

**WRITING BEYOND THE EDGES: APPROPRIATION, REWRITING AND
BLURRING OF GENRES IN ANGELA CARTER'S *NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS*
AND *WISE CHILDREN***

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Data da Defesa: 25/03/2010

Palavras-chave: Postmodernism, parodic intertextuality, blurring of boundaries, genre, gender

What is it about the journalist, fictional writer and essayist Angela Carter that makes her such an enchanting, prolific, spellbinding postmodern writer who died rather too soon? Is it the manner and extent to which she engages her reader to the point that s/he becomes the author's collaborator? Could it be the precision and great insight with which she chooses and appropriates the textual past with the intention of making as transparent as possible the oppressive mechanisms patriarchy constructs and strives to preserve for posterity? Or would that be her categorical effort to democratise language and culture so as to put an end to traditional dichotomies and undermine the perpetuation of hierarchies on the basis of, among other things, gender, class and race? Perhaps it amounts to a little bit of this, a little bit of that, but it certainly has to do with the singular artistry with which Carter manages to put to question all the 'Big Books'¹, their writers, as well as those readers who endorse their 'universal truths', whose

ulterior purpose is to enforce limits by means of disempowering cultural and ideological discourses that aim at relegating the ‘others’ to oblivion.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, “[l]anguage is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others” (Bakhtin, 1982, p. 294). Nonetheless, some ‘others’ have not been heard to by patriarchal historiography, much less given a voice. In reality, they have sometimes been literally silenced by force. Needless to say, that is what Carter does through her work: she empowers these ‘others’ by giving them a chance to make their different experiences and perspectives known. In a similar vein, she extracts and brings to light the latent and restrictive content from the traditional discourses and forms patriarchy throughout the times has tried to impose. In this way, as far as gender is concerned, Carter dematerialises the produced, materialised and replicated idea of womanhood that invariably works to the detriment of the female subject in such a manner and to such a degree that it perfectly accords with Stanley Fish’s ironic statement about the biggest of the ‘Big Books’ in Western culture: “Ye shall know that truth is not what it seems and *that* truth shall set you free” (Smith; Watson, 1998, p. 34; Fish, 1990, p. 448; John 8:32).

Hence, the aim of this dissertation is exactly to investigate how Carter performs this deconstruction of patriarchy’s enforced limits by means of the transgression and blurring of genre boundaries, as well as analyse its connection with the emancipation of the female subject on the level of the narrative in Angela Carter’s last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, in the light of parodic intertextuality theory. After all, the sort of oppression the narrators/protagonists Fevvers and Dora Chance as well as the other female characters undergo in both novels turn out to be intrinsically related to the ideological and formal constraints traditionally imposed on genres by

patriarchy. And these are precisely the norms and regulations Angela Carter sets out to unveil, question and undermine so as to pave the way for new alternatives as well as different future possibilities for men and women alike. In the end, the main contribution of this dissertation lies in its attempt to relate genre, gender and social change in order to nourish further research on the political power underlying postmodern female rewriting or ‘reinvention’ and blurring of genres.

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ⁱ It is worth noting the clear allusion Carter makes to the biggest of the ‘Big Books’ in Western culture in *Nights at the Circus* before unveiling Mr Rosencreutz’s ulterior reasons to be against women’s suffrage: “[...] he [Mr Rosenreutz] was reading in a big book, like a Bible” (Carter, 1993, p. 74).