

# A study of Carter's *Wolf\_Alice* based on Showalter's Gynocriticism

Azadeh Nouri<sup>1\*</sup>, Fatemeh AzizMohammadi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English Language, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Department of English Literature, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran

\*E-mail address: Azadeh.nouri89@gmail.com, f-azizmohammadi@iau-arak.ac.ir

## ABSTRACT

One of the most radical and stylish fiction authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Angela Carter, expresses her views of feminism through her various novels and fairy tales. 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 revolves around a specific type of feminism, radical libertarian feminism and her critique of the patriarchal role that has been placed on women. In this article, the main concentration is on heroine's internalized consciousness which echoes in their behavior. All of the female protagonists in Carter's short stories; such as *The Company of Wolves*, and *Werewolf* and mainly in *Wolf\_Alice* 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")

Gynocritical 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.

### 1.1. 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.

### 1.2. 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.

## 2. 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

## 3. 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

#### 4. SUMMARY

Wolf-Alice is a girl who was raised by wolves. She cannot speak, she runs on all fours and howls, she acts like wolves but the fact is that, “she is not a wolf.” Some nuns find her in a wolf’s den, next to her “foster mother”, who has been shot. They take her back to their monastery and try to teach her to eat like a “civilized” human, but she remains wild. After nine days the nuns give up and hand Wolf-Alice over to the Duke, and old Werewolf who lives in a nearby. He is a monster who does not appear in mirrors and cannot die, and every night he wakes up filled with ravenous hunger. He wanders around in the moonlight, hunting humans. Or if everyone’s doors are locked he digs up graves and eats the bodies. Wolf-Alice moves into the Duke’s house and sleeps in the ashes of the fireplace instead of a bed. She learns to sweep up the remains of the Duke’s victims when he is away. Wolf-Alice grows older in this horrible environment, and one day she gets her first menstrual blood. Wolf-Alice is confused by this, and she searches the house for sheets to clean herself with. Then she comes across a mirror. She thinks there is another pale “not-wolf” trapped inside of it, mimicking her. Time passes, and a month later Wolf-Alice menstruates again. She begins to develop a sense of time from these cycles. Wolf-Alice finds an old ball dress and looks in the mirror. She starts to realize that the mirror is a reflection of herself, like the shadows that she used to play with. She washes the dress and then figures out how to put it on. She wades out of the house, finally feeling different from a wolf. Meanwhile a young man from town has been plotting to kill the Duke, who murdered his bride. The young man and some other town’s people are gathered in a church with an arsenal of silver bullets and holy water. Wolf-Alice hears them and approaches the church, and then she smells the Duke. The young man comes out of the church and shoots the Duke in the shoulder, and the Duke limps away. Wolf-Alice follows, frightened of the bullet. The church people think she is a ghost taking vengeance on the Duke. Duke lies on his bed in his room and writhing in pain and was on mid-transformation, neither wholly human nor wholly beast. Wolf-Alice watches him, and then she approaches and licks his bloody face. The mirror across the bed at first shows only Wolf-Alice, but as she licks him the face of the Duke begins to appear there too.

#### 5. ANALYSIS

“Wolf-Alice” is a short story within the novel “The Bloody chamber”. Wolf-Alice is based off of the childhood stories of “Little Red Riding Hood”. This story is not based on a specific fairy tale but on many disparate legends of feral children raised by wolves. In this way wolf-Alice is another kind of “beast” or metamorphic creature, part human, part wolf. The nuns are closer to “clockwork maid” on the spectrum of wildness and civilization, and so they fear Wolf-Alice. The Duke is another kind of half-wolf, half-human, but otherwise he and Wolf-Alice are almost opposite. The Duke is another bestial man-monster exploiting his power. Alice also exists on that metamorphic threshold, but she begins to develop her humanity on her own, in the “bloody chamber” of her body, as she becomes a woman. The mirror returns as an important image, the Duke does not appear because of his monstrous nature, but wolf-Alice is able to see herself in it as something distinctly not-wolf. Carter associates Wolf-Alice’s menstruation with the development of her humanity of both blood and enlightenment.

Unlike many of the other characters, Alice undergoes her metamorphosis without the aid or encouragement of another. She discovers her sexuality and humanity not for the sake of

another's love, but on her own. The young man is another unimportant character, as the heroine of the earlier stories had been already married before being kidnapped by beasts. The Duke is shot mid transformation, so he is truly trapped on the threshold between man and master now, unable to shift between masks. Alice puts on an old white dress like the first heroine or the vampire countess. Wolf\_Alice takes on the role of the tiger or the British soldier, transforming another through a kiss or lick. The Duke becomes human through the human compassion of Wolf\_Alice, but this compassion means that Wolf\_Alice is beaming a human, too. Carter ends the book with another lyrical transformation, this one not only emphasizing dark sexuality but also hope in a place of despair.

Wolf\_Alice is another short story which is based off of the Little Red Riding Hood. It tells the journey of Alice, a child raised by wolves and how she becomes more human throughout the course of the story.

Carter points to several things that distinguish humans from animals: knowledge of our morality, the ability to feel shame and subsequent desire to wear clothing, and the belief that we are more important than, and masters of our surroundings. All of these human characteristics are latent in Wolf\_Alice, but she cannot realize them until she is in the presence of human things: a house, a mirror, a dress. Wolf\_Alice is a somewhat bracing reminder that we are mere beasts without our culture. As the narrator admits, the townspeople feared her imperfection because it showed them what they might have been. Whereas the heroine in "The Company of Wolves" ends up safe in the wolf's den, Wolf\_Alice starts out there, because she grows up without society to inform her of how she should behave, she is the anti these of the well pampered, well-behaved, and sheltered woman.

Wolf-Alice's enlightenment stems from pure wonder at her own reflection. During that time, she becomes more restrained and therefore more human simply because menstruating causes her to experience both time and shame. Once she sees that her reflection is her "shadow", she understands that she has control over it. Her perspective shifts from animal objectivity to human subjectivity.

With the view point of feminism and gynocriticism, readers can see this part as very usual situation in society and daily routine. In other hands, shadow resemble the society, and a situation that heroine can observe her behavior and action toward every-issue, so she recognizes herself, her characteristic, her personality and her thought. At first, It seems strong for her, but she when realize herself and her existence, she enjoys it and try to realize more and more.

The Duke is a half-being in two ways; he is a half-beast half-wolf and is trapped between the physical and metaphysical worlds. The Duke is "real" enough to kill and eat people, but not "real" enough to cast a reflection in the mirror. For the Duke, we cannot be sure whether he transforms into a human or a wolf. We are told only that the mirror reflects "the face of the Duke". Carter leaves both characters in liminal ambiguity to suggest that authentic living requires one balance one's humanity and beastliness.

Humans recognize themselves as separate entities from others, from others, from the world. This ability draws the line between beast and human. A literary exploration of this idea is Angela Carter's Wolf-Alice. In the story, the main character is a child who has been raised by wolves. Since birth and does not recognize herself as a human. She functions in animalistic state of timeless, existing strictly in the "now", oblivious to the past and the future. She walks on all fours because she cannot stand. She howls because she cannot speak. By being a human physically but acting inhuman as well as

failing to recognize herself as a human, Wolf-Alice brings into question what separates beast from humanity. (Mc Caffrey 20)

Wolf-Alice takes pity on the Duke because she recognizes that he is imperfect, just as the wolves pitied her for being a human, like the heroine in "The Courtship of Mr-Lyon" she transforms the tormented half-being by her kindness alone. Wolf\_Alice's pity, like the other heroines, is a function of her animal side and not her human side. All the other humans in the story want to kill the beast because they cannot understand his ravenousness and his torment, but Wolf\_Alice can because she has experienced these sensations in the way he has. In "Tiger's Bride" the heroine transforms into a tiger. In "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" the beast transforms into a human. In "Wolf\_Alice" the heroine becomes more human throughout the story, but still retains enough animal kindness to save the Duke.

Showalter's four main models that address the nature of women's writing are: The biological model, linguistic model, psychoanalytic model and Cultural model.

The biological model emphasize how the female body marks itself upon a text by providing a host of literary images along with a personal, intimate tone. The Linguistic model addresses the need for a female discourse, investigating the differences between how women and men language. This model asserts that women create and write in a language peculiar to their gender and addresses the ways in which this female language can be used in their writings. The Psychoanalytic model analyze the female psyche and demonstrates how such an analysis affects the writing process, emphasizing the flux and fluidity of female writing as opposed to male writing's rigidity and structure. The last of Showalter's model, The Cultural model, investigate how society shapes women's goals, responses and points of view.

The last model is what in this part will be focused and analyzed. The Cultural Model shows that what kind of women's characteristic is accepted by every society, However There are some points in these characteristics which are common in all of societies. Such as being weak in manner and thought for women and dependence to men for living. Wolf\_Alice changes this thought with her manner. Although at the beginning of story she was dependent on the Duke for living, for his house and for everything, but during the story it changes. When she protects the Duke, Wolf\_Alice shows that it is the Duke now whom is dependent on her. Although Wolf\_Alice's manner is not like human and is too strange as a woman but in her instinct that kindness is clear. So this kindness of women is not a sign of weakness but it is something that exist in their essence.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Red Riding hood sheds the historical associations of her own red cloak which resembles; blood, sexual availability and a various set of meanings. These revisions may empower the heroine, enhance her animal instincts, or give her a richer identity. Some challenge the power of the wolf as a symbol of patriarchy. Others merely challenge his status as the tyrant of the fairy tale. Some suggest Red Riding Hood's darker side; others highlight her natural sexuality or her predatory mating tactics. Some of these revisions just give the heroine a change of clothes.

Storytellers from the women's movement and beyond reclaimed the heroine and her grandfather from male dominated literary tradition, recasting the women as brave and resourceful, Turing Red Riding Hood into the physical or sexual aggressor and questioning the masculine pride of the wolf. 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.

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