

**DYING FATHERS, EMERGENT MOTHERS:
READING *WISE CHILDREN* THROUGH THE EYES OF
THE LAUGHING MEDUSA**

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In her theorising about feminine subjectivity and representation in 'The Laugh of the Medusa', Helene Cixous critiques the phallogocentric bias of history. She states that the 'entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason...a privileged alibi...one with the phallogocentric tradition' (249). Our perceptions of Medusa have been framed by literary and historical narratives which have shaped a static representation of her. Medusa remains an image who is hideous, 'dangerous' and 'a dark continent', that readers must not explore or else be turned to stone by its impact (Cixous, 'Sorties' 68). In 'Sorties', Cixous discusses how the feminine is indentured based on a series of paired dualities in which each quality associated with Woman is located in the lower binary, for example 'Active/Passive, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Dark/Night... Man/Woman'. Cixous interrogates the subjectivity of woman by posing a rhetorical question, 'Where is she?' (ibid 63). She uses this urgent question to point to the problematic subjectivity of women constructed by this system of philosophical thought which locates woman in the lower binary.

Cixous is informed by Derridean deconstructionism and uses it to re-position the subjugated Body. The representation of woman portrayed by literature prior to the rise of feminism has been largely one of a sexual and subjugated being. The Body like writing has been perceived as 'derivative' and relegated to the position of a second-class citizen (Derrida 30). However, by writing the Body into the text, Cixous' *écriture féminine* draws on the corporeality of the body, infuses it into the text and appropriates the body as a tool to undermine the limited representation of the feminine as constructed by phallogocentrism. Cixous, by inscribing the body into the text, has moved to an 'elsewhere' in order to create a feminine text with a new vocabulary and flow (Cixous, 'Sorties' 71).

One of the strands of criticism against Cixous is that by writing the body into the text she is being essentialist. However, I beg to differ. By introducing the body into the text, Cixous employs the body as a self-reflexive tool allowing it to break the subjugated realm to which it has been assigned. She calls for a reappraisal of Medusa and woman when

she re-reads this historical image and perception of Medusa: ‘You only have to look at the Medusa straight only to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing’ (LM 255). She does the same with the Body. Let us step into Medusa and gaze with her upon the world and undo the classical trappings of Greek mythology and patriarchy. I would like to argue that Cixous’ daring title ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ challenges the reader to perceive with a new gaze. I suggest that the image of Medusa has the power to break the limited historical gaze by representing her outside the normative historical and visual representation of the deadly gorgon. By depicting Medusa as a laughing Medusa, Cixous reframes the position of woman in narrative, opening her up, allowing her not to be engulfed by history, and re-positions her as the Other. I borrow this image of Medusa from Cixous’s ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ as an entry point to the layers of interpretation surrounding woman. In my discussion, I would like to examine how Angela Carter through the image of the emergent woman–mother in her novel *Wise Children* defines a ‘feminine historiography’, reframing notions of family, and re-examining the Father of English Literature, Shakespeare (Roessner 103).

Angela Carter’s *Wise Children* resonates deeply with some of Cixous’s theoretical underpinnings introduced in ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’. Cixous describes the open and boundless nature of *écriture féminine* when she suggests:

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discussion that regulates the phallogocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico—theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate. (LM 253)

Carter succeeds in ‘surpass[ing] the discussion that regulates the phallogocentric system’ by conducting her discussion in a space that is not subordinated by ‘philosophico–theoretical domination’ (LM 253). She conceives Dora and Nora Chance as ‘subjects’ capable of disrupting the ‘automatisms’ of History, Time, Art and Family in a profound attempt to escape enclosure and coding, and so to transcend the ‘discussion that regulates the phallogocentric system’ (ibid).

The reframing of the feminine can be seen in a break from traditional definitions of femininity. We see Carter expanding the woman's role from one which is fixed and determined by the logic of language to alternative representations where women are presented as fluid and multifarious. Women are 'sister-lovers, maternal-daughters, mother-sisters' (LM 249). We see that by dismantling the common binaries introduced through language with a word such as 'sister-lovers', the role of woman can encompass sister and lover and transcend the roles determined by language. A daughter can be a mother with maternal qualities but does not need to be a biological mother. A mother can be a sister and vice versa, once again freeing the feminine roles from the *logos* of language, customs and traditions that they have been circumscribed to in the past. The Chance sisters do not give birth. Instead, they create new notions of family. They are wise children and play both fathers and mothers in their makeshift family with Old Wheelchair, their geriatric child and their pregnant, adopted daughter Tiffany.

Carter in reconstructing the feminine redefines feminine sexuality for us. For in the past femininity or 'female sexuality' was 'uniform', 'homogenous classifiable into codes' (LM 246). Carter's new femininity defies that. We are told time and again by Dora that the Chance sisters might be identical but they are not symmetrical. The failure of the father and the lover to appreciate their subjectivity results in a failure to experience the feminine and an inability to truly know her. We can see this in the failure of the young tenor who recognizes that there are some physical differences in the sisters but is content to clump Nora in with Dora and falls prey to the role that she is playing. While Dora achieves full sexual fulfillment, what he achieves is sexual fulfillment with a stranger. What results for the young tenor is a desexualization. Carter presents him with no name and he constantly repeats his errors even a few years later, when he assumes at Melchior's party that the woman he shares sex with under the table is once again Nora.

It is this reassessment of woman that Carter undertakes in *Wise Children* through the physicality of woman. Carter through body, physicality and sex puts woman into the text, world and history by her own initiative and efforts (LM 245). Carter plays with women in a variety of positions and this materializes through the presences of Dora and Nora Chance, Lady Atalanta Lynde, Saskia, Imogen, Tiffany and the other memorable woman characters she introduces. As much as we are aware of Medusa's hissing physicality, the extreme physicality of woman reaches its peak in *Wise Children* as we hear the shrieks of laughter of the Chance sisters as they perform their high kicks in Nudes

Ahoy! Here Come the Nine O'clock Nudes! or as the twin birds whose bottoms shake like hard boiled eggs. Carter through her presentation of Dora and Nora breaks the stereotypical image of the pristine, well-bred Englishwoman and opens her up to the 'vile' facets of her personality (Bradfield 90). The extreme physicality of woman and body reflects Carter's efforts to write woman's body into the text. By playing with the body, there is a refusal to inscribe the body in a conventional way.

Carter manipulates body, sex, and sexuality to break traditional frames of depicting a woman. The Chance sisters are well aware that sex and their bodies are powerful commodities—bargaining chips in the world of performance and theatre (Lee 118). Strategically, they wield their bodies with power to seduce men who cannot recognize their individuality or their subjectivity. We need only think of the young tenor who is Nora's gift to Dora on her sixteenth birthday to neatly dispense with her virginity. Nora by embracing her sister's sexuality is able to perform, dupe, tease and taunt a room full of men and be recognized because of her sexuality. The power to be physical earns Dora artistic tutelage from Irish O' Flaherty, an up-and-coming Hollywood novelist whom she readily dispenses with once she is satisfied with his tutelage (Lee 118). Nora promptly sums this barter up when she says, 'Fair exchange is no robbery' (WC 13). The Chance sisters play with the physical as they slide from the world of Genghis Khan—the Hollywood magnate—to the world of the poor Italian man seamlessly, gulling them as one sister stands in for the other at the wedding ceremony. Men's intoxication with Dora and Nora's physical selves will only lead to them being duped as they cannot fully appreciate woman's subjectivity.

In *Wise Children*, 'the Bakhtinian idea of carnival' is a useful concept to explore feminine subjectivity. Carnivelesque, as summarized by Webb, is a 'transgression of order—a transgression that is according to Bakhtin, at once both sanctioned and illegitimate' (171). Carnival has the ability to conflate and collapse the emotions of 'laughter with fear' and 'pleasure with nausea' (ibid 171). Carnivelesque as a tool is probably most important in *Wise Children* because it allows Carter to mould the world into an 'infinitely reversible and remakeable' place (ibid). Using Bakhtin's carnivelesque, Carter breaks stereotypical expectations of what it is to be woman, 'challenges the gender stereotypes often upheld in traditional histories' and the woman's role in society (Hardin 80; Roessner 102). The elements of the grotesque and the absurd that Bakhtin describes break any expectations of what it is to be woman. We see the Chance sisters thwart definitions of femininity through this extreme physicality. Hardin argues that by bringing the element of carnival into the text, what Carter is able to do is distort fixed

images and break them so that she dispenses with stereotypes (80). Importantly, this allows the text to depart from origins or established historical forms. Through the element of carnival, woman in the symbolic dimensions of Medusa can cause destruction and chaos. One only needs to think of the chaos in Melchior Hazard's production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the chaotic, raging fire that engulfs Melchior's mansion as his daughters watch its ruins during his centennial birthday.

The deconstruction of the Father, history, and origins is systematically carried out through Carter's interrogation of 'patrilineal history' and a new mapping of 'feminist historiography' (Roessner 103). She does this early in *Wise Children* as we are plunged *in media res* by the narrator Dora Chance with no clear indication of past and present. We learn that she is the twin sister of Nora, both of whom are ageing vaudeville girls but this information comes to us not in a linear fashion but in bits and pieces almost as though it is a piecing together of memory. Try as we might to contextualize or fix Dora to a particular point in history, the text denies us a comfortable linearity from the first sentence in the novel. It throws the reader a riddle, 'Why is London like Budapest?' before telling us: 'A. Because it is two cities divided by a river' (WC 1). While the reader is given an answer, within it lies a large clue to this novel, our constant need for an answer being frequently provided by a historical perspective that feeds the reader a cause and effect. Carter offers us an answer but a psychologically dissatisfying one in order to remind us how we consume what is on the page as long as its form and shape fits our expectations.

Our impulse to fix a time and place in the novel is constantly undermined as the narrator tells us that this picture she paints for us could be Brooklyn and Manhattan or the Parisian *rive gauche*, *rive droite*. Carter's clever use of the riddle to describe the similarities between cities raises the point of how amorphous the boundaries of language and politics are. It is quickly dissolved through the text's telling words, 'Why is London like Budapest?'. From these answers we learn that there are two sides to everything, as there are alternative ways to read a novel and to read history. Ultimately, it depends on who tells the story. By constructing the story through Dora's narrative, Carter introduces a feminine narrative that allows Dora to reveal her story in her own time and inscribing what Roessner terms a 'feminist historiography' (103).

In place of linear temporality, Carter gives us details of location and point of view, for example, South London—the wrong side of the tracks', the darker side of the Thames where the twins painful

illegitimacy comes slowly to be revealed (WC 1). What is significant is that though this is the wrong side of the tracks, by retelling the story from Dora's point of view, Carter gives Dora agency. Dora the narrator is able to legitimize her place in history through the text although she cannot do it in London's hierarchical, theatrical society.

Carter continues to disrupt the linearity of history through the description of the physical and by departing from linear temporality. By emphasizing the physical details more than an emphasis on time, we obtain an emphasis on sense and feeling which gives us insight into the rich and idiosyncratic lives of the Chance sisters. We obtain the colourful, quirky and concrete physical details in the Chase sisters' home—for example, the inherited 49 Bard Road house, the Inverness grandfather clock and the red and mauve silk kimonos sailing through the hallways. The text shares with us that the postmodern condition could be experienced on any part of the earth. All this is done in an attempt to deconstruct the modern and conventional reading of fixing an origin to Dora's narrative.

Seeing the Chance sisters on their seventy-fifth birthdays and not at their birth is strategic as the text veers away from 'a patrilineal history' (Roessner 103). Lee argues that birthdays are a significant organizing tool in *Wise Children* because they are both a repetition and a return (21). This undermines origins as Dora is able to revisit incidents and experiences in her life through birthdays. Origin is further undermined when we learn that they are adopted daughters of a grandmother—Grandmother Chance. In drawing our attention to their source who is a grandmother by chance, Carter seems to suggest that their origins are a chance happening. Dora and Nora also take the name 'Chance' and not Hazard in an effort to move away from the dying father and emerge as new mothers. Dora vehemently exclaims that they are 'Chance by name, Chance by nature' (WC 24). By reflecting the impact of Chance on their birth, Carter destabilizes the importance of the history of origins and the father in identifying a person's history. Dora and Nora's chance conception is further illustrated through the description of a chance encounter between Melchior Hazard and a 'slip of a thing but she was bold as brass' who has died many years ago (WC 24). Carter is strategic in denying us the origins of their birth by not privileging the Chance sisters' biological mother as she is left nameless, a personality, and an essence that wafts in and out of the narrative. This is indeed masterful as Carter dodges the trap of origins by emphasizing neither mother nor father.

Wise Children explores the gradual death and hold of history on the lives of the Chance sisters. By doing this we see Carter 'dispensing with

the Origin, past–present and future, she appropriates for the woman her irrecoverable past’ (LM 247). The collapsing of ‘past–present and future’ enables women to resurrect their forgotten childhoods at any point of time in history which in the past may have been condemned to ‘eternal rest’ (ibid). Carter illustrates this dissolution of ‘past–present–future’ through the characterization of Lady Atalanta Lynde. To the reader, she is Old Wheelchair, the geriatric who needs to be lowered into the bath by Dora and Nora and to be powdered before she can even attend Sir Melchior Hazard’s centennial birthday celebrations. Carter by collapsing past–present–future and departing from a ‘patrilineal historiography’ resurrects Lady Atalanta Lynde from her ageing past and transforms her into a formidable presence at the party to allow her to reclaim for her husband’s daughters their rightful place in society (Roesnner 103). She rises, Medusa–like in dimensions, at the party and reclaims her past history as the first wife of Sir Melchior Hazard and admonishes Sir Melchior in the following words:

And wasn’t it the Hazard Blood? she cried, full throated, clarion–like. We’d never heard her sound like that before. ‘The Hazard blood! The precious, unique Hazard blood that blinds parents to their children and turns daughter against mother!’(WC 214)

She continues in this fashion when she states ‘—oh, yes! the daughters you never acknowledged, as though you thought the Hazard blood lost all of its virtue once it was mixed with that of a chambermaid’ (WC 214). By collapsing ‘past–present–future’, Lady Atalanta Lynde is able to question Melchior Hazard about his injustice to his daughters whom he has never acknowledged.

Carter breaks down history and time to empower woman, reposition her role and question the injustice that is done to her. What is sad is the grudging acknowledgement that while Sir Melchior is exposed as the Chance sisters’ father, in no way does he consciously accept his role in their fathering. Perhaps what Carter is critiquing is that the role of the father is not one necessarily defined by biology. She reminds us that there is ‘more to fathering than fucking’ (WC 211). The Chance sisters’ painful desire to be acknowledged by their father, Melchior, pervades the novel and suggests that even though there is this desire to reinvent history, time and position in history, there are few ways out and an unconscious need to lean on ‘patrilineal history’ (Roessner 103).

Carter’s deconstruction of history is reminiscent of Cixous’ telling words: ‘the future must no longer be determined by the past’ (LM 245).

By undermining the linear narrative, and conflating the action of seventy-five years into one day, Carter's interweaving narrative makes the past amorphous and difficult to trace to an origin. This Carter does to present us with a situation where she begins to 'deny that the effects of the past are still with us' (LM 245). The longing of the Chance sisters to be acknowledged by their father, whether it is at the theater at Brighton where they are left bawling on Uncle Peregrine's shoulders or in his refusal to recognize them in public where they are merely known to him by their perfumes Shalimar or Mitsouko, reflect the pervasive influence of the Father. Carter suggests that while the shadow of history casts its pall on the lives of her characters, the form and structure of *Wise Children* deny it. Like Cixous, Carter refuses to reinforce the power of history. Cixous says, 'I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us—But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them' (ibid).

Family as a social construct is deconstructed in *Wise Children*, along with its oppressive values. In the East, there is the old Confucian analect that states that the family is the foundation of society, while in the west, there is an exhortation for a return to family values. Carter shows how we

foster and exploit binary opposition in culture in order to justify the domination and exclusion of others, and to sustain elite privilege in society, it is a much more complicated thing to respond to the fictions. (Webb 168)

Carter is trying to offer possibilities outside the binarism and posit alternatives to the English genealogy, the family tree, the symbolic father, and present the reader another space for a new construction of family to exist. Cixous locates the position of woman for us in the family structure:

In philosophy woman is always on the side of passivity. Every time the question comes up; when we examine kinship structures; whenever a family model is brought into play; in fact as soon...as you ask yourself what is meant by the question 'What is it?'; as soon as there is a will to say something. A will: desire, authority, you examine that, and you are led right back—to man, to *his* torment, his desire to be (at) the origin. Back to the father. There is an intrinsic bond between the

philosophical and the literary...and phallogentrism.
(Cixous, 'Sorties' 65)

The alternative Carter offers us is a point of reference from the locus inwards to outwards, allowing Dora and Nora the agency to redefine their family structure. The difficulties we face in tracking genealogy is a deliberate attempt by Carter to prevent the reader from tracing the characters back to their roots, surpassing patriarchy, culture and tradition, so filled with family trees and an obsession with rank and prestige.

While family as an historical and social construct boasts of many social and political benefits, let us flip the coin, to examine how Carter probes family and those who do not belong to this social construct. She interrogates the traditional family structure with the emergence of characters like Dora and Nora, who are born on the wrong side of the fence. Where do they fit in a hierarchical and status-filled society like England? Do we deny Peregrine the title of father? He may not be the twins' natural father but spends time nurturing the twins at different points of the lives. What about Grandma Chance, an adopted Grandmother-cum-mother? Is she relegated to no position in family because she is not married and did not bear the Chance sisters? The novel forces the reader to rethink a notion of 'family' that marginalizes the position of both woman and man, especially if an individual does not conform to roles and functions within a family as defined by society.

As a means of illustrating Carter's point, Dora and Nora construct a family of their own by adopting the illegitimate children of their half-brother Gareth, showing us the new, evolving structures of family. Aidan Day argues that this departure from the traditional structure of family will enable children to grow up 'free of the oppressions and inequalities that patriarchy imposes on different genders, on different sexualities and on different races; a model free of the fiction that is patriarchy' (214). The impending birth of Tiffany's baby cheats closure in the novel, because it is 'the continuation of the Hazard clan and her pregnancy is a way of resisting novelistic closure' (Lee 114). As Lee suggests, the anticipated birth of the child takes fruition outside the text and weaves a dialogue between reader and the text—a distinctly postmodern trait as we contemplate the future heir of the Hazard clan (*ibid*). By freeing this definition of family as defined in language and that which we have been socially trained to accept, Carter opens up further possibilities for the excluded.

Carter reconstructs the notion of family, as it is a powerful social construct of history that sets woman within its boundaries based on her

ability to be a wife or mother. By allowing woman to redefine this societal construct of family, Carter empowers Medusa to define family on her own terms. It is interesting to note that Carter does not fall into the trap of merely defining the new family as a negation of the older historical construct. She creates a polarity of choices between the two Chance sisters, where one grieves over the end of her menstrual cycle—marking the inability to conceive—while the other embraces it with joy. Even here with regards to conception, Carter opens up options for woman. By reconstructing this notion of family, Carter echoes Cixous in her depiction of woman's struggle in defining her place in society: 'her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of the universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history' (LM 245).

The motif of illegitimacy is strategically manipulated by Carter in *Wise Children*. By being born naturally and out of wedlock, Carter frees the bastard twins by assigning a space outside the legitimizing presence of father. Carter paradoxically creates a legitimate new space out of illegitimacy for both Dora and Nora. 'We are Sir Melchior Hazard's daughters, though not, ahem, by any of his wives. We are his *natural* daughters, as they say' (WC 5). We see the Chance sisters always carving a meaning for themselves and an identity for themselves without the acknowledgement of the father. To Melchior Hazard, they are Peaseblossom and Mustardseed, the rude mechanicals. Perhaps Carter argues that human beings should be valued for who they really are and their value should not be defined by virtue of being a daughter to a famed Shakespearean actor who is little but a fallen father in the novel.

She draws on the motif of illegitimacy to introduce the seamier side of English life and 'the absolute fissure between bourgeois culture and non-bourgeois culture' (Bradfield 91). For as much as it is concerned with propriety, class, manners and hierarchy, it is this same society that breeds bastard children and judges them by painful double standards. In an interview with Scott Bradfield, Carter describes English society in the following terms:

We're a very complicated country, she informed me at the start. I don't think you Americans ever realize how extremely complicated we really are—you get nourished on this crazy idea about the English ladies and gentlemen. That we're this quiet, well-educated, *dignified* bunch of people over here. And then you come on holiday and you're absolutely horrified to discover that this is simply not the case. The English are

vile. We're a very strange race of people, you know.
(Bradfield 90)

Carter extends this point on illegitimacy to present the double discrimination the Chance sisters have to endure both in birth as well as their profession. In their acting as chorus girls, in *The Darling Buds of May* and the singing birds, Dora and Nora too present a bastardized form of high culture—in this case, the high art of Shakespeare. I would like to suggest that with the presence of this illegitimate form of art, Carter makes two acute points. Firstly, the power of this 'corrupt' and bastardized form of art acts to undermine the appreciation of Shakespeare, the dying Father. Secondly, the emergence of many innovative parodies of Shakespeare indicates that they are significant art forms today and have large followings. Perhaps a significant point for us to note is that while a parody does function to undermine high art, it can also create a new space of existence, just as Dora and Nora do with their art in the text. This can be taken further as a legitimization of postmodern art and writing.

The second point Carter makes regarding the motif of illegitimacy is the freedom this space offers. It is a freedom to behave, a freedom to create and ultimately, a freedom to be oneself. We remember Dora's description of Nora's first sexual escapade. It was not

a squalid, furtive miserable thing, to make love for the first time on a cold night in a back alley with a married man with strong drink on his breath. He was the one she wanted, warts and all, she *would* have him, by hook or by crook. She had a passion to know about life, all its dirty corners, and this is how she started. (WC 81)

Webb argues convincingly that Dora and Nora Chance have far more freedom to live their lives by their own rules and not society's rules compared to the entrapments of their step sisters Saskia and Imogen (194). Of course, the price they pay is alienation or a lack of societal acknowledgement.

No doubt as Webb argues astutely, this freedom that challenges legitimacy is also 'a celebration of the vitality of otherness' (ibid). Nevertheless this space is reliant upon 'one another's mirror-image of difference', and 'a celebration of illegitimacy' valorizes the system that produces these outcasts (ibid). I agree with Webb that Carter steps out of the hegemony of the patriarchal system through Dora and Nora's ability to weave in and out of society and culture, revelling in their opposition

to patriarchy but straddling a legitimate artistic world—Shakespeare—which is also filled with elements of illegitimacy such as bastardy, incest, vengeance and joy. Webb's conclusion is that this special position to occupy both worlds at the same time situates the twins in a 'mixed up and hybrid' world (194).

Boehm argues that in Carter's past novels, she exposed the male bias behind literary and cultural constructs, in particular the construction and representation of 'femininity' more obviously, but now her focus is on more metaphysical questions (85). One of the means by which Carter examines the influence of the male bias is through the exploration of the relationship of daughters and the undermining of the father of arts, Shakespeare. The male bias in art is explored time and again, for example in the play *King Lear*. Shakespeare highlights the father-daughter relationship but excludes the mother-daughter relationship. Ellen Terry notes 'how many times Shakespeare draws fathers and daughters, never mothers and daughters' (Foreword, WC). In order to disrupt this pattern, Carter undermines the primacy of the father-daughter relationship through the Chance twins. They are always present in the arts scene performing their 'low' art and indirectly undermining Melchior Hazard's performances of art. They act almost as caricatures to what Melchior is performing and Melchior hesitates to acknowledge their existence. Many interpret the Shakespearean play *A Midsummer's Night Dream* as a comedy with a plot that involves a mere swapping of lovers owing to mistaken identities and a happy resolution of marriage at the end. An alternative reading that undermines a comic reading is the recognition of Oberon's dark coercion of Titania to marry him, the chaos and pain of the mismatched lovers and the humiliation suffered by the Queen of the fairies when she falls in love with a donkey. As we examine the play through a tragic frame what is deeply resonant is that comedy can transform into tragedy when viewed through someone else's eyes. Using this play, Carter strategically undermines the power of the father in order to raise the emergent mother. For while the Chance sisters do their song and dance routine and dramatize Peaseblossom and Mustard's seed role in Hollywood, they do it unconsciously to be near their father Melchior, and hope by doing so to earn recognition from him. Carter destabilizes the male and dominant thread of the main plot, as the minor/illegitimate/rude mechanical plot threatens to disrupt the play. By empowering the minor and the illegitimate, Carter questions our own notions of what is high and low culture.

While Melchior Hazard performs the high culture of Shakespeare, his daughters undermine the high art he stands for by appearing in G-strings and performing in nude shows. While acting and the arts may

have once been a field dominated by men, Carter breaks out of this convention by making the Chance sisters go on stage and challenge Shakespeare with their appearance in *A Midsummer's Night Dream* as Peaseblossom and Mustardseed. She encourages female characters to find new entry points into high culture fields which were once dominated by men. One cannot help but hear Cixous, who exhorts women to enter fields of art that they have been excluded from: 'And why don't you write? Write! I know why you haven't written.... Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it's reserved for the great' (LM 246).

Carter with her exquisite art unravels the established tapestries of History, Art and Culture and questions devotion to the Father of Literature—Shakespeare—by opening possibilities of new entry points for women writers, for example, Dora or Carter herself (Lee 114). Dora's oral narrative and the voices of the women we hear emerging through *Wise Children* signal new possibilities of space for women in writing (Lee 120). Carter's examination of woman and Cixous' use of Medusa are efforts to re-appropriate and re-examine woman and open her up to allow her new possibilities of interpretation. Ultimately, it is an effort at re-orientation and openness to re-read History and re-construct notions of Family in order to carve a space for the excluded. For as Cixous suggests, like Medusa, the Other cannot be theorized, for when you theorize it you do violence to it. Ultimately, it is the search for the Other outside history/outside the Empire of the Selfsame that Carter strives for (Cixous, 'Sorties' 70–71).

Angela Carter's swansong is an effort to create her own melody in *écriture féminine*. She writes fluidly with 'white ink' (LM 251). We hear that 'blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end, we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing, and we're not afraid of lacking' (LM 248). Medusa—woman who was once repressed in the bonds of history laughs back. For in *Wise Children*, we are given a glimpse of a space, a niche, which is 'precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a spring board for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures' (LM 249).

NOTES

Abbreviations

LM	Cixous, 'Laugh of the Medusa'
WC	Carter, <i>Wise Children</i>

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