

A review of
**The Arts of
Angela Carter:
A Cabinet of
Curiosities**

B.C. Kennedy

The catalyst for this book was the exhibition 'Strange Worlds: The Vision of Angela Carter' that Marie Mulvey-Roberts co-curated at the Royal West of England Academy in Bristol in 2017 to celebrate the life, work and multi-disciplinary interests of the iconic late 20th-century feminist writer Angela Carter (1940-92) 25 years after her death. This is the continuation of a tradition triggered by the first edited collection by Lorna Sage in 1994, published after Carter's death in 1992, and the anticipated Bloomsbury publication due to be published in 2022.

In the Introduction Mulvey-Roberts explains that although Carter is generally regarded as a London writer, she wrote more than half her novels while living in Bristol, and it seemed appropriate, therefore, to draw attention to Carter's neglected links with Bristol. The contributors – including leading Carter scholars – focus on the diversity of her interests and versatility across different fields. This book foregrounds Carter's multidisciplinary interests and influences, which allows each chapter to function as part of a cabinet of curiosities and each author 'invites' the reader of this collection into a Carteresque curious room.

In the opening chapter, Michelle Ryan-Sautour explains how the breadth and variety of Carter's short fiction demonstrates the far-reaching intertextual and intermedial diversity of her writing, providing 'powerful, multimedial spaces of fictional reflection for her reader'. This is followed by Anna Kèrchy's exploration of Carterian poetics of space from the vantage point of a 'feminist psychogeographer' who challenges generic conventions and gender roles. Concerned with deconstructing misogynistic images of women, Kèrchy is drawn to Carter's short stories with place-based titles such as 'The Bloody House', recognising that Carter's fiction has been distinguished by a topography of the carnivalesque with such liminal settings as Bluebeard's Gothic castle, Uncle Philip's rundown magic toyshop and Colonel Kearney's travelling circus.

Julie Sauvage revisits Carter's short stories by focusing on the complex interplay between painting and music in *The Bloody Chamber*, showing how Carter creates literary hybrids, while

Sarah Gamble's chapter on Carter's poetry – situated in the context of British poetry in the mid-1960s – reminds us that this is a neglected aspect of Carter's work that predates her fiction.

Another often overlooked aspect of Carter are the translations she made from French, which provided an important stimulus for her imagination and creativity. Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère points out that this laid the groundwork for translating and adapting Charles Perrault's fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, while *Black Venus* revisits Jeanne Duval's cycle of poems from a female perspective.

One of Carter's lesser-known interests is anthropology, and Heidi Yeandle suggests that the work of Claude Lèvi-Strauss played a central role in Carterian fiction through her portrayal of supposedly primitive communities in *Heroes and Villains* and *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. The extent of Carter's interest in religion, on the other hand, has often been underestimated, which is hardly surprising since she was a self-proclaimed atheist. In the following chapter Mulvey-Roberts examines Carter's critiques of Judeo-Christianity and its influence on Western cultural myths that hold oppressive gender roles in place. In addition to discussing how Carter demythologises religion, this chapter makes the first extensive interpretation of an episode from *The Passion of New Eve* in relation to Zero and his exploited female followers, based on real-life American cult leader Charles Manson. Through this fictionalisation, Mulvey-Roberts argues that 'Carter not only reveals the potential harmfulness of the quasi-religious messianic ideology fuelling certain cults, but also exposes the burgeoning disillusionment with the Summer of Love.' Catherine Spooner also invokes the counter-culture of the 1960s through her discussion of Carter's short essay, 'Notes for a Theory of Sixties Style' (1967), which presents a condensed account of some of the major sartorial concerns of Carterian fiction throughout her career. This chapter explores the ways in which subculture style became a major influence on Carter's aesthetic sensibility.

Gina Wisker explores how Carter rewrites the constraining myths for women, maintaining that her writing was crucial for the later 20th-century rebirth of Gothic horror. This chapter traces how Carter unpicks the fascination which Edgar Allan Poe and H.P. Lovecraft had with the mythologising of women as monstrous, vulnerable and enthralling. Helen Snaith looks at the power dynamics relating to gender and performance within the puppetry and performance of Japanese culture which fascinated Carter. Alongside a reading of 'The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter' and 'The Loves of Lady Purple', this chapter argues that Carter deliberately uses images employed with *bunraku* (a form of traditional Japanese puppet theatre) in order to challenge the dichotomous relationship between the puppet and the puppet master. Snaith suggests that by using theatrical tropes within both tales, Carter challenges authority within an overtly phallogocentric society. Carter's puppets must 'still ultimately adhere to a performance that is imitative of gendered and socio-political expectations in Japan'.

Caleb Sivyer reconsiders Angela Carter's relationship to cinema, arguing that it is important to acknowledge that she was much more ambivalent about this medium than is

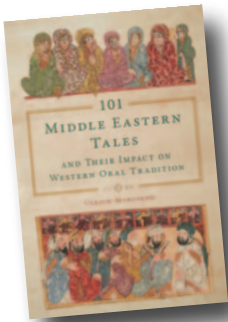
often noted by scholars. The chapter plays on this ambivalence and suggests that *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* employ cinematic-inspired techniques from classic Hollywood films in order to increase the sense of proximity between spectator and spectacle. In the final chapter Maggie Tonkin examines how Carterian writing has often been read through the prism of theatricality, focusing on the representations of literal performance in her work.

As this book demonstrates, place and space were important to Carter, producing an extraordinary vitality in her intermedial work which continues to be relevant today. Representing the transgressive, subversive and iconoclastic, this collection of essays may be seen as a building block that continues to be revisited in the newly emerging discipline of Carter studies. Erudite, cross-referenced and meticulously footnoted throughout, this is a compelling read.

Editor: Marie Mulvey-Roberts.

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B.C. Kennedy



A review of **101 Middle Eastern Tales and Their Impact on Western Oral Tradition**

D.L. Ashliman

Awidespread legend tells of a man who dreams of treasure in a distant town, but upon going there he discovers that the treasure is actually at the place he has left and on his own property. Those familiar with English folklore know this story as 'The Pedlar of Swaffham', first recorded in Abraham de la Pryme's diary (10 November 1699) as a 'constant tradition'. Here the leading character is directed by a dream to go to London, where he shall hear 'joyful news'. Once in London, the pedlar is belittled

by a man for having foolishly followed a dream. The Londoner himself had dreamed of a treasure buried under a particular tree in the village of Swaffham, but was not foolish enough to have pursued it. The pedlar realises that the tree thus described is on his own property, returns at once to his home village, and digs up the treasure.

This legend, always with essentially the same plot, has been localised in dozens European cities and towns, where it typically claims to be the record of an actual event, not a make-believe fairy tale. In spite of its broad European distribution, this story was not born in the West, but rather in the Arabic-speaking Middle East. Its earliest recorded version is found in the anthology *Deliverance Follows Adversity*, written in Iraq in the 10th century by al-Muhassin ibn Ali al-Tanukhi. Here the leading character is a citizen of Baghdad who dreams that a fortune awaits him in Cairo. Arriving there he is ridiculed by an Egyptian who claims that he himself had dreamed of a treasure in Baghdad and relates details about the treasure's location. He concludes that he was not foolish enough to make such a long journey because of a mere dream. Recognising the site revealed in the Egyptian's dream, the man from Baghdad returns home and finds the treasure.

'The Man Who Became Rich through a Dream' is but one of the 101 Middle Eastern narratives identified and analysed by Ulrich Marzolph as having impacted Western oral tradition. His Middle Eastern sources are primarily works originally composed in Arabic, Persian, or Ottoman Turkish. A retired professor of Islamic studies at the Georg-August University in Göttingen, Germany, Marzolph is uniquely qualified to conduct this comparative study of the Muslim world's contributions to European folktales. His forty years of occupation in this field include three decades of editorial involvement with the prestigious 15-volume *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, where he also has contributed numerous articles on European as well as Middle Eastern oral traditions.

The author opens each of the 101 chapters with a European or New World sample of the relevant story, followed by a discussion of important variants. In the best folkloric tradition, wherever possible he chooses versions recorded directly from oral informants, typically in the 19th or 20th century. Marzolph's design to begin each chapter with an *oral* version of a Western tale ensures that each of the 101 stories represents a tale type that is both timeless and cross-cultural in its appeal. In many instances these stories were heard, told, and retold by the uneducated, even illiterate, segments of society. Their appeal thus responds to basic human concerns, and not necessarily to a sophisticated intellectualism.

In each chapter Marzolph then moves to Middle Eastern precedents of the tale, including the narratives themselves as well as the history of their original composition and subsequent distribution, both orally and in writing. He concludes each chapter with copious notes, which together with the bibliography of works cited (pp. 597-669), containing about 1700 entries, constitute a valuable research tool in their own right.

The organisation of Marzolph's *101 Middle Eastern Tales* follows the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) type index of international folktales and includes at least one example from

each of the major groups (Animal Tales, Tales of Magic, Religious Tales, Tales of the Stupid Ogre, Anecdotes and Jokes, and Formula Tales). Reflecting the type of story most likely to migrate between disparate cultures, the category best represented in Marzolph's book, with 65 samples, are the anecdotes and jokes (ATU types 1200-1999). These stories, often referred to as jocular tales, are typically brief and unsophisticated in their humour; thus lending themselves to easy memorisation and cross-cultural migration.

Many of the stories included in Marzolph's sampling of this category will be quite familiar to Western readers. For example: the fools who try to keep a bird from escaping by building a fence around it (ATU 1213); the foolish man and boy who end up carrying their donkey while trying to please every passer-by as to who should ride on it (ATU 1215); the fool who digs a hole in the ground to dispose of an unwanted pile of dirt (ATU 1255); the fool who fails to count the donkey he is riding (ATU 1288A); and the enchanted tree (ATU 1423 – a tale included both in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*). As he does throughout the book, Marzolph presents these tales mostly in recently collected oral versions, thus showing them in new light, as does his tracing of their genealogy to their Middle Eastern origins.

101 Middle Eastern Tales can be read on two levels. At its elementary level the book is an anthology of timeless stories, presented both in their original Islamic dress and also in the forms they have developed after migrating to the West. The chapters can be read in any order; each one constitutes an independent unit consisting of two or more reading selections plus an accompanying interpretive essay.

The interpretive essays reveal both the depth and the breadth of Marzolph's scholarship. His unique ability to illuminate parallels as well as distinctions between the cultures of the Middle East and those of Europe as reflected in their oral traditions ensure this book's future as a standard reference tool.

Author: Ulrich Marzolph.

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D.L. Ashliman