Introduction

For her, fiction was about asking questions. At a time when most British writers were entrenched in the drab realism that she rather disparagingly described as "the low mimetic," she was painting vivid pictures of fairy tale creatures and monsters in complex fusions of fantasy, Gothic, science fiction and romance. While her peers anatomised adultery in Hampstead, she was taking her characters on wild journeys into castles and caves, across Siberian deserts and into enchanted kingdoms where nothing was what it seemed. Richly playful, these dense, glittering fictions drew on ideas ranging from Melville to the Marquis de Sade, Barthes to de Beauvoir and feminist theory to Freud, but with the emphasis firmly on the seductive power of the storyteller. (Patterson)

Angela Carter - the “high sorceress” and the “benevolent witch-queen” (Rushdie) of English literature is a novelist, journalist, short story writer, dramatist and a critic all in one. In her works we come across a beautiful commingling of Magic Realism, fantasy, science fiction, Surrealism, Gothic tradition and other post modernist traits. We also witness an abundance of the distinctive motifs of Magic Realism. A few critics have perceived Carter not only as an exponent of Magic Realism but also as the “natural heiress of a northern Gothic Tradition” (Lurie). This distinction is an outcome of her novels which feature northern scenes of horror and infamy - a blend of the bizarre, the eerie and the haunted.
Angela Olive Stalker (her maiden name) was born in Eastbourne (Sussex) on 7th May 1940, to Olive (Farthing) Stalker and Hugh Alexander Stalker. Her father was a Scottish journalist and socialist working in London. During the war years, due to the bombing raids of the World War II, she was moved by her grandmother to Wath-upon-Dearne in South Yorkshire. She was thereafter brought up in London and attended the local grammar school. Carter describes her early years of upbringing and childhood as being carefree and nonchalant. She writes:

Life passed at a languorous pace, everything was gently untidy, and none of the clocks ever told the right time . . . (Carter, Mother 7)

A few important details of her family background need to be highlighted here. The “Imperial ring” about the wealth that her maternal grandfather (a soldier in India) left behind for her mother filled her childhood imagination. On the other hand her maternal grand-mother was a working class, matriarchal, domineering and tyrannizing feminist figure. Carter writes of her grandmother:

[She] was a woman of such physical and spiritual heaviness she seemed to have been born with a greater degree of gravity than most people. She came from a family where women rule the roost and she effortlessly imparted a sense of my sex’s ascendancy in the scheme of things . . . (Carter, Mother 4)

Most of Carter’s proximate female relatives including her mother were “strong women of striking candor and pragmatism” (VanderMeer). In
spite of all this, she suffered from teenage anorexia, which possibly sprung from low self-esteem and the possessive dominance of her mother, and fought to vanquish it.

These early years and influences played a very significant role in formulating her philosophy of life and in giving a new direction to her writing career in the future years. These influences surface when we turn to her works like The Bloody Chamber (1970) which is a collection of feminist fairy tales “firmly grounded in the popular Indo-European tradition.” In these she appears as an “old mother goose” who almost conjures the tales of Bluebeard, Little Red Riding Hood and Alice in Wonderland. Carter’s mother – a voracious reader was yet another pivotal literary influence on her. She owes the knowledge of Shakespeare and other great names of English literature to her mother.

At the age of eighteen she decided to take up her father’s profession and began to work as a journalist on the Croydon Advertiser. In addition, she wrote records and reviews. Carter was distressed and disturbed by the closing of mines and the breaking of mining strikes in the 1960s and over the failure of socialist revolution in general. Her socialist leanings are apparent in her preoccupation with social justice (equal rights, access to further education, abortion laws, the position of black women) and are also reflective in her writings.

Carter moved to Bristol after her marriage to Paul Carter in 1960. She began studying English studies at the University of Bristol and
Carter once stated: “As a medievalist, I was trained to read books as having many layers” (Haffenden 87) and therefore, her novel(s) can be read and interpreted as an allegory - which holds possibilities of multiple levels and layers of meaning. Life and times in Bristol gave her opportunity to observe the bohemian, vagrant and erratic mode of existence in the side walk cafés and smoky backroom poetry reading sessions.

It was at Bristol, her childhood love for eclectic literature surfaced to express itself. Her works echo enormously the influence of various writers and authors belonging to different ages and genres. We find references to Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Blake, Lawrence, Mansfield, Dickens, Woolf... the list being endless. We witness influence of theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, novels of Dostoyevsky and Balzac, Magic Realism of Garcia Marquez and Louis Borges, of Dadaism, Surrealism and psychoanalysis. Carter's taste was not just confined to English literature. She was also fond of French literature especially the works of Rimbaud and Racine. She was fascinated by the philosophy of De Sade and Bataille regarding sexuality, Irigaray and De Beauvoir for feminist theory and Genette and Roland Barthes for ideas concerning intertextuality and analysis of text. Writings of male authors like Marquis De Sade and Charles Baudelaire were also reappropriated by her in The Sadeian Woman (1978) and Black Venus (1985) respectively. This eclectic and eccentric borrowing from
varied sources is a deliberate stratagem by Carter who in 1983 wrote in “Notes from the Frontline”:

I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode. (Wandor 69)

It was during the 1960s that Carter ventured into novel writing. The period between 1965 and 1975 served as a rehearsal ground for the writer and gave her the required “apprenticeship” to emerge as a writer par excellence. Her early novels are set in Bristol where she had spent most of her time during the 60s. Shadow Dance aka Honeybuzzard (1966) her first novel was followed by The Magic Toyshop (1967) which won her the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1969. Several Perceptions came out in 1968 and brought her more acclaim and the Somerset Maugham Prize. Heroes and Villains was published in 1969. It deals with the changing gender roles and is set against the post-holocaust background. The above mentioned writings are considered to be the formative novels which helped to establish the literary reputation and credentials of Angela Carter. However, on the personal front, her life was undergoing an emotional upheaval – things were becoming complex and unaccommodating. In 1972, her twelve years of married life ended in a divorce.

At this critical juncture in her life, the proceeds of the Somerset Award as well as her fluency and competency in French and German provided her the means to travel and explore Asia, Europe and the United
States. She also sought freedom from the British culture which she saw as “a demolition site.” She went to Japan and lived in Tokyo for three years. Carter chose Japan because she “wanted to live for a while in a culture that is not now nor has ever been a Judaeo-Christian one, to see what it was like” (Carter, Nothing 28). Life was not easy for her. She had to work as a bar hostess, a model, a freelance journalist and had to take up various other odd jobs to eke out a living. Her life and experiences in Japan matured her intellectually and made her the “wilful, stubborn and outstanding writer she subsequently became.” It was in Japan where she learnt – “what it is to be a woman and become radicalized” (28). Caryl Phillips in an article titled Finding Oneself at Home correctly states – “It takes a politically determined, clear sighted and brave writer to purposefully embrace wilful exile.” Furthermore, she expresses that:

She [Carter] was fully aware of the fact that the very act of living in a country where she would be a complete outsider would bring her face to face with herself at a critical time in her literary development. Although she knew that, as an exceedingly smart and outspoken young woman, it was already somewhat problematic for her to feel fully at home in British society, she absolutely understood that in Japan it would be almost impossible for her to ever belong. In other words, by travelling to Japan she would, in a sense, be free to reinvent herself without having to wrestle with the multiple anxieties of belonging.

Angela Carter was an acute observer of the societies in which she lived and worked. Her authorial skills were sharpened (to a great extent)
by the travels she undertook. The travelling gifted her with a plethora of imagery which along with her other life experiences came to be incorporated in her writings from time to time. In Carter’s own words:

I’m basically trying to find out what certain configurations of imagery in our society, in our culture, really stand for, what they mean, underneath the kind of semi religious coating that makes people not particularly want to interfere with them. (Carter, Conversation 11-17)

During the 1970s, Carter lived in Bath and produced many of her famous works. She seemed to have reinvented herself and grown into a more accomplished and determined writer. *Love* was published in 1971. *Shadow Dance* (1966) *Several Perceptions* (1968) and *Love* (1971) are referred to as the “Bristol Trilogy.” Her novel *The Infernal Desire Machine of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) aka *War of Dreams* followed next. It is a bizarre journey through an anonymous South American country in which scenes of revulsion are infused with humour and poetry. It proved to be an epitome of the “ideas and ideals of surrealist beauty.” In 1976 she moved to London and the same year she got married to Mark Pearce, her second husband. Carter’s literary genius, her creative prowess and writing skills were at their zenith between 1975 and 1985. *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), “captures the essence” of the USA and is “afame with dangerous ideas and fantastical images” (VanderMeer). *Nights at the Circus* (1984) “successfully assimilates aspects of myth and folklore.” Some critics
consider this novel as the writer's *magnum opus*. *Wise Children* (1991) is a "witty and bawdy tale" with "a semblance of reality."

A prolific writer, Carter's creativity knew no bounds. She kept experimenting and expressing herself in different forms of literary writing. Apart from the nine novels to her credit which will be discussed in this thesis, Angela Carter contributed many articles to - *The Guardian, The Independent* and *The New Statesman*. She also worked as a reviewer for *New Society* and *The Guardian* from 1966. All these articles and works of journalism are compiled together in *Shaking a Leg* and *Expletives Deleted*.

Carter also wrote for the radio, adapting a number of her short stories. She wrote two original dramas on Richard Dadd and Ronald Firbank for the radio. Two of her fictions have been adapted for the silver screen. *The Company of Wolves* is a film by Neil Jordan, based on some of the stories of *The Bloody Chamber* which emphasize the sexual connotations in them and *The Magic Toyshop* became a television film in 1987. Her radio play scripts, the two screenplays together with an unproduced screenplay - *The Christ Church Murder* and a libretto for an opera of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* are collected in *The Curious Room*. She was also the co-founder of Virago Press with Carmen Calil. She decided to become a part of this feminist publishing venture, and thus gave to women, their first independent literary voice. Carter’s motive behind the decision to join Virago is apparent in the following quote by her:

I am moved towards it by the desire that no daughter of mine should ever be in a position to be able to write BY GRAND CENTRAL STATION I SAT DOWN AND WEPT, exquisite prose though it might contain. BY GRAND CENTRAL STATION I TORE OF HIS BALLS would be more like it, I should hope. (Sage, *Good 525*)


From 1970s to 1980s Carter kept herself occupied as a writer-in-residence at different universities in America and Australia including Sheffield University, Brown University, University of Adelaide, University of East Anglia and at other places like Austin Texas, Iowa City and Albany in New York state. She served as Arts Council fellow at Sheffield University, England and was visiting professor of creative writing at Brown University, Rhode Island, USA. She also taught in Australia and East Anglia University, United Kingdom.

Angela Carter’s death at the age of 52, on February 16, 1992 from lung cancer came as a great loss to English literature. Her death robbed the English literary scene of “one of the most vivacious and compelling voices” (Carter, Infernal back cover) and brought to end an eventful life. Lorna Sage describes the life of Angela Carter thus:

Angela Carter’s life...is the story of someone walking a ‘tightrope’ where everything happened “on the edge” in no man’s land, among the debris of past convictions. (Death 236)

With the loss of the benign “witch queen” (Rushdie) who thought “like a devil” but wrote “like an angel”, critical attention to her fiction gained momentum. Her writings captivated and sought to gratify those craving for the “baroque and blood whimsy.” They not only tranquilized them but were sufficient to provoke their envy. In her book, The Fiction of
Angelá Carter, Sarah Gambles writes that “Carter Studies” developed “into a fully-fledged discipline” (8) in 1994 with the publication of the first monograph on Carter’s work and the first collection of critical essays *Flesh and Mirror: Essays on the Work of Angela Carter* by Lorna Sage. In the same year, University of York held the first major academic conference on Carter. Elaine Jordan states that “in 1993-94 the British Academy were saying that for every three people who wanted to do a thesis on eighteenth-century writing, there were forty who wanted to write on Angela Carter” (82). David Punter, Gina Wisker, Ellen Cronan Rose, Sarah Gamble, Linden Peach, Magali Cornier Michael, Stephan Benson, Emma Parker, Lorna Sage and Jean Wyatt are some names whose critical books and essays have contributed to a great extent in the study and understanding of Angela Carter. Sarah Gamble gives an invigorating perspective of Carter in her critical books like *Angela Carter - A Literary Life, Angela Carter - A Readers Guide to Essential Criticism* and *Angela Carter - Writing from the Frontline*. Linden Peach’s book titled *Angela Carter* is a critical biography for general readers marked by sophistication and coherence and proves very useful. It is the enriched postulations of such writers and critics that has inspired and given the impetus and the rationale to take up this research study.

The topic of this research study is *Magic Realism and Gothic Tradition in the Novels of Angela Carter* but there are sections in the thesis beginning from chapter one where Surrealism has been dealt in detail. The first chapter gives an insight into the background history and
characteristics of Magic Realism, Gothic Tradition and Surrealism. Magic Realism and Surrealism are overlapping terms and often share similar characteristics, so it often becomes difficult to establish a clear dichotomy between the two. The magical in Magic Realism is often the product of Surrealism and surrealist techniques employed by the writer. Therefore, it becomes imperative to discuss it as a part of the thesis. The main aim of this research study is no doubt to highlight the Magic Realism and Gothic Tradition in the novels of Angela Carter. The secondary but still a significant aim is to widen the recognition and influence of the most original and disconcerting yet a splendid writer who has “produced what are among the greatest fantastical works of this century” (VanderMeer). Sadly, even today her existence is a matter of enigma for a vast majority of readers and writers in the country of her birth as well as in other parts of the world.
Works Cited


