

Investigating Desiderius Erasmus' *Copia* and Its Semiotic Meaning: A Case Study of Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*

Jie Gu

Beijing Foreign Studies University, China

Abstract

Desiderius Erasmus' "Copia" is not only inscribed with rhetorical interpretations but also implied with semiotic meanings. This paper starts from the definition, components, and functions of "Copia" and then analyzes *Nights at the Circus* from two aspects: the abundance of expression and the abundance of subject-matter, through discussing the employment of metaphor and antonomasia, the dividing of a whole into parts, and the tracing of causes in this novel. This research finds that the use of "Copia" can not only contribute to the richness and variety of style but also highlight the characters' personalities and enable Angela Carter to discuss political and social issues such as patriarchy and individual rights. From a perspective of Bakhtin's cultural semiotics, the paper aims to explore "Copia" semiotic meanings in literary classics and provide alternative interpretations of this conception in literary criticism.

Keywords: *Copia*, *carnivalization*, *Nights at the Circus*

1. Introduction

According to Erasmus, "Copia" consists of the abundance of expression and the abundance of subject-matter, so this article will explore *Nights at the Circus*'s richness from these two aspects. Firstly, this paper will present a brief introduction to the

concept of “Copia”, including, its definition, components, and functions. Next, this study will discuss *Nights at the Circus* from the aspect of the abundance of expression, i.e., the rhetoric figures, including metaphor and antonomasia. Then, it will analyze the abundance of subject-matter of this novel to examine the author's methods of enriching materials by dividing a whole into parts and tracing causes. Meanwhile, this research will also explore what functions and effects “Copia” can achieve in shaping characters and revealing themes in literary works.

In addition, Erasmus' “Copia” has a significant impact on improving the quality and variety of writing. It will help to avoid repetition and monotony of compositions, and achieve the richness of style through embellishing the language via “abundance of expression” including synonymy, enallage, antonomasia, periphrasis, metaphor, metonymy, hyperboles, equivalence, change in sentence form, etc. and “abundance of subject-matter” including separating a whole into parts, presenting process, tracing causes, enumerating results and achieving vividness. This paper aims to study “Copia” in *Nights at the Circus* from the perspective of Bakhtin's cultural semiotics, in order to explore a cultural semiotics interpretation of literary classics for literary criticism in China.

2. The Case: *Nights at the Circus*

Nights at the Circus is one of Angela Carter's most popular novels. This work has generated a great deal of literary criticism among critics over the past years. The author was undoubtedly one of the most prolific writers in the 20th century. Toyé (2007) states that she is a twentieth-century original and no matter what one thinks of her writing, no one can argue that she was ever less than unique. Most of her works are written in highly-polished English language with a richness of vocabulary, imagery, and allusion. She prefers using rhetoric devices such as synonyms, antonomasia, metaphor, metonymy, etc. to portray characters and polish her novels. *Nights at the Circus* is one of her masterpieces in the genre of magical realism. Apart from its superlatively imagined plot and profound social and political implications, the novel is also appreciated for its richness of language.

Scholars of literature pay much attention to the feminism, magical realism, and carnivalization in the novel. For instance, focusing on the corporeal and social

interconnectedness between women and animals, Yang (2016) discusses Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and its exploration of literal and metaphorical woman-animal transcorporeal imaginings. Moreover, foregrounding the obvious, yet critically unacknowledged, similarities between Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, Holliday-Karre (2019) argues that the outsider society of the circus becomes a feminist tool of resistance to productive meaning. In many aspects, Carter's *Nights at the Circus* can be understood as a postmodern retelling of *Nightwood*, and thus crucial to the understanding of Barnes' feminism. Moreover, Takolander and Langdon (2017) attend to magical realist trauma narratives by women and mention that *Nights at the Circus* reproduces the technical gesture of magical realism. Also, Mirmusa (2014) argues how *Nights at the Circus*, an influential paradigm of magical realism, gradually destroys the boundaries of the paradoxical impulses through including the theories of carnivalization.

To recapitulate, few people associate "Copia" with the book. Previous studies of "Copia" concentrate on the variety of English language in order to polish writing skills. Yuan (2015) offers contemporary examples to help readers understand that "Copia" plays an essential role in avoiding repetition in writing. For example, when describing American ancestors, John Steinbeck uses "early settlers", "colonists", "brave and forest-wise men", "these Americans", "immigrants", "the new settlers", etc. to achieve the variety of writing. Also, previous studies of *Nights at the Circus* mostly analyze feminism, postmodernism, magical realism, and carnivalization. This paper will connect the conception "Copia" with the novel, and explore how the abundance of expression and the abundance of subject-matter are demonstrated in this literary work.

3. "Copia" and Its Semiotic Meaning

Semiotics studies the nature, meaning, and development laws of signs. It is interrelated with cognitive science and thought science. With its diverse research perspectives and strong disciplines, it has become a kind of interdisciplinary methodology. Semiotics, together with other disciplines, forms new sub-disciplines or independent disciplines.

Semiotics assists literature studies. It changes the way of research on literary works which focuses solely on the induction of themes and the refinement of artistic features. Semiotics tends to view a text as a linguistic symbol system, trying to investigate the information transmission function of a text, that is, starting from the structure of the text, exploring the complex ambiguity of the character image, and thus revealing the text's vast information.

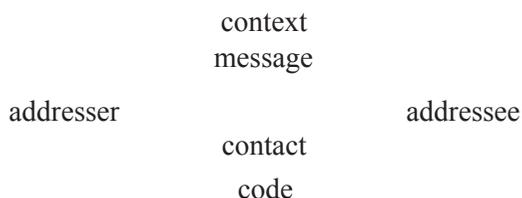
Rhetoric, generally understood, is "a technique to strengthen the persuasive ability or artistic effect of words or sentences" (Zhao, 2011). Traditional rhetoric belongs to the category of linguistics, focusing on the collation and research of ancient books. However, the "linguistic turn" in the 20th century directly led to the revival of rhetoric, especially the large-scale "symbol proliferation" of human culture at the end of the 20th century. From production as the center to consumption and leisure as the center, the production and consumption of signs exceed material production and consumption. This situation has promoted the shift of rhetoric from linguistics to semiotics.

3.1 Rhetoric and semiotics

The author will first introduce Jakobson's communication model. All factors inalienably involved in communication may be represented in a schematic form as in Figure 1.

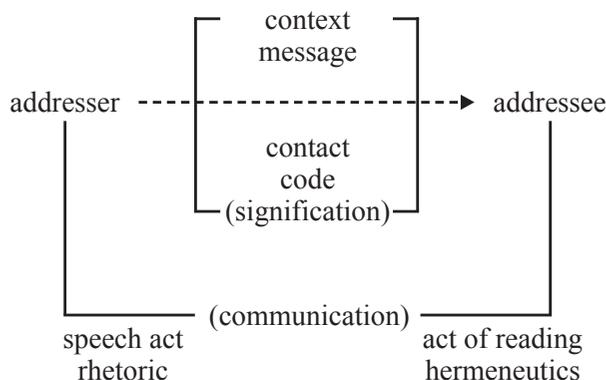
The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE. To be operative, the message requires a CONTEXT referred to ('referent' in another, somewhat ambiguous, nomenclature), seizable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a CODE fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee (or in other words, to the encoder and decoder of the message); and, finally, a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication. (Jakobson, Pomorska & Rudy, 1987, p. 6)

Figure 1



The study of literature should concentrate on the actual works of art themselves. Wellek and Warren (1956) recognize that literary history has been so preoccupied with the setting of a work of literature that its attempts at an analysis of the works themselves have been slight in comparison with the enormous effort expended on the study of the environment. Jakobson's model analyzes the works themselves rather than the conditioning circumstances such as setting, environment, and external causes.

Figure 2



The focus of Figure 1 and Figure 2 is the text construction and signification, namely, the process of message construction through code. In semiotics, this process is called signification. Then, communication is how the meaning is coded by the addresser and transmitted to the addressee through a specific channel to decode it. Throughout the history of rhetoric, the “signification” constructed by the interaction of codes and messages represents the traditional rhetoric; the communication constituted by the interaction of language users, especially the discursive power of

the addresser's speech act on the audience, is actually another kind of rhetoric as a persuasive technique (Zhang, 2011).

To sum up, through Jakobson's linguistic model, we can see the contribution that rhetoric may offer to literary research, whether in the communication involving the addresser and addressee of a message, or in the representational role of rhetoric in the interaction of codes and messages (Zhang, 2011).

3.2 "Copia"

Wellek and Warren put forward that "the old methods of classical rhetoric, poetics, or metrics are and must be reviewed and restarted in modern terms" (1956, p. 139). As for the definition of "Copia", namely, abundance, different scholars have varied explanations. "Copia" is a Latin word, meaning fullness, abundance, or variety in English (Enos, 2011). According to Erasmus (1978), "Copia" is the abundant style in content and expression.

Erasmus deems that "Copia" is twofold, including the abundance of expression and the abundance of subject-matter. The abundance of expression involves synonyms, enallage, metaphor, variation in word form, equivalence, and other similar methods of diversified diction. The abundance of subject-matter covers the assembling, explaining, and amplifying of reasoning by the application of examples, comparisons, similarities, dissimilarities, opposites, etc. It might be thought that these two aspects are so interconnected in reality that one cannot easily separate one from the other, and that they interact so tightly that any distinction between them belongs to theory rather than practice (as cited in Yuan, 2013, pp. 105-106). There is no denying that both components have a significant influence on improving the quality and richness of diction.

In *De Copia, Book I*, Erasmus (as cited in Yuan, 2013, pp. 99-126) introduces twenty rhetoric figures including synonyms, enallage, antonomasia, periphrasis, metaphor, reciprocal metaphor, allegory, catachresis, onomatopoeia, metalepsis, metonymy, synecdoche, equivalence, paired expressions, interchange of correlated expressions, heightening, hyperbole, meiosis, arrangement, syntax or construction, and change in sentence form. This paper will mainly explore antonomasia and metaphor.

According to Erasmus, antonomasia is "substituting something else for a

person's proper name, substituting something else for a person's proper name" (as cited in Yuan, 2013, p. 114). It can be divided into the following four situations. First, substitute proper names for proper names, like calling Achilles "the son of Peleus" or "the grandson of Aeacus", the Romans "the descendants of Romulus", the Trojans "the sons of Priam" or "the race of Dardanus", Hercules "the man from Tiryns". Second, substitute a common epithet for the proper name. For example, in Terence "the old man" is often used for "the master". Similarly, "the poet" is used for Homer and "the philosopher" for Aristotle. Third, substitute proper names for ordinary epithets. For instance, call a robber "a Verres", an effeminate man "a Sardanapalus", a rich man "a Croesus", or a cruel one "a Phalaris".

Moreover, Erasmus divides metaphor into five types. The first type is deflection, which refers to a word deflected to some closely related concept, like 'see' for 'understand', 'hear' for 'obey' or 'believe', 'sense' for 'discern', 'perceive' for 'comprehend'... The second is the transference from irrational to rational creatures and vice versa, like saying that a man who keeps on talking in a repulsive and tasteless manner 'brays' or 'bleats' or 'snarls'. We also can call the swan a singer, the nightingale a musician, the fox a traitor. The third type is made from transferring animate to inanimate or vice versa, like saying "the land smiles", "both in the flower of their youth"; or, "the angry sea", "the Araxes chafing", "the greedy sea", "Gargara marvels". The fourth type is transferring one animal to another. For example, a crow using a pig for a horse, bees browsing. The fifth is the transference from one inanimate thing to another and vice versa, such as "the wood gushes into leaf", "hatred sprouts", etc.

Except for the abundance of expression, "Copia" can also be achieved by abundance of subject-matter. In *De Copia, Book II*, Erasmus mentions five methods regarding the enrichment of material: separating a whole into parts, presenting process, tracing causes, enumerating results, and achieving vividness.

In *De Copia, Book II*, Erasmus (as cited in Yuan, 2013, p. 128) concludes that separating a whole into parts means taking something that can be expressed in brief and general terms, and expand it and separate it into its constituent parts. Erasmus also presents some examples to help readers understand. Let us take the sentence "He wasted all his substance in riotous living" for an example (as cited in Yuan, 2013, p. 129). It can be elaborated by making a display of all the different types of possessions

and the various ways of wasting them:

all he had inherited from mother or father or acquired by the death of other relatives, all that was added by his wife's dowry, all the increase that accrued from various legacies, all he received by the prince's generosity, all that he raked in during his military service, all his money, plate, clothes, estates, and land, together with farm buildings and stock... (ibid.)

In Erasmus's words, when explaining something, "we do not set out the fact unadorned, but look for causes of it, even some distance back, and try to explain what gave rise to it." For instance, "if one were not content with saying that a state of war developed between the French and the Neapolitans, but added the reasons for the enmity, said who instigated it, what was the pretext for commencing hostilities, and what hopes they had of victory, and on what each party based its confidence" (as cited in Yuan, 2013, pp. 133-134). By investigating the underlying reasons for something, the readers can have a more comprehensive overview of the overall situation.

"Copia" contributes to fullness and richness of style and many scholars recognize its significance. Erasmus (1978) deems that variety ("Copia" in expression) is such a powerful skill in every aspect that nothing is brilliant unless it is commended by variety. Cai cites

the words repeated would ordinarily be either varied or left out; the repetition, that is to say, is more or less abnormal, whatever is abnormal may be objectionable in a single instance, and is likely to become so if it occurs frequently... Never use the same word or write the same thing twice in a sentence unless you are repeating intentionally for emphasis or for clarity. (2003, p. 368)

Lastly, the concept of carnivalization is implied in "Copia". "Carnival is syncretic pageantry ritualistic sort," and it is "the sum total of all diverse festivities, rituals and forms of the carnival type" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 122). Namely, carnival is a general name of diverse folk festivals. Carnival is a second world, a second life that exists outside official life, a different way of living, and a realm of community, equality and universe freedom. People are free from all the conditions, positions, obligations, and

laws of ordinary life. The world will be turned upside down and inside out.

Bakhtin elaborates on the carnival and carnivalistic sense of the world with great effort, but the real focus of his studies is on the carnivalization of literature. In Bakhtin's opinion, "Carnival was, as it were, reincarnated in literature" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 157). That is to say, the specific and concrete ideas, which are under the range of the carnivalistic sense of the world and formed in the real experience of carnival life, are to be expressed in artistic literary language. Bakhtin defines carnivalization of literature as a process of the transformation of carnivalesque to literary form.

Carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms—from large and complex mass actions to individual carnivalistic gestures. This language, in a differentiated and even (as in any language) articulate way, gave expression to a unified (but complex) carnival sense of the world, permeating all its forms. This language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language, and much less into a language of abstract concepts, but it is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature; that is, it can be transposed into the language of literature. (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 122)

Bakhtin defines this transposition of carnival into the language of literature as the carnivalization of literature. He clarifies that any literature that is influenced either directly or indirectly by one or another variant of carnivalistic folklore, should be classified as carnivalized literature.

Carnivalization is essential to the overall development of literature. Bakhtin (1999) deems that "in the subsequent development of European literature as well, carnivalization constantly assisted in the destruction of all barriers between genres, between self-enclosed systems of thought, between various styles, etc." (pp. 134-135). The concepts mentioned above are just some rudimentary ones in Bakhtinian theory of carnivalesque, but they have been sufficient to reflect the theory's supreme spirit, which can also be glimpsed in *Nights at the Circus*. These concepts, inscribed in the conception "Copia", contribute to its semiotic meaning in the novel and also in rhetoric studies.

4. Case Study

Nights at the Circus focuses on the life and exploits of Sophie Fevvers at the tail end of the nineteenth century. She is a celebrated aerialist of Colonel Kearney's circus who is—or so she would have people believe—a “Cockney Venus”. She is part woman, part swan. Jack Walser, an American journalist, is on a quest to reveal the truth behind her identity. The story of London in the novel consists of an interview of Sophie Fevvers by Jack Walser, which is mostly a story of Sophie Fevvers told by herself. In Petersburg, the story focuses on Walser's transformation into a clown as he becomes subsumed into the magical world and recognizes that he has fallen in love with Sophie Fevvers. The final section occurs in Siberia. Jack Walser and Sophie Fevvers are separated, and the novel ends when they are reunited. In this segment, the narrative shifts between Sophie Fevvers's and Jack Walser's stream of consciousness, embedded stories, and authorial narration. Due to the incompatibility between the carnival world and the orthodox image, the novel is naturally filled with a series of weird carnival images such as clowns, female monsters, Hercules, and animals with high intelligence.

4.1 Laughter in “Copia”

“Laughter” is a cultural-historical term coined by Bakhtin. He states that “this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival” (1984, pp. 11-12).

(1) Example 1

“[...] Under these impenetrable disguises of wet white, you might find, were you to look, the features of those who were once proud to be visible. You find there, the aerialist whose nerve has failed; the bare-back rider who took one tumble too many; the juggler whose hands shake so, from drink or sorrow, that he can no longer keep his balls in the air. And then what is left but the white mask of poor Pierrot, who invites the laughter that would otherwise come unbidden.” (Carter, pp. 137-138)

This part is about the past failures of clowns who under “the white mask of poor Pierrot” by dividing a whole into parts. Carter showed “the features of those who

were once proud to be visible” by separating them into individuals, the aerialist, the bare-back rider, and the juggler. Carter further described their former life in detail: “the aerialist whose nerve has failed”, “the bare-back rider who took one tumble too many” and “the juggler whose hands shake so, from drink or sorrow, that he can no longer keep his balls in the air”. All of these not only enriched the description but also reflected the desolation of those clowns’ lives. Carter hinted at the tail end of the nineteenth century, and there existed a huge gap between different social ranks. Specifically, people looked down upon clowns. Clowns had done respectable jobs and when they were clowns against their actual wills, they also desired the audience’s due respect.

Clowns, one kind of the outstanding representatives of the carnival spirit, are the kings of happiness on the carnival square. There is joy everywhere they go. Clowns are the source of joy. With the help of masks, they can escape from reality and their own identities, do whatever they want, enjoy carnivals. They can step out at any time, without taking any responsibility, and are therefore the best spokesmen for the spirit of freedom and innovation.

Apart from expanding a general term into more detailed parts, the enrichment of material can also be achieved by tracing the causes of a situation. In some sections of *Nights at the Circus*, Carter gave some explanations to the riotous reality of the nineteenth century.

(2) Example 2

“[...] we subject ourselves to laughter from choice. We are the whores of mirth, for, like a whore, we know what we are; we know we are mere hirelings hard at work and yet those who hire us see us as beings perpetually at play. Our work is their pleasure and so they think our work must be our pleasure, too, so there is always an abyss between their notion of our work as play, and ours, of their leisure as our labor.” (Carter, p. 138)

This is a clown’s soliloquy. In this section, Carter depicted a clown’s attitude to his job. She likens the clowns to whores and then delineates the reason why they are “the whores of mirth” by tracing causes: “like a whore, we know what we are; we know we are mere hirelings hard at work and yet those who hire us see us as beings perpetually at play”. Mockingly, customers deem clowns’ work as play while clowns

consider customers' pleasure as clowns' labor. Moreover, by stating that clowns brought pleasure to people, but asking who could bring happiness to clowns, Carter infused the story with underlying social issues like individual rights.

4.2 Ethics liberty in "Copia"

Carter employed *antonomasia* to substitute someone or something else for characters' proper names. The application of *antonomasia* not only helped to avoid repetition but also highlighted the prominent personality of characters.

(3) Example 3

"Lord love you, sir!" Fevvers sang out in a voice that changed like dustbin lids. "As to my place of my birth, why, I first saw light of day right here in smoky old London, didn't I! Not billed the 'Cockney Venus', for nothing, sir, though they could just as well 'ave called me 'Helen of the High Wire', due to the unusual circumstances in which I come ashore, for I never docked via what you might call the normal channels [...]" (Carter, p. 1)

Accompanied with the free and familiar contact, participators use a kind of carnival speech to communicate with each other. In the center of carnival, all the participators contact each other freely without noticing their class, gender, or even species. Participators use abusive words and gestures in communicating with each other, because in carnival only in this way can they realize a kind of real communication and reverse the social structure which is dominated by the official language.

The center of carnival is Fevvers' dressing room. The journalist Walser interviews Fevvers in order to explore the possible fraud, and he tries to keep his wits and captious eyes; however the interview has been controlled by Fevvers and Lizzie since the very beginning. They use a kind of carnival speech to change this interview into a female's autobiography which is totally narrated by women.

In this monologue, the author addressed Fevvers "Cockney Venus". Venus is the Roman goddess whose functions encompass love, beauty, desire, sex, fertility, prosperity, and victory. Carter shaped the heroine Fevvers with similar abilities.

Carter also called Fevvers "Helen of the High Wire", avoiding the monotony of calling her name repeatedly. In Greek mythology, Helen of Troy, or simply Helen,

was said to have been the most dazzling woman in the world, who was married to King Menelaus of Sparta, but was kidnapped by Prince Paris of Troy, resulting in the Trojan War when the Achaeans set out to reclaim her and bring her back to Sparta. From Carter's perspective, the use of *antonomasia* hinted that Fevvers could bring about chaos as well.

(4) Example 4

So he stumbled upon his profession, and, at this time in his life, he filed copy to a New York newspaper for a living, so he could travel wherever he pleased whilst retaining the privileged irresponsibility of the journalist, the professional necessity to see all and believe nothing which cheerfully combined, in Walser's personality, with a characteristically American generosity towards the brazen lie. Call him Ishmael. (Carter, p. 6)

In this sentence, Carter addressed Walser as Ishmael. According to the Old Testament, Ishmael was driven away with his mother after the birth of Isaac. Therefore, Ishmael can refer to the outcast. The use of *antonomasia* not only avoided repeating the name Walser but also showed that Walser was, to some extent, not accepted by the society and hence roved all over the world, just as Ishmael.

(5) Example 5

"What a shock I got when I felt the rasp of her fingertips on my palm, for they were indeed hard, as if there were no flesh on 'em. Afterward, when I was free again, Esmeralda's old man, *the Human Eel*, told me how this Madam Schreck, as she called herself, had indeed started out in life as a Living Skeleton, touring the sideshows, and always was a bony woman." (Carter, p. 65)

Madam Schreck's appearance and characteristics are vividly described in this section. She was terribly skinny and utterly indifferent, just like a skeleton with breath but without emotion. What's more, when Madam Schreck started out, she played the role of a living skeleton. These two reasons contributed to this application of *antonomasia*.

(6) Example 6

And, then, again, consider matches! Lucifers; the little wooden soldiers of the angel of light, with whom you'd think she was in complicity if you'd never heard of phosphorus. (Carter, p. 234)

Lucifer is one of the books' biblical references. Usually, it has two meanings. Firstly, Lucifer is the embodiment of evil in Christian texts. For instance, Carter likens to Lucifer when describing Fevvers' first attempt at flight. This allusion suggested that Fevvers herself was a fallen angel, rebelliously resisting the patriarchal doctrine of the 19th century. She was similar to Lucifer, who led the revolution against God during "The War of the Heavens". Secondly, according to the New Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary, Lucifer refers to the planet Venus when appearing as the morning star, which is the common meaning in English. It can also be used as an adjective, "light-bringing". Lighted matches could also bring light.

Also, a metaphor has often been used to imply the freedom in ethics. In *Nights at the Circus*, Carter employed lots of metaphors to diversify and amplify his expression. She mainly used transference from inanimate to animate and vice versa and transference from one inanimate thing to another in order to not only combine realistic details with marvels but also dictate the transition from the old age to the new age and from patriarchy to equality.

(7) Example 7

He was a kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness. That was why he was a good reporter. (Carter, p. 7)

This paragraph touches upon the reason why Walser becomes a journalist. According to the New Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary, "kaleidoscope" refers to a toy consisting of a tube containing mirrors and pieces of colored glass or paper, whose reflections produce changing patterns when the tube is rotated. Carter likened "Walser" to "a kaleidoscope", depicting that he could adapt himself to changing circumstances. Carter always combined realistic details with marvels. In this novel, through Fevvers and Walser, she presented the contrast between the magical and the believable. While Fevvers' status as a half swan and half woman remains questionable, Walser's role as

the fact-finding journalist helps to ground the story in reality. With magical realism, Carter could address everyday concerns through an engaging and playful form.

Walser aims to make Fevvers an object in his clarification, but in the end, he has to become the object himself under the control of Fevvers. Robinson (1991) suggests: “For Carter, gender is a relation of power, whereby the weak become ‘feminine’ and the strong become ‘masculine’. And, because relations of power change, this construction is always open to deconstruction” (p. 77). In the interview, Fevvers exceeds Walser in their relationship with the help of her aggressive body; therefore, their gender roles are reversed. Fevvers becomes an active speaker to tell her own story, while Walser becomes a “passive prisoner of her voice” (Carter, 1984, p. 43). As a female with the grotesque body, Fevvers is no longer an object waiting to be identified. In Carter’s viewpoint, grotesque functions as a possible chance for women to change their oppressive and disempowering position the hierarchical society gives to them.

(8) Example 8

For we are at the fag-end, the smoldering cigar-butt, of a nineteenth century which is just about to be ground out in the ashtray of history. It is the final, waning, season of the year of Our Lord, eighteen hundred and ninety-nine. (Carter, pp. 8-9)

This is the scene when audiences clamor for Fevvers’ arrival, coinciding with that of the new century. Carter used metaphor to liken “the fag-end of the nineteenth century” to “the smoldering cigar-butt”, not only indicating the end of old age and the arrival of a new age but also creating an atmosphere of hope and change. The turn-of-the-century setting dictated much of the novel’s content. The female characters encompassed a transition between one century and the next and from one time period’s ideals (patriarchy doctrine) to another’s (feminist freedom).

(9) Example 9

First impression: physical ungainliness. Such a lump it seems! But soon, quite soon, an acquired grace asserts itself, probably the result of strenuous exercise. (Check if she trained as a dancer.) (Carter, p. 15)

This is the scene depicting the situation when Walser first watched Fevvers’

performance and witnessed her flying tactics. Carter employed the device of metaphor to liken "Fevvers" to "a lump", clearly manifesting that Fevvers was of great stature, yet without decent appearance and manners.

Also, the body of Fevvers, the female protagonist, accompanied by her wings, is a typical example of a grotesque body. Fevvers' body appears as one of the most elemental figures: the part-human, part-bird. Besides, everything about this woman seems excessive: her size, her wings, her six-inch-long eyelashes, her taste for immense quantities of champagne as well as her overwhelming rancid smell, which fit the grotesque body's factor of extending without end. There are many narrations in the novel that focus on her exaggerated body and emphasize the lower or physical stratum. Her rude immense body makes it possible for her to refuse to play the gender role as a passive object in the hierarchy.

In *Nights at the Circus*, Carter enriched her description by expanding and amplifying something that could be expressed in general terms, then unwrapping and opening it out and displaying it fully to the gaze. She was not only telling a situation in infantile and general terms but also showing some social issues.

(10) Example 10

He subjected his life to a series of cataclysmic shocks because he loved to hear his bones rattle. That was how he knew he was alive. So Walser survived the plague in Setzuan, the assegai in Africa, a sharp dose of buggery in a Bedouin tent beside the Damascus road and much more. (Carter, p. 7)

In this scene, Walser's worldly life is vividly presented. To begin with, Carter wrote a general sentence, "he loved to hear his bones rattle". Then she expanded it by enumerating his adventurous experiences, such as the plague in Setzuan, the assegai in Africa, a sharp dose of buggery in a Bedouin tent beside the Damascus road, etc., to show that Walser is courageous and persistent. Had the author not enumerated those writers, the description would be vague and abstract, for readers would only get the general conception that he had experienced many catastrophes without having a clear understanding of how they are. By the way, this case is similar to the example of expanding "He wasted all his substance in riotous living." by listing some of his events.

(11) Example 11

On that European tour of hers, Parisians shot themselves in droves for her sake; not just Lautrec but all the post-impressionists vied to paint her; Willy gave her supper and she gave Colette some good advice. Alfred Jarry proposed marriage. When she arrived at the railway station in Cologne, a cheering bevy of students unhitched her horses and pulled her carriage to the hotel themselves. In Berlin, her photograph was displayed everywhere in the newsagents' windows next to that of the Kaiser. In Vienna, she deformed the dreams of that entire generation who would immediately commit themselves wholeheartedly to psychoanalysis. (Carter, p. 8)

Carter portrayed the scene that Fevvers' native city welcomed her home with delirium by separating a whole into parts. When describing the Parisians who "shot themselves in droves for her sake", she did not merely use some adjectives such as "maniac" or "crazy", but separated Parisians into some parts, including Lautrec, Willy, Colette, Alfred Jarry, and cheerful students. She expanded the general description of maniac "Parisians" by depicting individuals—"not just Lautrec but all the post-impressionists vied to paint her"; "Willy gave her supper"; "she gave Colette some good advice"; "Alfred Jarry proposed marriage"; "a cheering bevy of students unhitched her horses and pulled her carriage to the hotel themselves". Therefore, delirious Parisians were shown in a fuller and more detailed way.

4.3 Duality of characters in "Copia"

The characters shaped in the novel are complicated with dual personalities. Many rhetoric devices such as metaphor have been applied to express the complexity and subtle diversity of characters.

(12) Example 12

Sometimes she'd laugh and say, "It was a pirate ship, and went under false colors," her barque of pleasure that was moored, of all unlikely places, in the sluggish Thames. (Carter, p. 34)

Nelson, who owned a brothel, said the above sentence. Carter used metaphor by likening the brothel to a ship. She was the captain and shouldered great responsibility

for the operation of her ship. Nelson was not only a protector of Fevvers but also of women's rights. She considered marriage a personal and social impediment. Besides, women in the novel represented the entire Women's Suffrage Movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. In a nutshell, the duality of prostitutes and suffragists is an intriguing image and illustrates the females' forward-thinking.

The brothel is often seen as a place for sexual orgy. In this novel, the brothel is a meeting place for the sexually underprivileged. Many prostitutes are portrayed as lovers and haters. They are very warm and humane inside, but ill-tempered outside. They are elegant, and concerned with politics and women's rights, challenging the traditional patriarchy, and daring to break the patriarchal stranglehold on women. Through Nelson's brothel, Carter connects angels and prostitutes, two opposing polarities in traditional society and culture, on the same level. Through their physical, psychological and emotional communication with each other and the outside world, Carter shows the subversive variables hidden between vulgarity and nobility.

5. Conclusion

This paper investigates Erasmus' "Copia" based on a case study of *Nights at the Circus*. Firstly, it has found out that the enrichment of material can not merely be achieved by employing rhetoric figures such as synonym, enallage, antonomasia, metaphor, hyperbole, etc., but also by amplifying the subject-matter through separating a whole into parts, presenting processes, tracing causes, etc. Secondly, through the investigation of *Nights at the Circus* from Erasmus's "Copia", this paper has also discovered that the "abundance of expression" and "abundance of subject-matter" can not only contribute to the richness of style but also highlight characters' personalities and reveal the author's thoughts. For instance, in the novel, the employment of antonomasia plays a crucial role in highlighting the eminent characteristics; the appliance of metaphor helps to dictate the transition from the old age to the new age and from patriarchy to equality by combining realistic details with the magical; separating a whole into parts helps to shape Walser as an experienced and flexible journalist and uncovers some social issues; the employment of tracing causes offers a clear explanation of characters' psychological activities as well as implying the author's attitude to the industrial revolution. "The old methods of classical

rhetoric, poetics, or metrics are and must be reviewed and restarted in modern terms” (Wellek & Warren, 1956, p. 139). “Copia” not only plays an essential role in decorating and embellishing language but also contributes to revealing the novel’s themes, namely, feminism and magical realism, etc.

References

- Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Rabelais and his world*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1999). *Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics* (C. Emerson, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cai, J. (2003). 《英汉写作修辞对比》 [*A contrastive study of writing & rhetoric in English and Chinese*]. Shanghai: Fudan University Press.
- Carter, A. (1984). *Nights at the circus*. London: Vintage Press.
- Enos, T. (Ed.). (2011). *Encyclopedia of rhetoric and composition*. London: Routledge.
- Erasmus, D. (1978). Copia: Foundations of the abundant style. In C. R. Thompson (Ed.), *Collected works of Erasmus* (Vol. 24) (pp. 279-660). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Holliday-Karre, E. (2019). Seductive nights: The circus as feminist challenge in Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood* and Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*. *Feminist Modernist Studies*, 2(3), 274-286.
- Jakobson, R., Pomorska, K., & Rudy, S. (1987). *Language in literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Mirmusa, S. S. (2014). Bakhtinian’s carnivalesque in Angela Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop*, *Several Perceptions*, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 20(2), 141-154.
- Takolander, M., & Langdon, J. (2017). Shifting the “vantage point” to women: Reconceptualizing magical realism and trauma. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 58(1), 41-52.
- Toye, M. E. (2007). Eating their way out of patriarchy: Consuming the female panopticon in Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*. *Women’s Studies*, 36(7), 477-506.
- Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1956). *Theory of literature*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Yang, K. (2016). Angels and feathers: Transcorporeal morphing in Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 57(5), 502-511.
- Yuan, Y. (2013). *Readings in Western rhetoric*. Suzhou: Soochow University Press.
- Yuan, Y. (2015). 从伊拉斯谟的“丰裕”论英文写作中的避复 [From Erasmus’ “Copia” to

variety in English writing]. *Foreign Language and Literature Research*, 1(5), 93-101.

Zhang, H. (2011). 修辞学与比较文学研究（上）——一个现代方法论的考察与古代“哲学对话”的实例分析 [Rhetoric and comparative literature study (I): An investigation of modern methodology and an analysis of ancient “philosophical dialogue”]. *Contemporary Rhetoric*, (1), 27-37.

Zhao, Y. (2011). 《符号学原理与推演》 [*Semiotics: Principles & problems*]. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press.

(Copy editing: Alexander Brandt)

About the author

Jie Gu (gujie@bfsu.edu.cn) is a postgraduate student in the School of English and International Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University. Her research interests include rhetoric and semiotic studies.