

► An Analysis of Angela Carter's review of the Beauty and the Beast: The Courtship of Mr Lyon and The Tiger's Bride

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The main goal of this essay is to analyse Angela Carter's review of the classic fairy tale *The Beauty and the Beast*. In *The Bloody Chamber*, considered Carter's masterwork, she proposes a reading of the classic fairy tales unveiling the ideological content presented in those tales through a feminist perspective. In order to achieve her goals Carter's rewriting is filled with ambiguities and intertextualities. In analysing *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* and *Tiger's Bride* it is relevant to take into consideration those aspects.

Carter's specific goals are to update, twist, and demythologise the classic fairy tales from a feminist perspective. In an interview to Anna Katsavos, she defines myth as "ideas, images, stories that we tend to take on trust thinking what they really mean, without trying to work what. . ." (2) Carter uses fairy tales to treat themes relating to liberation and change, re-evaluating the female experience in patriarchal society. She intends to deconstruct masculinity and femininity and it's explored through the contemporary feminism lens.

According to Paulina Palmer, If on the one hand, fairy-tales contribute to perpetuate the patriarchal ideology and status quo by making female subordination an inescapable fate, at the other hand they give Carter the opportunity to explore the theme of psychic transformation, liberating her protagonists from conventional gender roles. "In *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter succeeds in transcending the ideological limitations which fairy tales generally review." (3)

Fairy tales generally contain somehow parameters of domination and obedience, women under male dominance and patriarchal system. In these reviews, Carter strongly emphasises the woman desire and sex liberation, playing with the reader expectations about the traditional roles of masculine and feminine. For her "writing is playing game with the reader." (4) Through those games she brings to light the hidden aspects of female sexuality, fantasies and repressed desires. She also exposes sexist and stereotyped traditional construction of femininity

In order to analyse Carter's review of the *Beauty and The Beast* it's necessary to understand one of the main aspects of the classic version, the title of the tale itself brings a reflection of the acts of mirroring, while the Beauty is at one side, the Beast is on the other side. The idea is that the two sides must be opposites that what is beastly cannot be beautiful and what is beautiful cannot be beastly. There's a binary opposition which can be associated to others, such as male and female, tame and wild, prey and predator, innocence and experience, body and soul. Those pairs are always presented as being completely dissociated. One side is always empowered in relation to the other. A strand of feminist research, which influenced woman's fiction was the deconstruction of those polarities, taking into account the Derridean ideas of deconstructive theory. French feminists as Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Lucy Irigaray have examined the role played by the set of dichotomies, produced by the phallogocentric culture in perpetuating women's subordinating position. They exposed a set of some familiar polarities as man/woman, culture/nature, mind/body. The general association is man-mind-culture, woman- nature-body.

In her reviews of fairy tales as in *The Tiger's Bride* and *The Courtship of Mr Lyon*, Carter characters are always ambiguous, presenting both side of the pairs, this way Carter deconstructs some familiar polarities using fantasy and grotesque, as in the representation of a metamorphosis of the woman into Beast, or abeast that is transformed into a man but remains with scraps of beast. Somehow, she also deconstructs the famous polarity active/passive postulated by Freud. For Freud, in the reproduction, women were generally passive. "... using the active sperm swimming to penetrate it he argued that

women were naturally passive and men active, in sex.”(5)

Carter's *The Tiger's Bride* is a tale that begins with the desire for financial gain through economic marriage. Beauty means to her father the money he needs to pay his debts. “My father lost me to the Beast at cards.”(6)

The Bride is the reflexive narrator who questions her existence, her lack of place in the patriarchal society. She is the virginal daughter of a wealthy merchant who is playing cards in Italy. During the tale she reflects about her existence only in relation to the patriarchy, whether father or husband, her passivity as the woman peculiar state “...acrid gout of wax on my bare shoulders. I watched with the furious cinicism peculiar to women whom circumstances force mutely to witness folly,....”(7) The narrator is not naive, it couldn't be said that the Bride is only innocence, she's also experience, it's exposed when she gives her father a white rose “smeared with blood”. While the white rose means virginity, innocence, the bloody means defloration, experience. “..My tear-beslobbered father wants a rose to show that I forgive him. When I break off a steam, I prick my finger and so he gets his rose all smeared with bloody.”(8)

The body and soul polarity is also placed in the tale. The narrator sees the soul not as a separated part from the body. She's conscious that it's also a social construction. In the patriarchal society the soul is viewed as masculine and the body as feminine. The male is associated to reason, intellectuality, the female is irrational, so women and beasts are in the same level. “If I could see one single soul in that wilderness of desolation all around mesince all the best religions in the world state categorically that notbeasts nor women were equipped with flimsy, insubstantial things when the opened the gates of Eden and let Eve and her familiars tumble out...”(9) Using intertextuality, Carter ironically alludes to the Bible and to Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the woman is seen as the evil or as beasts in the patriarchal religion.

During the whole tale Carter deals with the beastly nature hidden behind the mask of constructed humanity, both in the case of the tiger, that uses the mask to hide his animal face as of the bride who doesn't have autonomy and doesn't know what is hidden behind her mask. The mask here is represented as a jail in which lies a beast that can't come up because of social conventions.

Carter also uses intertextuality to remind the ideological content of fairy tales when the bride is driven to her new owner and she remembers the fairy tales of her nurse, perfectly designed with fear and enchantment in order to install in her the code of feminine behaviour. In the nurse fairy tales, the tiger man tale ends with the warning that if the young lady is not a good girl, then he would, “... yes, my beauty, GOOBLE YOU UP.”(10) The tiger-man described by the nurse can be associated to the girl's father figure. “...Then the tiger would put on his big black bag travelling cloak lined with fur just like your daddy's.”(11) In the nurse tale can be observed the installation of the fear of the father, a pre- Oedipally necessary construction. It can also be associated to the anticipation of the consumption of marriage night. The tale install fear of defloration. Defloration is linked with the female destruction. It causes abjection and the woman's sexuality is denied. The nurse's “gooble you up” suggests the sexual relation as something that causes female annihilation.

Another relevant aspect in *The Tiger's Bride* is the presence of the mechanical maid. Her artificiality is strongly emphasised in terms of her being a mechanical object, “...with glossy, nut-brown curls, rosy cheeks, blue, rolling eyes....her little cap, white stockings, her frilled petticoats. She carries a looking glass in one hand and a powder puff in the other.”(12) She can be seen as a social creation of femininity as something superficial which can be assumed through make-up and clothing, as a standard of woman that the patriarchy has been sculpturing through the centuries. In one hand she carries a mirror that represents her unconscious, her necessity of self-knowledge and definition of identity. In the other hand she has a powder puff, a representation of femininity construction. Acting mechanically, the maid represents the woman with her subjectivity denied. The mirror she holds reflects not the beauty's face but her father's, representing that the bride's existence is only as an extension of him. In presenting the mechanical maid Carter presents the female as a creation of the patriarchal society, being a “coded manequim”, metaphor used by Hélène Cixous to represent “the robotic state which human beings are reduced by a process of psychic repression.”(13) The female is seen as a social construct, a simulacrum

that satisfies the male's needs. This construct is very convenient, besides not requesting anything it is programmed to obey and perform the distinct roles. "We surround ourselves instead, for utility and pleasure, with simulacra and find it no less convenient than do most gentlemen."(14)

Angela Carter doesn't only suggest the deconstruction and redefinition of femininity but also of masculinity. At her first sight of the beast the bride describes him as a simulacrum, a "carnival", a constructed mixture of several fragments, "...he has an odd air of self-imposed restraint, as if fighting a battle to remain upright...a beautiful face but one with too much formal symmetry to be entirely human, one profile of his mask is the mirror image of the other."(15) The patriarchy has constructed a perfect man that represents only the empowered side. He is only experience, mind, intellectuality, culture. He represents only one side of the reality, "too perfect", "too uncanny." This extreme perfection makes the man no-human, his subjectivity is also to be redefined but the difference from the woman is that he is a social construction but he is the controller, he is empowered "...He is a carnival figure made of papier-mâché and crêpe hair; and yet he has the Devil's knack at the cards.(16)

The empowered tiger in an act of voyeurism asks the bride to be naked for him in order to pay her father debts. She refuses to submit herself to his gaze, to be seen as a mere "spectacle". For the feminist theory, the voyeurism is symbol of the man's dominance through the gaze. For Palmer the controlling effect of the male gaze in a patriarchal society can be noted through "the constant circulation of visual representation of the femininity that is exploitative and oppressive. It pressures the women into a narcissistic preoccupation with self-image and imposes indirect control on their behaviour."(17) The woman's body control is deep-rooted in our culture, and "the male gaze controls not only the woman appearance, but also her identity and sense of self-worth."(18) This controlling can be observed in the constant change of women's clothing, make-up, hair-style, and excessive preoccupation with the body that has caused some psychic diseases as anorexia and bulimia.

In *The Tiger's Bride*, Carter subverts the gaze, and as the bride refuses to be undressed to the tiger, he decides to unveil himself and to be exposed to the female's gaze, taking off his clothes and mask, being free of the fantasy of humanity, he is revealed as he really is, a beast. He lets behind the social construction and shows to the bride his animal side that was hidden behind it. Surprisingly the bride identifies herself to his no-human part and she also takes off her clothes and her mask of femininity construction. The consumption is mutual and her sexuality is liberating. "When I looked at the mirror again, my father had disappeared and I saw a pale, hollow-eyed girl whom I scarcely recognised."(19) For the first time, she is unveiled to herself. It's the beginning of the recognition of the self.

In spite of recognising it as a difficult process, the bride's gets rid of artificiality of gender construction. "I was so unused to my own skin that to take off all my clothes involved a kind of flaying."(20) Her maturation comes with her sexual realisation, her self-knowledge, discovery of her sexuality, her freedom from "the nursery fears". "...his appetite need not to be my extinction."(21)

At the end of the tale the narrator describes the sexual consummation as a metaphor of her freedom of artificial femininity construction. "... 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 platina of shinning hairs."(22) Finally she is transformed into a tigress, her transformation into a beast can be seen as a revelation of the possibilities for alternative models of gender of and sexuality and also the self assuming a new kind of subjectivity. Finally the bride gets rid of the several artificial skins that had been constructed upon her through the years. Carter's goal is the elimination of gender differences, proposing the model of androgyny, with men and women adopting a combination of masculine and feminine attributes.

In the *Courtship of Mr Lyon* Carter once more deals with some recurrent themes as self-knowledge, sexual liberation and gender construction. In this tale a ruined father has a lovely girl and as in Beaumont's version, finds the beast's castle in the right moment he is in a road hungry, thirsty and with no money to buy petrol to return. After eating and drinking at the Lyon's castle, he tries to steal a rose to his daughter. A white rose that is a symbol of beauty's virginity. When he is confronted by the beast, he implicitly offers her daughter to the beast, in change from his favours, showing him a beautiful photograph of his daughter. It seems that the father wants to make a bargain "... The beast rudely snatched the photograph her father drew for his wallet and inspected it, first brusquely, then with a

strange kind of wander,...”(23)

In the courtship of Mr Lyon when the daughter was going to the beast's castle she felt herself as “ Mr Lamb, spotless, sacrificial.”(24) The daughter fears the sex relation and sees the defloration as something dirty, she sees the sexual relation with abjection. She also fears to be separated from her father, the oedipal complex is still evident in her.

The daughter is conscious of her annihilation in the patriarchal society but she doesn't have autonomy to overcome it. “...that it would be so and her visit to the beast must be, on some magically reciprocal scale, the price of her father's fortune..”(25) In this passage Carter puts into question the daughter's marriage for convenience. And the narrator adds “ Do not think she had no will of her own;she was possessed by a sense of obligation to an unusual degree..”(26) Carter also brings to light the woman “sense of obligation,” a necessity to respond the patriarchal society exigencies. The daughter is presented as an ambiguous character that is between the knowledge and the purity. When she sees the spaniel, wearing a choker of turquoises, it represents to her, somehow a feeling of impotence, she feels a victim, a prey, being in a suffocating situation “...today the spaniel wore a choker of turquoises.”(27)

In *The Courtship of Mr Lyon*, as in the most of her works, Carter strongly uses intertextuality. “...The *Bloody Chamber*, Carter shows an acute awareness of the changes that result from an oral to written transposition and calls attention to them by heightening the intertextuality of her narratives, making them into allegories...”(28) A good example in this tale is when the narrator makes a reference to a collection of French tales the daughter found in the bookcase. “She had found in the rosewood revolving bookcase, a collection of courtly and elegant French fairy tales about white cats who were transformed princess and fairies who were birds.”(29) Here there's an allusion to the fairy tales from the oral tradition that generally don't have the ideological content the classic fairy tales have. Carter argues that the oral fairy tales that have come from folklore, “the old wives tales” and were transformed into masculine tales. For her some of the compilers as Charles Perrault, Grimm Brothers and others converted those tales in some kind of bourgeois art.

The language is also a relevant aspect that is treated in Carter's reviews of fairy tales and also in *The Courtship Mr Lyon*. She argues that the patriarchal language doesn't communicate. It has failed. “...The voice that seemed to issue from a cave full of echoes, his dark, soft rumbling growl;...how she could converse with the possessor of a voice that seemed an instrument created to inspire terror...”(30) Language is seen as an ideological construction that empowers man and inspires dominance and control. Carter proposes a reformulation of it. “She has acted on her assumption that a woman writer has a mission to other to redeem the language.”(31) There's a necessity of another language that could set people free from conventions. In the rewriting of these tales language is marked by poetry and sensuality. “...She stayed stock-still transfixed; she felt his hot breath on her fingers...the rough lapping of his tongue and then, with a flood of a compassion, understood: all he is doing is kissing my hands.”(32)

At the end of the tale, the metamorphosis of the beast into human appears to signify the evolution of the protagonist, her acceptance of validity of sexual desire, her female repression was overcome. “Her face was acquiring, instead of beauty a lacquer of the invincible prettiness that characterises certain pampered exquisite, expensive cats.”(33) It's the beginning of the female construction of subjectivity. The daughter social constructed mask is taken, however she could liberate her beast instincts, her desires. On the other hand, Mr Lyon is also transformed into a man, not the socially constructed man, but a man with scraps of the beast. “...And then it was no longer a lion in her arms but a man, a man with an unkempt mane of hair and, how strange, a broken nose, such as the noses of the retired boxers, that gave him a distant heroic resemblance to the handsomest of all beasts.” (34) Mr Lyon is transformed into a man who still possesses scraps of a beast, and the daughter is transformed into a beast with scraps of a human.

In both tales, *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* and *The Tiger's Bride* Carter proposes the deconstruction of masculine and feminine as social gender construction, and a fusion of the opposites; male/female, human/no-human, nature culture. She suggests a new kind of gender free from social constructions, a creation of an androgynous being who could transpose gender and sex construction. Masculine and feminine as correlatives that involve one another.

Notes

- 1- Anna Katsavos, An Interview with Angela Carter. The Review of Contemporary Fiction, issue 16
- 2- Paulina Palmer, in Women Reading Women's Writing ed. Sue Roe p.195
- 3- Anna Katsavos, An Interview with Angela Carter. The Review of Contemporary Fiction, issue 16
- 4- Merja Makinen, Embodying the Negated contemporary Images of Female erotic in 5-Image and Power, ed. by Sarah Sceats and Gail Cunningham. P.41
- 6- Angela Carter, Burning your boats, Collected Stories p. 156
- 7- Ibid p. 156
- 8- Ibid, p.158
- 9- Ibid, p. 165
- 10- Ibid p. 158
- 11- Ibid 158
- 12- Ibid p.162
- 13- Paulina Palmer, "From Coded Manequin" to Bird Woman in Women Reading Women's Writing. ed.by Sue Roe p.180.
- 14- Angela Carter, Burning your boats, Collected Stories p.162
- 15- Ibid, 156
- 16- Ibid, 156.
- 17- Paulina Palmer, Contemporary Women's Fiction. Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory. P.34
- 18- Ibid, p.35
- 19- Angela Carter, Burning your boats, Collected Stories p.167
- 20- Ibid, p.168
- 21- Ibid p.168
- 22- Ibid., p. 169
- 23- Ibid, p.147
- 24- Ibid, p. 148
- 25- Ibid, p.148
- 26- Ibid p. 148
- 27- Ibid p.148

28- Mary Kaiser, Fairy Tales as Sexual Allegory: Intertextuality in Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber. Contemporary American Fiction issue 16 p.31

29- Angela Carter, Burning your boats, Collected Stories, p.148

30- Ibid, p.149

31- Harriet Blodgett, Fresh Iconography: Subversive Fantasy by Angela Carter. The Review of Contemporary Fiction, issue 16 p.49

32- Angela Carter, Burning your boats, Collected Stories, p.149

33- Ibid, 151

34- Ibid, 153

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