects in Chinese Acting" in John Willett (trans.) *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964) 91-99.
19. Emphasis mine.
20. My translation of Henri Meschonnic's phrase, "théâtralisation de la page," in *Critique du rythme, Anthropologie historique du langage* (Paris: Verdier, 1982) 303.
21. "Est-il légitime d'identifier le blanc typographique au silence? Un silence signifie (...). Il est entre des paroles, du côté de la parole, plus que son contraire, bien qu'on l'y oppose. Un silence n'est pas l'absence de langage." Henri Meschonnic, *idem*, 305.

## ABSTRACTS

Dans *Fireworks*, son premier recueil de nouvelles, Angela Carter recourt à la superposition de deux modèles esthétiques, l'un pictural, l'autre théâtral pour créer des "effets d'irréalité". Nature morte et tableau vivant se mêlent dans ses récits théâtraux, où personnages et objets se voient attribuer une forte valeur symbolique, approchant celle des acteurs et des accessoires sur scène. L'auteure joue également sur l'intertextualité et sur la dépersonnalisation propre à toute représentation théâtrale pour créer les conditions d'une distanciation comparable à celle que

préconisait Brecht. D'une part, ses personnages symboliques dont le corps, tel celui des acteurs, devient un ensemble de signes à déchiffrer dénoncent la dépersonnalisation qu'exerce, selon elle, toute société sur l'individu. D'autre part, ils lui permettent de susciter une relation d'antagonisme entre les instances psychiques du lecteur. Pendant les narratifs du théâtre épique, les nouvelles de *Fireworks* le placent en effet dans une position paradoxale, où des voix narratives auxquelles il ne peut accorder crédit viennent le happer dans le récit, demandant sa participation active, exigeant qu'il endosse le rôle d'un narrataire omniprésent au statut problématique. Il se trouve ainsi conduit à interpréter le texte, tel un acteur dont le débit et l'intonation modifieraient le sens.

## AUTHORS

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Julie Sauvage, a lecturer at the University of Nantes, has recently defended a PhD on theatricality in Angela Carter's novels at the University of Bordeaux. She has published several articles on novels and short stories by Angela Carter and Kate Atkinson. She is currently working on the rewriting of myth and fairy-tales, narrative voice and image/text relationships in contemporary British fiction.