MAGIC REALISM IN ANGELA CARTER'S NOVEL "NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS"

By
Zainab Abdullah Al-Jibory
Assistant Instructor
Tikrit University / College of Education
English Department

ABSTRACT

Magical (magic) realistic fiction, as a form of narrative, witnessed an increase in the last decades; it became highly adopted by writers and enjoyed by readers across the globe. Magic realism is a literary form in which weird, supernatural, and unreal tales are narrated as if the events were commonplace. Angela Carter is a British author whose works, but not all, have been discussed by critics as magical realistic texts.

The aim of the following study is to analyze Nights at the Circus in the light of magic realism. An outline of the characteristic features of the genre is introduced at the beginning of the study in order to define magic realism as a genre independent of fantasy or science fiction. A comparison between the characteristic components of the magic realism novel and their equivalents in Carter's text is also a significant part of the analysis.
Introduction

Magic realism is the opposite of the "once-upon-a-time" style of story-telling in which the author emphasizes the fantasy in narrating imaginary events. In the world of magic realism, the narrator speaks of the unreal so naturally in a way that reveals it as real. Magic realism aims to re-imagine the world and its reality; it is not an escapist literature but rather an opportunity to see the extraordinary things every day.

Franz Roh, a German art critic, first used the term 'magic realism' or 'magical realism' in 1925 as a description of a painterly style also known as the New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit), a reaction to Expressionism. Roh, in this way, was emphasizing the magic of the normal world, how everyday objects can be perceived as strange and fantastic. Roh's theory had a great influence on European and Latin American literature, for instance on an Italian writer called Massimo Bontempelli. Bontempelli tried to present the mysterious and fantastic qualities of reality exactly in the way Roh understood magic realism. In 1940, Latin American authors mingled Roh's and Bontempelli's theories in order to create the original Latin-American novel. From the 1960's onwards, there has been a strong current of magic realism within the general movement of British and American post-modern literature. (Bowers: 33).

Angela Carter (1940 –1992) was an English novelist and journalist, known for her feminist, magical realism, and picaresque works. With the publication of her first novels in the late 1960’s, Carter received wide recognition and praise in Great Britain for blending gothic and surreal elements with vivid portrayals of urban sufferers and survivors. Critics have praised her wit, creativity, eccentric characters, descriptive wealth, and strongly sustained narrative while sometimes questioning her depth of purpose and suggesting a degree of affectation. Her
imaginative transformation of folkloric elements and examination of their mythic impact on sexual relationships began to be fully appreciated on the appearance of The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories, which received the Cheltenham Festival of Literature Award. Nights at the Circus, recipient of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, helped to establish for Carter a growing transatlantic reputation as an extravagant stylist of the Magical Realist School. Following her sudden death in 1992, Carter was immediately hailed as the most important English fantasist of her generation. Her critical writings attracted new attention and in 2008, The Times ranked Carter tenth in their list of "The 50 greatest British writers since 1945" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angela_Carter).

Magic Realism, Fantasy, Science Fiction and Surrealism:

When attempting to know something it is often helpful to know things around that may cause confusion. Magic realism is "an aesthetic style or genre of fiction" (Zamora & Faris: 5) that, contrary to fantasy or science fiction, is not escapist but engaging and thought provoking. It is a narrative form that blends magical elements with a realistic atmosphere. The themes and subjects are often imaginary, fantastic or dream-like. However, these magical elements are explained in the same way as ordinary occurrences that are presented in a manner which allows the real and the magical to coexist next to each other and be accepted in the same stream of thought.

Science fiction and fantasy are usually speculative while magic realism is not. It does not conduct thought experiments; instead, it tells its stories from the perspective of people who experience a different reality from the one called objective. If there is a ghost in a story of magical realism, the ghost is not a fantasy element but a manifestation of the reality of people who believe in and have "real" experiences of ghosts. Magical realist
fiction depicts the real world of people whose reality is different. It is not a thought experiment or a speculation. Magical realism endeavors to show the world through other eyes. (<http://www.writing-world.com/sf/realism.shtml>). On the other hand, Surrealism is often confused with magical realism as they both explore illogical or non-realist aspects of humanity and existence. Surrealism "is most distanced from magical realism [in that] the aspects that it explores are associated not with material reality but with the imagination and the mind, and in particular it attempts to express the 'inner life' and psychology of humans through art" (Bowers: 22).

**General Characteristics of Magic Realist Fiction:**

Many characteristics can be found in a given magic realist text while every text is different and employs a smattering of the qualities listed next. However, they exactly portray what one might expect from a magic realist text.

Like many modernist movements, magic realism rejects the nineteenth-century positivism, the faith in science and empiricism, returning to folklore, mysticism and mythologies. Literary works that can be classified as magic realistic novels may employ only a selection of the characteristic features of the genre. The most common features are the supernatural, plenitude, hybridity, ironic distance, authorial reticence and political critique. It may be defined as:

A kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical events are included in a narrative that otherwise maintains the 'reliable' tone of objective realistic report, designating a tendency of the modern novel to reach beyond the confines of realism and draw upon the energies of fable, folk tale, and myth while maintaining a strong contemporary social relevance. The fantastic attributes given to characters in such novels — levitation, flight, telepathy, telekinesis — are among the means that magic realism adopts in order to encompass
the often phantasmagorical political realities of the 20th century (Baldick: 146).

In magic realism, the supernatural is not displayed as something questioning. While the reader realizes that the rational and irrational are opposite and conflicting sides, they are not confused because the supernatural is mixed within the style of the narrator and characters in the fictional world. Magic realism lacks emptiness, departs from rules and structures, and contains an extraordinary plenitude of disorienting details. This layering of elements creates a specific, exaggerated atmosphere. The space in between those layers is where the marvelous real can be observed, marvelous: not meaning beautiful and pleasant, but extraordinary and strange (Carpentier: 102-104).

The other feature that magical realism utilizes is the hybridity that means multiple planes of reality taking place in inharmonious arenas of opposites such as urban and rural, or western and indigenous. The plots of magical realist works very often involve issues of borders, mixing, and change. The authors establish these plots to reveal a crucial purpose of magical realism: a more deep and true reality than conventional realist techniques could illustrate.

The writers keep an ironic distance from the magical worldview for the realism not to be compromised. Simultaneously, the writer must strongly respect the magic, or else the magic turns into simple folk belief or complete fantasy, split from the real instead of coordinated with it. The term "magic" relates to the fact that the point of view that the text depicts explicitly is not adopted according to the implied worldview of the author.

Authorial reticence refers to the lack of clear opinions about the accuracy of events and the credibility of the worldviews expressed by the characters in the text. This technique promotes acceptance in magical realism. In magical
realism, the simple act of explaining the supernatural would eradicate its position of equality regarding a person’s conventional view of reality. Because it would then be less valid, the supernatural world would be discarded as false testimony (Chanady: 16).

Magic realism often contains some degree of political critique in form of implied criticism of society, particularly the elite. It presents the point of view of the geographically, socially and economically marginalized. Magic realism's alternative world works to correct the reality of established viewpoints, like realism, naturalism and modernism.

**Magic Realism in *Nights at the Circus***

The very beginning of the novel sets the overall tone of the text presenting the magical descriptions as real; the most prominent feature of magical realist fiction:

"As to my place of birth, why\, I first saw light of day right here in smoky old London, didn't I! Not billed the 'cockneyvenus', for nothing, sir, though they could just as well 'ave called me 'Helen of the High Wire', due to the unusual circumstances in which I come ashore -- for I never docked via what you might call the Normal channels, Sir, oh, dear me, no; but, just like Helen of Troy, was Hatched. "Hatched out of a bloody great egg while Bow Bells rang, as ever is!"

[…] But these notorious and much-debated wings, the source of her fame, were stowed away for the night under the soiled quilting of her baby-blue satin dressing-gown, where they made an uncomfortable-looking pair of bulges, shuddering the surface of the taut fabric from time to time as if desirous of breaking loose. ("How does she do that?" Pondered the reporter.) (Carter: 7-8)

According to geographical locations *Nights at the Circus* can be divided into three parts, and the story becomes more and
more fantastic along with the geographical movement from London to Siberia. The principal narrators include Fevvers, a winged woman, and Walser, an American reporter. Other than these two protagonists’ narratives, the novel also contains various stories told by women. The narratives all take place in unordinary places, inclusive of the whorehouse, the museum of female monsters, the circus, the prison and so on.

In the first section, the novel starts with Walser’s interview with Fevvers, in which Walser tries to define what Fevvers is. Walser stands for patriarchal thoughts, which tend to classify and to control things. However, during the interview, Fevvers is fully in charge of her narrative as well as her identity. She gives an account of her life, in which she explains the days she had in the brothel and in the museum of female monsters. Her account of her formal life illustrates how women are defined and isolated according to patriarchal thoughts.

Later on, in the second section, Fevvers joins the circus, a place of uncommon events. Walser also joins the circus in order to find out whether Fevvers is a fraud or not. The circus is a world in which a chain of commands is absent and rules are broken. Clowns and performers, together with animals, shape a world in which things are turned upside down.

In the third section, a panopticon made for female convicts is mentioned. These female inmates, at last, successfully get out of the panopticon and form a female community. In this section, Fevvers and Walser are not together due to a train accident. The tundra, where Walser stays after the train accident, is a place in which time does not follow traditional notions. Walser, losing all his memory, becomes totally blank. His prejudices have been erased totally. At last, Fevvers and Walser come together. Having gone through the life in tundra, Walser has been turned into a New Man, who no
longer views Fevvers as an object but as a human being. Their reunion, the integration of New Man and New Woman, signifies the better world for women in the future, in which men no longer take superior position and women do not exist only as belongings to men. Through *Nights at the Circus*, Carter calls into question the constructed nature of patriarchal society (Carpentier: 108-109).

One of the most prominent features distinguishing magic realism from fantasy fiction is the use of the antinomy which means the immediate presence of two mutually incompatible codes. This results in diametrically different treatment of the supernatural. In fantasy literature, the supernatural is very often something to which special attention is drawn; the supernatural or magical elements are used as primary elements of plot, theme and setting. In magic realism, the presence of the supernatural or magical is accepted. Fevvers, the protagonist of the *Nights at the Circus*, claims to have been hatched from an egg laid by unknown parents:

> For I never docked via what you might call the normal channels,  
> Sir, oh, dear me, no; but, just like Helen of Troy, was hatched.  
> Hatched out of a bloody great egg while Bow Bells rang, as ever is! (Carter:7)

The facts are the facts, but here they are presented as if they were fables. Fevvers indeed does not know her parents, and was found in a basket along with some broken eggshell. Along with her possessing a pair of wings, these are the facts, no matter how fabulous that leads Fevvers to the conclusion that she was not born like a normal human being. While she pursues the career of an aerialiste the general audience refer to her as “A fabulous bird-woman” (Carter: 15) because of her wings:

> Heroine of the hour, object of learned discussion and profane surmise, this Helen launched a thousand quips, mostly on the lewd side. ("Have you heard the one about
how Fevvers got it up for the travelling salesman...") Her name was on the lips of all, from duchess to costermonger: "Have you seen Fevvers?" And then: "How does she do it?" And then: "Do you think she's Real?"

(Zamora & Faris: 3)

In conversations people react to her supernatural feature with a mixture of fear and disbelief. However, their approach changes dramatically during her performances, where everyone can experience the supernatural first-hand. The supernatural is widely accepted as surprising and extraordinary but authentic and true in the same train of thought:

The supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence -- admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism. Magic is no longer quixotic madness, but normative and normalizing. It is a simple matter of the most complicated sort. (Zamora & Faris: 3)

The fact of Fevvers possessing a pair of fully functional wings is treated as "marvelous reality" but reality nevertheless:

She rose up on tiptoe and slowly twirled round, giving the spectators a comprehensive view of her back: seeing is believing. Then she spread out her superb, heavy arms in a backwards gesture of benediction and, as she did so, her wings spread, too, a polychromatic unfolding fully six feet across, spread of an eagle, a condor, an albatross fed to excess on the same diet that makes flamingoes pink.

Oooooooh! The gasps of the beholders sent a wind of wonder rippling through the theatre. (Carter: 15)

On the other hand, the second protagonist, a well-travelled American journalist Jack Walser, is very skeptical about both Fevvers and her supposedly possessing wings. In the beginning of the novel, he represents the rational point of view and the voice of reason untampered with a false notion and magical thinking: "Now, wings without arms is one impossible
thing; but wings with arms is the impossible made doubly unlikely -- the impossible squared.” (Carter: 15-16)

However, with Fevvers relating the events of her life, Walser starts to see glimpses of marvelous reality around him. As Fevvers progresses with her story, Walser becomes less and less critical even though the story itself becomes more mysterious and dreamlike.

In London, the first section of the book, Fevvers' story creates a feeling of supernatural and magical by presenting the extraordinary alongside all-too-ordinary events. The fact that she was left in a basket on the doorstep of a brothel raised by prostitutes with hearts of gold and never expected to work as one of them but only as a living statue seems almost like a literary cliché. This kind of ordinariness the readers can encounter now and then in romances or fairy tales but rather rarely in the real life, which creates an additional feeling of the plot being detached from reality. (Hsia: 11-17). The readers may start to suspect that Fervvers' account of her life is untrue or comprised of dreaming about the past – either way it adds to the overall atmosphere of the marvelous and uncanny. At one point, Fevvers gives a description of the madam of the brothel she was raised in:

She had the one peculiarity, sir; due to her soubriquet, or nickname, she always dressed in the full dress uniform of an admiral of the Fleet. Not that she ever missed a trick, her one eye sharp as a needle, and always used to say, "I keep a tight little ship." Her ship, her ship of battle though sometimes she'd laugh and say, "It was a pirate ship, and went under false colors," her barque of pleasure that was Moored, of all unlikely places, in the sluggish Thames. (Carter: 32)

Although Ma Nelson is a believable, realistic character and both Fevvers and Lizzie, her caretaker, call her a proper
lady, she seems anything but ordinary and therefore belonging to the realm of the supernatural. Still there are some characters in the novel that can be obviously described as supernatural or fantastical, such as Toussaint, a mouth-less servant of Madame Schreck, Fanny Four-Eyes or Madame Schreck, the Living Skeleton, the owner of the museum of female monsters, herself.

Ma Nelson is a realistic character that seems fantastical; Toussaint on the other hand is her direct opposite. Although he seems even more realistic and believable than she does, he belongs to the realm of the supernatural. Despite the fact that his condition is seemingly believable, it would be a physical impossibility for such a person to survive beyond infancy:

That self-same fellow with no mouth, poor thing, opens the door to me after a good deal of unbolting from the inside, and bids me come in with eloquent gestures of his hands. I never saw eyes so full of sorrow as his were, sorrow of exile and of abandonment. (Carter: 57).

Yet another impossible creature, and therefore undoubtedly a fantastical one, is Fanny Four-Eyes, who has an additional pair of eyes in the most unlikely of places. Fanny comes to the museum out of her own will because “She saw too much of the world altogether” (Carter: 69); and therefore “She chooses to rest with all of us other dispossessed creatures, for whom there was no earthly use” (ibid: 69)

"And Schreck would say: 'Look at him, Fanny.' So Fanny would take off her blindfold and give him a beaming smile.

"Then Madame Schreck would say: 'I said, Look At him, Fanny.' At which she'd pull up her shift.

"For, where she should have had nipples, she had eyes. Then Madame Schreck would say: 'Look at him properly, Fanny.' Then those two other eyes of hers would open.

They were a shepherd's blue, same as the eyes in her head; not big, but very bright. (Carter: 69)
The occurrences taking place in the circus in Petersburg, the second part of the novel, “break down the conventional hierarchical order in which man rules over animals” (Michael: 195). The circus is a place in which pigs and chimps have higher intelligence than men are. Colonel Kearney – the owner of the circus – keeps a pig that functions as both his oracle and a business adviser. Since the Colonel trusts his so-called “partner”, entirely it is revealed that all the major decisions and the whole policy of the circus depend on the pig's choices regarding the cards. In this case, a man believes that an animal possesses magic powers. Colonel trusts the pig to such an extent that the animal makes decision in his stead:

She could spell out your fate and fortune with the aid of the alphabet written out on cards -- yes, indeed! Could truffle the future out of four-and-twenty Roman capitals if they were laid out in order before her and that wasn't the half of her talents. Her master called her "Sybil" and took her everywhere with him. (...) Colonel Kearney invited his pig to tell him whether to hire the young man or no. (Carter: 98).

Similarly Lamarck's Educated Apes, a group of chimpanzees performing a school routine, seem to be more intelligent than their masters, only pretending to be trained animals, and perfectly capable of taking care of themselves. While pretending to rehearse their school routine in fact the chimpanzees plot against their trainer. Their leader, the Professor, gets rid of Monsieur Lamarck and forces Colonel Kearney to sign a new, more profitable contract with the apes, written by the apes themselves:

The chimps put themselves through their own paces; the trainer's woman was no more than their
keeper and Monsieur Lamarck, a feckless drunkard, left them to rehearse on their own.

(...) The Professor's face, grinning like a Cheshire cat, was not six inches from Walser's own as he popped it on. Their eyes met.

(...) Then the Professor, as if acknowledging their meeting across the gulf of strangeness, pressed his tough forefinger down on Walser's painted smile, bidding him be silent. (Carter: 107-108)

The very end of the Petersburg Section sees Fevvers escaping from the Grand Duke by means of jumping on the model train, the legend The Trans-Siberian express (Carter: 191). Fevvers' jump blurs the concept of immovable space and creates a break between reality and fantasy therefore contributing to the element of the supernatural. In this scene, her action either transports the girl to the real train at the station or the toy train becomes a real one. (Hsia: 28).

All the above-mentioned elements, supernatural characters, astonishing events and fantastical creatures, function as features strongly embedded in the novel's presented reality.

As mentioned in the beginning, one of the features of magic realism is containing an exceptional plenitude of disorienting details. The layering of these details contributes to a specific, baroque atmosphere. The space in between those layers is filled with the extraordinary and strange occurrences and is the place where real maravilloso can be observed.

The baroque abundance of the details can be observed especially in the vivid descriptions of locations and objects or the portrayal of characters. The narration, that is not only comprehensive but also overstated with an emotional commentary, creates lively and engaging pictures. The object may be nothing but ordinary yet the careful description makes it seem magical, as in the case of the simple staircase leading to the drawing-room of Ma Nelson's house:
As for the drawing-room, in which I played the living statue all my girlhood, it was on the first floor and you reached it by a mighty marble staircase that went up with a flourish like, pardon me, a whore's bum. This staircase had a marvellous banister of wrought iron, all garlands of fruit, flowers and the heads of satyrs, with a wonderfully slippery marble handrail down which, in my light-hearted childhood I was accustomed, pigtails whisking behind me, to slide. Only those games I played before opening time, because nothing put off respectable patrons like those whom Nelson preferred so much as the sight of a child in a whorehouse. (Carter: 29)

Paradoxically, the more realistic details the description accumulates, the more magical the object or situation appears. The magical realistic narrative is filled with useless details that serve no function other than to create a sense of the concrete real, of that which is.

In this manner, the reader starts to accept things less familiar in the same train of thought portrayed in a similar carefully detailed manner:

The French gilt clock that stood there in a glass case. This clock was, you might say, the sign, or signifier of Ma Nelson’s little private realm. It was a figure of Father Time with a scythe in one hand and a skull in the other above a face on which the hands stood always at either midnight or noon, the minute hand and the hour hand folded perpetually together as if in prayer, for Ma Nelson said the clock in her reception room must show the dead centre of the day or night, the shadowless hour, the hour of vision and revelation, the still hour in the centre of the storm of time. (Carter: 29)

In achieving the magical realistic effect of plenitude, the method of description is more important than the object described. Although the clock, one of the key items of the novel, is an object suspended between the real, physical object, and
supernatural, able to manipulate the flow of time, the narrative presents the duality of its features as something completely natural and acceptable as a hard fact within the novel's reality. The plenitude of often disorienting details in terms of presenting the characters of the novel results in their portrayal being larger than life.

The extraordinary plenitude of details in the aforementioned descriptions and portrayals results in an atmosphere of marvelous real. Carter tries successfully in flooding the reader with quite ordinary things that seem stranger, or characters that become larger than life, or making the whole narrative grotesque and magical. This specific, baroque atmosphere is characteristic of magical realistic literature. Magic realism makes use of multiple planes of reality. This hybridity results from juxtaposing inharmonious areas full of opposites: urban and rural, Western and indigenous. The usual issues taken up by the writers involve questions of borders, mixing and change:

It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor". (Bakhtin: 358)

In the last part, the vast, empty and uninhabited spaces of Siberia become a symbolic representation of freedom from control and social restraints. The rationality of the western civilization is being substituted with Eastern spirituality within the amnesiac Walser, who flees into the Siberian woods and is taken under the wing of a village shaman. The shaman teaches Walser the ways of his people, believing him to be a sort of spiritual guide.
The mixture of multiple planes of reality and the combination of the opposites, result in the co-presence of oddities, the interaction between the weird and the ordinary and emphasize magic realism's reliance on two different two world-views (Hegerfeldt: 70-72).

The ironic distance of the author allows for two simultaneous readings, a realistic and a fantastic one. The whole body of the narrative is built in a manner suggesting that the events and characters, despite their supernatural features, might have occurred. However, the very factuality that has been so meticulously established is called into question by one of the characters. Walser's initial attitude towards Fevvers is a skeptical one, and as a man well-travelled he recalls himself realizing the tricks behind the seemingly magical events he experienced in his trip to India. The rope trick and fakir on a bed of nails were simple illusions. His conclusion however, is that what (...) would be the point of the illusion if it looked like an illusion? (...) For (...) is not the whole world and illusion? And yet it fools everybody. (Carter: 16).

In addition, the story carries underlying political and social messages despite the fantastical characters and supernatural events. The novel alludes to the historical development of the suffragist movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and tackles the social issues of patriarchy and individual rights. That allows for both the realistic and the symbolic readings of the narrative.

The ironic distance is firmly connected with authorial reticence. The author purposely refuses to give the information and explanations in order to make the mysterious even more disturbing, and prevents the narrator from favoring realism over the supernatural, or vice versa. The established world-view is
threatened by an event that does not fit into the common ideas of logic or norms of reason. This event represents a world of fallacy and myth, which is difficult to accept for the sane man. The author presents two levels of reality, the natural and the supernatural. Authorial reticence integrates the supernatural into the natural framework of magical realism, where the author presents a world-view that is completely different from the reader's world. By having to explain the supernatural its position as equal to the conventional view of the world would be taken away. In fantastic, the supernatural world is perceived as different or disturbing, whereas in magical realism this world appears as integrated. The narrator places no judgment on the supernatural world, which is presented equally to the so-called rational world. In order to resolve the antimony created by the presentation of two different worlds, the reader is forced to suspend their judgment of what is perceived as rational and what is perceived as irrational (Chanady: 16-30).

Works of magic realists very often touch upon social issues and contain some degree of political critique in a manner of implicit criticism of society. Magic realist fiction has been accused of escapism in the vein of fantasy literature, that it provides an alternative, a utopian world. This claim, however, cannot be upheld for the majority of magic realist works, many of which are in fact very political. In super naturalizing certain events, the texts express an astonished disbelief about the state of the world, suggesting that the idea of such things actually happening exceeds, or should exceed, human imagination. Within the text, a fantastic style is used to characterize the events as almost impossible, and at the same time these passages either refer to historical events or have clear historical parallels. Therefore, far from denying the reality of such events, the
Magic Realism in Angela Carter's novel

Zainab Abdullah

fantastic tone conveys a sense of despair over the fact that, tragically, they are possible (Hegerfeldt: 61).

The women of the novel represent the suffragists and the entire women's suffrage movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Fevvers, Lizzie and the remaining female characters represent the New Woman, a feminist ideal of a woman who pushes against the limits of the male-dominated society with her entirely new way of thinking. However, the fact that women are depicted as strong, independent thinkers that can overcome their restrictive gender roles is more connected to post-feminist thought. In post-feminism women are no longer seen as victims and traditional feminism is no longer applicable in the contemporary society. Many characters challenge the conventional social and gender roles of their times and remain true to themselves therefore praising individualism. The women do not follow their nineteenth century gender roles nor do the animals behave in the way that would be expected. Lizzie and the other women in the brothel support the concept of individualism when they remain independent and describe marriage as a socially acceptable form of slavery.

Nights at the Circus also raises the issue of social class. Fevvers, Lizzie and Walser function outside of the traditional social structures. The remaining characters, prostitutes, clowns and other circus performers inhabit the lower level of social hierarchy. Wealth brings with itself power Fevvers having many opportunities in London loses all her influences in Siberia, despite her celebrity status. Similarly, Walser falls down the social ladder the very moment he becomes a clown in the circus. Throughout the whole story, the ideas of confrontation between appearance and reality are all pervasive. The truth about Fevvers' wings is the key point of this concept in the novel, although further doubts arise by Fevvers' final, celebratory cry.
The reader is left questioning whether the real deception refers to Fevvers' wings or to her glorified virginity. Even though Fevvers looks human, she claims to carry the wings of her avian ancestors. Similarly, although the women in the brothel work as prostitutes, they are simultaneously self-sufficient, forward-thinking women. Lizzie even compares them to suffragists. Nothing is as it seems in the novel, and even the animals are given magical features and are taken out of their conventional boxes. Through these magical elements, the reader's perception of reality is tested and one is challenged to question their surroundings (Stoddart: 64-65).

The story moves back and onward from order to chaos, usually with the narrative between Fevvers and Walser. While Fevvers remains hypnotizing in her narrative, she is also disorganized and jumps back and forth in time during her tales. Walser is quite the opposite. He is practical and grounds the reader in reality in his journalistic search for the facts. Fevvers represents the chaotic part in life while Walser represents the order.
Conclusion

_Nights at the Circus_ utilizes many features characteristic of the magical realistic literature. It treats the supernatural elements as the unquestionable part of the presented world and contains plenitude of details that create a baroque atmosphere. It juxtaposes dramatically different settings and planes of reality with resulting hybridity. In keeping the ironic distance, the narrative respects both the magic and realism, and never transgresses from the magical real into the realm of fantasy literature or fairytale. The credibility of the world and the accuracy of the events are never clearly defined and, according to the authorial reticence technique, no interpretation, neither realistic or symbolic, is ever imposed on the readers who are to make their own meaning of the novel. Political critique, a common tool in magical realism, takes as its aim subjects of individualism, personal freedom, patriarchy, equality and feminist and post-feminist movements. All the aforementioned features clearly categorize Angela Carter's _Nights at the Circus_ as a magical realistic novel.
References
-Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. The Dialogic Imagination. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981.68
-Hsia, Chen-I. Deconstructing Binary Opposition in Angela Carter’s “Nights at the Circus”. Taiwan: National Chengchi University, 2005.