



Burning Your Boats: The Collected Short Stories

Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie (contributor)

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One of our most imaginative and accomplished writers, Angela Carter left behind a dazzling array of work: essays, criticism, and fiction. But it is in her short stories that her extraordinary talents—as a fabulist, feminist, social critic, and weaver of tales—are most penetratingly evident. This volume presents Carter's considerable legacy of short fiction gathered from published books, and includes early and previously unpublished stories. From reflections on jazz and Japan, through vigorous refashionings of classic folklore and fairy tales, to stunning snapshots of modern life in all its tawdry glory, we are able to chart the evolution of Carter's marvelous, magical vision.

Burning Your Boats: The Collected Short Stories Details

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Shane says

Angela Carter was indeed the master of the short story during her short life, and I wished that I had read her stories earlier in my writing career for there is much to learn in her approach to the craft. In this collected work that compiles all of her short writing over a 30-year period, we are introduced to a variety of styles, subjects, arrangements, voices and situations that led me to crown her the "magician of the short story."

Gothic is the overarching mood of her stories, but that is the only connection. The subject matter roams over a wide canvas, from biblical tales to fairy tales like The Beauty & the Beast and Puss in Boots, with Carter placing her unique spin on them. In fact, we get two cuts of the B&B story, one in which the Beauty's kiss turns Beast into a human, and the other in which Beast kisses Beauty and turns her into an animal! The content then moves to the biographical where we get versions of the lives of Baudelaire and Edgar Alan Poe. The fusion of play, screenplay and prose is skillfully woven in the story of the movie director John Ford and his namesake, a Jacobean period dramatist. The most chilling pieces were the two stories on Lizzie Borden: an abject lesson that you can convey terror without spilling a drop of blood.

Throughout, Carter evokes the senses, smell in particular, and her tendency to veer off into the macabre gives us liberal doses of sweat, vomit, feces and blood, all a bit much, but to be expected from a writer of gothic tales.

The research behind her writing, particularly in the historical pieces, is evident, as her fiction is always a spin off from the real story, and given the wide canvas, I suspect Carter actually enjoyed ferreting out the real stories before fictionalizing them, lending texture where the purely biographical is unable to.

And, as if to foreshadow her own early demise, there is the spectre of the grim reaper, a faceless man, who appears in many of her stories, blending in with the Gothic, but also making one wonder if the author suspected her own exit and pumped out these stories at a furious pace, leaving valuable lessons for practitioners of the short story to follow.

Mary says

I feel like Angela Carter's stories are a bit like really rich chocolate truffles. One or two at a time are wonderful but eating thirty in a row will just make you sick. I made the mistake of reading straight through these stories and I just got sick of them by the end. Some of them were good, others not really at all. And some I'm not sure should really be qualified as stories since they seemed to be more thoughts or essays. There was also a lot of sex which got to be ridiculous (with people, with animals, with fruit...). Ultimately, I wasn't that impressed with Carter as a writer.

Adam says

This is a complete collection of Carter's excellent short from her sadly short career. Her work takes stock

imagery of our imagination (legends and historical figures) and plunges it into her surreal and gothic imagination and re-imagines, demythologizes, or makes it utterly unrecognizable. Resembling the work of Borges, Dineson, Brothers Grimm, Burroughs, Hoffman, and Poe but still really being unique and in her own voice. Highlights include “Loves of Lady Purple”, “The Tiger Bride”, “Fall Rivers Axe Murders”, “Alice in Prague, or the Curious Room”, “Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe” and many more.

DeAnna Knippling says

A collection of all of Angela Carter's tales.

Each one of these stories is so dense as to be a novel packed up in a portmanteau. To unpack them is a great deal of work. For example, in order to understand the John Ford story, you have to know that there was both a director of Westerns named John Ford, and a playwright around Shakespeare's time named John Ford. Or at least be willing to stop and research same.

I can't give these five stars--the three unpublished stories at the end made me realize that she probably edited all her stories practically to death to make them that dense--but when I step back from the actual marks on the paper, the tales she's telling are wonderful, fascinating, and inventive. I just wish she'd told them at their natural length.

Melanti says

I really should have put a review on each of the collections in this omnibus separately. But, in my eagerness, I neglected to do so and now am writing one for the omnibus as a whole, since I can't help but see them in relation to each other.

I love how the stories are arranged in more or less chronological order. It really allows one to see how Carter's style improved and evolved over time. The first collection, *Fireworks*, is by far the weakest of the four and that is in part due to Carter struggling to find out exactly what her style is.

Then you have *The Bloody Chamber*, which is in its own way evolving even during the collection. The stories in the beginning are more straightforward fairy tale retellings - very little changed, no real motivations or choices added, but still managing to make me think of the stories in a different way. But by the end of the collection, Carter has added in the feminist twists that she is so famous for.

It makes me think of the essay about McKillip in *Fairy Tales Re-Imagined*, where it's argued that *choices* were what differentiated the later Beauty from the early Beauty and were what allowed her to break free of the set fairy tale narrative. By the end of the collection, her characters are making their own choices, though in many ways those choices do still seem inevitable.

Next up is *Saints and Strangers*, which was my favorite collection of the set. There are re-tellings here - but they're not re-tellings of fairy tales, but of other stories and real people. What exactly was Lizzy Borden's motivation that morning? Why did Edgar Allan Poe write as he did? What was the story behind Oberon and Titania's estrangement in *Midsummer Night's Dream*? Stylistically, its much improved from *Fireworks* and even slightly better than *The Bloody Chamber*.

The last is *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders*, which is a mix of fairy tale retellings, other story retellings, and non-retellings. I did love these as well, and would rank it just slightly behind *The Bloody Chamber*.

Ollie says

Reading a short story by Angela Carter is the equivalent of visiting a friend who has travelled the world and now lives by herself in an apartment filled with cats, trinkets and incense. Some days, as you sit in this friend's living room, waiting for her to brew some exotic tea, the scent of burning incense lulls you into a reverie, the way in which the sunlight hits the smoke gives her living room a mysterious feel. At other times, your friend makes the mistake of lighting too many incense sticks, keeping the windows closed, the curtains shut; the items hanging on her wall suddenly look dull, the clothes hanging off her body tawdry, the bright red lipstick on her face wrong for the occasion.

When Carter is good, her stories transcend their fairy tale roots like dreams with hidden meanings. When Carter is bad, your mind drifts away from every sentence and all you can think of is skipping to the next tale.

Christopher Stevenson says

If she were alive today, they would say, "Bad woman! Bad!" because of her lack of compromise on textual aesthetics. When she was alive, they said, "Bad woman! Bad!" because aesthetics of her characters. You can't just like Angela Carter. You can't say, "Oh! this was a good book..." You have say, "Even though I oppose the idea of marriage, I would wed this collection."

Helen McClory says

A collection of stories that read at times like discourse on the idea of stories, deconstructed as they go - so at times difficult and laboured. Also: smoky, purple, repetitive, othering, verbose. but there is so much in them and they keep giving.

Mira says

More people need to know about Angela Carter. There are several reasons for this- she did dark and sexual fairy tales before they were cool and better than anyone else has, she wrote a nonfiction coherent analysis of the Marquis de Sade's writing in relation to feminism that wasn't just throwing up her hands and giving up, she blurred the lines of magical realism in a manner comparable to Borges- but an incentive I'd like to add is that she's one of the best writers of gothic short stories I've ever found.

Her most famous work is *The Bloody Chamber*, the aforementioned fairy tale collection (the movie that was loosely based on it is *The Company of Wolves*, and I urge you all to watch it,) but I'd recommend you get *Burning Your Boats*, which collects all her short fiction. The fairy tales are there, as well as historical fantasy, deadly puppet-women, sex comedies, werewolves, vampires, sinister circuses, days in the life of

Lizzie Borden, and a hauntingly grotesque take on 120 Days of Sodom from the victims' point of view. Her work isn't for the faint of heart (or, at times, for those impatient with whimsy) but I'm dying to make more people as in love with her as I am.

Orna Ross says

The world of an Angela Carter short story is a world at once fantastic and familiar. Tigers, werewolves and other beasts stalk through; Bluebeard, Red Riding Hood and Puss-in-Boots perform new, startling acts. Hollywood, pantomime, the fairground, Shakespearean comedy all lend their forms to have them smashed up and put back together as something quite different.

But through it all the feeling of familiarity is there, not because we have heard the tale or seen the show before, but because it is our own psyche which is being rummaged through, its murkiest corners revealed in the light of Carter's brilliance.

Burning Your Boats is the first in a series to be published of the collected works of Carter and it gathers together her four published short story collections, along with early stories and uncollected works.

She always claimed that what she wrote were not short stories but tales. "The tale does not log everyday experience, as the short story does," she said, in the afterword to 'Fireworks', her first collection. "It interprets everyday experience through a system of imagery derived from subterranean areas behind everyday experience." Many of the stories in that collection were set in Japan, a country she "ran away to," in 1969, and where she "learnt what it is to be a woman and became radicalised."

In 'Journey to the Heart of the Forest', a 13-year-old brother and sister find carnivorous water-lilies which bite, tree trunks covered in milk-dispensing breasts and an apple tree with fruit so juicy that the girl has to "extend a long, crimson, newly sensual tongue to lick her lips," for the knowledge the tree imparts is "the hitherto unguessed at, unknowable, inexpressible vistas of love." And incestuous love, at that.

Carter was not just interested in the moral or psychological function of fairy tales but also in the way they conveyed information about the material lives of those who invented and retold them: "Fairy tales, fold tales, stories from the oral tradition, are all of them the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labour created our world," she said, in her introduction to The Virago Book of Fairytales.

In "The Bloody Chamber" she insists that such tales are not mere repositories for dominant cultural assumptions but metaphors for the deepest sexual dangers and desires. For this and her staking out of the taboo, she was labelled politically correct by some, dismissed as cultish and marginal by others. But many who looked askance while she was alive came to praise her when she died three years ago.

For to attach the PC catchall to as wayward and wicked a writer as Carter is, of course, ridiculous. As for marginality, she once said: "The tale has not been dealt with kindly by literati, and is it any wonder? Let us keep the unconscious in a suitcase." She is now the most studied 20th century writer in British universities, a development which her friend Salman Rushdie in his introduction describes as "a victory over the mainstream she would have enjoyed."

What is unusual about Burning Your Boats, is the lack of a sense of development. It seems Carter's gift

emerged almost fully formed. 'A Very, Very Great Lady and Her Son at Home', begins: "When I was adolescent, my mother taught me a charm, gave me a talisman, handed me the key of the world." The mother's gift to her shy son? When awed by people, imagine them on the lavatory for "the bowels are great levellers." At the end of the story he turns the same question on her with the result that "she crashed forward on to the carpet and lay there, a tree felled," and he "vanished, laughing into the night."

Here already are her love of gothic imagery and ideas, her preoccupation with language, her mingling of high culture with low flesh. And from start to finish her concerns remain the same: violence, magic, love, the frailty of the flesh, the strength of the spirit. Each successive volume of stories in *Burning Your Boats* demonstrates not so much an author extending her range as a wild imagination giving form to itself. It's like watching a high diver perform one virtuoso display after another, using the same spins and twists to dazzling new effect.

For that reason, it is not a book which you can read from beginning to end without succumbing to imaginative vertigo. Neither is it one you dip into, in the usual sense. But take a periodic plunge with her into deep, dark Cartesian waters and witness your imagination emerge clutching pearls of "hitherto unguessed at," richness.

Jean-marcel says

Angela Carter is a phenomenal stylist, of this there can be no doubt. I truly enjoy her juxtaposition of the beautiful and the grotesque, often depicted in single sentences, so that one doesn't quite know whether to be smitten or disgusted. Many of her tales possess a sort of profound, gothic heaviness that occasionally appeals very much to my sensibilities.

It has to be said though that quite a few of the stories in this collection, especially some of the early ones, feel like writing exercises rather than actual tales. I also must warn that Carter's symbolism is often rather unsubtle and heavy-handed. Sad to say, but all the twisted fairy tales, awakening sexuality (often shown in terms of wolfen or beastly creatures), bloody roses and so on, become a little tedious after a while. Read a little bit at a time though, this huge book should provide many hours of pleasure, though the quality of the individual pieces is extremely variable. "The Bloody Chamber" is a famous example of Carter's writing, and it is a representation of her finest traits. The side-by-side depiction of the morbid and the lovely in this piece acquires an almost rhythmic, hypnotic cadence. I wasn't crazy about the ending though, in which a character we've never really met or heard a great deal about before shows up to "save the day", though again, this ending has much to do with Carter's intense and heavy use of symbolism, and is best understood in a rather non-realistic way.

Jennifer Ochoa says

I was destined to not like it. Beyond the fact that I rarely enjoy short stories, I also find Carter's style excessive, baroque, more imagery than story. I love minimalist writing and Carter is at the absolute other end of the spectrum. I'm also burned out on fairy tale themes and most of these stories are evocative of them (if not outright reimaginings of classic tales).

Some of the stories I ended up skimming more than reading, I was that impatient with her writing. Normally, I'd give a book 1 star for that, but there were a handful of 3 star stories, mostly in *The Bloody Chamber* (which I read a couple years ago--note I did not read them again, they weren't *that* good) and *Black Venus*.

In all honesty, I only read this book because it's been sitting in my bookshelf unread for many years and I'm trying to pare down my collection. After reading *The Bloody Chamber* and a novel (Heroes and Villians) by Carter (neither of which did much for me), I knew this one would end up in the "donate" pile.

With that said, I still plan to read her novel *Night at the Circus* one day (won a James Tait Black), and her non-fiction work *The Sadeian Woman*, so I'm not completely done with Carter yet.

Jean says

This book was a different kind of read for me. Kind of "fairy-tale-ish." I really enjoyed those stories that I read and found myself pondering each tale. I believe that, for me, pondering books is a good thing. Probably would have given it a five had I read all the tales.

WordsBeyondBorders says

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Red Riding Hood ???? ??? ?????? ?????? ‘The Company of Wolves’?? ???? ?????? ??????????
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Beauty and the Beast’/ The Courtship of Mr Lyon ?????? ?????? ??? ?????? ‘The Tiger Bride’ ??????
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????? ?????????????? ??? ?????? And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin,
all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back
to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur“, ?????? ??????
‘The Tiger’s Bride’ ?????? ???, “The Bloody Chamber“ ???? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????
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bare as a lamb chop. Most pornographic of all confrontations.” ?????? (????? ?????? ??? ??????????????)
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Erl-king’ ??? ??????????/ ?????? ?????? ‘The Erl-King’?? ??? ?????? ?????? – ??? ?????? ?????? ??????????
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cat prowls in a weedy garden; he grins and spits, arches his back, bounces away from an intangible on four
fear-stiffened legs.” ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? intangible ?????? ‘??/ ?????? ??????’ ???
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????? ?????? ?????? ?????? “A tremendous throbbing, as of the engine that makes the earth turn,
filled the little room; he had begun to purr. The sweet thunder of this purr shook the old walls, made the
shutters batter the windows until they burst apart and let in the white light of the snowy moon. Tiles came
crashing down from the roof; I heard them fall into the courtyard far below. The reverberations of his purring
rocked the foundations of the house, the walls began to dance. I thought: ‘It will all fall, everything will

Sea; sand; a sky that melts into the sea—a landscape of misty pastels with a look about it of being continuously on the point of melting

And, ah! his castle. The faery solitude of the place; with its turrets of misty blue,
.....his castle that lay on the very bosom of the sea with seabirds mewling about its attics,
....., evanescent departures of the ocean, cut off by the tide from land for half a day ...
that castle, at home neither on the land nor on the water, a mysterious, amphibious place, contravening the
materiality of both earth and the waves, with the melancholy of a mermaiden who perches on her rock and
waits, endlessly, for a lover who had drowned far away, long ago. That lovely, sad, sea-siren of a place!
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Wolves), ‘The Erl-King’ ??????, ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????????????? ?????? ??????????
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The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales – Pantheon Edition.

Jack Zipes ??????? ?????? ?????? ?????????? The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm: The Complete First Edition, ?????? ??????????????????, ????? ?????????? ??????????, ?????? ??? ?????????? ?????????? ??????????????????.

Elan says

an ex-lover gave me the gift of angela carter, and when she did, she confessed that every time she opened her copy of "burning your boats" that she found some new story she had not read before. shortly after that, i got my own copy of the collection. i've had it for several years, travelled with it, kept it close to my beds and my toilets, and the same seems true for me. i am forever falling in love with this book, forever reading tales of werewolves and purple-madam-puppets and tigers outloud in cars and sick beds, and to initiate long nights of dirty dirty behavior. i am always finding some as-yet undiscovered delight. carter's writing is impeccable and enchanting - she does what so few feminist fairy tale writers are brave enough to do - she embraces darkness and evil and flesh and makes her heroines fierce and failing and fuckable. and terrifying. she is the author who most consistently inspires me to keep working the story circuit - investigating the old tales and telling them with my very young, and very perverse, tongue.

Patricia says

Pues ha sido un recorrido muy interesante. Antes de este libro había leído *La cámara sangrienta* y me había encantado.

Admito que este me ha parecido un libro muy dispar. Es decir, algunos relatos me dejaron muy fría, mientras que otros me dejaron flipando. Pero lo que está claro es que Angela Carter es un autora muy interesante y me alegro de que esté siendo recuperada en España con estas ediciones tan bonitas.

Mi top 10 de relatos sería este:

1. La cámara sangrienta > ¿qué decir de este? un retelling de Barba Azul de estilo gótico. Erótico y brutal.
2. Reflejos > El relato más fantástico y extravagante de la recopilación. Onírico casi.
3. La dama de la casa del amor > Vampírico, gótico, poético.
4. Lobalicia > La historia de una niña perdida en un bosque.
5. Venus negra > La historia de la amante de Baudelaire.

6. El gabinete de Edgar Allan Poe > Tan genial como un cuento del propio Poe.
7. La matanza a hachazos en Fall River > Narra los días previos al asesinato de una familia por parte de la hija menor. La atmósfera que crea Carter en este cuento me alucinó.
8. El mercader de sombras > Un homenaje/parodia a El crepúsculo de los dioses. Maravilloso.
9. El pabellón nevado > Un joven conquistador de señoritas acaba en una casa misteriosa durante una tormenta de nieve. Puro estilo de historia de fantasmas.
10. La cosedora de retales > Este es el último relato del libro. Habla sobre la vida y la vejez, y me pareció muy tierno.

Laura Gaelx says

Adoro a Angela Carter. Me ha gustado especialmente la colección "Fantasmas americanos y maravillas del viejo mundo" (1993), donde disecciona mitos populares (cuadros, cuentos infantiles, películas, leyendas urbanas...) desde su mirada perturbadora y feminista. Algunos relatos, como 'El barco fantasmal. Un cuento de Navidad' recuerdan a American Gods y en otros se acerca más a Mitologías, pero ya le gustaría a Barthes.

Christine says

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. Why am I only discovering Angela Carter now? Life so sucks.

Fuchsia Groan says

Salman Rushdie dice en el prólogo que Angela Carter *era una escritora demasiado particular, demasiado extrema, sin embargo, como para disolverse con facilidad: ahora formal y extravagante, ahora exótica y coloquial, exquisita y burda, preciosista y vulgar, fabuladora y socialista, púrpura y negra.*

Y transgresora, irónica, macabra, irreverente, surrealista. Barroca y excesiva en ocasiones, perturbadora casi siempre. Asombrosa en todos y cada uno de los relatos.

En este volumen se reúnen las cuatro colecciones publicadas en vida de la autora, en orden cronológico -*Fuegos artificiales, La cámara sangrienta, Venus negra y Fantasmas americanos y maravillas del Viejo Mundo*- más seis cuentos inéditos.

Prácticamente todos y cada uno de los cuentos destacan por algo. Incluso el que menos me gustó, el extrañísimo *Una fábula victoriana* -no puedo decir ni siquiera que lo haya entendido- me parece digno de observar mientras sufres escalofríos ante la tarea a la que tuvo que enfrentarse el traductor.

Me maravilla y fascina la manera en que trata tan diferentes temáticas (reinterpretaciones de cuentos populares, Lewis Carroll, el Marqués de Sade, Edgar Allan Poe, un hombre enamorado de su contrabajo, Lizzie Borden, folclore, Jeanne Duvall) de una manera personalísima, feminista, erótica, elegante, inteligente.

Parece que hay consenso en afirmar que *La cámara sangrienta* es su obra maestra. Quizás sea también mi favorito, ya lo había leído en la edición que tiene Sexto Piso de esa recopilación en solitario, ilustrado

magníficamente por Alejandra Acosta, que guardo como un tesoro. Tras esta segunda lectura puedo decir con seguridad que es uno de mis libros favoritos.

La colección me acompaña desde hace ya bastantes meses, no creo que sea una obra para leerse del tirón, y ahora que la he terminado me resisto a dejarla en la estantería. Volveré a ella más pronto que tarde.

Mark Desrosiers says

Although these tales are filled with wolves, menstrual blood, sharpened teeth, burned flesh, you name it, there is no clear key to their horrors. Carter clearly eschewed Freudian nonsense just as surely as she rejects the quintessentially male notion that we make our destinies by "chucking paint at a wall". Many of these tale are relentlessly schematic, adorned by her snaky prose and sliced in bits by her strategic lacunae. Some even seem like a new genre: "Black Venus," "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe," and "In Pantoland," for example, seem only vaguely fictional -- liberated mental exercises about historical figures or existing imaginative structures. Altogether a dark, moving experience, and closing it with an optimistic meditation on aging called "The Quilt Maker" ("shake it out and look at it again") was especially difficult to endure, knowing that Carter died at age 51.
