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## The Mexican Landscape in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo*

Maya Venugopal

The emergence of the regional novel in the first decades of the twentieth century marks a turning point in Latin American narrative. In the Boom period, Latin American writers became world leaders in combining technical innovation with commercial success and critical acclaim. However, what came to be known as the Boom novel would not have been possible without advances made in various fields of writings, especially in the area of regional novel, in the preceding decades. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Latin America experienced economic expansion and relative political stability. These changes were accompanied by the consolidation of various liberal political institutions. The regional writers of the early twentieth century were influenced by these changes combining international influences and local cultures to generate new narrative forms. The eminent Uruguayan critic Angel Rama perceives that the regional novels of Latin America can be defined as works engaging with the local cultures of the land. These novels describe local realities by painting pictures of nature, rural life and cultural traits understood as peculiar to Latin America. They play a crucial role in defining Latin America's modernity.

The regional novels of the land represent a major portion of early twentieth century Latin American narrative. In most of the canonical regional novels, the nation appears as a process of domination leading towards homogenisation, often allegorised through landscape and rural life. These novels represent the maturity of Latin American literature through the successful expression of national identities. The makers of these novels write with the supposition that their works would participate in much broader dialogues on the issues of their day, including the conception of local histories and their relationship with international politics and national development. Mario Vargas Llosa once called them "primitive novels" (*Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*), technically, as they contrasted with the high modernism in



Many feminist writers have also tried to retell tales told by men – subverting the male gaze. Feminists discovered that so called many 'great' literary works image women only as items in male fantasy. Women writers reread, revise and revisit Shakespeare to critiquing the silencing and marginalization of female characters in his plays.

Angela Carter, a British author with a feminist orientation has tried to subvert some basic themes usually found in Shakespearean drama in her novel, *Wise Children* (1991). Much of her work is considered part of the feminist canon of Post-imperialist British writers.

Angela Carter was a thumper of noses, a defiler of sacred cows. She loved nothing so much as cursed but also blithe non-conformity. Her books unshackle us, topping the status of the pompous demolishing the temples and commissariats of righteousness. They draw their strength, their vitality, from all that is unrighteous, illegitimate, low. (Rushdie 5).

The multiplicity of meaning and the embedded ambiguity in Shakespeare oeuvre is suppressed.

Carter has chosen a genre, which was initially called a woman's genre to subvert the basic themes in Shakespearean drama. She has fully exploited the possibilities that the loose structure fiction affords to playfully interrogate and successfully challenge ideologies and themes Shakespeare put forward in the format of the rigid and formal structure of a five-act play. It is not just one play but a number of themes, found in Shakespeare that Carter satirizes.

*Wise Children* is a comedy both in the contemporary and in the Shakespearian sense of the word. "Women novelists engage in this parallel process of textual takeover and adaptation – the rendering opposite or appropriate as it were of Shakespeare in a new context" (Sanders 3).

The controlling voice of the novel is Dora Chance's. Dora and her twin sister Nora are the unacknowledged and illegitimate daughters of an icon of the British stage, Sir Melchoir Hazard. They were told that their mother died in childbirth and that their mother's land lady

Grandma Chance raised them because their father refused to have anything to do with them. There are many direct references to Shakespeare in this novel. The Chances live on 'Bard Road.' Sir Melchoir Hazard is a much-acclaimed Shakespearean actor. Linking illegitimacy to marginalization, Carter presents the theatrical careers of the Hazards and the Chances. While Sir Melchoir trod the boards of the most prestigious theatres, declaiming Shakespeare's words to great acclaim, Dora and Nora debuted as the "Lucky Chances" in the low theatres of the era – the music halls and the colourful vaudeville venues.

There are references to most of the Shakespearean plays in this novel. "Shakespeare to whom our family owes so much" (*Wise Children* 5). Like Hero in the play *Much Ado About Nothing*, Tiffany is also assumed to be dead. In this novel Carter explores tragedy through comedy. Miscarriages on stage ala Gloucester's blinding in *King Lear* and Nora's experience of domestic violence are but a few examples. Carter repeatedly invokes *Hamlet* in her novel. The famous scene portraying the insanity of Ophelia is mirrored by Tiffany's shamming on the game show "Lashings of Lolly." Tiffany also carries flowers like Ophelia. But Carter parodies the intensely tragic scene in Shakespeare, which actually reveals the helplessness of women. In Shakespeare poison is often used to kill kings, as is seen in *Hamlet*. Saskia tries to poison Melchoir on his hundredth birthday. In *Hamlet* the last scene is a series of misadventures where the poison, which Claudius meant for Hamlet inadvertently, kills Gertrude who is Claudius's "wife – sister". Saskia almost poisons Tristram hinting at their incestuous relationship. The romance between Ranulph Melchoir and Estelle bloom, when they are playing *Lear* and *Cordelia*, hinting at a May-December romance. The relationship between them hints at the possibility of an incestuous relationship.

The profusion of twins in *Wise Children* allows the author to play with all types of dualities. There is a clear allusion to *Twelfth Night*, where there is a mix up of twins. The motif of the good and the evil twin is common enough, but in this novel, Carter has added an engaging twist to the particular trope that allows it to evade being familiar. Nora and Dora are metaphorical mirror images, in the sense that they are inversions of each other. As an additional duality Saskia and Imogen



## Subverting Shakespeare: A Feminist Reading of Angela Carter's *Wise Children*

Dr Priya K. Nair

Ideology is woven into the fabric of everyday life. Ideology is made of beliefs and practices of the dominant section of society. By masquerading as universal ideology, the ideology of the powerful class successfully represses and subdues the marginalized voices. The relevance of traditional canonical texts in the post-modern era is a much-debated issue. Most of the so-called writers and texts canonical reveal a male view of the world; they are exclusive in nature and biased in favour of the western culture. Shakespeare is no exception.

William Shakespeare often referred to as the Bard hinting at his universality and the iconic status that is accorded to him. He is considered to be an author who has transcended the stifling clutches of time and space. Shakespeare it is said is for all time. But research has revealed that the Shakespearean oeuvre is caught within the web of patriarchal culture and reveals essentially a male perspective of the world. He has also been accused of writing for male entertainment and of objectifying women. Feminist and gender study approaches towards Shakespearean texts have been successful in focusing on patterns that emerge in Shakespeare's plays as to male insecurities about women and man's need to dominate and possess women. It has now been accepted that every generation can formulate its own relationship with Shakespeare.

In concrete historical terms Shakespeare can never be "our contemporary" except by the strategy of appropriation, yet the protean values which subsequent generations of critics have discovered in the texts themselves can be demonstrated to be in large part the projections of their own externally applied values (Drakakis 25).

Feminists have long engaged in rediscovering lost works by women writers and focusing on the portrayal of women in male written texts.



### Epistemological Fragmentation

The famous British administrator in India Sir Denzil Charles Jeff Ibbeston (1847–1908) noted with a tint of self-reproach and exasperation:

Our ignorance of the customs and beliefs of the people among whom we dwell is surely in some respects a reproach to us; for not only does that ignorance deprive European science of material which it greatly needs, but also involves a distinct loss of administrative power to ourselves (qtd in Bate 10).

What the bureaucrat really lamented was not the lack of holistic historical knowledge about the native subjects but a corpus of information with which they could be tamed and tapped better. It was this urge for practical knowledge that would be translated into census and other documentation processes which acted as a “vehicle for the consolidation of imperial ideology [and] the means for the collection of empirical knowledge” (Dirks 48). One of the major elements of this attempt to make populations knowable was to divide the people into mutually exclusive identity categories (Kertzer and Arel 9).

The cognitive sensibility of Holmes bears an eerie resemblance to the informational grids espoused by the colonial machinery in relation to its vast taxonomical process and is selective, fragmentary, patchy and pragmatic. He is not bothered about the broader picture of the world and does not pay attention to a scientific breakthrough, however seminal it is, unless it directly impacts upon his area. The document Watson drew up on the fortes and limits of Holmes shows that his knowledge in literature, philosophy and astronomy is nil, whereas he is formidable in chemistry, anatomy and crime (Doyle 12). Holmes’s lackadaisical attitude towards certain disciplines sharply contrasts with the thoroughness and exactitude with which he pursues others. Correspondingly, his knowledge system does not cover all the aspects of a problem but only those required to solve a case, thwart a threat or diffuse a crisis with the ultimate intention of keeping certain stratified social strata unharmed.

The social order Holmes strives to keep intact and the issues that concern him most betray his affinity with and loyalty to the colonial

expansion. Contrary to popular belief, Holmes did not always interfere in crimes as such but stepped in whenever a social norm—which need not necessarily be an infringement upon the law—was broken, preferably one which would kindle his “love of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum routine of everyday life” (Doyle 76). Generally speaking, every Holmesian narrative is a testament to the order of the elite and the powerful. At the end of each investigation, disorder is redressed, not necessarily in legal or moral terms, but in such a way that a social balance is restored. Neither goodness nor justice but social order is Sherlock Holmes’s primary concern (Menes102). In other words, his feats are identical to the solid, traditional wisdom of the middle class which held the “the potentially disruptive forces of science, technology, and industrialism” (McConnell 181) of the late nineteenth century in check. It is no coincidence that the crime genre during this period was a particularly powerful ideological tool which consolidated and disseminated patriarchal power and that its voice was the rational, coolly logical voice of the male detective or his male narrator. In the stories of Holmes, crime is always punished, either by law or by divine providence, except the sins of the aristocracy, whom Holmes cannot, or will not, bring to justice (Scaggs 20, 25).

As Holmes’s competence, erudition and “expertise consists in what he decides he needs to know in order to do what he wants to do” (Kayman 50), the position entails a lot of lacunae and omissions. More than anything else, it is in his stance vis-à-vis race and racial correlations that Holmes most emphatically aligns himself with the colonial constructs. He remained happily ignorant of and detached from social currents, political upheavals and academic debates which had the potential to rewrite history and redefine the zeitgeist. Holmes credulously reproduced the racial theories that flooded the European intellectual circles in the second half of the nineteenth century by employing them.

### Racial Correlation

The conceptualization of race as a biologically determined agency had been difficult to find feet in the west because the Bible presents



## Sherlock Holmes and / as the Locus of Colonial Cognitive Construction

Dr P. K. Sreekumar

Sherlock Holmes was "a resonant symbol of the late Victorian faith in the power of logic and rationality to ensure order" (Jann 685) amidst real or imagined disruptive emergence of unsettling structural changes, ideological slides and mutating economic interrelations. He optimally functioned in a cultural space defined by the anxiety-ridden Victorian conceptual frames and semantic matrices which were underpinned by a "yearning for stability and authority in a complex world requiring careful decoding" (Moran 92). In order to provide stability, the suave, sinewy, cerebral and perceptive<sup>1</sup> detective always kept himself abreast of emerging knowledge and in fact anticipated many forensic techniques.<sup>2</sup>

Though Holmes is obsessed with the acquisition of knowledge, his epistemological schemata are problematic at best and regressive at worst because despite all the trappings of modern science, his ends are limited, vision narrow and objectives politically dictated. While "Doyle's readers did not need to be told that reason holds the key to truth" (Kissane and Kissane 360), in the Holmesian cosmos 'reason' and 'truth' are not sublime philosophical ideas but ingredients of an object-oriented drive to assuage the fears of the age, to predispose its populace to the ongoing aggressive imperial enterprise and to psychologically legitimize the inbuilt dehumanization of colonialism. It is in this context that the method of Holmes has been disparaged as "a counterfeit, a simulacrum of the real thing" (Michael Shepherd, qtd in Kayman 49) and the stories have been accused of being not "really about the power of reason, but rather about the myth of reason, about the desperately hoped-for chance that the universe might be comprehensible" (McConnell 178). Such contradictions and fragmentation of the Holmesian system are caused by its underlying colonial strategy/project of gathering and processing information and putting it into praxis.