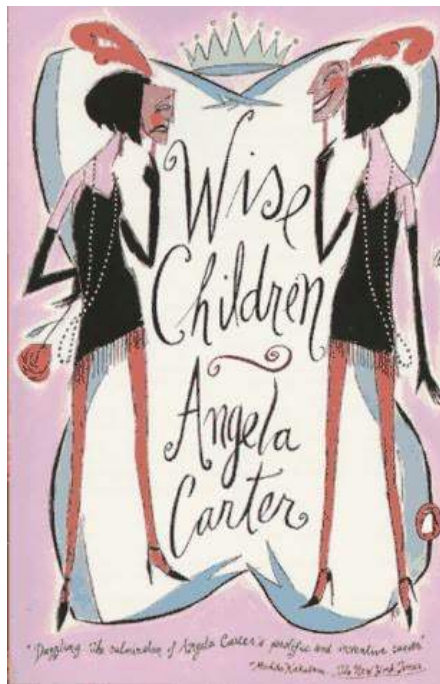




Wise Children

Angela Carter

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Wise Children

Angela Carter

Wise Children Angela Carter

Dora and Nora Chance are a famous song-and-dance team of the British music halls. Billed as The Lucky Chances, the sisters are the illegitimate and unacknowledged daughters of Sir Melchior Hazard, the greatest Shakespearean actor of his day. At once ribald and sentimental, glittery and tender, this rambunctious family saga is Angela Carter at her bewitching best.

Wise Children Details

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From Reader Review Wise Children for online ebook

Chiamartini95 says

Il giorno del loro settantacinquesimo compleanno le gemelle Nora e Dora ricevono per la prima volta l'invito alla festa del centesimo compleanno di Melchior Hazard, famoso attore Shakespiriano nonché padre delle ragazze. La famiglia Hazard infatti sforna attori di fama mondiale da generazioni ma qualcosa sembra essere andato storto con le sue gemelle, figlie mai riconosciute dal padre, ballerine e attrici di seconda categoria. Con una prosa irriverente e anticonvenzionale Angela Carter ci racconta le vite sbandate e bizzarre delle gemelle attraverso una serie di flashback che ripercorrono le loro rocambolesche avventure alla continua ricerca di qualche lavoro nell'avanspettacolo per riuscire a sbarcare il lunario. Brillante e irriverente 'Figlie sagge' é un romanzo unico nel suo genere.

Gabrielle says

My experience reading Angela Carter has been mixed, but to be honest, it's not her, it's me. I read two of her novels deep in the middle of a hyper-anxious era that rattled me so badly that I barely remember anything I read that whole year (I promise you, "Magic Toyshop", I will come back!) and I'm afraid it has tainted my enthusiasm for her other books. I have to thank Cecily for writing an enthusiastic review of "Wise Children" that got me dusting off the used copy that had been patiently waiting on my shelf... I now feel silly for neglecting "Wise Children" all this time: Shakespeare, musical theater acts and convoluted family history are like literary catnip to me. I have a viceral and romantic attraction to any story that could have a grinder organ soundtrack, the more sequins and greaspaint, the better!

Dora Chance has that dirty old lady voice that I aspire to have when my seventy-fifth birthday rolls around (although anyone who hangs out with me over a few glasses of pinot noir might tell you I already sound exactly like that...). She is a rambling, passionate, self-depricating story-teller who spins a colorful, topsy-turvy yarn. You might be tempted to call her an unreliable narrator but history has a way of being so much stranger than fiction... Its useless to try and summarize the Chance sisters' story but I will tell you about the aspects of it that really stayed with me.

Duality is explored in so many ways in this novel. Obviously, there is a rather improbable amount of twins running around, all of which have personalities that oppose each other. The introvert and the extrovert, the man of the cloth and the game show host, the refined Shakespearean actor and the stage magician. But there are also two sides to the river Thames - in this story's context, it is about being born on the "bad" (read: poor) side of the river. The legitimacy of acts such as classical theater vs. the Vaudeville and other such low-brow forms of entertainment. But do those extremes not complement each other? Isn't that the constant balancing act of life?

Another important theme is that of nostalgia. Dora is telling us this story on her seventy-fifth birthday, which happens to be her father's hundreth's birthday. She looks back at a world that has all but completely vanished. There is something sad about Dora and Nora being aged biddies, living with their sort-of-stepmother and having very little to do with themselves. It is tempting to live in one's memory of good times gone but it ain't over 'til the fat lady sings, as they say - and the ending will give them a lovely second wind.

The theme of absent fathers struck a chord with me: my father left my mom when I was too young to appreciate that it was the right choice for everyone, but even before they separated, he wasn't around much. He's tried to make amends since, but you don't teach an old dog new tricks, and in many ways, Melchior

reminded me of him. Dad never went as far as to pretend my siblings and I weren't his, but the serial deranged marriages are a speciality of his...

The only thing I am really unhappy about with this book, is that it isn't longer. I would have wanted to listen to Dora's stories for another hundred pages. But despite this flaw, this lovely bittersweet book made me giggle and sigh, and what else can you ask from a dirty old lady?

Greta says

IT IS A WISE FATHER THAT KNOWS HIS OWN CHILD

“Figlie sagge” è un'esperienza straordinaria e disorientante, una lettura che prende il lettore e se lo trascina dietro come un pupazzo passivo e inerte, lo stratonna e lo fa girare in cerchio solo per disorientarlo e farlo cadere a terra, ad osservare l'universo da una prospettiva distorta, sporca ed estremamente vivida. Credo che lo spirito giusto per affrontare questo romanzo sia quello della più completa apertura e disponibilità nel lasciarsi trascinare ovunque Angela Carter voglia portarci, mettendo per un po' da parte tutte quelle belle questioni sulla morale, sulla veridicità di una storia, su regole di tempi e spazi, tutto. Un po' come quando ci si ritrova ad una festa un po' squallida ma troppo grande, dove non si conoscono abbastanza persone e non si sa nemmeno bene perché ci si trovi lì, e allora si potrebbe cercare in ogni modo di tenere insieme i pezzi, di giustificare la propria presenza, cercare di ricordare i nomi e intuire i comportamenti più adatti da tenere, finendo con l'isolarsi in una bolla di disagio e straniamento. Oppure si può accettare di mandar giù in un sorso il contenuto del bicchiere che prima o poi ci si troverà in mano, quasi fosse una medicina, e ci si può semplicemente lasciare andare, seguire l'onda, parlare con persone di cui non si conosce il nome, raccogliere storielle e confondere persone, fare figuracce e voltare le spalle, parlare troppo di sé e ascoltare racconti che non hanno probabilmente nessun fondo di verità, ma chisseneffrega, va bene anche così.

Ecco, con Angela Carter bisogna lasciarsi andare ed accettare quello che viene senza fare domande, mettendo al massimo da parte qualche suggestione per ripensarci il giorno dopo, con la bocca secca e la testa pulsante.

“Figlie sagge” è una grande farsa, ha facciate di cartapesta e corone di cartone dorato, superfici luccicanti troppo vecchie per nascondere la tristezza di un teatro di provincia, la polvere e la puzza di sudore, l'alcool a buon mercato, ombretto di tre colori e ciglia finte che non aderiscono nemmeno bene alla pelle di un viso raggrinzito e incastrato in un passato troppo lontano. “Figlie sagge” è il racconto di Dora (Floradora) e Nora (Leonora) Chanse, due gemelle figlie illegittime di gemelli, nate dalla parte sbagliata del Tamigi e dello spettacolo. Loro padre, Melchior Hazard, è il più grande attore Shakespeariano dell'epoca, loro sono ballerine di avanspettacolo nemmeno troppo brave, che da sole valgono poco e niente, ma possono far girare la testa se prese in coppia. Saggio è il padre che conosce suo figlio, e saggi sono i figli che conoscono i propri genitori. E in questo romanzo è tutto un rincorrersi e avvoltolarsi su sé stessi di intrighi familiari, scambi di persona, doppi (non a caso i gemelli abbondano nella famiglia di Dora e Flora), e in fondo a tutto questo immane gioco di riflessi ci si chiede se effettivamente ci sia qualcuno di saggio. E forse saggio è proprio quel lettore che smette di interrogarsi su quello che si nasconde dietro il velo variopinto e sgargiante della rappresentazione, perché tutto, se visto da troppo vicino o fuori dal suo contesto specifico, perde di forza e importanza, e finisce per apparire squallido e terribilmente finto, proprio come il comico George a Hollywood. Perché se si gratta sotto la superficie, se si ascolta con più attenzione la voce gracchiante e appesantita dal gin di Dora, se si cerca di collegare tutti i puntini, inevitabilmente il castello di carte crollerà. Per apprezzare “Figlie sagge” bisogna accettare le regole del gioco, sospendere l'incredulità all'interno di un gioco di sospensione dell'incredulità, accettare di prendere il racconto di Flora e Dora per quello che è: un racconto rimaneggiato da tutta la vita, un racconto soppesato e ingrandito, esaltato, confuso e forse anche un po' tradito, lo spettacolo migliore che le sorelle Chanse siano riuscite a mettere in scena.

Angela Carter ci regala un meraviglioso omaggio al mondo del teatro, alla finzione, agli scambi di identità, alle scene madri recitate con troppa enfasi e agli effetti speciali così palesi da far quasi tenerezza. E ci regala

un omaggio a Shakespeare commovente. Shakespeare si respira ovunque, fra queste pagine, ma non lo si respira con la deferenza accademica con cui spesso si trattano i grandi nomi della letteratura: Shakespeare in questo romanzo è un vecchio amico, un amico che si conosce così bene e da così tanto tempo che lo si può anche prendere un po' in giro, gli si può fare il verso. Angela Carter si sporca le mani con Shakespeare, e spinge il lettore a fare altrettanto. Qui c'è tutta l'attenzione ai dettagli, la commistione di farsa e tragedia, il gusto per il grottesco e l'esasperato di Will. Sì, perché credo proprio che Angela Carter possa permettersi tutti i nomignoli che desidera, ed è bellissimo che, grazie a lei, anche noi lettori possiamo calarci un po' in quell'atmosfera di grande familiarità che mi piace immaginare dovesse aver regnato sulle assi del Globe Theatre.

Un romanzo onirico, dalle tinte esasperate ed esasperanti, un romanzo a tratti non semplice: come in ogni racconto fatto da una persona che ha molti anni alle spalle, e questi anni li ha raccontati tante volte proprio per il gusto del racconto, i personaggi spesso si confondono, il filo della storia si perde in aneddoti e filoni secondari, il fine ultimo della narrazione si sgretola, lasciando solo il ritmo concitato di una voce che narra e narra e continuerebbe a narrare. E noi lettori, col trucco ormai sfatto e i piedi doloranti, vorremmo solo non allontanarci mai da quella festa dove gli ospiti più eccentrici ci stanno incantando.

Wanda says

Read to fill the “Magical Realism” square of my 2017 Halloween Bingo card.

The large cast of off-beat characters in this book reminded me strongly of Canadian author, Robertson Davies. And all of the links back to Melchior Hazard, Shakespearean actor, made me think of Station Eleven! But Carter definitely makes this tale all her own, despite the echoes with other authors.

Like the Shakespeare that permeates the novel, there are lots of twins, sudden changes in fortune, costumes, and a lot of uncertain parentage. As the old saw goes, it's a wise child that knows its own father. Dora Chance, Melchior's illegitimate daughter and twin to Nora Chance, tells the tale and it unrolls like an article in a gossip rag. Whether you can trust all she says or not is a Chance that you'll have to take! The Lucky Chances, as the sisters are known, can only be considered lucky in comparison to others in the tale. For instance, they were raised by a woman who seemed to actually care about them, rather than by their biological parents and in this, they seem to come out ahead.

Dora and Nora sound like they would be a lot of fun to have a gin and tonic with, but I wouldn't want to stay in their house!

Descending Angel says

Took awhile to get into the writing style which was expected and then it just clicked and flowed beautifully. A lot of it is kinda a flashback/history of the Chance twins and it's interesting, it's funny and there's a lot of casual incest and illegitimacy of children. The story is probably its weakest part but it does enough. The characters and the classic Carter banter is really what makes this (her last novel) so good.

Megan Baxter says

I trust my sister's choice in books, but I was a little startled when I picked up this book that it was about the theatre. I don't know why that should startle me, except that I scarred her once by exposing her to a bunch of actors, and she's seemed a little leery since. At the remove of fiction, though, this was apparently right up her alley, and I'm pleased to say that it was exactly to my taste as well.

Note: The rest of this review has been withheld due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision here.

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at Smorgasbook

Teresa Proença says

Muito divertido, emocionante, original são alguns adjetivos que me ocorrem para classificar este livro, de que fiquei com pena quando terminou e com muitas saudades das personagens.

A narradora é uma velhota, com mais de setenta anos, que conta a sua vida e da sua família - de muitos gémeos (quatro pares mais um de presente) - que trabalha no mundo do espectáculo (teatro e dança). Trocas de paternidade (e de namorados); alguns incestos (leves); infidelidades e mais uma catadupa de loucuras, proporcionam uma leitura delirante do princípio ao fim.

A escrita é, aparentemente, simples - sem pretensões de educar ou ensinar a viver - focada na acção e no comportamento das personagens, cuja caracterização tem expressões deliciosas, como esta sobre um homem que tem um "*sorriso removedor-de-cuecas-de-senhora*".

Encontrar este livro foi uma tarefa difícil, mas desfrutei cada frase da sua leitura o que compensou todo o tempo que consumi na procura. Próxima missão: desencantar mais um livro (esgotado) de Angela Carter que, só pelo título (As Infernais Máquinas de Desejo do Doutor Hoffman), promete ser outro desvario.

Rowizyx says

Spassoso e brillante, mi ci voleva proprio.

È una soap travestita da alto teatro? È una pantomima messa in forma di romanzo? Per quanto la famiglia (o la non-famiglia) delle due protagoniste sia un totale casino, e per quanto sia incredibile, anche solo per il numero di gemelli sfornati in serie senza mancare neanche un passaggio, questo passa in secondo piano nella prosa di Angela Carter, che svela una matassa ingarbugliatissima. Anzi, è quasi un punto di forza perché, per quanto abbia dei passaggi artificiosi, la storia teatrale che ci racconta ha una verve e una brillantezza incredibili. Nora e Dora, figlie illegittime, si muovono nelle ipocrisie del mondo paterno con carattere e bellezza, e si stagliano su tutta una schiera di parenti insignificanti, meschini, gretti, malgrado la loro legittimità.

Da leggere.

Mariaelena Di Gennaro says

"Buongiorno! Lasciate che mi presenti. Mi chiamo Dora Chance. Benvenuti nel lato sbagliato della città. In altre parole: se venite dagli States, pensate a Manhattan, poi a Brooklyn. Mi spiego? Per un parigino è probabilmente una questione di rive gauche e di rive droite. Ma a Londra si tratta della barriera nord-sud. Io e Nora, mia sorella, siamo sempre vissute sulla sponda sinistra, quella che i turisti di solito non vedono, la sponda bastarda del Vecchio Padre Tamigi."

Ecco, a me è bastato questo incipit a farmi capire che stavo per cominciare un viaggio straordinario, in compagnia di due protagoniste eccezionali e di una scrittura che difficilmente riuscirò a dimenticare. E infatti non mi sbagliavo, perchè questa è stata una delle letture più belle e sorprendenti che ho fatto quest'anno. A raccontarci questa storia è proprio una delle due protagoniste, Dora Chance, della quale io mi sono innamorata fin dalle primissime righe e che costituisce assieme a sua sorella gemella Nora l'asse portante di tutto il romanzo. Se in alcuni romanzi il rivolgersi del narratore direttamente ai lettori può apparire bizzarro o addirittura fuori luogo, qui invece questo espediente ha funzionato alla perfezione, conferendo alla vicenda un'immediatezza e una freschezza che hanno reso il tutto ancora più coinvolgente. Conosciamo le gemelle Chance nel giorno del loro settantacinquesimo compleanno quando ricevono, a sorpresa, l'invito ad unirsi ai festeggiamenti per il centesimo compleanno del signor Melchior Hazard, il più grande attore shakespeariano del suo tempo, nonchè loro padre, che mai ha voluto riconoscerle come sue figlie. Questo invito inaspettato darà il via a tutto il romanzo e permetterà a Dora di raccontarci la storia della sua famiglia, una storia che ha innumerevoli sfumature, una storia triste, a tratti assurda, divertente, bizzarra, malinconica, narrata con una profonda ironia, mai forzata, mai fuori luogo, ma delicata, affascinante, irresistibile e che rende lo stile della Carter assolutamente unico.

Dora e Nora sono gemelle, sono ex ballerine ormai avviate sul viale del tramonto, sono due donne forti che si sono aggrappate alla vita con le unghie e con i denti, che hanno superato insieme innumerevoli difficoltà, che hanno fatto del teatro e dello spettacolo la ragione della loro esistenza, ma sono soprattutto due figlie illegittime. Questo tema accompagnerà praticamente ogni pagina del romanzo ed è presente fin dall'incipit: Dora parla di una Londra divisa in due, parla della sponda "bastarda" del fiume Tamigi, in una potente metafora che accomuna questa visione a quello che è anche la loro grande, strampalata famiglia: da una parte il ramo "legittimo" degli Hazard, incarnato dai figli che Melchior ha avuto dalle sue tre mogli, dall'altro il ramo "illegittimo", che comprende il loro volto, il volto di due bambine avute dal grande attore dopo un'unica notte di passione passata con una povera cameriera di una scalcinata locanda situata nella parte "sbagliata" di Londra, appunto nella parte "bastarda" della città, una giovane donna morta dandole alla luce. Dora e Nora avranno come unica figura materna la vecchia Nonna Chance, un personaggio incredibile, una donna forte, accanita animalista, promotrice del nudismo e vegetariana convinta, che le accoglie ancora in fasce dando loro il suo cognome e, cosa più importante, tutto l'amore possibile. Nonna Chance è un personaggio frizzante, esuberante, tenero nella sua eccentricità e che riempie le pagine del romanzo a lei dedicate e il rapporto tra lei e le bambine ci viene descritto benissimo da Dora, in maniera schietta, mai melensa, eppure dolce con quella vena di malinconia che si avverte in maniera particolarmente acuta nelle parti delicate e commoventi dedicate al ricordo che di lei hanno Dora e Nora. Questi ricordi sono così vividi nella mente e nel cuore delle due donne, che le portano a sentire ancora il suo inconfondibile profumo di cavoli e naftalina, la sua presenza in quella vecchia casa che avevano condiviso per decenni e che porterà sempre la sua impronta.

Oltre al rapporto con Nonna Chance, emerge fortissimo nel romanzo il rapporto tra le gemelle e il loro vecchio padre, o meglio, il loro "non-rapporto" e tutte le implicazioni che questo mancato riconoscimento paterno ha portato nella vita di Dora e Nora. Sono proprio queste, secondo me, le pagine più struggenti di tutta la storia e allo stesso tempo le più reali. L'attesa spasmodica di vedere per la prima volta quel padre che avevano sempre e solo immaginato è l'attesa di ogni bambino che aspetta solo di incontrare gli occhi di chi gli ha dato la vita, l'emozione incontenibile che porta Dora e Nora a tremare come foglie, a sentire il cuore scoppiare nel petto, a non riuscire a dire nemmeno una parola durante il primissimo incontro con Melchior è quella di ogni figlio che sente di stare realizzando uno dei suoi più grandi sogni e soprattutto la loro

sofferenza, le loro lacrime davanti alla gelida indifferenza di quel padre che tanto avevano agognato di conoscere è quella di ogni figlio che si sente inspiegabilmente e crudelmente rifiutato da chi invece dovrebbe amarlo in maniera appassionata e incondizionata. L'unica figura paterna che Dora e Nora hanno conosciuto nel corso della loro vita è il loro zio Perry, fratello di Melchior, che si era assunto agli occhi del mondo la paternità delle due bambine per risparmiare al più famoso fratello uno scandalo in pubblica piazza. Perry è, al pari di tutti i personaggi del romanzo, una persona bizzarra, amante della vita e dei piaceri che essa può riservare, inaffidabile sotto una molteplicità di aspetti, incostante, volubile, divertente, animato da uno spirito di eterno fanciullo che lo fa apparire piuttosto irresponsabile agli occhi dei più, ma allo stesso tempo dotato di quella enorme dose di bontà, di gentilezza e amore che lo porta a prendersi cura delle sue sfortunate nipoti fin dalla loro nascita e ad amarle come solo un padre saprebbe fare. Nonostante la presenza, seppur incostante, dello zio Perry, è Melchior che Dora e Nora vogliono conoscere, è lui che tentano in ogni modo di conquistare, è al suo affetto che anelano, è il suo amore che quasi elemosinano ad ogni costo, sognando il giorno in cui il loro vero padre dirà davanti al mondo che quelle due ballerine scalzinate, tenere, assurde, divertenti, sono proprio figlie sue, dando loro finalmente il benvenuto nel ramo legittimo della grande dinastia degli Hazard. Nonostante gli innumerevoli rifiuti, la terribile indifferenza che Melchior non manca mai di dimostrare loro, Dora e Nora lo amano di un amore tanto inspiegabile quanto profondo, straziante e doloroso e questo passo che ho deciso di riportare ne è la perfetta dimostrazione:

"Quel sorriso! E, accidenti, ci innamorammo di lui, un'altra volta, proprio come avevamo fatto in quel giorno di festa di agosto tantissimi anni prima, quando ci spezzò il cuore per la prima volta, quando era giovane e sciocco e impaurito. Adesso vedevamo che non era più nessuna di tutte queste cose. Eravamo cotte, dalla testa ai piedi. Non avevamo bisogno di parlare. Le parole non sarebbero servite a nulla. Il suo sorriso. Nora stava piangendo come una fontana e lui allungò la sua vecchia mano venosa e cosparsa di lentiggini per toccarla, tremulo ed esitante, la guancia con un gesto da spezzare il cuore."

Dora e Nora dovranno aspettare settantacinque lunghissimi anni per avere da lui quella piccola, semplice, splendida carezza che finalmente permetterà loro di chiamarlo "Papà" come tante volte avevano solo sperato, settantacinque anni perchè lui le guardi con un piccolo barlume di affetto e tenerezza, eppure non si sono stancate di aspettare. Nonostante il comportamento indifendibile, sciocco, duro, imperdonabile del loro sciagurato genitore, nonostante le volte in cui ha spezzato il loro cuore, le due donne non solo lo perdonano, ma gli offrono tutta la loro gioia, la loro emozione agguantando ogni suo sorriso per imprimerlo nella loro mente, cibandosi di ogni suo sguardo rivolto a loro due sole, afferrando con disperata felicità ogni suo gesto di affetto, aggrappandosi finalmente a quella realtà che per settantacinque anni era stata solo un inafferrabile e malinconico sogno.

Non c'è solo ironia, divertimento, spensieratezza in questa storia, c'è anche tantissima malinconia, dolore, rimpianto, nostalgia ed è come la Carter sceglie di narrare tutto questo spettro di emozioni e sentimenti che mi ha lasciato a bocca aperta. Il suo stile è sempre molto diretto, senza troppi fronzoli, a volte perfino crudo e amaro, fatto di frasi brevissime ed incalzanti, tanto per le pagine più spensierate, quanto per quelle più cupe e dolorose ed io l'ho apprezzato tantissimo. Mi è piaciuta molto anche l'ambientazione della storia, questa Londra fumosa, quasi triste, grigia, ferita dalle atrocità della seconda guerra mondiale, dalla miseria, dalla fame da essa portate, resa splendidamente dalla scrittrice perchè raccontata in maniera quasi abbozzata, accennata, senza perdersi in infiniti dettagli e descrizioni minuziose, eppure incredibilmente incisiva. Secondo me sta proprio qui la grandezza di questa autrice, nel saper colpire al cuore i lettori anche narrando vicende complicatissime senza approfondirle in maniera eccessiva, nel saper incidere con la sua scrittura in qualsiasi cosa decida di raccontare e nel saperci riuscire alla perfezione anche in pochissime righe. Ho trovato interessante anche la netta contrapposizione tra il grigiore londinese e la bellezza di tutto l'aspetto teatrale della vicenda perchè il teatro, in modo particolare quello shakespeariano, gioca un ruolo fondamentale nel romanzo. Il teatro è ciò che ha plasmato la grandezza della dinastia degli Hazard, è ciò che costituisce la vera identità di questa famiglia, il teatro è l'ossessione di Melchior, è il destino di Dora e Nora che già da piccolissime amavano sgambettare in tutù e calzamaglia nei teatri più sconosciuti e decadenti della città e bearsi di ogni applauso a loro rivolto, è ciò che le lega al ramo legittimo della loro famiglia che, pur avendole sempre respinte, ha trasmesso anche a loro il DNA artistico di tutti gli Hazard. Emergono forti i

riferimenti a Shakespeare e alle sue più grandi opere e questo rende il romanzo ancora più accattivante. All'inizio la storia potrebbe risultare un po' confusionaria, soprattutto perchè narrata in un continuo alternarsi tra il presente e le vicende passate, è un lunghissimo viaggio che da Londra porta Dora e Nora in America per la preparazione di un'improbabile spettacolo teatrale in cui è coinvolta praticamente tutta la famiglia Hazard, è una serie infinita di colpi di scena, di amori proibiti, di amori soffocati e tragici, di matrimoni mancati, di scambi di persone, di segreti indicibili, di disastri e fallimenti che in alcuni punti può travolgere il lettore come un fiume in piena, ma in cui io ho amato immensamente perdermi. Non potrete mai più dimenticarvi di Dora e Nora, non smetterete mai di amarle anche dopo aver terminato il romanzo, starete lì a sognare con loro, a vivere tutte le loro incredibili disavventure, a fare il tifo per loro, a desiderare che abbiano la migliore delle vite possibili, soffrirete e riderete con loro, vi prenderanno per mano per condurvi in un viaggio che vi sembrerà di vivere da vicino, di toccare con mano, in una storia tanto bizzarra quanto irresistibile, la loro storia, unica e meravigliosa che solo Angela Carter poteva narrarci con tale maestria.

Nancy Oakes says

The more I thought about this book after reading it, the more I realized that four stars just isn't enough to express how much I enjoyed it. Wise Children is a lovely book in which there is never a dull moment, and I do mean never. It is funny, audacious, bawdy, and often flat-out farcical crazy, and I loved every second of it. Why is that, you might want to ask, and my answer is that above all, it is just teeming with life.

The novel begins at 49 Bard Road, Brixton, London, South West Two. It's a special day -- the Chance sisters ("Chance by name, chance by nature") are celebrating their seventy-fifth birthday. Notice I used the word "their" -- the women are twins: our narrator, Dora, was born just five minutes ahead of her sister Nora. On this day, Dora gives a "little shiver," because she knows that "something will happen today." She doesn't "give a monkey's" what it is -- as she says, "Just as long as something happens to remind us we're still in the land of the living." It's also the day of the centenary birthday celebration of their father, the actor Sir Melchior Hazard, "though not, ahem, by any of his wives."

The title of this book comes from an old saying that is brought out now and again here: "It is a wise child that knows its own father," and one thing Carter does quite well in Wise Children is to examine the idea of parenthood -- not just on the paternal side, but the maternal as well.

As Dora notes at the beginning, some readers may want to know "Just who is this Melchior Hazard and his clan, his wives, his children, his hangers-on," so her role is to "provide some of the answers:"

"It is in order to provide some of the answers to those questions that I, Dora Chance, in the course of assembling notes towards my own autobiography, have inadvertently become the chronicler of all the Hazards..."

and with that, we are launched into a saga which, as W.B. Gooderham notes in a Guardian article,

"contains all the juicy Shakespeare tropes of ambition, greed and revenge; fathers and daughters; brothers and sisters; twins, mistaken identity, incest and adultery."

I would love to just go on and on about this book, but time and all that. The truth is that I'm sure I could read this book another two or three times and find something new I'd missed before -- that's just the sort of book it is. Anyone who hasn't read this novel is in for a treat -- I can promise that this book is one of a kind, and that it is a story not soon forgotten. It's a lovely book, really, and it's sad to think that this was the last book Angela Carter ever wrote.

There's a reason I love her work, and this book is just one example of why.

Algernon says

Extract from the introductory note:

... cheerfully bawdy, it's Carter's most glorious, most comic, most fulfilled, certainly her most generously and happily orgiastic, fictional performance. By chance it is also her last novel.

A fitting swan song for the master enchanter, conjuring wonders out of her magic pen for the last time, guiding me again by the light of a Paper Moon into world of entertainment. After joining the circus in the company of a winged trapeze artist in **Nights at the Circus**, it's the turn now of Dora and Nora Chance to be the hosts of a wild ride through almost a century of popular entertainment. They are twin illegitimate daughters of the greatest Shakespearean family in the English Theatre, the Hazards. Being from the wrong side of the tracks (literally from the South Bank of the Thames), their career develops in the 'bastard' scion of the art : the Vaudeville. Foul mouthed, gin infused and outrageously libertine, Dora Chance on her 75 year birthday recounts the tumultuous history of the family, starting with their grandparents and going through several pair of twins in each Hazard generation. Prepare to be shocked out of your socks and to laugh until you cry your eyes out.

Well, you might have known what you were about to let yourself in for when you let Dora Chance in her ratty old fur and poster paint, her orange (Persian Melon) toenails sticking out of her snakeskin peep-toes, reeking of liquor, accost you in the Coach and Horses and let her tell you a tale.

The whole journey takes place under the auspices of The Bard : the grandparents toured the world as a Shakespearean company, Melchior and Peregrine Hazard, as well as the Chance twins are born on the same day as Shakespeare. Melchior would achieve his world wide fame playing dramatic roles from the Bard's repertoire, and later in the novel the whole family would move to Hollywood to film **A Midsummer Night Dream** . This reference is not a coincidence, as the whole book is a manifesto against artificial divisions of entertainment between high- and low-brow, be it theatre, literature, music or cinema. Shakespeare is the perfect master of both the comedy and the tragedy that is life, indivisibly and irrepressibly bursting out of the restraints of conventions and categorizations.

Dora and Nora Chance are raised in poverty by their grandmother, unacknowledged by their sire Melchior, but supported from a distance by their wandering uncle, his twin Perry. Their fate is sealed on their seventh birthday, as they are treated to a night out at the theatre. They see a performance of **Lady Be Good** and afterwards the Grandmother exclaims: *"You've got stars in your eyes, girls"* All they want to do from now on is to get up and dance. They will take lessons, and start earning money as chorus girls in their early teens, but that first magic moment will be cherished forever in their pit-pating hearts:

The lights went down, the bottom of the curtain glowed. I loved it and have always loved it best of all, the moment when the light go down, the curtain glows, you know that something wonderful is going to happen. It doesn't matter if what happens next spoils everything; the anticipation itself is always pure. To travel hopefully is better than to arrive.

Their career is anything but a bed of roses, with two world wars to get through and the degradation of the vaudeville scene into nude peeping shows in later years. But throughout their tribulations they stood shoulder to shoulder and kicked their heels high and the air, laughed at the troubles and sang out their songs as loud as they could:

She said "Yes!" to life and I said, "Maybe!" but we're both in the same boat, now. Two batty old hags, buy us a drink and we'll sing you a song. Even manage a knees-up, on occasion, such as New Year's Eve or a publican's grandbaby.

What a joy it is to dance and sing!

One thing you can be sure of: nobody will say the Chance twins will go gently into that good night. And neither will Angela Carter, who remains in my heart a rebel and a fighter, cheerfully demolishing stuffy historical figures and dusty moralities in thinly veiled references to Lewis Carroll (*Not many people can boast a photo of their grandmother posing for kiddiporn*), Lawrence Olivier, Charlie Chaplin, a Certain Distinguished Person from the Royal Family, F Scott Fitzgerald (I read on wikipedia that he is the inspiration for Irish), Fred Astaire, Hollywood moguls and divas, TV presenters and venerable lords of the theatre.

TV game shows are Simplicity itself. It's all about greed. The camera lingers on the faces in the audience, their eyes are popping out, they're drooling and slobbering. Money! Money for nothing! A win on Tristram Hazard's 'Lashings of Lolly', almost as good as a Civil List pension.

Coming back to the twins in the family and the best Shakespearean tradition of mistaken identities, switching places and shady parenting, every Hazard / Chance generation recreates the dialectics of entertainment: tragedy and comedy, Carnegie Hall and Las Vegas, meditation and escapism, marriage and adultery, poetry and doggerel, chalk and cheese. Each twin is not a carbon copy of the other:

- Melchior is King Lear and Hamlet, Perregrine is Falstaff traipsing around the world and hunting for butterflies in the Amazonian jungle;
- Nora falls in love at the drop of a pin, Dora guards her heart fiercely;
- Saskia is a famous TV chef, her sister Imogen is famous for her role as a goldfish in a children's programme;
- Tristram is a game show presenter, his brother Gareth a Jesuit priest (*Not so different, really, I suppose. Both of them in show business.* quips Dora)

And none of them is actually certain who his/her parents are. That's where the title of the novel comes from (*It's a wise child that knows its own father, hissed Peregrine, like the gypsy's warning. But wiser yet the father who knows his own child.*), and the whole argument Carter makes in here that we should love life fully, unrestrained by moral prejudices, envy, greed, timidity. In the end:

all is laughter, forgiveness, generosity, reconciliation

just as the Bard taught us four centuries ago.

I've got a couple more quotes that I couldn't fit in without repeating myself , but I'll add them here because I would hate to misplace them later:

Tragedy, eternally more class than comedy. How could mere song-and-dance girls aspire so high? We were destined from birth to be the lovely

ephemera of the theatre, we'd rise and shine like birthday candles, then blow out.

when Dora advises the American Star Daisy to lie to her producer husband: *Such moral horror as suffused her features! You never saw anything like it. We were quite surprised and felt shoddy, by comparison, as if*

we lived in an ethical twilight, a cockroach world of compromise, lies, emotional sleight of hand. And so we did, I suppose. We called it "Life". But Daisy wanted something better. So did Irish, come to think of it. It's the American tragedy in a nutshell. They look around the world and think: "There must be something better!" But there isn't. Sorry, chum. This is it. What you see is what you get. Only the here and now.

Irish is Dora's elderly playwright boyfriend in Hollywood: Poor old Irish. I gave him all a girl can give - a little pleasure, a little pain, a carillon of laughter, a kerchief full of tears. And, as for him, well, he gave me the ability to compose such a sentence as that last one. Don't knock it. That's lyricism.

from Grandma, a lesson to last a lifetime: **Come off it girls! Pluck the day! You ain't dead, yet! You've got a party to go to! Expect the worst, hope for the best!**

additional material, companion pieces to **Wise Children**:

- David Niven - The Moon's a Balloon

- **The Prince and The Showgirl** a classic comedy with Lawrence Olivier and Marilyn Monroe

soundtrack listing (actually in the book as the Chance twins theme songs):

- *It's Only a Paper Moon*

- *I Can't Give You Anything But Love*

- *Please direct your feet
To the sunny sunny sunny
side of the street*

- *Is You Is or Is You Ain't*

- *I'll See You Again*

- *My Heart Belongs to Daddy*

- *The Way You Look Tonight*

Nandakishore Varma says

I love Angela Carter's prose: the sentences dance together, perfectly matched, creating a sinuous harmony of prose that's almost poetry. *Wise Children* is no different. In telling the story of the Misses Dora and Leonora Chance, the "Chance Sisters" whose rhythmically clicking heels have lighted up many a music hall stage, Ms. Carter has not spared any expense, choosing to spread the paint in loud, garish brushstrokes. For are they not the twin daughters (albeit born on the other side of the blanket) of the great Shakespearean actor

Melchior Hazard?

Dora tells the story-and does it in such a bawdy style reminiscent of the music hall that you get carried away. It is a wildly improbable story, full of clandestine affairs, terrible disasters and great revelations-yet somehow unreal, as though we are watching a burlesque play. The girls are bastards of the great Melchior, born during the first world war, abandoned by their mother and brought up by Grandma Chance and their father's twin brother Peregrine. Even though their father do not accept them publicly, their story is always entwined with the story of the Hazard family, as Melchior moves from the drama stage to Hollywood and back again, picking up three and discarding two wives in the process. He has twin daughters from his first wife and twin sons from his third, and they all interact in wildly improbable ways throughout this kaleidoscopic novel.

It would not make any sense to describe the plot, so I will not attempt it-even if I were able to do so! Suffice it to say that there are artifices and deceptions aplenty, and nothing is what it seems to be...rather like a Shakespear play... In fact, the spirit of the great bard, especially the bawdiness of his comedies, is present throughout the narrative. This novel could be Angela Carter's tribute to him. Also, the vulgar light of the music hall makes itself felt on each page.

This is show business, and after some time, we start asking ourselves: is anything for real? As Nora asks Dora towards the end-does their father really exist? Or is he a pasteboard creation of their imaginations?

The other persistent theme is that of twins. One active, one passive: one quiet, one sprightly: one good, one evil... Even the city of London, split by the river into "twins": the North, respectable and the South, vulgar. Diametrical opposites permanently linked together. The novel aptly ends with the arrival of a new set of twins.

The question then arises: for such a many-layered story, why only three stars? Well...the book had a bit too much of vulgarity in it for me. Maybe Ms. Carter did it on purpose, but the constant references to semen (especially on one occasion, the presence of it on a young man's moustache after he has oral sex with another man) put me off. Also the numerous instances of incest didn't help. But I confess it is entirely a matter of personal taste.

So the verdict: a well-written, fast-paced literary novel, but perhaps not everybody's cup of tea.

Christy says

Dora tells the story of her and her twin, Nora, unrecognized illegitimate daughters of the great Shakespearean actor, Melchior Hazard, from their birth at the beginning of the century, to Melchior's hundredth birthday party, a narrative that progresses chronologically, but with jags and with hints and clues which remind us that we are dealing with that tricky stuff, living memory.

Apart from referring to Shakespeare and his plays, Carter cleverly adds as much Shakespearean twists into her own story as she can: twins, a young woman drowned for love, a jealous husband who murders his wife, thankless daughters, questionable paternity, characters dressing up like each other, etc. This is never clunky, but seems a living, organic part of her loud, colorful and carnival-esque tale. And, eventually, one remembers with a surprise that streak of magical realism hidden up her sleeve. This is a masterful work – light and frivolous in tone, but is superbly worded and has playfully sharp dialogue. And, like a magic tent, it's bigger on the inside that it seems on the outside.

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

Ms. Flirtworthy, I Presume

At just under 240 pages, this isn't a long or difficult book, but it is hugely enjoyable and rewarding at multiple levels.

At one level, you can read it as a first person narration of a 75 year old woman (Dora Chance) that is hilarious, vulgar, witty and dynamic.

It's like sitting Mae West in front of a microphone and plying her with alcohol. The stories, street wisdom, wise-cracking, jokes and double entendres just pour out of her endlessly.

I've met this kind of woman before, at cocktail parties, a long time ago. If you enjoy flirtation, nobody in the room could possibly be more flirtworthy. (I don't mean flirtation in any way other than the sheer pleasure of good company and good conversation.)

At first, you approach them tentatively and gently, as if they might be quaint, thinking they'll only last one martini, and they'll want or need to catch a cab home. Then you realise that, as the twinkle surfaces and remains in their eye, they can handle their liquor better than you. They're the life of the party, not you. They're the speaker, you're just the listener. They're the author, you're just the reader.

They've had more practice, and besides, they have more and better stories to tell than you. Slowly, drink by drink, they better you. Without doubt, they've met better men than you, too. They might forget you, but you will never forget them.

I used to live next to two twins like this. We used to attend monthly Art Gallery functions, when the Gallery still paid for drinks and hors d'oeuvres. We always caught a cab home together, if I could handle the pace.

Brush Up on Your Shakespeare

At another level, this novel is an extremely sophisticated project. Its five chapters function like a five act play. It appropriates themes and tropes from just about every Shakespearean play in existence (except perhaps two?).

It really is an exercise that proves, if you brush up on your Shakespeare, you can achieve something breathtaking and remarkable. Well, at least Angela Carter could.

Shakespeare is the foundation upon which the novel is built. Well, his theatre is. As we fast-forward into the present, Dora reveals to us her life in theatre, music hall, song and dance, and ultimately film of the Hollywood variety.

Dora proves that all the world's a stage. I don't really know to whom the stage belonged in Shakespeare's age. It wasn't just Shakespeare and Co. However, increasingly, entertainment has been taken over by the supposed deal makers. The playwrights have been pushed into the background, as have the actors and actresses. In a way, Dora/Angela asserts the value of the person, the storyteller, the actor, the one who gets up on stage, the one who acts the part, the one who acts a goat, the one who entertains.

Doesn't Feel like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag

As narrated by a 75 year old woman, you have to wonder whether this is all nostalgia, a requiem for a time that has passed.

Yet Carter's prose beats with the biggest heart you can conceive. This is no *"feels like I'm fixin' to die rag"*.

This is a tale told by someone who is determined to eke the most out of their life until the very last heartbeat.

What a Joy It Is!

I could tell you about the difference between a Hazard and a Chance. I could tell you that Dora has an identical twin, Nora, and I could tell you about all of the other twins and all of the scope for mistaken identity that this creates, not to mention the uncertainty about paternity (and maternity, believe it or not).

But what I really want to tell you about is the joy that runs through this novel, these five chapters, like a river.

"So Long as Men Can Breathe, or Eyes Can See, So Long Lives This, and This Gives Life to Thee"

After all is said and done, Dora proclaims:

"What a joy it is to dance and sing!"

She's right, of course. If you make the effort to dance and sing.

But isn't that what life is about?

When you read that last sentence, you look back on the novel in its entirety and you marvel at the effort that went into it. The effort that was required to be precisely this hilarious, this vulgar, this witty, this dynamic, this wise.

It's OK for a writer to be praised for the quality of their sentences. But here is someone who writes great sentences, great paragraphs, great chapters, great novels.

Angela Carter never relaxes the pressure on herself in this novel. Only the best will do.

Then you realise that for almost the whole time she was writing this novel, she knew that she had lung cancer and that it would take her life within 12 months.

There isn't one iota of self-pity in this novel. It asserts that tragedy is something that happens to other people (even if comedy might also be a tragedy that happens to someone else).

But most importantly, it asserts that tragedy isn't so much a life that ends (for this happens to us all), but a life that is wasted.

Angela Carter wrote to the very end, partly so that her two sons might have a better life, but so that we might too.

Ironically, or perhaps not, both Shakespeare and Carter died around the time of their 52nd birthdays.

Teresa says

Perhaps there's something 'wrong' with me, but if a book is billed as "comic" or especially "richly comic" as this one is on the back of the edition I own, odds are I'm not going to enjoy it as much as a novel that's dark, morbid, or even darkly or morbidly comic.

Before starting this, I'd started the second book—The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman—in the aforementioned volume and couldn't get into that one at all; after only a few pages, I read Jan-Maat's review and decided it likely isn't for me at all. So I turned to this one and wasn't sure of it in the beginning either, but I kept on and got into it for quite a while. But then—and this is generally my issue with comedy of any kind—it went on too long for my tastes. Not just the book itself but the scenes themselves, starting with when the rather large cast of characters is sent to Hollywood; ditto for the 21st birthday party of one of several pairs of twins and the last scene, another birthday party.

I read a lot of works by English authors, so I consider myself fairly conversant with British slang, references and brand names, but there was a tremendous amount here I hadn't heard of before, perhaps that had something to do with the time period. Sometimes not knowing didn't matter; sometimes it did, and thank goodness for Google.

After I was finished, I was reminded that I basically felt the same way about Graham Greene's *Travels With My Aunt*. I've been accused by certain family members (and I agree with them) of taking some things too seriously and of not enjoying 'silly', so take my rating with that in mind. And despite my negativity, I agree with Cecily's warm review.

Ashley says

I probably spent the longest time reading this book compared to all the other books I read due to the complexity and complicatedness of its plot and the unsettlingly eccentric cast of characters. What an experience! A clever book deploying magical realism and saturated with parodies that left me feeling accomplished and simultaneously dizzy upon reading it. I despised it so much but I loved it just as much, which was why I had to finish reading it.

Cecily says

This is a gloriously ribald carnivalesque adventure, with deeper themes.

It is the life story of identical twin musical hall performers, Dora and (Leo)Nora and their complex family, as remembered by Dora on their 75th birthday. Dora is a wonderful raconteur, though hardly a reliable narrator. She's more of a chatty old biddy, rambling away, enthusiastically, and suddenly remembering little asides. She would be great fun to meet, and I really felt I did.

There are many twins in the story: contrasts, duality, uniqueness, and mistaken identity are the most obvious themes, all in a theatrical setting, with many Shakespearean references.

THEMES

As well as duality/twins (and related themes) and the theatre, uncertain parentage, absent fathers, decline and fall, comedy and tragedy, all feature strongly, and in fact most of them come back to duality and contrast. The performers range from the most revered Shakespearean thespians down to presenters on the trashiest sort of TV game show.

Twinship sometimes reduces a pair to a single entity, but also enhances to more than the sum of its parts: "Neither of us is anything special on our own... but put us together, people blinked... we turned heads." The trouble is, "This night of all nights I wanted to look like myself, whoever that was."

There are even similarities among those who are not twins, the same circumstances and actions recurring: romances arising from productions of King Lear, consensual incest (actual, presumed (but not certain, where paternity is not definite), and fictional (Lear and Cordelia, a pantomime goose and its gosling!)), and "to die for love runs in the family" - as does being long-lived (another contrast/contradiction).

Legitimacy and illegitimacy is another aspect, both in the literal sense of people's parentage, but also in terms of "proper" theatre versus lower forms of entertainment. Randolph, the patriarch, toured the world, evangelising Shakespeare, to the point where "the touring was turning into a kind of madness".

Performance is the background of everything, even real life: Grandma Chance's boarding house - on **Bard** Road "never looked *plausible*. It looked like a stage set of a boarding house, as if Grandma had done it up to suite a role she'd chosen on purpose", which was almost true. She even created her family out of scraps.

Fate is a strong thread, too, even in the main surnames, Hazard and Chance. "Ambition, the curse and glory of the Hazards, who'll risk everything they've got and a little bit more on a throw of the dice."

If you like spotting such things, also look out for mirrors, the grandfather's Grandfather clock (and indirect references, e.g. "we stopped, short..." re the menopause!), Shakespearean-style potions and poisons, and Melchior's obsessive attachment to a cardboard crown.

FAMILY TREE

This is rather complicated, as there are lots of twins, as well as partner-swapping, resulting in children being raised by their uncles. Other children, including Dora and Nora, are raised by people who are not their parents or uncles. There is a Dramatis Personae listed at the back, but this family tree is more useful: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wis...>

The title becomes clear towards the end, "I may never have known my father in the sense of an intimate acquaintance, but I know who he was. I was a wise child."

INCEST

This should be a troubling issue, but it's all glossed over in such a jolly way (no gory details), it's hard to be as outraged as one should be. Just the thought of it makes one character say, "Dread and delight coursed through my veins".

TRUTH

Parts of it are a little far-fetched, but whether that's Angela Carter's fantasy, or embroidered by Dora, we don't always know, though at times, doubts are explicit: "Over the years, Perry offered us a Chinese banquet of options as to what happened to him. He gave us all his histories, we could choose which ones we wanted - but they kept on changing." Another time, she admits, "I always misremember. It never seems the same twice, each time that I remember it, it distorts."

Similarly, "Grandma invented this family. She put it together out of whatever came to hand... she created it

out of sheer force of personality."

There is a scene where a comedian tells an old joke about multiple illegitimacy (<http://goodriddlesnow.com/jokes/view/...>), but it becomes a rather meta joke within the novel, as the fiction has so many parallels in the story.

The conclusion is that children invent their own histories, and Nora wonders if much of their own memory (especially of Peregrine) is "just a collection of our hopes and dreams... Something to set our lives by, like the old [grandfather] clock in the hall."

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

For their seventh birthday, Dora and Nora are given a beautiful toy theatre, and Dora comments (perhaps only with hindsight) that it's "just like life". They, like another pair of twins in the story, were born on Shakespeare's birthday.

"The priest and the game-show presenter. Not so different... Both of them in show business. Both, in their different ways, carrying on the great tradition of the Hazard family - the willing suspension of disbelief. Both of them promise you a free gift if you play the game."

"I... have always loved it best of all, the moment when the lights go down, the curtain glows, you know that something wonderful is going to happen. It doesn't matter if what happens next spoils everything: the anticipation itself is always pure."

When one pair of twins meet their real father, he denies parentage by quoting the Bard - ouch!

Dora describes the experience of watching film of her and Nora in their youth as "batty old tarts with their eyes glued on their own ghosts... When I was young, I'd wanted to be ephemeral... to live on just the glorious moment... But if you put your past on celluloid, it keeps."

FAVOURITE QUOTES

- * "The habit of applying warpaint outlasts the battle."
- * "He loved his boys [who may not have been his]. He cast them as the princes in the tower as soon as they could toddle."
- * "There he was on the bed, brushing up his Shakespeare." (Nudge, nudge.)
- * Of a cheating wife, whose husband murdered her, her lover and then himself, "She always had a gift for exits".
- * "She didn't so much talk as elocute."
- * "To travel hopefully is better than to arrive... I always preferred foreplay, too, well, not *always*."
- * "Tragedy, eternally more class than comedy."
- * "Irish had an old soul... He was a man with a great future behind him already."
- * When a wife is asked if she misses her errant husband, "she had the grace to twinkle right up at the very thought of him, but she twinkled dismissively."
- * "I've never known such profound silences... Silences in which the unspoken hung like fog that got into your lungs and choked you."
- * "We painted the faces we always used to have onto the faces we have now."
- * "The third Lady Hazard, wearing a Vivienne Westwood somewhat too witty for her years."
- * "She looked a million dollars... even if in well-used notes... a stunning advertisement for hormone replacement therapy... not a line on that skin but, then, sharkskin doesn't wrinkle" and her boyfriend was so unprepossessing "I hoped for her sake he'd got hidden talents."
- * "Comedy is tragedy that happens to *other* people."

Recommended by Danielle (CUSFS)

L says

Oh, icky, icky, icky. I literally fell asleep trying to read this. I cannot think of a more uninspiring narrator; she even made an anecdote about jism boring. The characters drink gin, dress up like old-timey movie stars, and have a scandalous story to tell about their births (twins). All of that adds up to a nap. How can one ever possibly make gin uninteresting, you ask? I'm not sure because I drank enough of it reading this crap to forget it all. But I trust my prior assessment.

Elizabeth says

Oh, why did it take me so long to read this? Books like this one, sitting on my shelves gathering dust because I once thought they sounded interesting enough to buy, but then never got around to reading them, are exactly why I am undertaking this project and reading the books that I have instead of buying anything new.

I loved this book a lot, obviously. It's the kind of book I want to read again for fun, but it also makes me want to go back to school, to read or reread all of Shakespeare (I am limiting myself to *The Winter's Tale* for now), to go back and read some Bakhtin.

This is a novel about the theater, about the romance of family (blood ties and created families alike), about fathers and daughters, about the "hypothesis" of fatherhood and the effects of its denial, about Shakespeare, about bastard children and lost heirs and endless sets of twins (I think there are five sets of twins, all told). Dora Chance, an identical twin and a bastard child and an elderly woman, looks back on her life as a song-and-dance girl on the wrong side of a great theater family that has fallen on hard times, artistically speaking: they now do margarine commercials, game shows, and cooking shows. Shakespearean plots and illusions repeat all through the novel and are sometimes consciously evoked by Dora, and sometimes appear under the surface.

The story is nominally about fathers and daughters and the claiming of paternity, right down to the title: the proverb reads, "It is a wise child that knows its own father," but Shakespeare turned it around to, "It is a wise father that knows his own child," in *The Merchant of Venice*, and in this novel the knowing and not knowing definitely goes hand in hand with wisdom, on both sides of the parental equation. And Carter opens the novel with a quotation: "How many times Shakespeare draws fathers and daughters, never mothers and daughters."

But I think the novel is about mothers. The absent mother, dead in childbirth or murdered by the father, the adopted caretakers, the grandmothers, the stepmothers, the nanny. Fathers are both larger than life and entirely elusive here, but mothers are everywhere. They crawl out of the woodwork to fill in the gaps Shakespeare left, while the "wise children" are so focused on fathers that they take for granted the mothers all around them. A quote from near the end:

"'Nora ... don't you think our father looked two-dimensional, tonight?'

"She gave me a look that said, tell me more.

"'Too kind, too handsome, too repentant. After all those years without a word. Remember that terrible bank holiday when he pretended to our faces that he thought we were Perry's? And tonight, he had an imitation

look, even when he was crying, especially when he was crying, like one of those great, big, papier-maché heads they have in the Notting Hill parade, larger than life, but not lifelike.'

"Nora sunk in thought for a hundred yards.

"‘D’you know, I sometimes wonder if we haven’t been making him up all along,’ she said. ‘If he isn’t just a collection of our hopes and dreams and wishful thinking in the afternoons. Something to set our lives by, like the old clock in the hall, which is real enough, in itself, but which we’ve got to wind up to make it go.’"

And on top of all of that, Wise Children is raunchy and very, very funny. I loved it without a single reservation.

Ivana Nešić says

E pa baš sam uživala.

Znate one besprizorne babe što vam pričaju svoje doživljaje iz mladosti a vi slušate i crvenite?

E pa ovo je jedna takva, još bivša plesačica, još ima i bliznakinju od koje je ljudi razlikuju samo po parfemu, još vanbraćna sestra uvenog glumca i na neki način hroničar njegove porodice.

I sve je baš kao da vam jedna takva baba priča. Setno i smešno i puno ponosa i žaljenja i zabavno, a tu su naravno i šljokice i pozornice i užasni preokreti.

Ima i morala, samo je baš dobro prikriven.
