

Abstract in English

This MA thesis focuses on the analysis of picaresque elements and traces of the picaresque genre in chosen novels of Angela Carter, namely her two most picaresque novels: *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984). However, as I have strived to prove throughout the analysis, Carter's earlier novels from the sixties, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), and *Heroes and Villains* (1969) are also rich in picaresque themes and motives of the journey and therefore deserve to have their place in the analysis too.

In the introduction the dissertation traces the history of the picaresque from its sixteenth-century Spanish roots until its more modern and postmodern development. It also stresses that in relation to Carter's work it is important to take into account her intertextuality. In describing it Linden Peach borrows Julia Kristeva's quotation from *Semiotike, Recherches pour un Semanalyse* where she observes that: "Every text builds itself as a mosaic of quotations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text."¹ For Carter this is especially valid – her novels are hybrid, multi-layered mosaics which use and at the same time subvert mythology, the Bible, European and English literary works, Renaissance drama (Shakespeare), fairy-stories and folk literature but also gothic tales, detective stories, horror motifs, porn and erotic romance as well as other art forms such as cinema, ballet, Saussure's linguistic and Freud's psychoanalytic theory.

Although Carter's work is so diverse and many-layered, a lot has already been written on her treatment of myth, her fusion with popular culture, the gender and gothic elements in her work, many feminist readings of her texts have been conducted as well as interpretations of her allusions to other authors. However, what has been hugely neglected are the picaresque motifs in her work, an omission which this dissertation seeks to correct.

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Semiotike, Recherches pour un Semanalyse* (Paris, Seuil, 1969) 146.

In John Haffenden's *Novelists in Interview* Carter defines picaresque as a "certain 18th century fictional device where people have adventures in order to find themselves in places where they can discuss philosophical concepts without distractions."² The main questions this dissertation strives to answer are how precisely does Carter 'reinvent' the picaresque? Who might be seen as the roguish hero in her novels? Is he or she an outcast openly defying social conventions? Is there the model of the faithful servant accompanying the roguish figure in her novels or is it just a mirror image, a reflection, of the main character? Do her characters actually finally come to terms with their place in the world or is it just one of Carter's illusionistic tricks? etc.

Although Carter's interpretation of the picaresque is rather loose and has more in common with its eighteenth-century examples than the original sixteenth-century models of the genre, she is nevertheless "orbiting in the picaresque galaxy."³ This thesis analyses her modern reinvention of the genre which consists not only of the concept of geographical travelling – with Carter it is very much a journey of the mind, journey into a land of fantasy and opportunity where the impossible becomes possible, a journey of maturity, a passage of rite, in order to discover the hero's/heroine's place in the world, a self-discovery and very often a revelation of the character's conception of sexuality and its fulfilment. In looking at the types of pícaros Carter provides, their journeys, metaphorical as well as physical, their growth and the change they undergo this dissertation demonstrates what Carter achieves by the clash of expectations of the genre and proves that it is an essential part of her work that she uses to challenge literary as well as philosophical and political boundaries and to keep readers wondering about the ongoing process of writing.

² John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Routledge, 1985) 87.

³ Alexander Blackburn, *The Myth of the Pícaro: Continuity and Transformation of the Picaresque Novel 1554-1954* (USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979) 7.

Key terms

the picaresque = a genre of the novel which has emerged in sixteenth century Spain, presenting the adventures of a roguish hero, usually in first-person narrative, who is of low social origin and strives to improve his place in society, by recounting pícaro's adventures the novel reveals corruption and hypocrisy of the society as such

pícaro = Spanish for rogue or rascal, the protagonist of the picaresque genre, usually charming but dishonest, a servant of many masters who undergoes a series of adventures

pícaro's companion = on his travels, the pícaro is usually accompanied by his faithful servant (or in Carter's case (potential) lover)