ABSTRACT

Carter's "The Snow Child" is much more complicated than the resource version, the "Snow White" of Grimm Brothers version. Complication is natural because Carter’s intention is Feministic and Postmodernist criticism on patriarchal society. However, the approach is unique for fantastic and realistic combination, formatting 'fabulation', a concept developed and popularized by Robert Scholes, in his work 'The Fabulators.' ‘The Snow Child’ is a good example of fabulation. I have made an effort to dissect the fantastic and realistic aspects of the story

KEYWORDS: Fabula, Fabulation, Eroticism, Masculine Fantasy, Feminism, Snow White, Adult Tales, Intertextuality, Postmodernist, Oedipal Tension, Psychoanalysis, Realism

INTRODUCTION

Angela Carter’s ‘The Snow Child’ is interpreted from the point of views of eroticism, masculine fantasy, postmodernist and psychoanalytical contexts but I think we are all missing Carter’s intention of combining two basic elements which are much dominant in works: fibula and realism, which together form fabulation.

FABULATION IN THE SNOW CHILD

Angela Carter and her story ‘The Snow Child’ both are puzzles to the readers. Some writers like Cristina Bacchilega relate 'her (Carter’s) unabashed eroticism' in the other stories of ‘The Bloody Chamber’, one of which is ‘The Snow Child’. Bacchilega calls the count "the Father" and the countess "Stepmother", and 'the child of his desire is born from a hole filled with blood in the snow, without the participation of his wife.'

From this detail, the child happens to be their daughter. Bacchilega further writes, "Nothing can mitigate the horror and erotic poetry of the ending. The child, obeying her 'Stepmother's' command to pick up a rose, pricks herself, falls and begins to bleed to death. In this desperate moment the father tries not mouth-to-mouth breathing, but something stronger and erotically surreal: "Weeping, The Count got off his horse, unfastened his breeches and thrust his virile member into the dead girl ......... [H]e was soon finished." It is much more shameful detail of the event- father having intercourse with his dead daughter. I get more puzzled when she writes "This father's behaviour makes the story peculiarly Carter's own.

"Were this literary character (child) and the writer's personal character the same? I did not find such kind of relationship anywhere in Carter's biography. Her biography details go like -"Angela Carter, a British novelist, was born as Angela Olive Stalker in the in the town of Eastbourne in the year 1940. While still young, Angela and her maternal grandmother were evacuated to Yorkshire, where she suffered from anorexia for the majority of her teenage years." Does Carter present the child in the story "The Snow Child" from the point of view of indignation against her father for her sufferings like Silvia Plath? Yet how far the parental incest can be justified?

Angela Carter adapted "The Snow Child" from a Grimm Brothers version of the story "Snow White", but in this story the father, not the mothers, wishes for the child. Carter uses this fact to her advantage, in order to portray masculine
control of female identity. "The Snow Child" is not only "the child of [the count's] desire"; she is the product of his physical desires. He wishes for her to be beautiful and nothing else, so it is clear that he is interested only in her appearance and her value as a sexual object. Cristina Bacchilega calls the Snow child "a masculine fantasy", a frozen image without a real life of her own. From a literary perspective, the Count is in the position of author; he has the power to say something and make it so.

The girl is a helpless character, unable to control her destiny. Bacchilega goes further to state that, like the Marquis in "The Bloody Chamber", the Count is a pornographer. He, clothed, imagines, and then creates a sexual image of a naked woman that he can deflower and in fact defile. It can't be believed that the girl becomes a 'woman' suddenly in the criticism. There is much difference in between child-girl-woman.

Unusually the child of the Count's desire turns to be a sexual image of a naked woman. There is something wrong first in Carter's imagination and then in critics' ways of making criticism on this story. The child may carry symbolic meanings like nature being destroyed by a man, red rose being symbol of beauty of nature, etc. I find wrong thinking in critics like Bacchilega. Being a female, she favours Carter, the Feminist, with blind eye and absurdist thoughts.

Carter may have adapted her story from the "Snow White", but ironically everything is quite opposite and different. Father wishes for the child with 'skin as white as snow', lips as red as blood', and 'hair as black as a raven', which is certainly "a masculine fantasy," a usual kind of beauty that is expected in Europe though 'white skin' supposed to be 'dead' in Indian subcontinent. In "Snow White", mother does not think of physical desires or a sexual object, but here father has genetic sexual attraction. Father has been generalized as a cruel inhuman character. Father and man are distinctly different by nature. Father is a man.

All fathers are men but all men are not fathers. All men do not have fathers' nature and characters. Here in the story father is a man; he controls everything. He is an author; he has the power over every creation which is from him. The girl is a helpless character, unable to control her destiny, but this destiny to be raped by own father is not justifiable act. That is excessive. Can the Feminism go to this far? This is a social taboo.

This Feministic approach, not an approach but a reproach, is a severe attack on social and cultural relationship between father and daughter. Such thing can be hardly believed in any culture, not even in Christian culture of Carter. Such thing is an obscene, vulgar intrusion into the beautiful romantic scene of "Snow White", a children's fairy tale. The story "The Snow Child" and Feministic criticism are here to corrupt such children's world.

If man in general is the target of the criticism, I will have no objection, but in the case of 'father' that will be hardly acceptable in any culture. The Count as father, the Countess as stepmother, and the snow child as daughter are triangular in relationship, but such relationship is not shown in "Snow White", where we can see enmity between stepmother and the child "Snow White".

The stepmother plays destructive role, with frequent intentions of killing the Snow White. This relationship is twisted and conversed between the Count (father) and the snow child (daughter). They do not have any enmity or jealousy. Rather they have sacred, parental love until the ending, where the story suddenly changes from beautiful romantic scene to ugly, corrupted obscenity, inhuman and cruel act of man over beautiful innocent child of his own desire, falsified by Carter herself.

Carter's stories are fantastic as well as realistic. Her contribution is unique and admirable in transformation of fairy tales into "adult tales" in 'The Bloody Chamber'. Her fairy tales aren't meant for children because fantastic and
romantic fairy tales have been transformed into "adult tales" and we know well that 'adult tales' or 'adult films' carry different meaning for people in general. Children's stories are fantastic, innocent and beautifully magical, but adult tales are realistic, experienced and factual and also vulgarly corrupted.

In her 1990 introduction to ‘The Old Wives’ Fairy Tale Book, Carter makes a distinction between folklore, emerging from oral "unofficial" culture, and the fairy tale, product of a literary "official" culture. She says that folklore is anonymous and fluid, resulting in "stories without known originators that can be remade again and again by every person who tells them, the perennially refreshed entertainment of the poor.” In her opinion, literary fairy tales transform an oral tradition into texts that become middle-class commodities.⁵ "The Snow Child" is the narrative as the transition from oral tradition to written tales, an example of intertextuality.

"The Snow Child" is a fabula. An author like Carter may be engaged in the composition of fables or stories, especially those in which the element of fantasy comes into heavy play. The story has magical realism, violating traditional subject matter, form, style, temporal sequence, and there is fusion of the everyday affairs and fantastic/magical details. The romantic story of Snow White has been brought to the horrible tragic ending by Carter. She is killer and creator the same at the same time.

Marina Warner says that Carter deconstructs the arguments that underly 'The Bloody Chamber’. Its about desire and its destruction, the self-immolation of women, how women collude and connive with their condition of enslavement. She was much more independent-minded than the traditional feminist of her time.⁷ Carter, being deconstructivist, has deconstructed not only the norms of children's fairy tales but also the social and cultural norms of parental status of father. In fact, the girl exists after her death, but father is dead, his existence is collapsed in spite of his life. This postmodernist reality is ugly in my opinion.

"The Snow Child" reduces the fairy tale to its skeletal outlines as a fable of incest. In Carter's version, a Count wishes for a daughter. The girl appears, just as he imaginers her, but he is forced to abandon her through the jealous stratagems of his wife. Bruno Bettelheim argues that all versions of the ‘Snow White’ are myths of Oedipal conflicts between mothers and daughters, but certainly the harsh simplicity of Carter's version heightens the Oedipal tension because of the presence of father between mother and daughter.

CONCLUSIONS

‘The Snow Child’ combines both fantasy and realism, producing a work of fabulation. ‘The Snow Child’ is subject of fairy tale. Her appearance and disappearance and shifting of clothes from woman to child and again from child to woman are magical parts of a fairy tale. Desire, sexual passion of the Count, psychological effect on the Countess, her jealousy against the Snow Child, torments of the Snow Child (but not genetic sex between father and daughter), etc. are realistic. Psychoanalytical approach to the man's characterization along with the woman's jealousy is realistic. Traditional structure of patriarchal society has been destroyed with postmodernist deconstructive views. Psychoanalysis is based on dream allegory: Carter’s Feminist story ‘The Snow Child’ is based on fantasy. Realism may lie within and around them or maybe beyond them.

REFERENCES


2. Ibid.


