

‘The fiction of asking “what if?”’: Reading Angela Carter’s Speculative Fiction in Comparison with its Intertextual Sources

Thursday 28th March 2024
Géopolis 2144 – University of Lausanne
Organised by Dr Marie Emilie Walz

Description

This study day will explore Angela Carter’s speculative fiction, which she conceptualised as the ‘fiction of asking “what if?”’ questions as starting points to rewrite stories (Interview with Anna Katsavos 14). Carter’s fiction is famous for its range of intertextual references and its creative and critical engagement with a wide variety of literary, artistic, and critical sources. While many of these intertextual relationships have been well documented, new ones are still being discovered today. Bringing together acclaimed and emerging Carter scholars, this study day will specifically focus on Carter’s three speculative novels – *Heroes and Villains* (1969), *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) and *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) – and investigate the ‘what if’ questions they are asking their intertextual sources. These include understudied literary texts (from medieval romances and Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* to Auguste de Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *L’Eve future*, Andrei Bely’s *Petersburg*, and J.G. Ballard’s science-fiction books), as well as theoretical writings in disciplines as varied as psychology (Freud), anthropology (Levi-Strauss), and philosophy of language (Wittgenstein). Asking specific ‘what if’ questions in fictional form in her three novels is Carter’s key strategy to respond to these wide-ranging intertexts and create new stories which stimulate the reader’s own speculative imagination and curiosity.

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