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# The Angela Carter Show: An Introduction

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## The Angela Carter Show: An Introduction / Robert Coover

This is *The Iowa Review's* first ever one-man exhibit. Because of the limited fiction space available over the next few years and the scores of able writers knocking at the door, it will probably be the last—and indeed probably would not have happened at all had it not been for the slight gap created by procedural adjustments to a new editorial staff at the magazine.

Nevertheless it seems like a good idea, now and then anyway.

Most writers' work is scattered about in little magazines all over the country (and often over decades as well), all with their own small, often committed, but seldom overlapping readerships, such that, unless the writer has achieved a certain fame or popularity, even the best of readers has only a very fragmented, narrow, and passing view of his work, if he's able to remember it at all. And the magazines themselves usually have such an ephemeral and insignificant life that a writer feels wasted even as he finds that outlet for his work he thought he was seeking.

This magazine has room each issue for about 40 pages—some 17,500 words or so—of fiction. As with most such magazines, the usual editorial practice is to select the best stories from all those submitted that quarter. Sometimes the submissions are very good, sometimes not, such that rejections one issue may outclass acceptances the next, but whatever its failings, it's a practice that gives access to as many as six different writers each issue and provides a variety of contacts for readers—in effect, enlarges the community, even if the general effect is often one of a certain weightlessness.

A one-man show like this forfeits that possibility of catholicity and deprives a lot of writers of space they probably deserve—but it gains in intensity, focus, and comprehension, and it can provide writers, especially those whose work is extensive but relatively unknown or undervalued or misunderstood, a little room to show their stuff. It is a little like a good solid hour-long public reading with question-and-answer time thrown in, and one is left with a fair impression after as to whether anything's happening here or not.

It is particularly suitable for someone like Angela Carter, an English writer, who works in a variety of forms, including short ones appropriate to this magazine, who is articulate about what she is doing and why, and whose talent and performance far exceed her reputation, at least in the United States. She's been with us, after all, for ten years now, has seven books of fiction in print, a radio play in production at the BBC, poems and essays hither and yon, regular columns in magazines—where have we been?

Three of her first four books are described in her "Notes on the Gothic Mode" (written expressly for *The Iowa Review*, as was the story "The Lady of the House of Love") which follow. The fourth, published between *The Magic Toyshop* and *Heroes and Villains*, was *Several Perceptions*, winner of the Somerset Maugham Travel Award, and these were followed by *Miss Z*, *The Dark Young Lady* (a book for children), *Love*, and her extraordinary *tour de force*, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (published in America as *The War of Dreams*). Additionally, a small press (Quartet Books) in England has recently published *Fireworks*, a collection of her short fictions, two of which—"Master" and "Reflections"—are included here.

At present she is living in Bath, England, "this baroque mausoleum of a city where the shade of Jane Austen is disturbed only by the shrieks of unfortunates undergoing amateur exorcisms and the rhythmical chanting of the drug-crazed Children of God who move in in enormous numbers as the retired colonels die off," where she is writing a book about the Marquis de Sade, "that is, about sex, politics, and the morality of cruelty," and working on a new novel to be called *The Confessions of New Eve*, "which is about deserts and transvestites."

"The isolation of the writer," she says, "and the isolation of the reader are part of the total effect of modern fiction—what is shared is a privacy . . ."

## Master

After he discovered that his vocation was to kill animals, the pursuit of it took him far away from temperate weather until, in time, the insatiable suns of Africa eroded the pupils of his eyes, bleached his hair and tanned his skin until he no longer looked the thing he had been but its systematic negative; he became the white hunter, victim of an exile which is the imitation of death, a willed bereavement. He would emit a ravished gasp when he saw the final spasm of his prey. He did not kill for money but for love.

He had first exercised a propensity for savagery in the acrid lavatories of a minor English public school where he used to press the heads of the new boys into the ceramic bowl and then pull the flush upon them to drown their gurgling protests. After puberty, he turned his indefinable but exacerbated rage upon the pale, flinching bodies of young women whose flesh he lacerated with teeth, fingernails and sometimes his leather belt in the beds of cheap hotels near London's great rail termini (King's Cross, Victoria, Euston . . .). But these pastel-coloured excesses, all the cool, rainy country of his birth could offer him, never satisfied him; his ferocity would attain the colouring of the fauves only when he took it to the torrid zones and there refined it until it could be distinguished from that of the beasts he slaughtered only by the element of self-consciousness it retained, for, if