

Angela Carter (1940-1992)

Angela Carter was a writer in the second half of the 20th century whose work dealt with areas of magical realism and adventure with undertones of feminism. Her work has received countless awards and she is often cited as one of the most important writers of her time.

Role

Writer of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and plays

Early Life and Education

Angela Olive Stalker was born on 7 May 1940 in the maternity home at 12 Hyde Gardens in Eastbourne. Only two weeks after Angela was born, British forces began their retreat from Dunkirk meaning the Southern coast of England swiftly became the front line of the war. Children that had originally been evacuated from London including Angela and her older brother (and their parents who had moved to be close to them) were ordered to return home to a place that wasn't exactly a haven of safety. Angela was eventually evacuated again to live with her maternal grandmother in South Yorkshire, before returning to London after the end of the war.

Carter attended Streatham Hill and Clapham High School, a private all-girls school in South London during her teenage years. It was here that she developed a keen interest in studying English and she wrote poetry and prose throughout her time at school. Carter is remembered fondly by the school where unseen poems that she had written as a teenager in the school magazine were recently recovered from the school archives and a small memorial was set up in her memory.

After school, Carter's first writing position was a job as a reporter for the Croydon Advertiser before she attended the University of Bristol and gained a degree in English Literature.

Her first marriage was to Paul Carter in 1960. Carter was nineteen when she married, and as well as being in love, the marriage can also be seen as an act of rebellion against her parents whose watchful presence had invaded her childhood. Carter's father was particularly disappointed by her marriage as he had mapped out her whole life for her and was keenly ambitious for her to pursue an active career and not settle so early in life. However, Carter was relieved and pleased to move out of her childhood home and start a new life in London with her husband.

After nine years of marriage, Carter left her husband and went to Japan to live and write for three years where she describes herself as having "learnt what it is to be a woman and [she] became radicalised". Her years in Japan helped her to form a stronger sense of her own identity and gave her the space and ability to write after spending years as not much more than "just a wife".

Carter spent much of the late 1970s and 1980s as a writer in different universities around the world including Brown University in the United States, University of Adelaide in Australia and University of East Anglia here in England. She married again in 1977 to Mark Pearce and gave birth to a son. In 1979 she released two of her most prolific works, *The Bloody Chamber* and the influential essay *The Sadiean Woman & the Ideology of Pornography*.

Carter died in 1992 at the age of 51 as a result of lung cancer. She describes the last sixteen years as the happiest of her life with her partner Mark and their son, Alex, in South London, seeing friends and writing. In the weeks after her death Carter was elevated to 'great-author

status' with her maintaining to this day a steadfast place in the contemporary canon as a pivotal writer that shaped the world around them.

#### Achievements

Carter published nine novels, along with many short fiction collections, essays, children's books, poetry works and plays.

She has been the recipient of countless awards including the Cheltenham Festival Literary Prize for *The Bloody Chamber* and James Tait Memorial Prize for *Nights at the Circus*.

Carter was ranked 10th in 'The Times' list of 'The 50 Greatest British Writers since 1945'.

Carter was on the panel of judges for the 1983 Man Booker Prize.

Carter is viewed as one of the most important writers of the 20th Century with her work being celebrated and studied around the world.

#### Researchers' View

While Carter was a feminist, she had never had any intention of writing stories that would be viewed and studied primarily for their feminist messages. Nevertheless, she never hesitated to confront and attack sexism and grew resentful when men, including her friends Ian McEwan and Salman Rushdie, were given many nominations, with little recognition given to their female contemporaries.

By chance of luck, I attended the same secondary school (Streatham and Clapham High School) as Carter and so already knew a bit about her life and work and also feel a special connection to the beginnings of her life, and her later residence in South London. Carter's steadfast focus on cultivating her own opinions is inspiring. Her determination to be her own person, separate from partners or the influence of friends demonstrates her strength of spirit

and resolute identity as a feminist, while not compromising her own personal femininity and romantic sensibilities.

#### Link to Eastbourne

Carter was born in Eastbourne during the Second World War. Later in her life, Carter also used to attend summer concerts at the nearby opera house Glyndebourne.