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## The Demythologizing Effect in Angela Carter's "The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves"\*

*Angela Carter'in "Kurt Adam" ve  
"Kurtların Dostu" Adlı Kısa Hikâyelerinde  
Mitolojiden Arındırma Etkisi*

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**Abstract**

Fairy tales have prominent influences on Angela Carter's sense of interpretation in her narratives, especially in practicing her demythologizing processes. For Carter, what is essential is the new readings of old texts which help her focus on the primary purpose of her demythologizing business. Through demythologization, Carter discards and disregards the traditional, or intended meanings in these old texts and then she prepares the panorama to create her subversive rewritings. Carter's demythologization is considered to be Carter's literal force which eradicates patriarchal mythic abjections through her new readings of old texts. The purpose of this study is to reveal the rooted deceptions in the misogynistic myths, hindering the gender codes and the sexual roles of women. Furthermore, it is also within the purpose of this study to display new subversive panorama creating a literal space for women who reflect autonomy, sexuality, free-will and rationality in Carter's "The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves" as the new readings of the well-known tale "The Little Red Riding Hood.

**Keywords:** Demythologization; Classical Fairy Tales; Subversive Tales; Body Politics; Angela Carter.

**Öz**

Angela Carter'in eserleri üzerindeki yorumlama anlayışında, özellikle de mitolojiden arındırma işlemini uygulamasında, masalların çok büyük bir etkisi vardır. Carter için esas olan, eski eserlerin yeniden okumalarını yapmaktır ki bu okumalar, onun mitolojiden arındırma vazifesindeki öncelikli amacına odaklanmasını sağlar. Carter, mitolojiden arındırma tekniği sayesinde eski eserlerde olan geleneksel ve istenilen anlamları çıkarıp onları hiçe sayar ve böylece yeniden yazılmış, alışılmışı yıkan tarzdaki eserlerini meydana getirmek için gerekli olan genel görünümü hazırlamış olur. Carter'in edebi gücü olarak görülen bu mitolojiden arındırma etkisi, kendisinin eski eserleri yeniden okumasıyla, ataerkil mitlerle ilgili bayağılığı yok eder. Bu çalışmanın amacı, kadınların cinsel rolleri ve cinsiyet kodları üzerine ket vuran, bir nevi kadın düşmanı olan geleneksel mitlerdeki kökleşmiş aldatmacaları ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu çalışmanın bir diğer amacı da, meşhur "Kırmızı Başlıklı Kız" hikayesinin yeniden okumaları olan Carter'in "Kurt Adam" ve "Kurtların Dostu" adlı kısa hikâyelerinde; özerkliği, özgür cinselliği ve özgür iradeyi yansıtan kadınlar için edebi bir uzam oluşturan yıkıcı bir görünümü göstermektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mitolojiden Arındırma; Klasik Masallar; Yıkıcı Hikâyeler; Beden Politikası; Angela Carter.

- 1 Bu makalenin araştırma ve yayın süreci "Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine" uygun şekilde yürütülmüştür.

\*: I hereby declare that this paper has been extracted from the dissertation of mine entitled: "Body Politics in Angela Carter's Works" and it includes the literary and theoretical analyses scrutinized within the scope of my doctoral study.

## Introduction to the Carterian<sup>1</sup> Demythologizing Business

Angela Carter's achievements of rewritings of fairy tales can be pointed out through her deconstruction and demythologizing processes. In "Notes from the Front Line" (1998), Carter contends: "I'm in the demythologizing business. I'm interested in myths [...] just because they are extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree" (1998, p. 27). Therefore, what is new for Carter's demythologized fairy tales is that she brings new contents to the old frames by creating authenticity<sup>2</sup> in which authentic and unique characteristics perform perverse and subversive body politics. It is also expressed that "while Carter would sometimes construct her own fairy tales from archetypal fragments of old ones her principal art revisit and deconstruct old narratives" (Calvin, 2011, p. 181). When Carter's new perspectives and readings of the old texts are intermingled with one another, a new demythologizing scope is produced. Moreover, in the rewritings of Carter's fairy tales and stories, Carter defends de Sade and makes use of his ideology because her rewritings originate from de Sade's pornographic materials which result in many of the controversies in *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1978). Carter defends de Sade claiming that "he treats all sexual reality as political reality and that is inevitable" (1979, p. 31). Similarly, Aytül Özüm, in her article "Deconstructed Masculine Evil in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*" (2011), writes that "[i]n *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter reads de Sade in such a way that, she believes he claimed the "rights of free sexuality for women" and created 'women as beings of power in his imaginary worlds' (1979, p. 41)" (Carter qtd. in Özüm, 2011, p. 2). In other words, the representation of female sexuality is the crucial link between Carter and de Sade, especially in *The Bloody Chamber* and *The Sadeian Woman*. As Özüm puts it:

In *The Sadeian Woman*, what Carter depicts is not the mere objectification of the female to the pervert male world, but reinforcing the idea of separation of women's sexuality from their reproductive function. In the selected stories, the evil female are allowed to take as much pleasure from sex as the evil male who have always already been accepted as such. The link which combines the subverted version of the fairy-tales and *The Sadeian Woman* is embedded in the way Carter reimagines the young heroines as active in their own sexual development and experience. (2011, p. 2)

In her rewritten stories, Carter's females are sexually active and they develop their sexualities through sexual experiences. This is a similar point in the Sadeian atmosphere since women are as sexually-active as men. In a similar vein, they get sexual pleasure as much as

<sup>1</sup> Relating to or characteristic of the Modern English novelist Angela Carter or her ideas.

<sup>2</sup> As Theodor Adorno writes: "authenticity and inauthenticity have, as their criterion, the decision in which the individual subject chooses itself as its own possession [...]" (2003, p. 94). For further information, see Adorno's *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Routledge, 2003.

men. In this respect, both in the rewritten stories in *The Bloody Chamber* and *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter's women have sexual codes and sexual rights through which they are able to reflect their subversive identities by challenging the misogynistic ideology represented in the earlier texts. It is Carter's subverted female characteristics that save women from victimization in her new stories. In other words, it is through Carter's new readings that women are able to save themselves from the evil policies of men. Özüm contends that in Carter's stories: "the representation of the female evil in the reappropriation of the fairy tales saves the woman subject from being victimized in the traditionally acknowledged frameworks" (2011, p. 1). In traditional fairy tales, women are represented through patriarchal norms which define their sexual roles. However, Carter reconstructs these traditional fairy tales and subverts them by deconstructing the roles of stigmatized women and their social behaviors. Sexual attributions of women which are depicted in traditional fairy tales are reformulated through Carter's subverted and perverted rewritten fairy tales. Carter's rewritten stories "fabricate new cultural and literary realities in which sexuality and free will in women replace the patriarchal traits of innocence and morality in traditional fairy tales" (Özüm, 2011, p. 2). Therefore, the female image: "which is mostly associated with the good, decent, innocent and naive is rendered either to have inclinations towards perverted sexual practices or to be violently harmful for the opposite sex (Özüm, 2011, p. 2). It is through Carter's subversive panorama that the real gender representations are reflected within the dichotomy of good and evil women since in the Carterian sense, she who is virtuous does not ensure that she is morally good while she who is evil does not show that she is immoral. In this respect, Carter breaks the codes of conventional social behavior for women by deconstructing their traditional representations. In her rewritten stories, Carter enables her female characters to reflect their sexual practices through free will and free sexuality.

Introduced into literary critiques with Carter and her works, the term demythologization has been in use to deconstruct androtexts.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, Carter's "The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves,"<sup>4</sup> the rewritten versions and the new readings of "The Little Red Riding Hood," can be considered to demythologize the androcentric<sup>5</sup> myth in which the sexuality and the gender codes of women are ignored. In other words, Carter challenges and disrupts male authority in her rewritten stories. The females reflected in these works perform subversive and perverse body politics to reject the male hindrances on their sexual developments. Therefore, this paper proposes that the female characters demythologize the male panorama of seeing women sexually

<sup>3</sup> Literary texts written by men.

<sup>4</sup> I hereby declare that I translated Carter's story titled "The Company of Wolves" from English into Turkish as "Kurtların Dostu." (Carter'in "The Company of Wolves" adlı hikayesini İngilizce'den Türkçe'ye "Kurtların Dostu" olarak çevirmiş olduğumu burada belirtirim.)

<sup>5</sup> Concerned specifically with men by taking a male point of view.

inactive. In other words, in the Carterian atmosphere, traditional social codes of women and the sense of morality in traditional fairy tales, are turned upside down. The real gender relations of women who have autonomy, free-sexuality, free-will, and rationality are reflected. Based on that, Carter's rewritten stories "The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves" show alternatives and possibilities to see how this subversive panorama can be reflected as the demythologized versions of "The Little Red Riding Hood."

### On Fairy Tales and Gender Relations

As Sonya Andermahr puts it in her "Contemporary Women's Writing: Carter's Literary Legacy" (2012), the groundbreaking innovations of Carter are reflected as the significance of the stories in *The Bloody Chamber*: "it is the element of demythologizing that most concerned Carter herself and has been so fruitful for subsequent women writers" (2012, p. 20). Carter demythologizes androcentric fairy tales and rewrite them as gynocentric<sup>6</sup> texts. In his *Relentless Progress: The Reconfiguration of Children's Literature, Fairy Tales, and Storytelling* (2009), Jack Zipes states that women writers are prominently active in making fairy tales popular because they all know that these tales are androtexts in which women are subordinated and put into an inferior position; hence, women writers challenge gender politics in these fairy tales which have long been shaped by patriarchy. According to Zipes, fairy tales:

became instituted as a genre and became canonized, women played an active role in disseminating, challenging, and appropriating the tales. They were never passive even if they accepted the sexist stereotypes in the canonical tales. [...] Women writers became more aware of the patriarchal implications and prejudices of the canon and thus began a more conscious revision of the classical tales [...]. (2009, p. 126)

Therefore, Carter revises classical tales in *The Bloody Chamber* to become more aware and conscious of the male-oriented world's policies on women. Carter's readings of fairy tales have authentic characteristic features because she "took these tales and made them part of her life, felt them, sensed them, digested them, and re-generated them to comment politically on the situation of women in their times and on the struggles between the sexes" (Zipes, 2009, p. 126). Carter focuses on gender politics which are shaped in the articulation of fairy tales. In this respect, Carter already knows the significance of her rewritings in which body politics of women are represented with the politics of gender. Therefore, Carter is decisive and consistent enough to produce rewritten forms of canon-fairy tales since she already knows how to react to the realities which are either distorted, or corrupted. As Ketu H. Katrak asserts in her *Politics of the*

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<sup>6</sup> Concerned specifically with women by taking a female point of view.

*Female Body* (2006), women writers show “the struggles of protagonists to resist patriarchal objectification and definition as daughter, wife, mother, [...]. Sociocultural parameters of womanhood [...] are grounded [...] and unconsciously constitute an ideological framework that controls women’s bodies” (2006, p. 9). Women writers like Carter react patriarchal ideology because they are against the sexist politics of patriarchy which control women’s bodies. Based on that, what is crucial here is that Carter reflects the actual representation of female sexuality in her rewritings. Therefore, by unveiling the concealed truths in patriarchy, she presents the subversive actualities to the readers in her rewritings. Carter is well aware of the significance of the female body and its empowered politics in the historiography of fairy tales. In this regard, it is possible to see autonomous characteristics of her female heroes in her subversive and perverse rewritings.

### **Carter’s “The Werewolf” As a Rewritten Version of “The Little Red Riding Hood”**

Carter’s “The Werewolf” in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, parodies Charles Perrault’s “Little Red Riding Hood.” On that account, it is possible to see how Carter deconstructs the original tale by demythologizing the old texts through her subversive and perverse narrative qualities. At the beginning of the tale, Carter introduces the atmosphere of the setting in which such mythic contents as devils and witches are described. Then, the protagonist, a little child, is introduced and the tale begins within the quest of the little child to her grandmother’s house to give presents that her mother has prepared. The grandmother’s house is located in the depths of a dark and dangerous forest. The child is aware that she might be exposed to probable dangers such as bears or wolves. Therefore, she has a knife for self-defense. As Carter puts it:

The good child does as her mother bids – five miles’ trudge through the forest; do not leave the path because of bears, the wild boar, the starving wolves. Here, take your father’s hunting knife; you know how to use it [...] she knew the forest too well to fear it but she must always be on her guard. When she heard that freezing howl of a wolf, she dropped her gifts, seized her knife and turned on the beast. (1995b, p. 109)

Though Carter represents patriarchal messages to show what to do or what not to do (path image, dark forest, wolf image), she deconstructs these facts by depicting that even the little child has a weapon to defend herself against the malign atrocities. The impending attack comes as a wolf. Carter contends that “it went for her throat, as wolves do, but she made a great swipe at it with her father’s knife and slashed off its right forepaw” (1995b, p. 109). The little girl is so cold-blooded that she cuts the paw of the wolf without hesitation and takes it with her. Therefore, the little girl shows her powerful body politics by being fearless and decisive. Carter deconstructs such

traditional female characteristics as naivety, timidity and cowardice to form her autonomous but subversive female portrayal. Thereafter, the most shocking event takes place when the little girl realizes that the paw she cuts is, in fact, the hand of her grandmother. Carter metaphorically associates the paw with the penis. In other words, the cut paw symbolizes the collapse of the men's hegemony over women. As soon as the little girl sees that something is wrong with her grandmother, she understands. Immediately afterwards, the little girl causes her grandmother's death and lives happily ever after by possessing the house of her grandmother. The ending of "The Werewolf" is written as follows:

She found her grandmother was so sick she had taken to her bed and fallen into a fretful sleep, moaning and shaking so that the child guesses she had a fever. She felt the forehead, it burned. She shook out the cloth from her basket, to use it to make the old woman a cold compress, and the wolf's paw fell to the floor. But it was no longer a wolf's paw. It was a hand, chopped off at the wrist, [...] By the wart, she knew it for her grandmother's hand. [...] The child crossed herself and cried out so loud the neighbors heard her and came rushing in. [...] they drove the old woman in her shift as she was, out into the snow with sticks, beating her old carcass as far as the edge of the forest, and pelted her with stones until she fell down death. Now the child lived in her grandmother's house; she prospered. (Carter, 1995b, p. 109-110)

Through Carter's rewritings of old texts, her fairy tales end surprisingly. Carter demythologizes the conventional panorama of the androtexts in which the male-oriented traditional and moral<sup>7</sup> endings are challenged and attacked. Hence, this time it is not the man but the woman who gains the victory.

### **Carter's "The Company of Wolves" As a Rewritten Version of "The Little Red Riding Hood"**

In "The Company of Wolves," Carter rewrites "The Red Riding Hood" from a different perspective. As Lorna Jowett puts it in her "Between the Paws of the Tender Wolf: Authorship, Adaptation and Audience" (2012), Carter's "The Company of Wolves:" "is a re-telling of Little Red Riding Hood and the act of telling stories is integral to the story" (2012, p. 41). However, this time the Carterian demythologizing process is performed by the little girl herself, apart from her grandmother. In a similar vein, throughout the narration, the setting is introduced in which the wolves possess magical and mystical attributions. Again, the plot overview is constructed upon the little girl's quest to her grandmother's house on Christmas Eve. Similarly, the little girl with a red-shawl sets off for a visit to her grandmother's house to give presents, and she has a

<sup>7</sup> For Perrault's moral message, see "Little Red Riding Hood" qtd. in Angela Carter's *Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, and Other Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, introd. by Jack Zipes, 2008, p. 3.



weapon again to protect herself from dangerous wolves. Yet, the red-shawl image, which has the same symbolic meaning as in the description of the original tale, is used abundantly to imply that the little girl is a virgin and she keeps her virginity. The metaphors which are related to the little girl's virginity are described in a parodic way as follows:

She stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel; she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug membrane; she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and she is afraid of nothing. (Carter, 1995a, p. 113-114)

Carter makes fun of the sense of morality in traditional fairy tales for young girls especially in terms of keeping their chastity. However, what Carter does is to let them have authentic sexual identities so that the Carterian female characters perform their subversive body politics.

Then, in the middle of the deep forest, the little girl comes across a young man who looks very gentle. She starts talking to him and tells him everything he needs, then the young man sees the condition of the little girl and he bets her on a kiss that he will be the first to get to the little girl's grandmother's house. As soon as the young man challenges the little girl, the little girl accepts the challenge. "Is it a bet? he asked her. Shall we make a game of it? What will you give me if I get to your grandmother's house before you? What would you like? she asked ingeniously. A kiss" (Carter, 1995a, p. 115). Thence, the young man reaches the house of the little girl's grandmother earlier than the little girl and he kills her grandmother. When the little girl arrives, she understands that her grandmother is dead. Immediately afterwards, the little girl asks: "What big eyes you have. All the better to see you with. [...] Where is my grandmother? There is nobody here but we two, darling" (Carter, 1995a, p. 117). When the little girl takes a look outside, she sees that there are a lot of wolves, and she stops fearing and acts half-mockingly. Then, the little girl starts undressing by throwing her red-shawl and blouse into the fire. Now, the little girl is as naked as the fire and she is ready to burn the wolf-man. The little girl is freer and more powerful than ever before because she discovers her body and her sexuality by questioning her female identity. She is utterly fearless and decisive, she knows how to play with the wolf-man, who this time fears her, and she goes on asking questions cunningly and ironically as follows:

What big arms you have.

All the better to hug you with. [...]

What big teeth you have! [...]

All the better to eat you with.

The girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat. She laughed at him full in the face, she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire [...]

She will lay his fearful head on her lap and she will pick out the lice from his pelt and perhaps she will put the lice into her mouth and eat them [...] See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf. (Carter, 1995a, p. 118)

Carter makes fun of serious plots of conventional fairy tales by deconstructing and demythologizing female stereotypes of old iconoclasm. As Sarah Sceats contends in her article titled "Flights of Fancy: Angela Carter's Transgressive Narratives" (2005), Carter's "The Company of Wolves" simply proposes that Little Red Riding Hood "needs no rescue by woodcutter or father; that the ideal solution is [...] to get into bed with the wolf, [...]. Carter's reversals, bestial transformations and use of gothic subtly redefine the conventions of the genre at the same time as challenging gender ideologies" (2005, p. 145). Carter's female heroes use their own identities to keep their autonomous selves by challenging traditional gender ideologies. For Carter's women, such patriarchal notions as virginity, chastity and virtue are not important but are "consolatory nonsenses" (Carter, 1979, p. 5). In her *Body Texts in The Novels of Angela Carter: Writing From a Corporeographic Point of View* (1998), Anna Kérchy also puts it that Carter's heroes "become Woman, doomed to identify with stereotypes of ideologically-prescribed Femininity, embodying Virgins, Witches, Whores, Mothers, Pregnant Women, Monsters or Enigmas. Yet, they also challenge these compulsory clichés of Womanhood" (2008, p. 60). Through Carter's rewritings of old tales, subversive endings are observed and the Carterian process of demythologization takes place since Carter's women challenge traditional notions about the roles of womanhood. In this regard, the little girl in "The Company of Wolves" performs subversive and perverse body politics by destroying the established sexual hierarchy of men.

### Conclusion

Carter's demythologizing business is targeted against conventional social codes, obstructing women and their sexuality in old misogynistic narratives. In this respect, Carter attacks traditional views which depict women sexually lifeless and artificial in her rewritten intertextual stories because Carter's subversive female characteristics perform charmingly authentic, but alarmingly freakish sexuality. Therefore, Carter demythologizes the traditional representations of women in androtexts and she also destroys the patriarchal ideology in androcentric myths which depict women like puppets having neither carnal rights nor sexual desires of their own. As a result, this paper has argued that in "The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves" as the demythologized versions of "The Little Red Riding Hood" Carter attacks the sense of morality and decorum in conventional tales. Through her subversive female



characterizations, Carter reflects female sexuality, female autonomy, female will-power, and female rationality in her intertextual rewritings.

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