

A study of Carter's *The Snow Child* in the light of Showalter's theories

Fatemeh Azizmohammadi*

Department of English Literature, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University,
Arak, Iran

*E-mail address: f-azizmohammadi@iau-arak.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

Angela Carter was an English fiction writer and journalist. Her female protagonists often take an empowered roles where they rise up against oppression and fight for both sexual and political equality. The actions of these women are direct reflections of the feminist movement that took place in the 1970s. The concepts within this movement relating specifically to the ideologies of radical- libertarian feminist, and regarding the extent to which she promotes feminist due to her style, referred to as "Galm-Rock" feminism. Carter began experimenting with writing fairy tales in 1970, which coincided with the period of second wave feminism in the United States. The majority of Angela Carter's work revolve around a specific type of feminism, radical libertarian feminism and her critique of the patriarchal role that have been placed on women. In this article, the main concentrate is on heroine's internalized consciousness which echoes in their behavior. All of the female protagonists in Carter's short stories; such as *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*, *The Tiger's Bride*, *The snow child* and mainly in *The Bloody chamber* have similar characteristics with different conditions, in which they are represented in a very negative light with less than ideal roles. In these stories, the protagonist is a young girl who has many conflicts with love and desire. Carter attempts to encourage women to do something about this degrading representation.

Keywords: Gynocriticism; Galm Rock feminism; love; suffragette; levitation-abstraction; pornography; patriarchal; desire

1. INTRODUCTION

Elaine Showalter born 1941 taught English and women's studies for many years at Rutgers University. Her book; *A literature of their own: British women novelists from Bronte to Lessing*.

Gynocriticism is the study of women writers historically as a distinct literary tradition. Showalter coined this term in her essay "toward a feminist poetics". It refers to a criticism that constructs "a female frame work for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience rather than to adapt male models and theories. (Quoted by Gordon and Kreiswirth from "toward a feminist poetics, new feminist criticism 131")

Gyncritical study is the study of feminist literature written by female writers inclusive of the interrogation of female authorship, images, the feminine experience and ideology and the history and development of the female literary tradition. Gynocriticism developed as a

literary critique from the theories and techniques of post-structuralism and psychoanalysis; post-structuralism is by nature, the study of the uncertain. They identifying the fact that language is ambiguous and therefore the universe is indeterminate. Psychoanalytic criticism focused on the word of Freud and the concept of the unconscious. The textual content is both conscious and uncovering or decoding of the two.

2. ANGELA CARTER

Angela carter was an English fiction writer and journalist. She was ranked number ten in The Times list of “The 50 greatest British writers since 1945”. Carter was a fiction writer and journalist whose writings embody a commitment to feminism and magical realism. She studied English literature at the University of Bristol. She moved to Tokyo for 2 years and her experience in Japan was immortalized in 1974 in fireworks.

Carter wrote many novels, works of nonfiction, anthologies as well as several articles. One of her anthologies is *The Bloody Chamber*; contains 10 short stories. In this anthology Carter rewrites fairy tales. A fairy tale is a type of short story that typically featured folkloric fantasy characters, such as fairies, elves, giants or mermaids and usually involve magic or enchantments. In some cultures where demons and witches are perceived as real, fairy tales merge into legends. The Brothers Grimm was among the first fairy tale writers that preserve the feature of oral tales.

a.. The fairy tale

“You mention folk culture and people immediately assume you’re going to talk about porridge and clog dancing.....”

Angela Carter, 1991

Carter in 1979 began for the first time to be read widely by readers who identified with her as a reader and rewriter. It seems that Carter; in the *Bloody Chamber* explains herself, unpacked her gifts, played her own fairy godmother.

The present essay sets out to explore some of the implications of this story, and the role fairy tales played in it. Fairy tales have a relation to reader’s heart; it explores the mysteries of love.

Carter in the preface to the first of the two collections of fairy tales, she wrote that fairy tales and folktales represent “the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labor created our world.” Like pornography, the fairy tale was practical fantasy, and it worked by narrative levitation abstraction, patterning, getting above yourself.

Those women, whom Carter has in her fictions, can be finding in conduct books, novels, psychoanalysis and suburbia as well as in pornography. And the fairy tale too has come to serve this post romantic agony culture that is modern and masochistic at once. Carter had always played with other “genres” like the gothic science fiction.

Women writers are hugely inventive in these genres, but some of them don’t afford the formal distance of the fairy tale, which has longer and larger history. So fairy tale has here a two faced character. Male and female character appears at the same time.

One of the reason she so valued fairy tale and one that is obscured by a too exclusive focus on gender politics is that she associated it with a world where our dreads and desires were personified in beings that were not human without being divine.

3. SHOWALTER AND GYNOCRITICISM

According to Elaine Showalter; gynocriticism is the study of not only the female as a gender status but also the “internalized consciousness” of the female. The uncovering of the female subculture and exposition of a female model is the intention of gynocriticism. Showalter believes that; literary history has been three distinct phases of gynocriticism. Until the 20th century:

1. The female literature tradition was constructed of images and values of the idealized feminine; which constructed from the patriarchal oppression that sought to identify the woman as “other”.
2. During the 20th century, the feminist movement saw a reaction to the patriarchal of previous times and protested the ideology of the feminine.
3. The most recent development is the “female” criticism, where a female identity is sought free from the masculine definitions and oppositions.

The recognition of a distinct female canon and the development of the “female reader” are fundamental aspect of gynocriticism.

4. CARTER AND GALM ROCK FEMINISM

Feminism is a concept that is not easily defined. Feminism is a complex ideology that encompasses many different subcategories that are all uniquely different from one another. One of the most radical and stylish fiction authors of the 20th century, Angela Carter, expresses her views of feminism through her various novels, fairy tales, and re-writes of fairy tales. Carter believes that women are represented in a very negative light with less than ideal roles that neither please nor glorify them.

Through Carter’s fairy tales, Carter is looking to encourage women to do something about this degrading representation by rising up and fighting against the oppression and fighting for equality. The majority of Angela Carter’s works revolve around a specific type of feminism, radical-libertarian feminism and her critique of the patriarchal roles that have been placed on women throughout time. Her female protagonist often takes on empowered roles where they rise up against oppression and fight for both sexual and political equality.

Although Carter is British, her pieces heavily depict what women from the U.S feminist movement were fighting for. The bloody chamber heavily reflects concepts from within this movement relating specifically to the ideologies of radical-libertarian feminists. Carter began experimenting with writing fairy tales in 1970, which coincided with the period of second-wave feminism in the United States. In 1970’s was the era of the women’s liberations when second-wave feminists fought for rights and opportunities that were equal to men as well as freedom of choice.

These feminists promoted the ideal that women need to become “androgynous persons” or women who possess both good masculine traits and good feminine traits. They argue that patriarchal society was rigid gender roles to keep women passive and men active. They believed that women needed to mix and match masculine and feminine traits. They claimed that as feminists, they needed to promote the idea that women need to reclaim control over female sexuality by demanding the right to practice whatever gives them pleasure and satisfaction. Female sexual liberation was among radical-libertarian’s biggest messages. Radical-libertarian feminists wanted there to no longer be restrains on women’s right to choose. Angela Carter revolved her tales around these radical-libertarian goals.

5. SUMMARY

The *Snow Child* is a short story in which Carter draws the inspiration from the story of *Snow White*. In this reinterpretation a countess and count ride through a winter landscape. The count imagines and hopes for a child whose features are inspired by the aspects of the landscape: the white of snow, the red of a pool of blood, the black of a raven. The count's wish becomes tired of her husband's dotting on the girl. She instructs the young woman to pick a rose. A thorn scratches the young woman and she melts leaving only a raven's feather and some blood. The countess reveals her desires to be the equivalent of her husbands.

6. ANALYSIS

The title "*The Snow Child*" seems to ensue something of purity and beauty, although it has many deeply meaningful messages within it. Sexuality is obviously one of the main themes within and the snow child can represent many different things depending on who read it. In one aspect, it seems that Angela Carter wants to focus on the masculine character, the count who idealizes women. He is powerful in this story, as we see him take the clothes away from his countess and give them to the child. In the other hands we see what power he has over the females as she wants the girl dead and does not concentrate her anger on him.

The two female characters cannot exist together, so one of them has to die for the other to continue existing. In this paper the main focus is on the countess and her role in the story. She does nothing to stop him, it shows that how women have to endure and complete for the fickle attention of men. Based on Showalter, the countess could be seen as a Sadeian woman, a woman who is constantly abused, humiliated but never acts on it. When the female reads the story and put herself on that situation and look at the count as her husband, she always asks herself why she does nothing or what she should do against these actions. It's the way of reading in which Showalter introduces, a gynocritic reading. Female readers try to interpret the story and think about a good solution based on the conditions. In Gynocritical reading of this story, female readers pay no attention to protagonist whom is count here, but focus on female character and analyses her and her actions. It should also be noted that Carter has often been recognized for writing from a feminist perspective, which seems evident in this piece of work, Carter's feminist perspective has often been seen as strange. This seems evident in the description of the countess. Many feminists would portray there heroine as innocent, but Carter shows her to be wearing dark clothing, which suggests she is not innocent. (Although it's not a good reason!)

Carter gives the readers a feminist theme that readers have to recognize by looking deeper into the text. The plot develops quickly, and has an almost fairy tale tone to it. Within the starting 10 lined paragraph, author introduces both main characters made aware of their position in story, what the count desires, which sets the rest of the plot going. Through the second paragraph we see how the countess wants rid of this girl who has just appeared. The plot develops very quickly within the next two paragraphs, the last paragraph describes the snow child melting into nothingness, with all that is left being a rose, and a feather and a small blood stain in the snow.

7. CONCLUSION

The Snow Child is a very well written piece, which hides many deeper ideas on feminism, sex and the idea of masculinity. Carter writes a short story that is precise in its

telling with nothing added in that should not be. Snow White is one of the most famous fairy-tales. This tale represent in various types during the centuries. All of them contain Oedipus desires which exist among father and mother that make the Mother jealous. But this version of fairy tale (count and countless) is clearer than other versions. The present essay sets out to explore some of the implications of this story, and the role fairy tales played in it. Fairy tales have a relation to reader's heart; it explores the mysteries of love. Through Carter's fairy tales, Carter is looking to encourage women to do something about this degrading representation by rising up and fighting against the oppression and fighting for equality. Carter effectively draws out the theme of feminism which usually depicted female characters as weak and helpless, but with strong female protagonists. Carter is able to create sexually liberated female characters that are set against the more traditional backdrop of the fairy tale. Carter reinvents the outdated fairy tales and offers insight on the archetypes and stereotypes of women in these well-known stories.

References

- [1] Carter, Angela. *The Bloody Chamber*. London: Penguin Group, 1993.
- [2] Lodge, David. *Modern criticism and Theory*. New York: Longman, 2000.
- [3] Abrams, M.H.A *Glossary of literary terms*.Canada:Wadsworth,2005.
- [4] Bettelheim, Bruno. *The uses of Enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*: New York,2010.
- [5] Showalter, Elaine. *New feminist criticism: Essay on women, literature, Theory*: Canada, Pantheon, 1985.
- [6] Carter, Angela. *Angela Carter; Book of fairy tales*: London, Virago Press Ltd,2005.
- [7] Orenstein, Cathrine. *Little red riding hood uncloaked, sex ,morality and evolution of a fairy tale*: United States, Basic Books,2002.
- [8] Schmitz, Thomas. *Modern literary theory and ancient texts*:USA,Blackwell,2007.
- [9] Wolfreys, Julian. Robbins, Ruth and Womack Kenneth. *key concepts in literary theory*: UK, Edinburgh University Press,2002.
- [10] Payne, Micheal. Barbera, Jessica Rae. *dictionary of cultural and critical theory*: USA, Blackwell, 2010.

(Received 08 February 2015; accepted 17 February 2015)