

The red shoes essay sample

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Literary criticism is the assessment of literature pertaining to the critic's reaction towards the text. We learn that there is a multitude of modes that influence which way we analyze the work. One in particular being Feminist criticism, initially developed to convict men of their prejudice towards women (Approaches to Literature). Feminist writers such as Virginia Woolf, argue that women should be able to write what they desire without any concern about their gender (Feminist Criticism). Feminist criticism stresses three main ideas, one being that social and political aspects of a woman's life should be the main focus. It also endeavors for the re-analysis of works that have already been examined and for literature and its analysis to be from androgynous views and experience (Feminist Analysis: Literary Criticism). Feminist criticism can be segregated into power, victim and androgynous interpretations, all perspectives containing the female experience. In *The Red Shoes* by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, we witness the calamity of a poor motherless child striving to maintain the possession of the only sentimental thing she has in her life; her red shoes. As this impecunious little girl follows her desire for the red shoes and eventually achieves it, she is punished and falls into a life of disability. Her story of the fight for what she desires can therefore be classified into the victim feminist perspective. In the story, the red shoes contain a number of significant meanings pertaining to lacanian and archetypal views. The first representation of the red shoes under lacanian psychoanalysis relates to his statement that the subject vaingloriously exemplifies themselves within language (Lacanian Psychoanalysis). So through lacanian interpretation, the red shoes could resemble the little girl, herself. " They were crude but she loved them" (The

Red Shoes). The color red resembles the unconditional love that she never received.

With the red shoes resembling her, she could pretend to be her mother, reasoning why she loves the shoes like a mother loves a child. Therefore she could be living vicariously through the shoes, loving them the way she wishes to be loved. Archetypal analysis defines the red shoes as a sense of empowerment for the little girl. According to archetypal symbolism, shoes represented authority and power in the ancient times, rulers possessed shoes but slaves didn't (Estés 222). Initially the girl did not possess any shoes, but she then constructed the shoes herself, essentially creating power for herself. The shoes themselves not only represent power, but the color red does so as well. " They made her feel rich even though her days were spent gathering food in the thorny woods until far past dark." (The Red Shoes).

When the little girl is taken in by the old woman, one of the first things she arranges is stripping the girl of her clothing and her red shoes and dressing her in white. The archetypal meaning towards the color white is that of purity and innocence, far from what the girl actually is. In fact, we can decipher that the girl is an ID driven character, and her motive is power, resembled by the red shoes. When the woman takes away her red shoes, she is essentially stripping the girl of her power. So throughout the rest of the fable, the little girl sets out to regain her power by attaining her red shoes and by conquering the old woman.

Therefore her development towards real power through the possession of the red shoes is an element of victim feminism (Victim Feminism). When female characters in literature manifest themselves to be perceived as

powerless and inferior, it is classified as victim criticism. Victim criticism relates to women hoaxing others into believing that they are incompetent of achieving something. By doing so, women clandestinely gain power through the manipulation of others (Victim Feminism). We notice the little girl manipulate and take advantage of the old woman numerous times throughout the plotline to virtually attain power. The first instance of this is when the old woman takes her to the shoemaker to purchase shoes for her confirmation. The little girl, aware that it is inappropriate to attire red shoes in church, takes advantage of the fact that the old woman cannot see the color red and deludes her into buying them. “ So even though red shoes were scandalous for church, the child, who chose only with her hungry heart, picked the red shoes. The old lady’s eyesight was so poor she could not see the color of the shoes and so paid for them.” (The Red Shoes). In the next paradox, the little girl takes advantage of the old woman’s color blindness again and bears the red shoes to the next mass. After being told by the old woman that she does not have consent to bear the red shoes in church, she does on the next Sunday. Again, we observe the girl displaying elements of victim criticism by taking advantage of the old woman’s color blindness to red. “ ‘ Never, never wear those red shoes again!’ the old woman threatened.

But the next Sunday, the child couldn’t help but choose the red shoes over the black ones, and she and the old woman walked to church as usual.” (The Red Shoes). The fact that the girl is willing to rebel against the rules of the church and society surely displays how power-hungry this child is. The final occurrence of this child’s manipulation is when the girl takes the red shoes while the old woman is bedridden. This little girl is so manipulative that she

takes advantage of a dying old woman. “ Not long after, as fate would have it, the old woman became bedridden, and as soon as her doctors left, the girl crept into the room where the red shoes were kept. She glanced up at them so high on the shelf. Her glance became a gaze and her gaze became a powerful desire, so much so that the girl took the shoes from the shelf and fastened them on, feeling it would do not harm.” (The Red Shoes).

This example also pertains to the fact that she is antagonistic towards the success of other women. We learn that the old woman is rich and evidently more powerful than the little girl, which is something that the girl detests. Since the red shoes resemble power, the girl is constantly struggling to attain these shoes. The old woman also has significant power over the little girl, and she tries to overcome the old woman through manipulation, in order to obtain the red shoes. Every time the little girl outsmarts the old woman and repossesses her shoes, she feels empowerment. Therefore, the story is a paradox of victim feminism through the little girl’s manipulation of the old woman and strong motivation for her red shoes, resembling power.

Victim feminism is defined as delaying the advancement of woman creating negative perceptions and division between them (Victim Feminism). This type of feminism is incredibly ineffective in attaining power and equality, and in the end of this story we see that men are still the more dominant beings. At the church, the little girl encounters an old injured soldier with a red beard who regards her red shoes, he then taps the soles of her shoes making her feet itch. As the little girl is leaving the church the injured soldier utters ““ What beautiful dancing shoes!”” (The Red Shoes). Suddenly her feet begin to move and she cannot control them. It seems as if the old injured soldier

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cursed her shoes when he tapped the soles of her shoes with a little song, disowning her of her power. Observe how the soldier has a red beard; this conveys that he also has power.

He being a man does not approve that

the little girl, being a female, has so much authority, so he curses the shoes so that she cannot have any control over her own authority. She manages to get the shoes off with the help of the old woman and the coachman, but as you will see, she does not learn her lesson. Here is where the ironic tragedy archetype comes into play. As was mentioned earlier, the little girl takes advantage of the old woman's condition and manages to take the red shoes. She then puts them on and her feet keep on dancing, the only problem is that it is impossible to make them stop. She dances into a dark and gloomy forest where she encounters the old soldier with the red beard again. "' What beautiful dancing shoes.'", he says again (The Red Shoes). He is obviously responsible for the uncontrollable behavior of her red shoes because he does not offer her any help, this means that he does not want her to have power since she is a female. She then resolves that the only way to stop her feet from dancing is to cut them off. She then turns the executioner, who is a man, to liberate her from her red shoes. It is an ironic tragedy because the little girl is responsible for her own downfall. The little girl ends up being more powerless than a slave since she does not even have feet.

Therefore, this story definitely displays the element of victim feminism since the delayed advancement of woman is evident, in the end of the story, the girl ends up further behind than when she started. The story of The Red Shoes is rich with contexts referring to victim feminism. We see this as the <https://assignbuster.com/the-red-shoes-essay-sample/>

girl being a display of powerlessness, yet she accomplishes power through her red shoes. When the old woman strips the girl of her red shoes, her power is taken with it. In the story, the little girl manipulates the old woman in order to attain her red shoes, which is essentially her power, an element imminent in the victim feminist perspective. The little girl's fate results in her making no advancement in achieving power and she creates a foolish perception of herself. The victim feminism of this story conveys a message that woman should not have power and authority because society believes they do not have the intelligence to handle it. It is essentially like the story, allowing woman to have power is like allowing a child to have power; it never results well.