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Revisiting the “Intentional Fallacy” as a Political Mechanism in Angela Carter’s “The Loves of Lady Purple”

Michelle Ryan-Sautour

The puppet-master is always dusted with a little darkness. In direct relation to his skill, he propagates the most bewildering enigmas, for the more lifelike his marionettes, the more godlike his manipulations and the more radical the symbiosis between inarticulate doll and articulating fingers. The puppeteer speculates in a no-man’s-limbo between the real and that which, although we know very well it is not, nevertheless seems to be real. He is the intermediary between us, his audience, the living, and they, the dolls, the undead, who cannot live at all and yet who mimic the living in every detail since, though they cannot speak or weep, still they project those signals of signification we instantly recognize as language.

Angela Carter, “The Loves of Lady Purple”

(Carter 1974, 24)

- 1 This second paragraph taken from Angela Carter’s short story, “The Loves of Lady Purple,” with its use of the inclusive “we” and the predominance of speculative discourse (“signals of signification”) reads as an invitation to a metatextual reading of the story, that is a reading that positions the reader at the crossroads of the authorial figure and the illusion of the story. The story, as Laurent Lepaludier has thoroughly observed in his article, “Modèles im/pertinents: La métatextualité dans ‘The Loves of Lady Purple,’”¹ is structured in a manner that leads the reader to decipher the text from a hyper-critical perspective. It indeed positions the puppeteer, “the Asiatic Professor,” as a “consummate virtuoso of puppetry” (25), at the center and, according to Lepaludier, invites the reader to analogically link this character to the figure of the author. Throughout the reading process, the reader learns of the puppeteer’s travels, of his two assistants, respectively deaf and dumb, with whom he communicates through a “choreographed quiet of [...] discourse” (26), and encounters the embedded life story of his most treasured marionette, Lady Purple, *femme fatale* who ultimately kills her foster mother, sleeps with and kills her foster father, lives a life as a prostitute who visits “men like the plague” (33), and ends up in a state of destitution and emptiness: “She became a marionette herself, herself her own

replica, the dead yet moving image of the shameless Oriental Venus" (34). As Lepaludier observes, the story guides the reader through a series of cognitive models that foster a critical reading of the signification of Lady Purple and her puppeteer. When, at the end of the story, in a shift of dramatic irony tinged with the fantastic, Lady Purple draws herself into the world of the living through sucking the force of life from her master's throat ("She gained entry into the world by a mysterious loophole in its metaphysics and, during her kiss, she sucked his breath from his lungs so that her own bosom heaved with it" (38)) she opens up further possibilities for interpretation, tempting the reader to perceive her as political allegory, and read her story as discourse on the agency of women. The resulting play with literary genre (references to the gothic modes of vampire stories, the fantastic, and the picaresque) and socially saturated discourse indicates, as Lepaludier observes, an intertwining of a reflection on culture and literary aesthetics (Lepaludier 112).

- 2 Such commentary on gender and simulacra, and the blurring of boundaries between fiction and the real are typical of a postmodern metafictional aesthetic which, in Carter's case, has been shown to have political implications. Carter's titillating style is indeed revelatory of an underlying agenda that teases the reader to seek out the intentions, however fleeting, of the author. I will argue that it is through this political pull, this invitation to ascribe reflections to an authorial, didactic figure that other subtle and impalpable forms of political power are brought to light in Carter's stories. As Sarah Gamble has commented, the theme of the mask in Carter's fiction echoes the elusiveness of the author: "Her perennial fascination with masks, masquerade, theatricals and dressing-up, tropes that appear throughout her fiction, in this respect point to the endlessly shifting identity of the author herself" (Gamble 9). It is in the reader's nostalgia for the authorial figure behind such masks that a means of rethinking political agency in Carter's short fiction might be revealed.
- 3 The identity of the author has indeed been a source of controversy over the last decades. Earlier critics in Anglo-American criticism such as William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, heralded the age of New Criticism with their essay on the "Intentional Fallacy" (1946) and the "Affective Fallacy" (1949), insisting that the meaning of a literary text is to be found neither in the life and mind of the author, nor in the effect the text exercises on the reader, but rather in the text's status as an independent artifact, a self-contained system. This revision of the authorial figure is later echoed in French criticism with Roland Barthes' infamous revolutionary article, "The Death of the Author," voicing the concerns of post-structuralist criticism where the author is perceived as *écriture* rather than as a historical, psychological figure: "Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*: language knows a 'subject,' not a person,' and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together,' suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it" (Barthes 1467).² Barthes' central tenet of a lack of textual origins, and his insistence on the multiplicity of discourses in an author's work have often been associated with Carter's "nostalgia for anonymity" (Sage 1991, 2) and the collective voice that arises out of the dense intertextual weaving that makes up her fiction. Upon the death of Angela Carter, the title of Lorna Sage's essay, "Death of an Author" (Sage 1992) indeed suggests the importance of the concept for Carter's work. As Cheryl Walker has observed, certain feminist appropriations of the "Death of the Author" have involved setting aside authorial presence "in order to liberate the text for multiple uses" (Walker 2002, 142)³, and Carter seems to have embraced this mode in her overt

limiting of access to her life story and her emphasis on the power of the reader: "Reading is as creative an activity as writing" (Carter 1983, 69). Sarah Gamble has also noted that Carter's predilection for irony and linguistic play foregrounds a questioning of the self in Carter's novels "which stringently interrogate[s] the notion that there is such a thing as a self that is capable of being unproblematically 'recovered'" (Gamble 10). Gamble reads Carter's political writing in opposition to confessional modes prevalent in 1970s feminist literature, and suggests that Carter transpires in her writing less as the illusion of a unified authorial figure and more through a mask of ideas:

Carter might not have been into self-disclosure, she might not have used her art to reflect on personal dilemmas, but that doesn't mean that she eliminated herself from her work entirely, or indeed at all. As an intellectual, Carter expressed herself through ideas [...] She was adamant in her commitment to both socialism and feminism, and firmly believed that her writing was, however fantastical it might appear, firmly rooted in the conditions of the material world. (Gamble 12)

4 In her final interview for the BBC, Carter expresses her reluctance to search for an original self, "I've never felt that the self is like a mythical beast which has to be trapped and returned so that you can be whole again" (Carter 1992). "The Loves of Lady Purple," published in 1974, was indeed written against a critical landscape where the unified subject and, along with it, the author figure were disappearing, and being recovered in various linguistic, pragmatic, literary forms.

5 Such a recovery can be read in Michel Foucault's 1969 essay, "What is an Author?," in which he writes of the "author-function" as an attempt to liberate the authorial figure from the prison of the unified subject. This concept resonates in relation to Carter's slippery authorial figure. Although he questions the "death of the author" as an inadvertent transferal of authorial transcendence to the act of writing, he, like Barthes, also proposes to rethink the author in relation to a new series of questions concerning authorial attribution:

No longer the tiresome repetitions:
 'Who is the real author?'
 'Have we proof of his authenticity and originality?'
 'What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language?'
 New questions will be heard:
 'What are the modes of existence of this discourse?'
 'Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?'
 'What placements are determined for possible subjects?'
 'Who can fulfill these diverse functions of the subject?'
 (Foucault 1969, 1636)

6 Although Foucault's article is often associated with the disappearance of the author, he actually brings to light the different problems associated with authorial death, and suggests a rethinking of the author as a function in the game of writing: "Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind. Thus, the essential basis of this writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears" (Foucault 1623). Despite a certain number of contradictions in Foucault's piece,⁴ it highlights a growing preoccupation with the figure of the author on the critical scene of the 60s and 70s, a preoccupation that is clearly submitted to fictional debate in "The Loves of Lady Purple."

7 Angela Carter once said, "Ours is a highly individualised culture, with a great faith in the work of art as a unique one-off, and the artist as an original, godlike and inspired creator

of unique one-offs" (Carter 1990, x), and Lorna Sage highlights such "disclaiming [of] individual authority" in Carter's fiction (Gamble 1994). Carter's palimpsestic re-writing of fairy tales is indeed suggestive of authorial displacement as, according to Carter, the oral dimension of the genre heightens the question of textual origins, "the term 'fairy tale' is a figure of speech and we use it loosely, to describe the great mass of infinitely various narrative that was, once upon a time and still is, sometimes, passed on and disseminated through the world by word of mouth" (Carter 1990, ix). Intertextuality based upon a diffuse oral/textual tradition, generic interweavings, and questions of narrative hierarchy and reliability complicate the perception of the author in her work and indicate a necessity to study the author-function more closely. This function appears most prominently when considered from the perspective of reading pragmatics.

- 8 Michel Foucault speaks of "shifters" and "deictics" which affect the reader's perception of the authorial figure (Foucault 1631). Similarly, Michel Couturier has consistently remarked in *La Figure de l'auteur* that the reader's perception of the author is closely linked to narrative strategies, prefaces, postfaces, and other para-intertextual elements that guide the reader's perception of "who's speaking":

It is particularly through a complex network of positive and negative identification with narrators, characters, and narratees (actants that belong to the black box of the text) that this exchange [between author and reader] can take place. (Couturier 22, my translation)⁵

- 9 This is strikingly apparent in "The Loves of Lady Purple" where the heterodiegetic/omniscient narrative voice on both the level of embedding and embedded story sets forth a didactic persona with whom the reader is led to identify as a figure of authority in the story. As mentioned above, the story reads as an analogon, where the reader is led to ascribe an authorial identity on multiple levels, and thus adopt to differing degrees a critical distance that opens up allegorical dimensions in the story. The reader can identify with the figure of the narrator as representative of an authorial didactic voice, and then with the central figure of the puppeteer who, as Lepaludier observes, encourages the reader to perceive a commentary on the author, and thus to proceed by processes of superordinate categorization to associate the theatre of marionettes with the literary stage, and perceive connections between the various characters and the components of the fictional situation (Lepaludier 97). This structure serves as the pivot upon which the different forms of metatextual reflection in the text are articulated. As the reader proceeds, he/she is thus enticed into associating the proper name of Angela Carter, the signature which marks the text with the presence of the "real author," with an authorial narrative figure who is in turn reflected *en abyme* in the story of the text. I will not reiterate here the totality of textual elements identified by Lepaludier as triggering a metatextual reading. I would like to suggest, rather, that it might be interesting to consider not only the cognitive dimension (Lepaludier 96-97) of this analogon but also the affect with which it is infused.
- 10 Narrative strategies that foster the perception of an authorial figure convey a perlocutionary affect of intention which is amplified by the manner in which allegory in the text imposes upon the reader the task of exegesis. This echoes comments made by Carter in interview on the presence of allegory in her writing, "I put everything in a novel to be read – read the way allegory was intended to be read, the way you are supposed to read *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight* – on as many levels as you can comfortably cope with at a time" (Carter 1985, 86). Multiple reading levels indeed point to the idea of a diffuse ideological voice with an insistence on the need for interpretation. Carter sets

forth the function of curiosity as the only imperative in her fiction: "But the moral function should not be hortatory in any way – telling people how to behave. I would see it as a moral compunction to explicate and to find out about things. I suppose I would regard curiosity as a moral function" (Carter 1985, 96). The predominance of metatextuality foregrounds the instructional function as a dominant in the story as it privileges the critical faculties of the reader.

- 11 However the seeming didactic quality of a narrative voice which can analogically be reconstituted as that of the author is counterbalanced by structural mechanisms and conceptual discourse that hinder clear interpretation in Carter's stories, apparent in lines such as, "The puppeteer speculates in a no-man's-land between the real and that which, although we know very well it is not, nevertheless seems to be real" (24), mentioned in the second paragraph of the story. In setting forth such enigmatic comments, the authorial persona invites the reader to think, to engage in a process of evaluation in a field circumscribed by the author, but left undefined, as one specific interpretation does not appear to prevail. Robert Eaglestone describes the resulting process in Carter's fiction as an "evolving, moving series of gestures and thoughts, a series of questions asked, answered and asked again in the form of stories. That it is a movement, in turn part of larger stories, is itself a success" (Eaglestone 205). Eaglestone places a particular emphasis on the unorthodoxy of Carter's work which cannot be read "like a political creed, or a firm and final statement of beliefs set as a novel" (Eaglestone 205). Carter's game-playing with fictional modes and the reader indeed creates the impression of fluidity in the meaning of words and accentuates an open reflection on the cultural resonance of language. Monika Fludernik has also commented on the destabilization of the reader and the intensification of reader involvement in Carter's short fiction through the use of pronoun shifts, shifts which rather than producing meaning in the text, set up the conditions by which the reader may experience defamiliarization:

No definitive true textual 'meaning' or function can ultimately be attributed to a change of pronoun; as I will argue, such a formal shift correlates with a cognitive category, that of defamiliarisation, and with a subsequent need to step out of the grooves of one's reading experience. This triggering of the need for additional processing leads to an intensification of the reader's interpretative engagement with the text, and it also enhances the sophistication of the textual analysis. Temporal and pronominal changes such as those employed by Carter in the two stories therefore ultimately serve as shifters and as metatextual clues to the need for interpretative sophistication. (Fludernik 215-216)

- 12 Although "The Loves of Lady Purple" displays differing degrees of the pronominal shifts that Fludernik identifies in much of Carter's short fiction, one can perceive an obvious play upon the reader's involvement with an authorial persona:

The master of marionettes vitalizes inert stuff with the dynamics of his self. The sticks dance, make love, pretend to speak and, finally, personate death; yet, so many Lazaruses out of their graves they spring again in time for the next performance and no worms drip from their noses nor dust clogs their eyes. All complete, they once again offer their brief imitations of men and women with an exquisite precision which is all the more disturbing because we know it to be false; and so this art, if viewed theologically, may, perhaps, be subtly blasphemous. (25)

- 13 The use of the present tense associated with the truth of aphorism, and the implicit consensus apparent in "we know" encourage the reader to align him/herself with the didactic persona of a narrator whose omniscient capacities are evident throughout the story, as this narrator reappears in the embedded story as the interpreter of the

Professor's story which is told in his unknown language: "As he crouched above the stage directing his heroine's movements, he recited a verbal recitative in a voice which clanged, rasped and swooped up and down in a weird duet with the stringed instrument from which the dumb girl struck peculiar intervals" (29). However, this didactic relationship becomes complicated when interpretation is triggered by the ritualistic repetition evident in temporal shifters such as "again in time" and "once again" in combination with the question of the art of marionettes as being "blasphemous." The reader is connected to a dominant authorial figure only to be ultimately left to his/her own resources to ascribe meaning to the text. It is this lack of "uniform explanation" that Fludernik underlines in what she identifies as Carter's "pronominal acrobatics:" "Carter's meaningful deployment of the second-person pronoun and of referential alternation does not allow for a uniform explanation, since a panoply of features – temporal, narratological, intertextual – interconnect and result in a variegated application of the various pronominal options and strategies" (Fludernik 237).

- 14 Similarly, Richard Pedot evokes the defamiliarizing metatextual practices associated with Carter's name (Pedot 188), and observes how Carter's self-conscious re-writing strategies function in a differing rather than an oppositional manner, staging re-evaluations of certain literary and societal "myths" (in the Barthesian sense of the word) with a variability that renders problematic the metatextual stance.

Another conception of (meta) textuality is therefore necessary, one that no longer presents the relationship between metatext, or outside the text, and text as a static difference, but rather as *différance*, that is the constantly moving and intertwining relationship where mastery, which is an illusion, gives way to resistance, although it is difficult to determine which text is resisting which text. In the case we're concerned with, this resistance, (or *restance* as Derrida says) of text or of writing can be read as the trace of an utterance seeking to thread its way through the always already of language. (Pedot 202, my translation)⁶

- 15 A tension appears in Carter's work between the pull to interpret that plays upon the intellectual and ideological curiosity of the reader, and a self-consciousness of the "always-already" in language, of the manner in which the life of words extends well beyond the current scene and subjects of utterance. A conflict develops between the impression of authorial sovereignty suggested by a narrative figure with didactic qualities, and a structure that defers meaning and resists ideological appropriation. For example, on the story level, it might be tempting to read the figure of Lady Purple allegorically as the liberation of the female character from the strings of her master puppeteer, the male writer. However, when the marionette/woman ultimately relives the story written for her, the reader is left to ponder over the implications underlined by the narrator of the character's inability, as Carter says in interview, to "sing a new song":

There's a story in *The Bloody Chamber* called 'The Lady and the House of Love,' part of which derives from a movie version that I saw of a story by Dostoyevsky. And in the movie, which is very good, the woman, who is a very passive person and is very much in distress, asks herself the question, 'Can a bird sing only the song it knows, or can it learn a new song?' Have we got the capacity at all of singing new songs? It's very important that if we haven't, we might as well stop now. Can the marionette in that story behave in a way that she's not programmed to behave? Is it possible? (Carter 1994, 16)

- 16 The question asked is whether Lady Purple is capable of performing anything other than the script she has always performed, as she heads for the nearest brothel. A similar sense of inquiry is maintained throughout the story with the repeated use of a present tense

narrative in combination with conceptual discourse, "Perhaps every single fair is no more than a dissociated fragment of one single, great, original fair which was inexplicably scattered long ago in the diaspora of the amazing" (26). Here, the present tense fosters a reflection about the universal quality of the fair and on the question of origins, without proposing a firm interpretation. The story thus opens up questions concerning origins, identity, and performance. Carter's story suggests, for example, a central tenet of performance theory, where the concept of origins gives way to infinite parodic reiteration in the constitution of gender, thus foreshadowing, as many critics have noted⁷, the emergence of Judith Butler's work on gender and performance. Carter also cites Borges in relation to parody, repetition and textual citation:

Katsavos : In the short story 'The Loves of Lady Purple' you say, 'she [woman] could not escape the tautological paradox in which she was trapped; had the marionette all the time parodied the living or was she, now living, to parody her own performance as a marionette?' How does this apply to women in general, and more specifically, to the woman writer?

Angela Carter: I was much younger when I wrote that. It's a very elaborate story. That was one of the first actual short pieces I ever wrote, and I was still very solemn in those days; I was a solemn girl. I looked at the story again because I used it in an anthology I did a couple of years ago. It was trying to say things about something that still possesses me quite a lot. Let me put it like this. I was discussing the Borges idea that books are about books. What then was the first book about? (Carter 1994, 16)

- 17 Such "discussions" also appear in multiple guises in Carter's short fiction, often arising in structural configurations that engage the curiosity of the reader. He/she is led to seek out possibilities and thus return unexpectedly to the concept of the intentions of the author as the guiding authority in the ideological forces at work in the text. Carter's story indeed reveals that the question of the authorial subject extends well beyond the simplicity of anonymity, and unexpectedly indicates how the norm of authorial authority pervades the literary landscape of Carter's works.
- 18 Maurice Couturier has written in depth about the figure of the author from a reader reception viewpoint. He notes in Barthes' later work, *Le Plaisir du texte*, an expressed "desire" for the figure of the author, and similarly observes the reader's need for such an interlocutor:
- [...] if I have borrowed the word "figure" from Barthes to refer to the author, it is because I am dealing with the question from the point of view of reader reception [...] I do not seek in the author a supplement of information that would allow me to fill in the gaps of the text, but rather an interlocutor (my translation).⁸
- 19 It is the search for this figure that fuels the process of reading according to Couturier : "It is the fleeting figure of the author that motivates my anxious reading of the text and invites me to continue to reread more closely" (Couturier 107, my translation). The authorial figure in Carter's fiction could certainly correspond to such a description, as the reader in negotiating the different levels of enigmatic, fictionalized reflection, inevitably returns to the figure of Carter, to the name that lies upon the cover of the book and is associated with her reputation for pornography, feminist politics, and provocation.
- 20 This return to the name behind the text is actually one of the troubling incoherencies Seán Burke finds in his exploration of writings about the authorial subject. He explores how the proper name continues to exercise a hold upon critics. He comments, for example, on the ambiguity apparent in Foucault's particular recognition of Freud as an "initiator of discursive practices" (Foucault 1632): "On the one hand, Foucault is seeking

out the specific conditions under which 'something like a subject [can] appear in the order of discourse', (158) whilst, on the other, he is presenting a meta-authorial figure who founds and endlessly circumscribes an entire discursivity" (Burke 93). He also identifies in Derrida's work an equivocal amount of praise for Rousseau that gives rise to a complexity in the philosopher's relationship to the author's name:

What exigencies force Derrida into this awkward, and as he would say, embarrassed position *vis-à-vis* Rousseau? Why does he never attempt to answer to this question which everywhere presses upon the *Grammatology*? Another way of presenting this dilemma would be to ask: if logocentrism is all-pervasive why make one author stand surety for 'the reduction of writing profoundly implied by the entire age', (98) and examine this repression in the innermost recesses of his corpus? (Burke 122-123)

- 21 It is certainly the problem of names that leads Foucault to make a distinction between the proper name and the author's name. The latter "points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within society and culture. The author's name is not a function of a man's civil status, nor is it fictional; it is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which gives rise to new groups of discourse and their singular mode of existence" (Foucault 1627-1628). Foucault is inviting us to look beyond the isolated work and perceive the manner in which an author's name can be suggestive of discursive practice outside the textual frame. In practice, as well as in theory, Foucault points to the power of the author's name, or signature, as a force behind both the individual work and the discursive practices to which it points. Such ambiguities, expressed on the level of content as well as in ambiguous styles of exposition, lead Seán Burke to highlight how the figure of the author haunts the scene of contemporary theory: "for the question of the author poses itself ever more urgently, not as a question within theory but as the question of theory, of its domains and their limits, of its adequacy to the study of texts themselves, to the genealogy and modes of their existence. And it does so in the manner of an interminable haunting, as that unquiet presence which theory can neither explain nor exorcise" (Burke 191).
- 22 The word "haunting" is indeed an appropriate word to describe the uncanny presence of Carter, this author who appears to peer through the lines at the reader, pulling him/her into varying modes of textual explication. When the narrator states: "she did not possess enough equipment to comprehend the complex circularity of the logic which inspired her for she had only been a marionette" (39), the reader is invited to sense Carter behind the speculative emphasis of the comment. In the end, in relation to reading pragmatics, it is perhaps this *impression* of presence, this fleeting force associated with the proper name behind the text, which serves as a major pivot in the contract between author and reader; it reveals forms of ideology circulating through Carter's texts. Cheryl Walker has called for a form of *persona criticism* that does not erase the relevance of the author, but rather examines the complexity of authorship as a series of "masks." Jean-Jacques Lecercle¹⁰ takes this a step further by addressing the reader's desire for the author behind such masks, a desire he sees as stemming from the traditional "tin-opener" *doxa* of interpretation. For Lecercle this is an essential element in reading pragmatics. He presents a model (ALTER – Author-Language-Text-Encyclopedia-Reader) of interpretative pragmatics, with a strong emphasis on Althusserian theory, that focuses on the interaction between Reader and Author through mobility in imposture and ascription

The ALTER structure is a structure not of communication, but of ascription. Interpellation is what circulates in the structure; and imposture is the action

through which interpellated subjects segment or invert the flow of interpellation (this is the language of Deleuze and Guattari's *Mille Plateaux*). It claims and reclaims the places ascribed through interpellation: the author 'a'-at-A and the reader 'r'-at-R, are equally impostors. (Lecerclé 151)

- 23 According to Lecerclé, the real author and real reader adopt shifting positions in relation to the forces of interpellation at work in a fictional text, thus adopting forms of imposture. In this process the respective parties ascribe intentions, perceptions etc. to the other figure. Lecerclé unexpectedly reveals how the doxa of recovery, presence, intention, often associated with a sovereign authorial figure, fuels this interaction from the reader's point of view: "the reader needs an author to play with, to authorise her reading and grant it the weight of his authority" (Lecerclé 14). The nostalgia for the authorial figure thus appears as a manifestation of interpellation in reading; the "fantasy" of the author, of Carter, transpires through the constraints of an ideologically saturated structure: "The 'author' is a fantasy, the result of construction through interpellation. The term 'fantasy' points out that the status of the author is that of the subject of ideology, subjectified by ideology, who has an *imaginary* relation to his real conditions of existence. At the very moment when we construct the figure, we treat the author 'as if' he were a real subject" (Lecerclé 150).
- 24 This type of fantasy reveals a means by which one could perceive power structures in Carter's fiction, structures associated with the illusion of the sovereign author and the aesthetic and narrative structures with which it is intertwined. The affect and interpellation in language that Jean-Jacques Lecerclé has identified as underlying the relationship author/reader in the fictional reading contract appears as a different stage upon which the political impact of Carter's work might be perceived. Although Judith Butler, in relation to the theory of Michel Foucault, is adamant about the impossibility of sovereign political agency, she also suggests that a fantasy for sovereign formations of power persists in contemporary thinking, and in itself actually drives the displacement of power.
- The difficulty of describing power as a sovereign formation, however, in no way precludes fantasizing or figuring power in precisely that way; to the contrary, the historical loss of the sovereign organization of power appears to occasion the fantasy of its return—a return, I want to argue, that takes place in language, in the figure of the performative. The emphasis on the performative phantasmatically resurrects the performative in language, establishing language as a displaced site of politics and specifying that displacement as driven by a wish to return to a simpler and more reassuring map of power, one in which the assumption of sovereignty remains secure. (Judith Butler, 78)
- 25 It is perhaps through the respective position of author and reader, (through ascription and imposture) in relation to the impression of sovereign formations in the literary text that Carter's fiction engages in other forms of dialogue with the constraints of literary and political norms. This in turn suggests elusive, yet no less significant, forms of agency in Carter's fiction.
- 26 The question of agency in Carter's carnivalesque aesthetic has often been asked. Clare Hanson comments on the "tension between a radical will and a sceptical Nietzschean pessimism" (Hanson 71) in Carter's fiction as being representative of the postmodern condition and notes that "it is entirely fitting that Carter's last novel [*Wise Children*, 1991], ending with the words 'What a joy it is to dance and sing', should be one in which the limitations of (its own) carnivalesque art have been so thoroughly canvassed" (Hanson

71). A self-consciousness of the limits of demythologizing is evident in much of Carter's writing.¹¹ However, the "radical will" behind her texts is undeniable, and the ideological saturation of the aesthetic forms and discourse that is foregrounded in her fiction, ironically holds up less a "nostalgia for anonymity" than a nostalgia for concrete forms of agency. Carter has often pointed out the limits of social realism, and has demonstrated an open opposition to didactic narrative forms associated with feminist writing.¹² However, her own fiction bears a didactic mark in the authorial imprint, this evanescent figure who appears through the fabric of her texts and plays upon the reader's nostalgia for the sovereign author-subject. Such a nostalgia in Carter's case, is fostered by the "radical will" apparent in her re-writing practices.

- 27 Judith Butler, in *Excitable Speech* has commented on practices of "resignification," on the aesthetic enactment of language. Although her focus is primarily on injurious language from a legal standpoint, the principle could easily be transferred to the fiction of Carter:

An aesthetic enactment of an injurious word may both *use* the word and *mention* it, that is, make use of it to produce certain effects but also at the same time make reference to that very use, calling attention to it as a citation, situating that use within a citational legacy, making that use into an explicit discursive item to be reflected on rather than a taken for granted operation of ordinary language. [...] This is not to say that the word loses its power to injure, but that we are given the word in such a way that we can begin to ask: how does a word become the site for the power to injure? (Butler 99-100)

- 28 In Carter's self-conscious recitation of literary conventions a will for resignification indeed prevails, and foregrounds the implicit ideology and power structures with which the intertextual utterance is intertwined. The aesthetic re-enactment on the levels of story, genre, and fictional conventions, is best known in relation to her self-declared activities of "demythologizing," a practice whose limits have often been recognized. As Lepaludier has observed, one is suspicious of Carter's appropriation of certain realist aesthetic devices in "The Loves of Lady Purple"¹³; he perceives this as a consciousness of cultural heritage and language as an inescapable trap. However, I would argue that what is being cited here is not only the trap of aesthetics, but also the doxa of intentionality and interpretation with which it is intertwined. The resulting titillating effect in relation to the authorial figure is symptomatic of forms of ideology that circulate in the reading process and expresses a potential for what Lecerclé describes (in reference to Judith Butler) as an "insurrectionary speech act" (Lecerclé 167): "Butler's version of Althusser does not indulge in passive acceptance of the position ascribed to the subject by the process of interpellation. Speech acts do not merely reflect dominant relations of power: they can be turned around, and sent back against their temporary authors" (Lecerclé 167). Carter's resignification practices actually exercise an effect not only as a revision of content and form, but also through the variances that emerge in the interaction of the respective actors with the recontextualized citation: "Interpellation cannot fail in so far as the ALTER structure always interpellates the necessary EGOs, but the contents of the interpellation vary with each recontextualisation, and are not necessarily what the interpellation/interpellated actors assume they are" (Lecerclé 166).
- 29 The figure of the author in Carter's story therefore can be conceived of as a nexus of ascription in the process of interpellation flowing between the position of author and reader, and points to a life beyond that of both figures. As Lecerclé notes: "The process of interpretation both needs to ascribe meaning to an author's *intention* (this corresponds to Shaeffer's 'understanding') and to *ascribe* such intention, which is therefore an effect of

construction. The author is not only Victor Frankenstein creating a monster that turns against him, he is also the monstrous creation of the reader, who acquires a life and a will of his own" (Lecerle 149). This life, with a temporality that transcends that of the moment of writing or reading, according to Judith Butler's reading of Foucault, points to the manner in which Carter's literary aesthetic, as associated with certain reading practices, reflects Foucault's concept of power as a diffuse multifarious doing:

This shift from the subject of power to a set of practices in which power is actualized in its effects signals, for Foucault, a departure from the conceptual model of sovereignty that, he claims, dominates thinking on politics, law, and the question of right. Among the very practices that Foucault counters to that of the subject are those that seek to account for the formation of the subject itself: 'let us ask ... how things work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours, etc. ... we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc. We should try to *grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects*'¹⁴ (Judith Butler 79 (emphasis Butler's)).

- 30 Carter's aesthetic is one of movement, of circulating ideology between the figures that establish the contract of reader/author interaction. Through Lecerle's theory it becomes evident that the authorial figure is at the same time a pivot of nostalgia for sovereignty and a means by which the stability of the literary image is destabilized in a fluidity which typifies Carterian writing practices. It is in this ongoing "doing" of the literary contract that political forces, configurations of power, emerge momentarily, engage the reader, and interpellate the author, Carter, into various places. Critics today are exceedingly conscious of postmodern practices that stage authorial intervention. This staging has even reached the status of convention in postmodern literature. However, a shift of emphasis from the destabilized ontology of the fictional universe, to the forces of reading pragmatics and interpellation intertwined with such practices, points out the political potential of the "author function" in Carter's fiction as proposed by Foucault: "In this sense, the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society" (1628).
- 31 This function appears especially prominent in Carter's appropriation of the condensed short story form, and indeed seems to be amplified in the palimpsestic maneuvers that characterize her work. In what Carter has called "the limited trajectory of the short narrative" (Carter 1974, 132), she indeed has inadvertently tapped into latent political forces and opened the door towards a re-thinking of the power of the short story. "The Loves of Lady Purple" typifies the intense politics of the author/reader relationship in Carter's shorter pieces. Monika Fludernik has commented on the apparent lack of attention Carter's stories have received: "Carter's linguistic mastery and stunning use of metaphor are most clearly on display in her short stories – a fact that has so far been little appreciated in the criticism" (Fludernik 215). Moreover, the defamiliarization practices at work in Carter's short pieces resonate in relation to theories of the short story. Charles May has commented extensively on the short story's fostering of aesthetic estrangement, an approach openly connected to Russian formalist theory: "The short story breaks up the familiar life-world of the everyday, defamiliarizes our assumption that reality is simply the conceptual construct we take it to be, and throws into doubt that our propositional and categorical mode of perceiving can be applied to human beings as well as to objects" (May 1994b, 137).

32 One can also recognize here the influence of Edgar Allan Poe, as his writing, according to Carter, also aims at "provoking unease," (Carter 1974, 133). Poe defines the short story in relation to his well known concept of a "certain unique or single effect," (Poe 61) an expression Maggie Tonkin has linked to the potential for Carter's stories (namely "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe") to stimulate new readings (Tonkin 19). Poe also insists upon the "intentions' of the author in creating this "preconceived effect" (Poe 61) and, according to Charles May, authorial control is a central characteristic of the short narrative: "short stories are more dependent on craftsmanship and exhibit more authorial control than novels" (May 1994a, xxvi.). Although May's insistence on the more timeless, religious dimension of short narrative and its apparent detachment from social context (May 1994a, xxvi) is challenged by Angela Carter's revisionist appropriation of the genre, it is tempting to consider the implications of the short story in regards to its illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects, that is the forces of intention that speak through the utterance, and the ultimate impact on the reader. Monika Fludernik has insisted that "Carter's short fiction deserves a wide-ranging and exhaustive critical effort" (Fludernik 237), and the depth and scope of the political mechanisms that speak through her writing indeed come to the forefront as one delves into the intricacies of intention, affect, and interpellation linked to the authorial figure. The heightened, and even staged, interpellation of the reader and author in Angela Carter's short stories echoes the force the short narrative typically exercises, in what Nadine Gordimer has characterized as involvement in an intense, ephemeral "moment": "Short-story writers see by the light of the flash; theirs is the art of the only thing one can be sure of—the present moment" (Gordimer 265). Curiously, the ultimate reading effect in Carter's story might reflect less Carter's proclaimed position of dethroning the author, and more a re-writing of the authorial figure as a means by which to perceive "flashes" of power in the ongoing "moment" of the short story. Carter's story unexpectedly opens up a revision of the death or disappearance of the authorial figure, a concept that, according to Seán Burke, has reached its own degree of mythic codification: "The absence of the author is taken for granted as though it belongs to the *vita ante acta* of contemporary theory" (Burke 186). The possibility for such reflection attests to the persistent political potential of Carter's short fiction to provoke thought, and engage both reader and theoretician in a fluidity of critical and aesthetic debates that continue to baffle and challenge, thus suggesting that if "Lady Purple" cannot "sing a new song," she can, at least, continue to engage us in the multiple ideological facets of her ongoing performance.

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NOTES

1. Im/pertinent Models: Metatextuality in "The Loves of Lady Purple" (my translation).
2. Wayne Booth's concept of the implied author also deserves to be mentioned as a significant means by which critics moved away from the biographical authorial figure. (Booth 1961)
3. Walker originally published her essay "Feminist Literary Criticism and the Author" in 1990, and its relevance for current discussions of authorship is evident in its republication in William Irwin's 2002 collection of essays *The Death and Resurrection of the Author*.
4. Seán Burke comments on such contradictions throughout his book, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. (see bibliography).
5. "C'est, notamment, à travers un réseau complexe d'identifications positives et négatives avec les narrateurs, les personnages et les narrataires (actants appartenant à la boîte noire du texte) que cet échange [entre auteur et lecteur] peut se produire." (Couturier 22)
6. "Une autre conception de la (méta) textualité est de ce fait requise, qui ne pense plus le rapport entre métatexte ou hors-texte et texte comme différence statique mais comme différance, rapport constamment mouvant et inextricable où la maîtrise, illusoire, fait place à une résistance, sans que l'on puisse jamais affirmer quel texte résiste à quel texte. Dans le cas qui nous concerne, cette résistance (ou *restance*, dit encore Derrida) du texte ou de l'écriture peut se lire comme la trace d'une parole qui cherche à se faulxer à travers le toujours déjà dit de la langue." (Pedot 202)
7. "It is almost impossible to read Carter's novels and short stories in the 1990s without noticing how uncannily they anticipate certain strands of current feminist theory, how importunately they seem to invite comparison with such influential work as that of Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler." (Bristow and Broughton 14)
8. "Si j'ai repris à Barthes le mot 'figure' pour parler de l'auteur, c'est que je me situe du côté de la réception, [...] Je ne cherche pas dans l'auteur ce supplément de savoir qui me permettrait de colmater les brèches du texte mais cet interlocuteur" (Couturier 107).
9. "C'est la figure fuyante de l'auteur idéal qui impulse mes relectures angoissées du texte et m'invite à les renouveler toujours plus attentivement" (Couturier 107).

10. I have used Lecerclé's reading model to study the authorial figure in three of Carter's autobiographical texts, "Autobiographical Estrangement in Angela Carter's 'A Souvenir of Japan,' 'The Smile of Winter' and 'Flesh and the Mirror.'" *Etudes britanniques contemporaines*. 32. 2007.
11. . See, for example, Michelle Ryan-Sautour, "Carnaval et réflexion métatextuelle dans 'In Pantoland' d'Angela Carter," *Métatextualité et Métafiction: Théorie et Analyses*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002. 141-160.
12. . "I just don't know, for example, what Marilyn French meant *The Women's Room* to do: [...] I thought the premises of her idea of emancipation were pretty ropery. I don't think it's good art, good fiction or good propaganda – if propaganda is what you want." (Carter 1985, 93-94)
13. "Après tout, que penser d'une instance narrative hétérodiégétique omnisciente et de ses commentaires au présent de l'indicatif ? Ils ne sont pas si éloignés de l'esthétique réaliste d'une Jane Austen ou d'une George Eliot. N'y aurait-il pas contradiction entre le fond subversif et la forme finalement traditionnelle ? Après Henry James et Joseph Conrad, les modernistes s'étaient détachés d'une telle pratique en revendiquant la seule subjectivité. Angela Carter, post-moderne, semble revendiquer ici la position selon laquelle il n'est pas possible de produire du sens et de l'art en dehors de la culture et que l'expression artistique ne peut pas être pure, piégée qu'elle est par le langage et l'héritage culturel." (Lepaludier 112)
- "After all, what can be thought of a heterodiegetic narrator and his/her commentaries in the present indicative tense? This is not so different from the realist aesthetic of Jane Austen or George Eliot. Isn't there a contradiction between the subversive content, and a form which is ultimately traditional? After Henry James and Joseph Conrad, the modernists stepped away from such practices and defended subjectivity alone. Angela Carter, as a postmodernist, seems to defend the position that it is impossible to produce meaning and art outside of culture, and that artistic expression cannot be pure, as it is caught up in language and cultural heritage."(my translation)
14. Quotation taken from Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon.

ABSTRACTS

"The Intentional Fallacy," essai de William K. Wimsatt Jr. et Monroe C. Beardsley écrit en 1946, a marqué un tournant dans le débat autour de la figure de l'auteur dans la littérature, débat qui continue de hanter la critique contemporaine. Roland Barthes a déclaré "La Mort de l'auteur" en 1968, et la critique continue de traiter de la question de l'identité de l'auteur avec prudence, car compte tenu des théories de langages modernes, il y a consensus que toute tentative de cerner l'intention de l'auteur est illusoire. Cependant il est difficile de purger la lecture de la contagion de l'intention car le lecteur persiste à cultiver une fascination pour l'auteur. Les nouvelles d'Angela Carter jouent de façon flagrante sur cette tendance, et produisent un effet d'intention avec une dominante métatextuelle et une prolifération de références critiques, culturelles, intertextuelles, politiques. En effet, Carter semble taquiner le lecteur avec un jeu de déchiffrement conceptuel et idéologique. Jean-Jacques Lecerclé dans *Interpretation as Pragmatics* (1999) insiste sur la complexité du rapport auteur/lecteur dans de tels jeux littéraires et étudie l'affect et les processus d'interpellation qui s'y manifestent. Dans cet article je démontrerai dans quelle mesure ces processus jouent un rôle fondamental dans l'esthétique politique de Carter. J'étudierai l'effet d'intention avec ses dimensions politiques et affectives comme une manifestation des forces à l'œuvre dans "The Loves of

Lady Purple," et j'observerai dans quelle mesure des mécanismes pragmatiques participent à un militantisme nuancé qui produit des effets inattendus

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Michelle Ryan-Sautour's doctoral research focused on the speculative fiction of Angela Carter with a special emphasis on reading pragmatics, game theory, and gender. She is Associate Professor and a member of the short story section of the CRILA research group at the University of Angers, France, where she has participated in the organization of conferences on "Orality in Short Fiction" and "Theatricality in the Short Story." Ms. Ryan-Sautour is currently pursuing her research on the figure of the author and reading pragmatics in Angela Carter's short fiction.