

Angela Carter and Nature
“Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest” from an
Ecocritical Perspective
The Annual Conference of the Angela Carter Society,
University of Szeged, Hungary, 15-16 May 2026



UNIVERSITY
OF SZEGED



Szeged
Szeged Megyei Igazgatóság
Önkormányzata

Academic Programme

May 15

10.30-11.30 Plenary 1

- Marie Mulvey-Roberts (University of the West of England, Bristol) *Angela Carter's "Celebration of the Primal Slime" and Ecogothic Bodily Fluids*

11.30-12.30 Panel 1

- Marie-Emilie Walz (University of Lausanne) *Claustrophobic Castles and Labyrinthine Woods. Reading Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber' and 'The Erl-King' as a Culture-Nature Diptych*
- Inna Livytska (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen) *Rhythms of Fear and the Waves: Affective Landscapes and Female Agency in "The Bloody Chamber"*

12.30-13.30 Light Lunch

13.30-15.00 Panel 2

- Mirna Radin Sabados (University of Novi Sad) *South of the River: Toxic Geographies and Uneven Exposure in Carter's London*
- Anna Kérchy (University of Szeged) *Teeth, Tongues, Transgressions. The Ecoethics of the Open Mouth and the Nature-Culture Threshold in Angela Carter's Fiction*
- Umberto Constantini (University of Verona) *Retelling Natures: Angela Carter's Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest as an Ecocritical Human-Nature Story*

May 16

9.00-10.00 Plenary 2

- Anna Watz (University of Uppsala) *Angela Carter's Garden of Talking Beasts and Live Flowers*

10.00-10.30 Coffee Break

10.30-12.00 Panel 3

- Auriane de Viry (University of Lausanne) *"All Sense In Me An Unnatural Being": Anthropocenic Denaturation in the French Fin-de-siècle and Carterian Fiction*
- Katarína Labudová (Catholic University in Ružomberok) *From Fur to Fossil to Shell: Ecofeminist Metamorphosis in Carter, Byatt, and Atwood*
- Lívia Szélpál (University of Szeged) *Exploring Animal–Human Metamorphosis in Angela Carter's The Tiger's Bride and Ali Smith's Glimp*

12.00-13.00 Light lunch

13.00-14.00 Plenary 3

- Caleb Ferrari (University of the West of England, Bristol) *Dystopic Space and Posthumanist Philosophy in Angela Carter*

14.00-15.30 Panel 4

- Maria José Pires. (ESHTE Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Estoril, Portugal) *A Style of Virtue: Food, Flesh, and Cultural Ecology in Angela Carter's Reviews (1974-1984)*
- Mengqin Huang (Zhejiang University) *'The Landscapes of the Heart': Angela Carter's Stage and Speculum*
- Kirill Melnikov (University of Lausanne) *Playing Verbal Games in Parks and Jungles: The Hidden Poetry of Angela Carter's "Master" and Love*

Venue

University of Szeged, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Faculty Conference Hall (ground floor, enter the building, turn left, room is at the end of the corridor)

Address: Egyetem utca 2 6722 Szeged, Hungary

The venue is located on the historic campus in the heart of the city, adjacent to the University Library and Information Centre. <https://maps.app.goo.gl/96zkynG5Ae7WWNoCA>

Social Programmes for Registered Conference Participants

Friday

Guided tour to Somogyi Library's Rare Book Collection, "Animals as They Were Once Seen.", Friday 9.00-10.00

Bestiarium Facultatis is a site-specific exhibition of works by students of the Department of Drawing and Art History, Institute of Art, SZTE JGYPK, created in response to the tradition of the bestiaries. Installed within the Interactive Nature Knowledge Center (Boldogasszony sgt 6), the project presents a unique "cabinet of monsters," where imagined creatures are interwoven with the natural science displays. Dispersed throughout the exhibition space, the works can be discovered with the help of a specially designed map, inviting visitors to explore the shifting boundary between scientific knowledge and artistic imagination. *Motto*: "The sleep of reason produces monsters." *Concept*: Marek Brzózka *Instructors*: Marek Brzózka, Gyula A. Kovács, Ignác Szalay, Ádám Török . (Boldogasszony avenue 6) Friday 15.00-16.00

Cruise on the River Tisza, Friday 17.00-18.00 (3000 Ft/ person)

Conference Dinner in Roosevelt Square Fish Tavern: Friday 18.30 (<https://www.sotarto-halaszcsarda.hu/>)

Saturday

Szeged Botanical Gardens (Lövölde utca 42) Open: Mon-Sun 9.00-18.00 Saturday: Fascination Plants Day: opening of Noah's Arc for endangered species, Pioneer Women Scientist's Nature Trail, Ceramics Exhibition in Mediterranean Glass House)

More Szeged Cultural Spotlights:

The Votive Church and Cathedral of Our Lady of Hungary (Dóm Square 15) Open: Monday-Sunday 7.00-19.00

Szeged Synagogue (Jósika utca 10) Open: Tues-Friday and Sunday, 10.00-16.00

Contemporary Hungarian Illustration Exhibition in Fekete Ház Museum (Somogyi utca 13) (<https://moramuzeum.hu/kortars-illusztracios-kiallitas-a-fekete-hazban/>) Open: Tues to Sun 10.00-18.00

Animals in Art: Feline Fantasies in Endre Penovac's ink paintings. Exhibition in Aula of the Rector's Building (Dugonics Square 13)

Nature in Szeged

Szeged ZOO (Szél utca 90) Open: Mon-Sun 9.00-17.00

Music in Szeged

14 May 19:00 Concert of the University's Symphonic Orchestra (Mendelssohn, Hummel, Chabrier) Rector's Building, Conference hall

15 May 18:00 Spring Concert of SZU's Department of Music. World Premiere of Choral Work by Daniel Csengery

Conference Call

Angela Carter's writing—rich in intertextual allusions, generic hybridizations, and socially critical, ironic demythologizations—lends itself to be read as a rhizomatic text that privileges multiple entry points and connections, much like a rhizome's root system. At this international conference, hosted by the [Institute of English and American Studies](#) of the Faculty of Arts at the [University of Szeged](#), Hungary, organized under the aegis of the [Angela Carter Society](#), we seek to interpret this vegetal metaphor in a literal sense. We invite participants to explore Carter's oeuvre from an ecocritical and/or ecopoetic perspective, focusing on her artistic representations (and/or lived experiences) of nature, animals, plants, non-human lifeforms, and nature-cultural assemblages.

While the subversion of hegemonic systems of domination—a leitmotif in the Carterian narrative—has already been extensively analyzed in relation to challenges against patriarchy, heteronormativity, classism, capitalism, ageism, and canonical knowledge formation, there remains ample scope for investigating how Carter interrogates anthropocentric assumptions through activating environmental imagination, urging a rethinking of human-nature ties. We aim to fill this critical gap by encouraging participants to re-read Carter's works through a *green lens*, to venture into a wilderness of interrelated questions. How do Carter's animal bride/groom tales revise normative scripts of gender performance and cultured embodiment? If humanimal hybrids—bird-woman, werewolf, Erlking, Wolf Alice—testify to Carter's interest in liminal states and metamorphic becoming, what do they reveal about interspecies entanglements, the fluidity of the boundary between humans and non-human animals? What are the symbolic significations conveyed by Carter's literary representations of natural landscapes—forests, deserts, tundras, beaches, and parks—and what do they suggest about the nonhuman agency of wolves and woods “that swallow you up”, the material sense of ecological embeddedness, as well as the limits of human conceptualizations of nature? Can Carter's post/apocalyptic fantasies be regarded as precursors of climate anxieties and posthumanist philosophies?

In “*Overture and Incidental Night Music for a Midsummer Night's Dream*” Carter makes a subtle differentiation between the haunted forest and the enchanted wood: the former is a locus “to a perpetual absence from humanity, an existential catastrophe, for the forest is as infinitely boundless as the human heart”, while the latter is a place for “the pleasure of roving, the temporary confusion of direction, [...] a holiday from which you will come home refreshed, with your pockets full of nuts, your hands full of wildflowers and the cast feather of a bird in your cap”. Lyrical passages like this invite an affective narratological analysis of the latent ecopoetic layers of Carter's writing, which explore the complex, mutually formative interrelationship of humans and their natural environment. These green-shaded passages, like all her other texts, are themselves extensions of an ecosystem, informed by intertexts ranging from Henri Rousseau's painted jungles, Romantic nature poetry, fables, and bestiaries to the tactile sensuality of Meret Oppenheim's surrealist fur cup, demythologizations of Mother Nature, and postmodernist problematisations of the culturally constructed notion of the “natural.” Her creative mingling of ecological concerns with gothic themes and feminist politics into ecogothic and/or ecofeminism is also worthy of scholarly attention.

While the circus animals of *Nights at the Circus*, Leda and the Swan in the *Magic Toyshop*, the fox tapestry in *Love*, or feline fantasies from Puss-in-Boots to *Lizzie's tigers* may function as metaphors of complex human psychic comportement, concerns for actual animals' abuse and

misrepresentation crop up in Carter's journalistic writing. Essays like "At the Zoo," or "Animals in the Nursery" trace an eco-feminist ethics to promote empathy, relational identity, and human-animal kinship without any sentimentalism. "In Pantoland" recalls a mythopoetic past when "in the time of the sky wolf, when fertility festivals filled up those vacant, dark, solstitial days, we used to see no difference between ourselves and the animals" and "little children remember [...] how once we knew that the animals were just as human as we were, and that made us more human, too." In line with today's critical posthumanist philosophies (including Braidotti, Wolfe and others), rejecting the rigid human/animal divide along with the idea of human exceptionalism paradoxically deepens the ethical sense of being human here.

We welcome scholars from diverse disciplines to join this critical conversation and contribute to a vibrant exchange of ideas on Angela Carter's ecological imagination.

Contributions could address, but are not limited to, one or several of the following areas:

- Carter's literary representations of natural environments (forests, deserts, tundras, landscaped parks) and their psychogeographical implications and spatial poetics
- Carter's bestiary: literary representations of animals, plants, non-human lifeforms
- Animal ethics, interspecies relationships, metamorphic becomings, monstrifications, dissolutions of human/nonhuman boundaries in Carter's fiction
- Carter's journalistic writings on animals and their place in culture (children's books, pets, zoos, etc.)
- Narratological analysis of Carter's ecopoetics
- Temporal ecologies in Carter's fiction: cyclical time, deep time, nonhuman temporalities
- Material ecocriticism: the role of matter, objects, and substances (earth, water, blood) in Carter's narratives
- Artists inspiring or inspired by Carter's environmental imagination
- The relationship between Romanticism and Carter's interest in the natural world
- Nature-related myths, fairy tales, and folklore as environmental commentary informing Carter's work
- Comparative readings of Carter's literary works with other writers and artists in terms of similarities and/or differences with respect to representations of ecological ideas
- Readings of Carter's literary works that blend ecology with the Gothic: the Eco-Gothic as a new perspective
- The relationship between Ecofeminism and Carter's literary works; Queer Ecologies
- Readings of Carter's literary works that draw on or inspire influential ideas and concepts from ecocriticism, environmental studies, and Anthropocene studies
- Carter's representations of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic events – and their implications for all forms of life and art in the future; The Anthropocene imagination: Carter's relevance to planetary crises and speculative futures
- Technology vs. nature in Carter's works: tensions between mechanization and organic worlds; pollution, bodily corruption, environmental degradation as cultural critique.
 - Food, consumption, and ecological ethics: representations of eating practices, carnivorousness vs. vegetarianism, and their environmental implications in Carter

PLENARY 1 (15 May Friday 10.30-11.30)



Marie Mulvey-Roberts is Professor of English Literature at the University of the West of England, Bristol. She is the author, editor and co-editor of over thirty books including *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal*, the winner of the Allan Lloyd Smith Memorial Prize in 2017, *The Arts of Angela Carter: A Cabinet of Curiosities* (2019) and *Angela Carter's Pyrotechnics: A Union of Contraries* (2022), co-edited with Charlotte Crofts with whom she created getangelacarter.com and co-founded the Angela Carter Society, along with Caleb Ferrari. In Bristol, she co-curated a major exhibition on Carter (2017) and co-produced two musical adaptations of her *The Bloody Chamber* (2019) and made a Massolit film on *The Bloody Chamber*. She is Editor-in-Chief of the international quarterly journal *Women's Writing* on historical women writers and a Series Editor of Bloomsbury Studies in Global Women's Writing.

Angela Carter's "Celebration of the Primal Slime" and Ecogothic Bodily Fluids

In her essay "The World as text" (1978), Carter has a vision of a post-literature generation, who are exclusively readers of signs. She compares them to birds, who leave no trace of their aerial passage. This contrasts with her view of the previous literate generation as creeping along like snails and leaving behind a slimy trail of writing. Carter's own slimy writing is evident from her "celebration of the primal slime" in Buffo's chamber pot in *Nights at the Circus* (1984) as part of a "Dance of disintegration", to "the russet slime of the dead bracken" underfoot in the menacing woods of "The Erl-King" (1979). In the same essay, she goes on to say that the world is a "wood of literature" because trees and printed words get in the way of us returning to a pre-Adamite unnamings of things. This regression will be traced in "Wolf Alice" (1979) and at the end of *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), where time runs backwards to the Eocene Time, the dawn of the new age when fauna began. The ultimate re-birth of new Eve is enacted through caverns and passages with "walls of meat and slimy velvet", language which builds on Carter's unpublished short story "The Caves of Silence". Slime also evokes the visceral and fluid materiality of the body, which Karin Sellberg uses to challenge rigid ontological definitions of the self. In occupying a space between liquid and solid, slime takes on a liminal nature. Another viscous substance is blood, which is a recurring motif particularly in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). This paper will examine the bodily fluids in her work, including menstrual blood and mucous, through abjection theory and Ecogothic that performs the slippery nature of the Gothic and which, like slime, continues to defy its own boundaries.

PLENARY 2 (16 May Saturday 9.00-10.00)



Anna Watz is Associate Professor of English at Uppsala University, Sweden. She has published extensively on surrealist art and literature, feminist theory, as well as the work of Angela Carter. Watz is the author of *Angela Carter and Surrealism: 'A Feminist Libertarian Aesthetic'* (Routledge, 2016), editor of *Surrealist Women's Writing: A Critical Exploration* (Manchester University Press, 2020) and *A History of the Surrealist Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), and co-editor (with Sarah Gamble) of the two-volume *Angela Carter's Pasts / Angela Carter's Futures* (Bloomsbury, 2025). Her second monograph, *Surrealism and Feminine Difference*, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

Angela Carter's Garden of Talking Beasts and Flowers

Angela Carter's journal notes from 1977 reveal that while she was writing 'The Tiger's Bride' and 'Wolf-Alice' – stories that would be included in the *The Bloody Chamber* – she conducted extensive research into animal behaviour, sociality, mating patterns, and communication. The journal also includes recurring reflections regarding the separating boundary between animals and humans. In addition to tracing these twin concerns through Carter's journal, my talk will propose her evident interest in animals and the natural world as an interpretative framework through which to read her 'beast' stories. While these texts should arguably be read primarily as demythologising commentaries on femininity and female sexuality, I suggest that their investigation of the 'nature' of humanity and animality is more multilayered and significant than has previously been acknowledged.

PLENARY 3 (16 May Saturday 13.00-14.00)



Caleb Ferrari is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of the West of England, Bristol, where he teaches on a wide range of undergraduate modules, including on myths and fairy tales, contemporary women's writing and utopian and dystopian fiction. He has published a range of scholarly pieces on Angela Carter, with a particular focus on her explorations of visuality and gender, as well as on other contemporary authors such as J. G. Ballard and Alison Bechdel. He co-edited *Ludic and Laughter as Feminist Aesthetic: Angela Carter at Play* (2021). He is a co-founder and administrator of the Angela Carter Society and runs the Angela Carter Online website, which has a thriving community on social media. He is currently working on a new research project which re-examines Carter's oeuvre through the concept of the Anthropocene.

Woods, Rivers, Deserts and Tundra: An Ecocritical Tour of Angela Carter's Worlds

Angela Carter used her stories and essays to explore the Earth's many and varied landscapes and biomes, including woods and forests, jungles, deserts and tundra, and rivers and seas. However, such places are infrequently mere backgrounds or inert stages on which her characters strut and take all of the reader's attention. Instead, Carter frequently draws our attention to the vitality of so-called "natural" spaces and in the process decentres the all-too human perspectives which often treat nature as inert background, container of natural resources ripe for extraction and exploitation, or as a dumping ground for waste materials. Carter's woods "enclose" ("The Erl-King") and their "shaggy branches tangle about you", as if the "wicked trees" were "fishing on behalf of their friends", the wolves ("The Company of Wolves"). She also frequently highlights, and so offers up for cultural critique, many of the dominant images that human beings project onto nature, thereby making metaphorical these natural spaces and forces. The Victorians, for example, turned the wood into a place of "nostalgia", disinfecting, cleansing, and denaturing it ("Overture and Incidental Night Music for a Midsummer Night's Dream"). Similarly, Carter makes clear the unnaturalness of landscaped gardens and parks, describing our "liking for parks, for landscaped meadows, for contained nature" ("Bath, Heritage City"). At the extreme opposite end of "contained nature" and the English landscaped park is the desert, which Carter explores in her 1970s novels. In *The Passion of New Eve*, the desert is "the abode of enforced sterility, the dehydrated sea of infertility, the post-menopausal part of the earth", and the place in which Evelyn is transformed into Eve. It is also "an insane landscape of pale rock, honeycombed peak upon peak in unstable, erratic structures, calcified assemblages of whiteness and silence where jostling pebbles marked the paths of rivers that dried up before time began." At the end of Eve's narrative, a womb-like cave appears to ingest her and transport her back to a time before *homo sapiens* had altered the Earth's climate. Carter thus draws on the traditional image of the desert as a place of metamorphosis.

This wide-ranging talk will take listeners on a journey across Carter's many spaces, from the woods and forests in *The Bloody Chamber* short stories to the icy tundra in *Nights at the Circus*; and from the jungles in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* to the desert in *The Passion of New Eve*. At each stop on this kaleidoscopic tour, we will consider how Carter uses her stories to comment on the all-too human figuration of nature – nature inflected through fairy tale, gothic, romantic, and surrealist sensibilities and iconographies – as well as to remind us of the vitalities and agencies of non-human lifeforms. Finally, the talk will contextualise these discussions in terms of current concerns about the climate crisis and the framework of the Anthropocene.

ABSTRACTS

Umberto Constantini (University of Verona)

Retelling Natures: Angela Carter's Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest as an Ecocritical Human-Nature Story

Angela Carter's *Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest* presents a retelling of Genesis's Creation and Fall of Man as an ecocritical narrative that challenges Western human-nature duality. In line with material ecocriticism's phenomenological reevaluation of bodies (Merleau-Ponty and Nancy), Carter shifts from anthropocentric cultural values towards a biocentric perspective. In particular, she exposes the violence embedded in Western dualistic thinking, which sever spirit from matter and culture from nature, in a way that resonates with the Anthropocene's awareness of the impossibility of denying nature's agencies. Human-nature duality separates the human both from nature, intended as the natural sphere (the outside), and from human nature itself, the body (the inside). Carter's text effectively addresses and then disrupts such myth of domination rooted in biblical origins. Her characters experience nature's bodies not as exploitable objects but as transformative subjects, fostering a human ecological perception. This paper aims to investigate Carter's concept of nature beyond Man's domination or exceptionality, a discovery of a new human dwelling. Taking into account the text's biblical sources, while also merging material ecocriticism with phenomenology, the analysis will follow the protagonists' venturing into the heart of the forest, that is, their experience of the 'outside' nature as synchronous to their perception of their physical selves, their 'inside' nature. By retelling the deprecation of the material realm by Western metaphysics, Carter thus articulates a new quest for a human-nature relation beyond duality and domination: not the Fall of Man, but the rebirth of the human within nature.

Mengqin Huang (Zhejiang University)

'The Landscapes of the Heart': Angela Carter's Stage and Speculum

This talk will explore Angela Carter's 'landscapes of the heart' – a phrase first brought to life in her personal notebooks and occasionally encountered in her fiction and essays – and propose that it is both a central Carterian motif and the key to understanding one of the primary frameworks around which Carter constructed her fiction. For Carter, the external environment – particularly the natural landscape – occupied a special place in her imagination; transposed to her fiction it is never an inert backdrop but rather an active agent that possesses a narratological function and forms an essential part of the infrastructure of her fiction. In the Carterian world, an alchemy takes place whereby the landscape not only participates in the production of identity – '*the stage*', but is also transmuted into a prosthetic extension of the inner psyche – '*the speculum*'. This dichotomy lies at the core of her novels. For example, the desert of *The Passion of New Eve* is the '*waste heart of that ... country*', a '*featureless*' landscape without content; here Carter creates a *tabula rasa* that is both a *stage* on which Zero can 'star' in his own hagiography, and a *speculum* of both Evelyn's inner, enforced sterility (a '*post-menopausal part of the earth*'), and Eve's palingenic emergence *ex nihilo* into a pristine nature untrammelled by Man: '*a landscape that matches the landscape of [his/her] heart*'. I will briefly trace the evolution of Carter's 'landscapes of the heart' in a literary and a biographical context. I also suggest that her innovative treatment of the physical and natural environment shows her anticipation of the current crisis in the 'Western narrative' and associated climate and environmental emergencies, and forms part of her wider project to propose a new language of spatial narratology for navigating the 'post-Western' world.

Anna Kérchy (University of Szeged)

Teeth, Tongues, Transgressions. The Ecopoethics of the Open Mouth and the Nature-Culture Threshold in Angela Carter's Fiction

My paper explores the ecopoethics of the open mouth in Angela Carter's fiction, arguing that buccal motifs of teeth, tongues, throat, and oral cavity possess radical transgressive powers that destabilises dichotomies such as nature/culture, body/mind, subject/abject, dry outside/slippery inside to invite readers to the „threshold of meaning” (Kristeva's seuil) where instinctual semiotic drives erupt into the structured linguistic symbolic order, effectively „rewilding” the narrative. In Carter's fiction the liminal organ of the open mouth simultaneously evokes the biological intensity of animal appetite, predatory urge, carnal desire, the carnivalesque grotesque corporeal immediacy of tabooed activities (biting, sucking, devouring, belching, cursing, kissing, licking, laughing), sexual and death drives, uncanny moist gothic sensibilities, but also it gestures toward the cultured oral delights of storytelling, oververbalisations generating a dense symbolic network of associations: the circular O of the circus of arena, the vagina dentata, the heart of the forest, the rosebud. I wish to argue that in Carter's revisions of fairy tales and myths, the open mouth emerges as an iconic metonymic marker of hybrid creatures—birdwoman, werewolf, feral child, vampire duchess—who challenge ready-made knowledge, Enlightenment rationality, disciplinary impulse, carnophallogocentric domination, and anthropocentric bias. Drawing on posthumanist ecocritical theory, my analysis explores how the Carterian mouth becomes an engine of more-than-human becomings and an ecopoethics of excess, articulating an ethics of entanglement, whereby both bodies and texts are situated within dynamic cycles of consumption.

Katarína Labudová (University of Ruzomberok)

From Fur to Fossil to Shell: Ecofeminist Metamorphosis in Carter, Byatt, and Atwood

This paper offers a comparative ecofeminist reading of Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" alongside A. S. Byatt's "A Stone Woman" and Margaret Atwood's "Metempsychosis: Or, The Journey of the Soul," examining how metamorphosis across animal, mineral, and vegetal registers functions as a critique of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. Taking Carter's fiction as its conceptual and methodological anchor, the paper situates her ecological imagination within a broader feminist engagement with nonhuman agency and material embodiment. In "The Tiger's Bride," Carter's animal metamorphosis stages a voluntary, erotic dissolution of the human/animal boundary. The protagonist's becoming-animal links female subjectivity to interspecies kinship which directly challenges patriarchal domestication and anthropocentric hierarchies. Carter's narrative aligns with ecofeminist ethics that reject mastery over nature in favor of relational, non-hierarchical modes of being, presenting animal becoming as a form of subversive rewilding. Byatt's "A Stone Woman" offers a contrasting vision of metamorphosis grounded in the mineral realm. The protagonist's involuntary (medical) petrification foregrounds deep geological time and materiality, exposing how women and nature alike are rendered inert, aestheticized matter within anthropocentric and patriarchal frameworks. Read through material ecocriticism, Byatt's story reveals metamorphosis as liberation. Atwood's "Metempsychosis: Or, The Journey of the Soul," from *Old Babes in the Wood*, complicates both positions through an ironic, late-Anthropocene identification with a marginal(ised) life form—the snail. Rather than mythic transformation, Atwood presents ecological becoming as psychological, liminal, and survival-oriented, foregrounding vulnerability, aging, and diminished human dominance in a damaged environment. Together, these stories demonstrate how metamorphosis operates as a key ecofeminist strategy for interrogating anthropocentrism. By tracing animal alliance, mineral objectification, and vegetal or marginal endurance, the paper highlights divergent yet complementary literary responses to ecological crisis and reimagines human–nonhuman relations beyond human-centered narrative

Inna Livytska (Justus Liebig University Giessen)

Rhythms of Fear and the Waves: Affective Landscapes and Female Agency in The Bloody Chamber

Angela Carter's short story "The Bloody Chamber" represents one of the outstanding genre hybrids, combining the mysticism of the Gothic dark surroundings with fairytales, full of symbolic animalistic details and semiotics of colour and detail. Carter strikes the reader with an exceptional sense of musical rhythm, coming from the alterations of places and spaces, on the one side, and the affective waves of the character's emotional tension, on the other: e.g. from within the castle, generating fear and disgust, and from the outer space, reflecting rhythmic roaring of the waves around the castle. By taking the ecofeminist and biosemiotic theoretical grounding, this presentation sheds light on how these two dimensions of narration: the formal level of story structure and the discursive one, symbolising emotions and nature-woman-water relation, are interwoven to modulate the rhythmical dynamics of the narration, based on synchronous and asynchronous episodes of emotional intensification and decline. It posits affective landscapes and rhythmical waves to be the central organising principle of Carter's poetics, deeply rooted in ecofeminist aesthetics, Neo-Gothic eeriness, sublimity, and biocentric poetics.

Kirill Melnikov (University of Lausanne)

Playing Verbal Games in Parks and Jungles: The Hidden Poetry of Angela Carter's "Master" and Love

Although she is best known for her prose, Angela Carter initially studied to become a medievalist, wrote poetry and was a folk songs enthusiast, even writing her "undergraduate dissertation on folk song's links with medieval poetry" (see Paulusma's 2023 book) in 1966 and translating twelve of Baudelaire's "Petits poèmes en prose" (see Martine Hennard's 2025 book chapter). These different genres and mediums of creative expression have left their mark on her own fiction and, I would argue, have enabled her to play "a whole lot of verbal games [with her readers]" (Carter in an interview with Katsavos, 1988). This paper aims to highlight some of these games in two of Carter's natural scenes: the description of the Gothic park on the opening pages of *Love* (1971) and Carter's short story "Master" (*Fireworks*, 1974) set in the jungle forests of South America. Both texts feature hidden rhymes and dactylic rhythms that evoke folk songs, while the highly alliterative style of narration recalls medieval poetry. The dactylic rhythm, along with a chiasmic rhyme scheme, not only adds to the musicality of the text, but also produces a sinister sensation of a cat-and-mouse game, similarly to the rhythmic influence identified in *Shadow Dance* (1966) by Polly Paulusma in an interview with Marie Walz (2025). In addition, the first couple of pages of *Love* feature several elements from Poe's poem "Annabel Lee" (1849) in accordance with Carter's own confession that "she used a lot of imagery from Poe [...] as a starting point for imagery of [her] own" (in an interview with Les Bedford, 1977). Carter's description of the Gothic park where the mad girl takes her walk is as rich in sound play as Poe's own work, setting the mood for this maze-like narrative of betrayal and alienation.

Auriane de Viry (Université de Lausanne)

"All Sense In Me An Unnatural Being": Anthropocenic Denaturation in the French Fin-de-siècle and Carterian Fiction

In 1873, geologist and catholic priest Antonio Stoppani acknowledges man as a "new telluric force which in power and universality may be compared to the greater forces of earth", and coins the term "anthropozoic era" - one of the early developments of the concept of Anthropocene; over the next decade, the French symbolist and decadent movements are formalised by Paul Bourget's 1883 *Essays on Contemporary Psychology* and Jean Moréas' 1886 *Symbolist Manifesto*. A profoundly urban and parisian aesthetic sensibility, 'decadent' literature is marred and haunted by the technological progress of the industrial age, the destruction and modernisation of French cities by Haussmann's ambitious vision, the steady disfigurement of the French countryside scarred by roads, railways, mines and factories, and the shrinking of a once vast and 'exotic' world now robbed of its mystique, charted and pillaged by

explorers, conquerors, colonisers and tourists; and as the idyllic or tempestuous *paysage état-d'âme* of the Romantics suffocates in the steam and coal of the later century, the decadent writer becomes an “unnatural being” (Jean Lorrain, *Monsieur de Phocas*, 1901) and like their precursor, retreats inwards: “When comes winter and its monotonous snows/ I will close shutters and windows/ To build in the night my fantasy palaces” (Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1861). The unmooring of the poet from their natural habitat, their *dénaturation* yields a new literary rapport to and representation of nature - not one born of innate belonging and individuation through meditation or exploration, but of estrangement, fetishisation and domestication. Nature becomes symbol, decor and phantasm, patterns on a carpet or a wallpaper in Des Esseintes's living room, esoteric floral compositions peppered in the backdrop of an ornate Gustave Moreau painting, feminine incarnations of an uncaring ‘matrix of death’ like Octave Mirbeau's hysteric Clara, distant visions laced with absinth and ether in Thomas Welcôme's feverish tirades about his Indian travels; both cause and symptom of a greater crisis of meaning, its haunting absence is a disembodied call to escapism, a scathing reactionary critique of an all-consuming and mercantile modernity, and perhaps, the search for a new paradigm of being in a post-natural world. In 1983, precisely one century after Paul Bourget's coining of the term ‘decadent’, Angela Carter joyfully remarks in *On Gender & Writing*: “I am the pure product of an advanced, industrialised, post-imperialist country in decline” - and goes on to break down the freedom and critical insight she, as a writer and a woman, inherited from generations of perceived decadence of the ‘Western world’. This stark contrast with the existential agony which seems to permeate decadent fiction has deep implications in regards to her own relationship to modernity, the notion of ‘decline’, and to nature - most notably in works inspired by the French decadents such as *The Bloody Chamber*, *Black Venus* and *The Passion of New Eve*: from ecocritical readings and subversions of the woman/nature dichotomy to Carter's admitted indulgence in “lush, fin-de-siècle” aesthetics, this paper will aim to question the obvious chasms (and unexpected similarities) between decadent and carterian fiction's discourse on and representation of nature, non-human life and the denaturation of the literary subject.

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A Style of Virtue: Food, flesh, and cultural ecology in Angela Carter's reviews (1974-1984)

This paper offers an ecocritical reading of four reviews by Angela Carter published between 1974 and 1984 and later collected in *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings*: “Fat Is Ugly” (New Society, 1974), “Lovely Linda” (New Society, 1974), “The New Vegetarians” (New Society, 1976), and “An Omelette and a Glass of Wine and Other Dishes” (London Review of Books, 1984), as they reveal a sustained critical engagement with how culture constructs nature through bodies, food, and taste. Accordingly, I argue that Carter's reviews function as a form of cultural ecology, interrogating the ideological frameworks through which “natural” bodies, ethical diets, and authentic food practices are aestheticised, moralised, and commodified. In the early New Society reviews, Carter exposes beauty and bodily norms as cultural codes rather than biological truths, demonstrating how flesh becomes a site of symbolic regulation; and her review of vegetarian discourse extends this critique to eating practices, revealing how environmental or ethical concern risks becoming a “style of virtue” rather than a materially transformative practice. By 1984, in her review of Elizabeth David's collection, Carter turns to gastronomic taste itself, dissecting how culinary refinement operates as classed cultural capital while obscuring the social and ecological conditions of food production. Situating these reviews within Carter's broader journalistic practice, this paper traces a shift from close scrutiny of bodily norms and aesthetic judgment toward a more explicit critique of consumption, taste, and ethical display. Her reviews expose how ideas of nature, health, and moral eating are mediated through cultural discourse, class distinction, and lifestyle ideology. Read ecocritically, they reveal the dense cultural frameworks that shape how relations between humans and food are imagined and evaluated,

encouraging us to approach “nature” not as an unproblematic origin or refuge, but as a category continually produced and contested within late-twentieth-century consumer culture.

Mirna Radin Sabados (University of Novi Sad)

South of the river: toxic geographies and uneven exposure in Carter’s London

This paper proposes an ecocritical reading of Angela Carter’s *Wise Children* that takes Dora Chance’s insistently “south of the river” vantage point as a way into the novel’s toxic geographies and uneven environmental exposure in late-twentieth-century London. Set between the theatrical heartlands of the north bank and the seedy, damp, and improvised spaces of South London, *Wise Children* repeatedly figures the Thames as a classed and gendered divide that maps onto different degrees of vulnerability to social and material pollution. Existing Carter scholarship has richly explored performance, intertextuality, gender, and the carnivalesque in the novel, yet it has tended to treat setting as backdrop rather than as an active ecology, and Carter’s work more broadly is still predominantly read through fairy tale forests, Gothic interiors, and bodies rather than urban environments. The paper addresses this gap by reading Carter’s South London as an uneven urban ecology in which theatrical waste, bomb-damaged housing, ageing bodies, and cheap costumes form an assemblage of what material ecocriticism would call “toxic matter,” unevenly distributed across the city’s classed and racialized spaces. Drawing on feminist and queer ecologies, it examines how Dora’s camp celebration of illegitimacy, excess, and “rubbish” people both registers and resists a regime that designates some lives – and some neighbourhoods – as more disposable than others. Methodologically, the paper combines close reading of key episodes set south of the river (boarding houses, courtyards, back-alleys and theatres) with urban ecocriticism’s attention to infrastructure, waste, and toxicity. In doing so, it reframes *Wise Children* as an ecological city novel in which environment is not inert scenery but a dynamic, degraded, and degrading participant in the making of theatrical and familial lineages, thereby opening Carter studies to current ecocritical debates on pollution, precarity, and the more-than-human metropolis.

Livia Szélpál (University of Szeged)

Exploring Animal–Human Metamorphosis in Angela Carter’s The Tiger’s Bride and Ali Smith’s Gliff

This presentation compares Angela Carter’s *The Tiger’s Bride* (Bloody Chamber, 1979) and Ali Smith’s *Gliff* (2024) by focusing on the representation of animal-human metamorphosis in the texts. Moreover, the presentation aims to scrutinize metamorphosis as a tool for ecological interpretation via the lens of feminist agency and animal-human relations. In Carter’s short story, the heroine’s transformation into a tiger subverts the traditional “Beauty and the Beast” narrative and empowers nature with agency. Smith’s *Gliff* continues this legacy by portraying identity as fluid and entangled with nonhuman agencies. In *Gliff*, two siblings, Briar and Rose, live outside society’s surveillance, and Rose develops a friendship with a horse named Gliff. This deep human-animal connection showcases how companionship and empathy offer freedom, understanding, and resilience amid oppression. Carter’s influence is visible in Smith’s writings through feminist revisionism, intertextuality, and the use of transformation as a narrative strategy. Ali Smith claims Carter as an influence on her writing. Smith wrote the Introduction to the Vintage edition of Carter’s *Wise Children* (2006). Also, she wrote the Introduction to the New Edition of the essay collection *Essays on the Art of Angela Carter: Flesh and the Mirror* (2007), a critical volume analyzing Carter’s oeuvre. Ali Smith’s works align with Carter’s experimental and deeply provocative approach to fiction. Moreover, both authors focus on challenging gender norms and utilizing magical realism. Smith views Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* as revitalizing literary forms and “letting Beauty also be a Beast, in swapping the so-called reality, by an act of artifice, for a better one” (Carter 2007: 15). Comparing these texts reveals a paradigm change in ecocritical condition: Carter envisions radical, embodied becoming-

animal, while Smith situates metamorphosis within consciousness, language, and ecological networks.

Marie-Emilie Walz (University of Lausanne)

Claustrophobic Castles and Labyrinthine Woods Reading Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber' and 'The Erl-King' as a Culture-Nature Diptych

In the 'Miscellaneous Fairy Tale Material' file, archived in the Angela Carter Papers, are handwritten notes which focus on, as Angela Carter herself puts it, 'a story, or rather, the constellation of stories & ballads' which assemble themselves around the tale of 'Bluebeard'. In this constellation, Carter includes Charles Perrault's 'Bluebeard', Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's 'Fitcher's Bird', Joseph Jacobs's 'Mr. Fox', and Italo Calvino's 'Silver Nose', as well as 'Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight' which is known both as a medieval ballad and a folk song. As she explores all these versions, Carter specifically focuses on the different settings, arguing that the fairy tales are all set inside and have a 'a sense of claustrophobia' while the variants of the ballad 'take place outdoors [...]; in the wood, by the stream, the wind blowing, the birds singing'. This distinction finds its way into Carter's own rewritings of 'Bluebeard' and 'Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight' in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979). Carter's take on Perrault's 'Bluebeard' in 'The Bloody Chamber' situates the story in the Marquis's castle with its series of closed and bloody rooms. On the contrary, 'The Erl-King', which Polly Paulusma has convincingly shown to be a retelling of 'Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight', takes place in the open and enchanted woods. However, both the Marquis's claustrophobic castle and the Erl-King's labyrinthine woods prove to be dangerous to the young women who enter them. Comparing 'The Bloody Chamber' and 'The Erl-King' to their fairy and folk intertexts thus prompts a reading of Carter's two stories as a diptych representing a culture-nature dichotomy while also challenging this binary opposition. Such a reading, in turn, underlines the complexities of both Carter's understanding of her intertexts and her representation of the environment.

BIOS

Umberto Costantini graduated in 2025 in the MA program of Languages, Literatures and Digital Culture, with a dissertation titled "British Popularisation of Botany in Children's Literature of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. A Cultural and Ecofeminist Study", at the University of Verona, Italy. They are currently working at the publication of their first monograph on the topic of popularisation of botany in British children's literature through an ecocritical lens. They have been awarded a scholarship for research on the topic "Botanical popularisation and fairytales in children's literature as a means to an eco-sensitivity through sensory experiences" at the library Internationale Jugendbibliothek in Munich, Germany. They collaborate with the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures as "collaboratore alla ricerca" for English literature.

Mengqin Huang is a final-year PhD candidate in English Literature at Zhejiang University. Her doctoral research examines landscapes and 'acts of travel' in the works of Angela Carter, with a particular focus on the narratology of movement. She was a visiting researcher at Queen Mary University of London from 2023 to 2024, has contributed to a national research project in humanities and social sciences (China), and has presented her research at academic conferences in China and Portugal. Her publications include an article on cyberfeminism in *Nights at the Circus*, and a forthcoming book review for *Contemporary Women's Writing*. Her broader interests include travel writing, mobility studies, and post-Western narrative theory.

Katarina Labudova is a teacher at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Letters, Catholic University in Ružomberok, Slovakia, where she lectures and teaches courses on British and Canadian Literature. She gained her Ph.D (2011) in the field of Comparative Literatures at the University of Masaryk, Brno, Czech Republic. Her dissertation deals with Angela Carter's and Margaret Atwood's strategies of writing beyond genre conventions. Katarina Labudova has published several articles focused on Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, identity, monstrosity and the representations of the body in postmodern literatures. In 2022, her book *Food in Margaret Atwood's Speculative Fiction* was published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Anna Kérchy, PhD DrHabil Dsc is a Full Professor of English literature at the University of Szeged in Hungary, where she is the head of the Doctoral Program in Literatures and Cultures in English, leader of the Gender Studies Research Group, and founding director of Children's and Young Adult Literatures and Culture Research Centre. Her research areas focus on Victorian and postmodern fantastic imagination, body studies, corporeal narratology, human-animal studies, posthumanism, transmedia storytelling, nonsense, women's writing, and children's/YA literature. She authored the monographs *Body-Texts in the Novels of Angela Carter* (Edwin Mellen, 2008), *Alice in Transmedia Wonderland* (McFarland, 2016) that won the HUSSE book award, *Essays in Feminist Aesthetics and Narratology* (JatePress, 2019) *The Poetics and Politics of Victorian Nonsense* (Hungarian Academy of Sciences Press, 2024), and co-edited fifteen essay collections. She serves as vice president of the Hungarian Society for the Study of English, and is editor-in-chief of TNT Ef, Interdisciplinary E-Journal of Gender Studies.

Inna Livytska, PhD., is a post-doctoral scholar specialising in psychonarration in literature, narrative cognitive studies, and biosemiotics. Currently, she is a Walter Benjamin post-doctoral researcher at Justus Liebig University Giessen, and a principal investigator of the DFG project on female agency in English fiction of the 19th -21st centuries. She is a member of the executive board at the International Association of Semiotic Studies, the International Society for Studies of Narrative, Angela Carter Society (since January 2026). She is working at the intersection of culture, literature, language and environment, and narrative artificial intelligence.

Kirill Melnikov is a PhD candidate at the University of Lausanne where he is employed as a doctoral assistant in English and Comparative literature. His current research focuses on the previously unexplored connection between Angela Carter's fiction and Russian literature of late 19th/early 20th century. He has published a book chapter on that subject (co-written with Dr. Marie Emilie Walz), called "In judging him, [we] judge ourselves." Murder, Morality, and Femininity in Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment and Angela Carter's "Elegy for a Freelance" in 2023. Along with Martine Hennard Dutheil and Marie Walz, Kirill has organized multiple conferences on Angela Carter in Lausanne in the recent years.

Maria José Pires is a researcher at the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES/CEAUL) and at CITUR/Estoril. Her research interests include contemporary British literature, cultural theory, food studies, literary tourism, and the creative reception of literary texts. She has worked widely on Angela Carter and co-curated the exhibition *The Bloody Chamber: Designing Perspectives, Challenging Boundaries* (University of Lisbon, 2017). Her current work continues to explore Carter's fiction and critical reception in Portugal.

Mirna Radin Sabadoš is a scholar of Anglophone literature whose research is focused on contemporary fiction and media, world literature, and critical theory, with a particular emphasis on crisis, mediation, and global cultural imaginaries. Her recent work on the contemporary British and American novel examines narrative responses to war, violence, and ecological and

social instability, including studies of Don DeLillo's fiction, body art, and representations of temporality and space in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century prose. She has published on world-literature frameworks and post-socialist literary representations of whiteness in the Balkans, as well as on the transnational reception and translation of Frantz Fanon, linking postcolonial critique with Eastern European contexts. She is Full Professor of English Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Serbia.

Livia Szélpál is a senior assistant professor in the Department of English Studies at the University of Szeged. She completed her M.A. in American Studies (2004) and History (2005) at the University of Szeged and earned a PhD in Comparative History from the Central European University in 2013. She is an advisory board member of *AMERICANA E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary* and an editorial board member of the *Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya Interdiszciplináris e-Folyóirat*. She participates in the work of the Center for North American Studies of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, as an associate member. She is a member of the Gender Studies Research Group and the Inter-American Research Centre at the University of Szeged, as well as *AHEA*, *HUSSE*, *HAAS*, *International Crime Fiction Association*, *Spechel*, *Angela Carter Society* and the *Hajnal István Kör*. Email: [szelpal.livia@szte.hu].

Auriane de Viry is a PhD candidate at the University of Lausanne under the direction of Martine Hennard Dutheil, with a Master in French Literature from Sorbonne-Université. Currently working on her doctoral thesis, "Angela Carter and the French *Fin-de-siècle*", she specialises in 19th century Decadent fiction on which she has given various papers and published various essays, including "A Journey Around My Room, The Moats, Museums and Monasteries of Private Interiors in the French fin-de-siècle and Carterian Fiction" for the English Department's latest study day, and an article on Parisian literary reviews in Pierre-François Moreau's incoming academic *Dictionary of 19th Century French Philosophy*.

Marie Emilie Walz PhD is Lecturer in English and Comparative Literature in the English Department at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). She specialises in cross-period comparative studies; feminist and young adult rewritings of fairy tales; and the relationships between allegory and fairy tales, fantasy, and speculative fiction. Her research interests also include intermedial and translation studies. Her PhD thesis titled *Reading Spells Backwards: Allegories of Violence and Love in Edmund Spenser's and Angela Carter's Fairy-Tale and Speculative Fiction* was awarded a Faculty Prize from the University of Lausanne. She has published and presented conference papers on, among others: the intertextual relationships between Angela Carter's works and early modern texts, such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and its intermedial adaptations; music in Angela Carter's fiction; Francesca Lia Block's and Jane Yolen's young-adult fairy-tale rewritings; and adaptations of fairy tales in series in Bill Willingham's comic book *Fables* and the TV show *Once Upon a Time*. She is the co-editor, with Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, of *Angela Carter Translator and Translated: In the Workshop of Creation* (Routledge, 2026).

Travel Information

If arriving at Budapest Ferenc Liszt International Airport, take bus 200E towards Kőbánya-Kispest M and travel five stops to Ferihegy Railway Station. From there, direct InterCity trains run hourly to Szeged (approximate journey time: 2 hours). Seat reservation is compulsory. Tickets (approximately 4000 HUF) may be purchased at the ticket office or from ticket machines at the station or from the online MÁV app or website: <https://jegy.mav.hu/>
From Szeged Railway Station, the city centre can be reached by tram (lines 1 or 2) or by a 20-minute walk.

Further travel information is available at: <https://szeged.esn.hu/how-get-szeged>

Accommodation

As the venue is centrally located, we recommend booking accommodation nearby. Options include:

[Booking.com](https://www.booking.com)

[Szeged Tourinform offers](#)

Science Hotel**** (Petőfi sgt 17) <https://sciencehotel.hu>

Riva Boutique Hotel**** (Boldogasszony sgt 12) <https://www.rivaboutiquehotel.hu/hu/rolunk>

Tiszavirág Szeged Hotel**** (Hajnóczy utca 1/B) <https://tiszaviragszeged.hu/?p=4196>

Art Hotel Szeged **** (Somogyi utca 16) <https://artszeged.accenthotels.com/hu>

Dóm Hotel Szeged *** (Bajza utca 6) <https://domhotelszeged.info/>

Hotel Piano*** (Petőfi sgt 4) <https://hotelpiano.hu/>

Partium Hotel*** (Honvéd tér 3) <https://www.partiumhotel.hu/hu>

Riva Hotel (Szeged, Egyetem utca 4) <https://www.rivahotel.hu/hu>

Szivárvány Panzió (Tisza Lajos utca 27) <http://szivarvanypanzio.hu/>

Mosoly Apartman (Szentháromság utca 38) <https://mosolyapartman.hu>

Família Vendégház (Szentháromság utca 71) <https://www.familiapanzio.hu>

BL Apartmanház (Szentháromság utca 48) <https://www.szegediapartman.hu/hu>

Tisza Sport Hotel** (Szentgyörgyi Albert utca 42) <http://www.tiszasporthotel.hu/>

Post-Conference Plans

We are planning to publish a volume of selected conference proceedings.

