

Psychosexuality and de-patriarchy in angela carter's "the company of wolves"



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“ Little Red Riding Hood” can be viewed as one of the most popular and famous bedtime fairytales. Based on the original counterpart, Angela Carter remolds this story by adding sexual elements through her work “ The Company of Wolves”, in which the narrator describes the red of the heroine’s cape, which resembles “ blood on snow” and “ color of sacrifices” (Carter 145), is an advertisement of her sexual readiness. Carter’s revision also deals with the perception of the heroine, as a young girl, towards her virginity and moral sexuality, as well as unconscious exploration of self. Moreover, Carter shows her concern on exploring the gender identities through retelling those fairytales which are seemingly innocuous. She ever said that what she has done is to debunk myth (38), which can be regarded as kind of criticism and rebellion towards patriarchy society which dominates traditional values and norms. This paper will, therefore, examine the heroine’s actions driven by the self-desire and psychosexual urge, as well as the hidden meaning of her final triumph over the werewolf in “ The Company of Wolves” from two categories: Freud’s psychoanalysis and Jung’s archetypal images.

As the central figure in “ The Company of Wolves”, the heroine is portrayed as “ an unbroken egg”, “ a sealed vessel”, and “ stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity” (Carter 145). She precisely fits Freud’s concept of the tripartite self and represents the conflicts and solutions of it. According to Freud, Superego is the moralist and idealistic part of the personality, residing in preconscious level and operating on “ ideal principle” (Freud 19). The heroine is the youngest and most beautiful child, thus, her family has indulged her and protected her from danger and

harsh reality by making her the gender ideal and a good girl who would never get off the path, which help to form the superego of the heroine, thereby, leading to her disbelief in the compass and subduing her desire to go to the forest when she makes the huntsman (werewolf) a bet. However, as the stage of sexual awakening and sensitive to the heterosexual relationship, the heroine's id, which resides at the unconscious level and acts under the pleasure principle (Freud 21), cannot be repressed completely. She is on the verge of puberty; she has just begun to menstruate, and starts her fantasy about sex. Then driven by her ego, which operates under reality principle and attempts negotiate between id and superego, the heroine, enticed as she is by the werewolf, agrees the kiss as a winning prize of the bet and lets him leave with her basket. She knows " she should never leave the path on the way through the wood", yet still " dawdle(s) on her way to make sure the handsome gentleman would win his wager" (Carter 148). She even does not seem to care whether the werewolf has eaten her grandmother or not but is eager to consummate her sexual desire and relationship with the werewolf. Here, readers can see a girl with independence and strong autonomy.

To further resolve the conflicts between id and superego, defense mechanisms appears to be employed by ego to achieve an equilibrium between desire and reality. Albeit the heroine knows that wolves are worst in the barren months, she still insists on sending a basket of food to her sick grandmother. She is solely armed with a knife for the two-hour trip but does not afraid of it; she is " afraid of nothing" (Carter 142). Being kept young by her family, the heroine undergoes the denial in defense mechanisms towards

the upcoming dangers unconsciously, and sets up her trip both towards her grandmother's house and mature woman with her red shawl which symbolized her sexual desire. In regards to her relationship with her grandmother, the heroine actually experiences a projection. Having plagued by phallic phase and Oedipus complex, the heroine indeed regards her mother as a romantic rival in her subconscious, and desires for her father's love. When she decides to visit her grandmother, " her mother cannot deny her" (146) without her father, Carter writes. Meanwhile, her id is restrained by her grandmother and mother through warning and telling her stay on the path; therefore, her envy for her mother spontaneously is transferred to her grandmother. In this case, she ignores her grandmother's clattering bones which can be seen as a warning or obstacle to her relationship with the werewolf, and further views the werewolf as her father's substitute and transfer her emotion to him. The narrator indicates repeatedly that " the wolf is carnivore incarnate" and they are absolute evil that their howl is " in itself a murdering" (Carter 140). Yet in the course of narrating, readers can perceive that for wolves as for any half-being, their existence equals torment. Through the heroine's eyes, their howl has " some inherent sadness in it, as if the beasts would love to be less beastly if only they knew how any never cease to mourn their own condition" (Carter 143), which suggests that even men who choose to become werewolves may be regretful because of the misery it brings them. Although defense mechanisms has eased the conflicts between the heroine's id and superego, in the end of the story, it is ultimately the heroine's pity or guilt, caused by avoidance of conscious solutions, for the werewolf and his company of wolves that moves her to join

them, or perhaps, becomes a leader and make them keep her company. It seems like that a new matriarchy wolf society forms.

“The Company of Wolves” can also be expounded through archetypal images and mythical patterns within collective unconscious. Similarly to Freud’s contrasting superego and id, Jung constructs the self (persona), which designates the whole range of psychic phenomena in man and expresses the unity of the personality as a whole (108), and the shadow, which represents one’s dark side of oneself that exists yet not be identified, as a pair of binary. Regarding the self of the heroine, she has been kept young because she is her family’s most beautiful and youngest child, and is made into the gender ideal of an innocent, sheltered and trusting girl. Nevertheless, the heroine in the story do have her darkness potentially: as a well-protected young girl, she is armed with a big knife; when she hears a wolf’s howl, she instinctively clutches her knife. She tells the werewolf, a stranger, where her grandmother lives and give him her basket without vigilance because she sees her grandmother as a barrier and wants to get rid of her in subconscious. Even she is aware of the death of her grandmother, she is busy interacting with the werewolf, satisfying her own desire, and doesn’t show too much pity or sadness. Besides the self and the shadow, the animus complex, which represents women’s biological expectations of men, but also refers to masculine that occurs in women. By wearing the red color which symbolizes both her new menstrual blood and the blood she will presumably shed when she loses her virginity, she has expressed the underlying sexual desire. In her grandmother’s house, she takes off her own clothes and then unbuttoned the collar of the werewolf’s

shirts proactively. She would never bother to think about she would be eaten; she “burst(s) out laughing; [...] she laugh(e)s at him full in the face, she rip(s) off his shirt for him and fling(s) it into the fire” (Carter 152). These actions exactly reflect her sexual desire and masculine possibilities to be the one in control, which could possibly, be as another proof to indicate Carter’s deviation from male’s dominant society.

As for exploring the source of archetypal images, Jung’s interprets, that archetypes are “universal, archaic patterns and images that derive from the collective unconscious and are the psychic counterpart of instinct”, and autonomous and potential forms “given particular expression by individuals and their cultures”, associating with racial memory and mythical forms (138). Jung mentioned in his book, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, a kind of optimism of pantheism which he discovers in an African primitive tribe, would disappear and replaced by fear during six pm till six am the next day. It is the fear that the sun, which is worshiped, is swallowed by the darkness, promoting them to form an original archetype of sun and darkness and pass it through collective unconscious in generation. As with the development of language, people develop the ability of using different simile to portray archetypes; the sun is also compared to god, lion, infinite power or king. In the story “*The Company of Wolves*”, the sun is the archetype of the red cape, whereas the darkness is the archetype of the werewolf. The heroine’s loss of virginity is likened that the sun is devoured by darkness. However, the virginity is meanwhile a welled-up force, ready to overwhelm the potential devourers. The heroine uses her human pity and immense sexual power to transform the act of devouring into a sexual one;

therefore, she survives, which also symbolizes that the sun breaks through the darkness, demonstrating the dominant power the heroine eventually obtains.

Generally speaking, to interpret this story by applying no matter Freud's psychic zones or Jung's archetypes, readers may have a glimpse that Carter echoes the romantic notion of locating the divine in nature, even the parts of nature that are not traditionally beautiful and innocent. Moreover, it also should be noted that Carter's intention to portray the heroine's unconscious sexual awakening. Carter has ever written in her book *Shaking a Leg*, that a writer could stating his opinion on reality through fabricating an another world, examining self-state of being instead of talking a lot of twaddle about daily life(35). In "The Company of Wolves", driven by the sexual curiosity and fantasy, the heroine explored her psychosexual development and make compromises between personalities unconsciously to adapt the reality: stay on the path while follow the desire at the end of the path, which is seemingly a slogan of women in the male dominant society. Women have their moral sexuality, yet they also need the sexual autonomy as well as sexual power, to make the society de-patriarchal.

Words Cited

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